

Doc_Number: GDE00075



In Iran, restrictive media landscape further deteriorates

New York, December 23, 2009—The Committee to Protect Journalists is concerned that Iranian authorities censored coverage of the death of a leading reformist cleric, shut down yet another reformist newspaper this week, and continue to arrest journalists.

The BBC [reported](http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/iran/2009/12/091221_wmt-papers-ershad.shtml) on Monday that the Iranian Labor News Agency was warned by the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance to report less on opposition groups in general and Mir Hossein Mousavi and his supporters in particular. The BBC also said that the same ministry dispatched representatives to several newspapers, forbidding them to publish on their front pages photographs of the recently deceased Grand Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri. Montazeri, an influential cleric who at one time was designated to become Supreme Leader and died on Saturday, was hailed by the opposition after he criticized the conduct of the election and the post-election turmoil. The newspapers were also instructed that all messages of condolences for Montazeri, except those coming from the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, must not be published on front pages.

On Monday, the Press Supervisory Board shut down the reformist daily newspaper *Andisheh No*, according to [local](http://www.radiofarda.com/content/F11_Iran_Postelection_Newspaper_Andisheh_No_shut_down_ILNA/1909960.html) and [international](http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/iran/2009/12/091221_wmt-papers-ershad.shtml) news reports. The Iranian Student News Agency [reported](http://isna.ir/Isna/NewsView.aspx?ID=News-1461685&Lang=P) that the closure was due to numerous violations, including “questioning general policies of the Islamic Republic” and “a constant effort to deepen differences among people after the presidential election.” According to the same report, *Andisheh No* was among five newspapers that received a warning from authorities for “insufficient coverage” on pro-government rallies Friday across Iran.

CPJ reported in its annual [prison census](http://www.cpj.org/reports/2009/12/freelance-journalists-in-prison-cpj-2009-census.php) on December 1 that 23 journalists were imprisoned in Iran. More have been arrested since. On Sunday, [international](http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/iran/2009/12/091220_na_nourizad_detained.shtml) media [reported](http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/iran/2009/12/091220_na_nourizad_detained.shtml) that journalist, blogger, and documentary filmmaker Mohammad Nourizad had been arrested a few days earlier. Nourizad wrote for *Kayhan*, a daily newspaper directly under the supervision of the Office of the Supreme Leader, but distanced himself from it after the June presidential elections and instead wrote articles criticizing the government’s policies and practices on his blog. He is being charged with “insulting authorities” and “propagation against the regime,” according to the semi-official [Mehrs News](http://www.mehrnews.com/fa/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1004073) agency. The same report said that he was to be released on bail but that he was unable to pay and was sent to prison.

On December 16, Sedigh Minaee, a Kurdish journalist with *Aso Weekly*, was tried in Sanandaj on charges of “refusal to stand up during the playing of the national anthem,” “propagation against the regime,” and “insulting authorities,” according to [Mookrian News Agency](http://www.rahesabz.net/favicon.ico). CPJ was unable to determine when he

was arrested. Minaee has denied all charges. According to the agency, he was tried without the presence of legal counsel.

“The authorities in Tehran seem intent on silencing critical journalists and stifling the media,” said CPJ Middle East and North Africa Program Coordinator Mohamed Abdel Dayem. “We call on Tehran to end its persecution of journalists, because despite having resorted to harassment, torture, fabrication of charges, and more, the authorities have failed to bring independent journalism to its knees.”

In the six months since the disputed presidential elections, CPJ has documented a number of cases in which authorities have [shut down](http://cpj.org/2009/10/three-newspapers-shut-down-in-iran.php) (<http://cpj.org/2009/10/three-newspapers-shut-down-in-iran.php>) newspapers, [blocked](http://cpj.org/2009/06/iran-censors-newspapers-amid-unrest.php) (<http://cpj.org/2009/06/iran-censors-newspapers-amid-unrest.php>) Web sites, and [arrested](http://cpj.org/2009/06/more-journalists-arrested-in-iran-cpj-seeks-their.php) (<http://cpj.org/2009/06/more-journalists-arrested-in-iran-cpj-seeks-their.php>) journalists. The government has also [banned](http://cpj.org/2009/06/iran-bars-foreign-media-from-reporting-on-protests.php) (<http://cpj.org/2009/06/iran-bars-foreign-media-from-reporting-on-protests.php>) foreign media from reporting on opposition protesters. More recently, the authorities revoked permits for foreign journalists to report on an annual rally due to be held on December 9. [According](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8397767.stm) (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8397767.stm>) to international news reports the authorities feared the opposition would use the rally to stage a new protest.

Local news [reports](http://www.rahesabz.net/%7bmy_template_group/rss_2.0%7d) (http://www.rahesabz.net/%7bmy_template_group/rss_2.0%7d) said imprisoned journalist [Issa Sahar-Khiz](http://www.cpj.org/2009/07/iran-is-worlds-top-jailer-of-journalists.php) (<http://www.cpj.org/2009/07/iran-is-worlds-top-jailer-of-journalists.php>), who was arrested July 3, offered his last defense at a Tehran court on December 16. He is being charged with “insulting the Supreme Leader,” “propagation against the regime,” and “mutiny to disrupt national security.” The court has consistently refused to issue a bail order even though the investigation into the case has long been completed.

An attorney for jailed journalists [Ahmad Zaid-Abadi](http://cpj.org/2009/09/cpj-urges-iran-to-release-journalists-during-ramad.php) (<http://cpj.org/2009/09/cpj-urges-iran-to-release-journalists-during-ramad.php>) and [Massoud Bastani](http://cpj.org/2009/09/cpj-urges-iran-to-release-journalists-during-ramad.php) (<http://cpj.org/2009/09/cpj-urges-iran-to-release-journalists-during-ramad.php>), Mohammad Sharif, [told](http://www.mardomak.biz/news/s/47567) (<http://www.mardomak.biz/news/s/47567>) news Web site *Mardomak* that Zaid-Abadi remains in custody, despite his family posting his \$500,000 bail. He added that a release order was issued for Bastani, but that he too remains in custody. In an [interview](http://www.roozonline.com/persian/news/newsitem/article/2009/december/15/-20e0bbb7d7.html) (<http://www.roozonline.com/persian/news/newsitem/article/2009/december/15/-20e0bbb7d7.html>) with *Roaz Online*, the wife of imprisoned journalist [Bahman Ahmadi Amouee](http://www.cpj.org/imprisoned/2009.php) (<http://www.cpj.org/imprisoned/2009.php>), Zhila Bani-Yaghoub, said that the court has prevented Amouee’s family from posting his bail for several months, and later reported, falsely, that his family had refused to post it. After six months of “temporary detention,” the court recently issued a formal detention order.

December 23, 2009 2:47 PM ET | [Permalink](http://cpj.org/2009/12/in-iran-restrictive-media-landscape-further-deteri.php) (<http://cpj.org/2009/12/in-iran-restrictive-media-landscape-further-deteri.php>)