



MANCHESTER, N.H.
UNION LEADER
—D. 66,091—
MANCHESTER-NASHUA METRO AREA

OCT 18 1983

IRAN: Now They Hang Women

By RAY SAIDEL

DESPITE THIS century's amazing and accelerating technological prowess, socially most of the world slides backward, adopting or surrendering to socio-political systems as bad as the worst in history.

Our ships probe the solar system and beyond but who can fathom the souls of the dour bureaucrats who presided at September's Soviet shoot-down press conference, or those of the grim mullahs of the Islamic Republic of Iran who hang women and teenage girls for religious reasons. I admit prejudice; I distrust humorless people; selfrighteous commissars and clerics put my hair on end.



The Korean 007 plane atrocity brought into focus, for a time at least, the ruthless, implacable character of our Soviet enemy. Unfortunately (though amply demonstrated by a long, well publicized episode involving the seizing of our diplomats) the ruthless, implacable character of resurgent Islam still does not register. Eventually it will. And there is ample tragic reason to fear that to be burnt as fuel for this flame of enlightenment will be the Baha'is of Iran.

True to recent Western democratic tradition their predicament has to date aroused little interest. After all—they control no oil; they are not revolutionaries; they have no multinational corporate ties. Why should the West be (now) more than "deeply concerned?" Later, we'll cry at their graves. For this there is precedent.

NO COMMUNITY under Islam could be less deserving of persecution than the essentially non-political Baha'is. Their religion (unlike Islam) is a peace-loving one. It requires the faithful to abstain from partisan politics, forbids subversive activity, endorses total loyalty and obedience to civil authority. Yet, the 300,000 Iranian Baha'is community faces imminent destruction. It has been told "Before it is too late, the Baha'is should recant Bahaism. . . . Otherwise, the day will soon come when the Islamic nation will deal with the Baha'is in accordance with its religious obligations, as it has dealt with other hypocrites who have appeared in more dangerous garb and have religious and satanic gatherings." This statement is to be taken seriously.

Consider the actions of its originator: Hojjatol-Islam Qazai is Religious Judge and President of the Revolutionary Court of Shiraz. It was his court which recently sentenced 22 Baha'is to death; in reference to which he said: ". . . I must say that by the grace of Almighty God, the Muslim nation of Iran, which follows the policies of the Sacred Household (the Inamate) will, God willing, fulfill the prayer of Noah (mentioned in the Koran): 'And Noah said, Lord, leave not a single family of Infidels on the Earth.' " He doesn't intend to.

AMONG THOSE hanged June 18th (1983) in Shiraz: Miss Mahshid Nirumand, age 18, a college chemistry major. She served on the Baha'i youth committee, the Shiraz Baha'i teaching committee, the Baha'i campus club. And there is Miss Simin Sabiri, early 20s, a victim of persecution long be-

fore her hanging on June 18. Her family of 11 was forced twice to move from one town to another. In the fall of 1979, the Sabiri home in Marvdasht was destroyed by a fire set by a mob. The Sabiris moved to Bahman. Their home there was looted and set afire. Forced from town, the family settled in Shiraz where Miss Sabiri was arrested for her Baha'i activities (she had been active in the Baha'i education of children). In March her cousin, Rahmatullah Vafai, was also hanged in Shiraz.

Others: Miss Shirin Dalvan, early 20s; Miss Akhtar Sabet, 19-years-old; Mrs. Tahirih Siyavushi, 32-years-old, were arrested in the fall of 1982 because of their Baha'i activities (including the education of children). Mrs. Siyavushi was the wife of Jamshid, hanged two days earlier. Miss Zarrin Muqimi, early 20s, had moved with her family to Shiraz, where her father was to repair and refurbish Baha'i properties that had been partially demolished by authorities. She was a teacher of Baha'i children's classes. Roya Ishraqi, 22-years-old, was known as a devoted Baha'i youth, whose courageous attitude served as an example to other Baha'i young people. Miss Monah Mahmudnizhad, 18-years-old, was arrested in the fall of

1982 with her father Yadullah; he was one of three Baha'is hanged on March 12, 1983 in Shiraz. Miss Mahmudnizhad was beaten before being executed.

WHILE THE President of the United States has appealed to Ayatollah Khomeini and the Congress has passed a resolution condemning the persecution of Baha'is, Iran's policy has not been tempered. Only a worldwide wave of revulsion such as that resulting from the Soviet Korean plane shoot-down might prevent large scale genocide. This requires major media motivation. Unlikely. Yet here is a cause that is about as pure as you can get.

To date almost 200 Baha'is have been killed by the Islamic regime; hundreds have been imprisoned; thousands denied schooling, employment or pensions due to their religion. Representatives of the Iranian government scoff: ". . . nonsensical fabrications . . . custom-made lies." Their U.N. mission explains: "Bahaism is not a religion, but rather, it is a political entity created and nourished by anti-Islamic and Colonial Powers." The Iranian U.N. mission (using the theocracy's special logic) states that ". . . the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran never sentences or pun-

ishes any individual on the charge of holding a particular ideology or following a particular faith . . . although the Constitution does not recognize Baha'ism as a religion . . . nevertheless, its followers have never been punished . . . merely and simply because of their beliefs." The explanation, of course, is that those "punished" were agents of Israel (and that earlier Bahai were agents of the British Empire). Amnesty International has a different opinion: ". . . they are being persecuted solely for their religious beliefs."

SINCE ITS founding in 1844, the Baha'i religion has been considered a heresy by Islam (more than 20,000 believers were put to death in the early days); now, in "revolutionary" Iran, once again the mullahs have whipped up a frenzy of anti-Bahai persecution. With no legal standing (the religion is not recognized by the government or Constitution) Baha'is and their property can be attacked by the most vicious clerical and criminal elements in Iran with near complete impunity. They need not fear retaliation. The peaceful Baha'is' religion forbids it.

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BP000260