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Iranian Court Shuts Down 3 Pro-Reform Newspapers as Dissent Continues to Simmer

By NAZILA FATHI

TORONTO — [Iran](#)'s judiciary has shut down three pro-reform newspapers, opposition Web sites reported Tuesday, in what appears to be a new effort to prevent protests against President [Mahmoud Ahmadinejad](#).

The closures came several days after the appointment of two hard-line military veterans to security-related positions. Together, analysts said, the moves reflected the government's continued determination to suppress the dissent that has risen in the wake of the disputed June 12 presidential election.

Iran's supreme religious leader, Ayatollah [Ali Khamenei](#), appointed Mohammad Reza Naqdi to lead the [Basij](#) militia force. The volunteer militia played a central role, along with the [Revolutionary Guards](#), in the crackdown against protesters after the election. The former commander of the Basij militia, Hussein Taeb, was moved to a position in the intelligence section of the Revolutionary Guards.

The timing of the developments appears to reflect the government's concerns about potential student protests as the new school year begins. Students staged at least two protests at two universities in Tehran last week, forcing Mr. Ahmadinejad to cancel his visit to one of them.

Analysts say they believe that the government's moves are aimed at putting further pressure on activists and limiting the information that newspapers can report. "The appointments all suggest that they are increasing the pressure," said Fatemeh Haghighatjoo, a former member of Parliament and a visiting scholar at the Boston campus of the [University of Massachusetts](#). "But they are implementing their plans step by step so that the pressure would not appear too shocking. They feel they have to control the crisis."

Opposition leaders have accused the government of using violence to suppress the unrest that followed the election, which they say was rigged by Mr. Ahmadinejad. The clashes have led to the deaths of at least 72 people.

The appointments of Mr. Taeb and Mr. Naqdi are likely to heighten the concerns of the opposition. [Human Rights Watch wrote to the Iranian judiciary](#) in August calling for an investigation into the role of Mr. Taeb and others in the killings.

Reformist politicians have accused Mr. Naqdi, a former chief of the intelligence section of the security forces, of being involved in the arrest and torture of reformist figures in the 1990s and later in a brutal crackdown against students in 1999. A court in Tehran sentenced him to eight months in prison, but he never served the sentence.

He was also named in a [United Nations Security Council](#) resolution passed in 2008 as one of the figures linked to the country's clandestine nuclear program.

The three newspapers that were closed on Monday were shut down by the Iranian court that deals with the press, opposition Web sites reported. They are Arman (Goal), Farhang Ashti (Culture of Reconciliation) and an influential daily in the southern city of Shiraz, Tahlil-e-Rooz (Analysis of the Day). The authorities closed another opposition newspaper, Etemad Melli, last month.

On Monday, the president of Shiraz University told the semiofficial Mehr news agency that students had been chanting "God is great" since the opening of Iranian universities last week. The chant has become a ritual in Tehran and around the country since the election as a way to protest the results and the crackdown.

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