

OPINION AND COMMENTARY

Readers write

On Bahais, US books abroad, alcohol's effects, 'Octopussy'

Your editorial "Iran's persecution of Bahais" (July 14) is particularly timely, published as the violence of the attacks on the Bahais in Iran is escalating. In the wake of the June hangings of 17 Bahais - 7 men and 10 women, including 3 teen-age girls - two nationally prominent Bahais were abducted in Tehran; and in the northern village of Ival over 130 men, women, and children were attacked, driven from their homes, and forced to flee into the surrounding forests. The 130 Bahais were set upon by mobs after three days' confinement and starvation failed to force them to deny their beliefs and convert to Islam.

The two kidnappings are reminiscent of the earlier "disappearance" of 14 nationally prominent Bahais three years ago. In all cases the government denied any responsibility or knowledge of the whereabouts of the Bahais, and it has refused to investigate.

Hangings, abductions, and mob attacks, however, represent only the more dramatic kinds of persecution. There are, as the editorial mentions, other acts of oppression against the Bahai faith: the imprisonment of hundreds of Bahais on spurious charges; the bulldozing of Bahai holy places, properties, and cemeteries; the widespread burning and looting of the homes, businesses, and farms of Bahais; the dismissal of Bahais from their jobs; the banning of Bahai meetings and religious services; the prohibition of Bahai literature; the denial of pensions, inheritances, and insurance claims; and the denial of schooling to Bahai children.

The Hojjatieh faction, mentioned in the editorial as exercising a "rising influence in Iran," began 50 years ago as the Anti-Bahai Society. Its enmity for the Bahai faith is well known and has often been at the root of campaigns of violence directed against the Bahais since the 1930s.

There is no evidence at all that the Khomeini regime is attempting to moderate the persecution of the Bahais. To the contrary

the Ayatollah himself has pronounced the Bahais to be enemies of Islam, worthy of destruction.

The suspicion with which the Bahais are viewed comes from fundamentalist elements in Iran who, over the years, have tried to discredit the Bahai faith and led the discrimination and violence against its adherents. The Bahai faith has no secret rites or rituals; it is virtually free of formal religious ceremony. The location of its international headquarters in Israel predates the formation of the state of Israel, and results from the founder of the Bahai religion, Baha'u'llah, having been banished to a penal colony in Palestine where he remained a prisoner of the Ottoman Empire until his death in 1892.

Parks Scott
Public Affairs Officer
Bahai Office of Public Affairs
Wilmette, Ill.

[Re] the editorial "Iran's persecution of Bahais." I am glad that you are bringing this horrible situation to the attention of your readers. But you have been misinformed on one point: You mention that "the rites and rituals of the Bahai faith are secret"; actually, there are no rites and rituals at all in the Bahai faith.

I believe the misapprehension arises from the policy of the Bahais of having certain of their meetings open to members only. This is particularly the situation with the meeting of the Bahai community of a given area which takes place every 19 days, and which corresponds to "going to church" in Christianity. At this (spiritual) "feast," as the Bahais call it, portions of their scriptures (published in English in the US and available to be read by anyone interested), are read aloud, the affairs of the Bahai community are discussed (in a sort of "town meeting"), following which refreshments are served. This "19th-day feast" is open only to registered members of the Bahai faith for a number of good reasons, one of which involves the intimate

devotional atmosphere which needs be present when matters affecting the Bahai community are deliberated upon. In any case, there are no meetings in which there are secret rites and rituals.

John Henry Ives
Albany, Calif.

A friend has called my attention to an editorial about the Bahai persecutions in Iran. As a Bahai of some 50 years, who has been and still is, very disturbed, I appreciate each time an organization or newspaper brings it to public attention. I compliment the writer on the unusual accuracy of the long account.

The one inaccuracy I note states that "the rites and rituals of the Bahai faith are secret." This simply is not true. The criticism may have sprung to the mind of the source of this statement from the fact that the Bahai 19th day feast - which provides for regular association of Bahais - is open only to Bahais.

Christine McKay
Boston

I am writing in response to your articles and editorial, as well as to a very touching report on the "20/20" program on television, regarding the terrible persecution and executions of people of the Bahai faith in Iran.

It is very difficult to understand how anyone could feel justified in the harassment and brutal treatment of these gentle people, who, as I understand it, include reverent worship of God, service to their fellow man, universal peace and education, and the equality of all mankind as the tenets of their religion.

Surely if enough people in the world community speak out against such atrocities, we can help stop the killing and be of help and comfort to these innocent people.

Elizabeth Dawn
Goleta, Calif.

Recycling textbooks

I read with interest your article of July 15 concerning the availability of American publications in foreign stores. Immediately I re-

called a scene, familiar to American college students, of a university bookstore displaying earlier "outdated" editions of textbooks.

Some of the books were of course on the edge of disintegration. However with minimal care many more had years of use left in them.

Is there no way we can salvage the thousands upon thousands of books disposed of each year in this wasteful manner and instead distribute them to foreign bookstores at cost of transportation?

Jon Davis
Midland, Texas

GM's ad

The GM advertisement, "How Much Is Too Much To Drink If You're Driving?" (July 28) is just what should be on the bulletin board of every garage, every auto sales place, every bar where alcohol is obtained.

The chart, with maybe an eye-catching drawing showing the effect on the nervous system of persons of different weights of varying amounts of alcohol, is a must for every driver, whatever the age. Every person learning to drive a car should be given the chart.

A big thank you to GM.
Emma A. Hunt
Charlestown, N.H.

Bad title

I am concerned about the title of the latest James Bond movie which is being plastered on many theaters in the United States this summer - "Octopussy."

Wouldn't it be wonderful if voices of protest could be heard by people about this terrible title? It should not be tolerated.

Jeanne Durkin Gerber
Needham, Mass.

Letters are welcome. Only a selection can be published and none individually acknowledged. All are subject to condensation. Please address letters to "Readers write."

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