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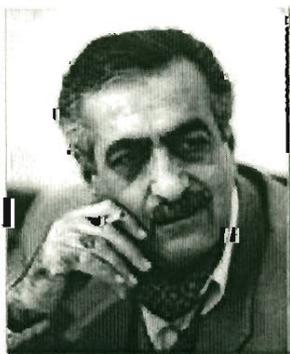
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IRAN 05.7.2002

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Regime jails journalist for eight years and suspends more publications



Reporters Without Borders (Reporters sans frontières - RSF) said today it was deeply shocked at the eight-year jail sentence passed on an elderly and ailing Iranian journalist, **Siamak Pourzand** (see photo), 71, and called for his immediate release. "It is outrageous to imprison a journalist of that age, especially when he is ill," said RSF secretary-general Robert Ménard.

He also expressed concern at the suspension of the country's main reformist daily newspaper, Bonyan, and urged Iranian President Mohammad Khatami to "block these steps taken by

the judiciary and ensure respect for the Constitution, of which he is the official protector."

Seven publications have been suspended in Iran since the beginning of the year. Despite the release today of journalist **Ahmad Qabel**, of *Hayat-e-No*, eleven journalists are still imprisoned in Iran and the country's supreme spiritual leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, is on RSF's worldwide list of predators of press freedom.



Pourzand was sentenced on 3 May 2002 by the Teheran press court for having "undermined state security through his links with monarchists and counter-revolutionaries" He admitted all the charges and said he would not defend himself. RSF is concerned however that psychological pressure might have been used to force him to confess.

He was seized by security police on 29 November last year and held in a secret place for four months without access to a lawyer or a doctor. As head of Teheran's artistic and cultural centre, he was also a cultural commentator for several reformist newspapers that have since been shut down.

The daily paper Bonyan was suspended by the court on 4 May for "many repeated offences" and for using the name and logo of a weekly of the same name. Many banned journalists, including **Alireza Alavitarbar**, editor-in-chief of the suspended paper *Sobh-é-Emrouz*, and **Ahmad Zeid-Abadi**, of the pro-reform weekly Hamchahri, who was jailed for 23 months on 17 April, have written in Bonyan, which is popular in universities and has become a place for debate among reformists because of its stand against conservatives.

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Also on 4 May, the reformist government daily Iran, which is controlled by the official Iranian news agency *IRNA*, was suspended after publishing an article deemed "offensive to the sacred principles of Islam." The next day, the head of the country's conservative judiciary, Ayatollah Mahmud Hashemi Sharudi, ordered the suspension lifted but said the paper would still be prosecuted.

The offending article was a review of a book by the writer Tuka Maleki about Iranian women musicians which scandalised the conservative clergy. **Banafsheh Samgis**, who wrote the review, and **Mohsen Sharnazdar**, editor of *Iran's* music supplement, are being prosecuted and now risk arrest. Iran's editor-in-chief, **Abdolrassul Vessal**, said the paper had received 96 formal complaints about material it had published.

Reporters Without Borders defends imprisoned journalists and press freedom throughout the world, as well as the right to inform the public and to be informed, in accordance with Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Reporters Without Borders has nine national sections (in Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom), representatives in Abidjan, Bangkok, Buenos Aires, Istanbul, Montreal, Moscow, New York, Tokyo and Washington and more than a hundred correspondents worldwide.

