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**EDITORIAL** 

## **Shutting Down Zanan**

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad of Iran and his hard-line allies rail against the United States and other external "enemies," but who they really fear are their own citizens.

The president and his crowd are increasingly nervous about losing next month's parliamentary elections, and next year's presidential vote. Their cowardly solution? Keep potential rivals off the ballot and silence anyone who can give Iran's people a voice — like Zanan, the country's premier women's magazine, and Shahla Sherkat, its courageous managing director.

The government shut Zanan down last week.

Mr. Ahmadinejad — with the backing of Iran's most conservative mullahs — won election in 2005 promising economic reform and an end to political corruption. He has failed to deliver either. In an era of \$100 a barrel oil, Iran's people are struggling with food shortages, high unemployment and spiraling inflation.

He has tried to divert attention from those failures with threats against Israel, Holocaust denials and a confrontation with the United Nations Security Council over nuclear ambitions. Iranians are not so easily fooled.

Fearing just that, Mr. Ahmadinejad and his allies are pressing the vetting committees to keep a much higher than usual number of moderates and reform candidates off the ballot. Already large numbers of reformers have been told that they will not be allowed to run. According to government data, 8.16 percent of the current candidates for Parliament are women. That is down from 9.89 percent four years ago. Some women are now talking about trying to enter the race with an all-female slate of candidates — challenging the government to throw them off.

The order to close Zanan, which means women, is the latest outrage and a sign of how much Mr. Ahmadinejad and the mullahs fear any debate. It should be reversed immediately.

Ms. Sherkat, a former religious revolutionary turned pragmatic feminist, has kept Zanan open for 16 years and 152 issues, despite financial and political pressures. She has managed to inform her readers without overly infuriating the mullahs — until now. According to reports from Iran, authorities said that the magazine was a "threat to the psychological security of the society" because it showed Iranian women in a "black light."

The truth is, the magazine respected and celebrated Iranian women by offering articles on

health, parenting, legal issues, literature and women's achievements. One recent article argued that laws codifying unequal treatment of women in Islamic countries lacked justification under Islamic law and could be changed. The only psychological threat Zanan posed was to the regime's authoritarian and anti-feminist pathology.

Mr. Ahmadinejad may be able to stifle debate, for a while longer. If Iran's mullahs think that he's strengthening the country, they don't understand Iran's people.

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