

## **Media Environment Guide: Iran**

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A guide to Iranian media and broadcasts to Iran - July 2009

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Part 1 Overview

Iran has a population of about 70 million people, with a relatively high literacy rate (estimates vary between 77 and 82 per cent) and a high degree of internet take up (23 million users in March 2008, according to the International Telecommunications Union).

Surveys have found that television is significantly more popular than radio or newspapers and that Iranians rely mostly on domestic television for their news and information. All broadcasting within Iran is controlled by the state and propagates state policy and ideology. Although satellite TV dishes are officially illegal, there is a big audience for foreign-based Persian-language satellite channels and international broadcasters.

In contrast with the lack of political debate in the broadcast media, there is more freedom of expression and a wider range of opinions to be found in the printed press and in a growing number of news agencies and news websites on the internet. However, this debate takes place within restrictions imposed by law and by unwritten "red lines". Criticism of Islam, Imam Khomeyni or Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamene'i is not tolerated, nor is questioning the legitimacy of the Islamic Republic. Debate is much more open and diverse on the internet, although not as serious or in depth.

Persian (Farsi) is the official language and the language used predominantly in the media. However, Farsi and associated dialects are the first language of only 58 per cent of the population. Azeri and other Turkic dialects are spoken by 26 per cent and Kurdish by 9 per cent; other languages include Baluchi and Arabic (1 per cent each; CIA World Factbook).

media freedom

Article 24 of the Constitution states that publications and the press have freedom of expression "except when it is detrimental to the fundamental principles of Islam or the rights of the public". Article 175 states that "freedom of expression and dissemination of thoughts" in radio and television (which are to be administered by the state) must be guaranteed "in keeping with Islamic criteria and the best interests of the country".

The Press Law of 1986 imposes a number of obligations and limitations on the press (more details below), enforced by a Press Supervisory Board. In 2007, a new board was established to supervise the activities of non-governmental news agencies.

During the first term of President Khatami (1997-2001) there was a dramatic growth in the number of newspapers. But from 2000 onwards, the judiciary began a crackdown on many of the pro-reform titles. Since the hardline conservative President Mahmud Ahmadinezhad came to power in 2005 action against the press has become more the domain of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance. By one estimate, 67 publications have been closed down or had their licences revoked since 2005.

Ahmadinezhad's government has taken legal action against some conservative, as well as reformist media, and has also put pressure on the media through the withdrawal of subsidies and advertising, and the issuing of directives as to how certain topics should be covered. It has also instituted a number of management changes to increase its control of news agencies and ordered the filtering (or blocking) of a number of news websites.

Reporters Without Borders, in its press freedom index for 2008, put Iran in the eighth lowest position - 166 out of 173 countries. In its annual report on Iran it said that 30 newspapers were banned in 2008 and that at least 60 journalists and bloggers were "summoned, questioned and convicted" during the year, making the country "the Middle East's biggest prison for journalists".

The Committee to Protect Journalists, in its report "Attacks on the Press in 2008", said that over 30 journalists had been "investigated or arrested or spent time in prison" during the year. At least five were in prison as of 1 December, making Iran the world's sixth leading jailer of journalists. Four of those imprisoned had been reporting for ethnic media outlets or about the treatment of minorities, said the CPJ.

According to CPJ, at least 35 journalists were arrested after the disputed presidential election of June 2009.

## PART 2 Broadcasting

Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) is the state organization in charge of domestic and external broadcasting. Its domestic services are also known as the Voice and Vision of the Islamic Republic of Iran. There are no private, independent broadcasters within the country.

The IRIB has a supervisory board, with two representatives of each of the branches of state - the presidency, the legislature and the judiciary - but they do not play any executive role in the organization. The power to appoint and dismiss the director of the IRIB is assigned by the constitution to the country's supreme leader.

The role of the IRIB, as defined in the constitution, is to support the ideology and interests of the state, which may occasionally differ from that of the government of the day.

### **Management**

Ezatollah Zarghami was appointed director of IRIB in May 2004, aged 45, replacing Ali Larijani (now Majlis Speaker). He was reported to have been reappointed for a second five-year term in May 2009. Zarghami was one of the students who occupied the US embassy in Tehran in 1979 and served in the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps. In the mid 1990s he was deputy minister of culture and Islamic guidance with responsibility for cinema. He then joined IRIB as deputy director in charge of legal, parliamentary and provincial affairs. The reformist daily Sharq described his appointment as strengthening the position of the "young conservatives", a group that has a strong belief in the principle of the guardianship of the supreme leader.

Since Zarghami took over, there have been changes in both the style and content of programming, moving it away from what a Reuters correspondent described as "a bland schedule dominated by religious programming which failed to attract young viewers". Radio and television have appeared to respond more quickly to social developments and to be prepared to do in-depth analytical reporting and ask tough questions of lower-level officials.

The range of programming has increased, some of it imported from abroad, and the quality of journalism and presentation has improved. There have also been moves towards internet broadcasting and interactivity - with viewers and listeners being urged to telephone or e-mail their opinions, and officials being put up to answer questions from the public.

But this move to lighten the style and appeal to a younger audience has not been without criticism. The use of more colloquial language, especially on channels such as Radio Javan (Youth), and socially controversial storylines in some television soap operas has attracted the ire of conservative elements. The IRIB has also been accused by some official circles of not giving proper credit to the government's achievements and of sometimes interrupting broadcasts of live presidential speeches.

## **Funding**

IRIB's main funding comes from the state and is included in the annual government budget. It also includes a TV licence fee in the form of a supplement added to all electricity bills. It earns some income from broadcast advertising, sponsorship and other commercial activities.

On 17 February 2009, IRIB reported Zarghami as saying that the organization's annual budget of 100bn tumans (approximately 100m dollars) was not sufficient for extending coverage and digitizing its network. He estimated that it needed in the region of 140bn tumans to provide "minimum" coverage throughout the country.

In January 2008 the Majlis approved the general outlines of a bill to allocate 250m dollars for IRIB to commission, equip and launch a broadcasting satellite. Finance for the project would be provided from the country's foreign exchange reserve. IRIB's domestic and external channels are at present carried on a number of international satellites; according to Zarghami this costs Iran over 25m dollars a year and leaves it open to both political and commercial pressures.

## **Audiences and reach**

An Intermedia survey in April-May 2005 found that 91 per cent of respondents had watched television the previous day, while 30 per cent had listened to the radio; figures for yesterday newspaper readership and internet usage were 31 and 8 per cent respectively. Television ownership was 99 per cent, while radio ownership at 81 per cent had registered a fall from the previous year.

Although IRIB's coverage is virtually nationwide, there are still remoter parts of the country where not all of its channels are available. For example, in the northwestern province of Ardabil in 2008, Networks 1, 2 and 3 and the provincial network were available in over 90 per cent of the province, Network 4 in 73 per cent, the News Network in 58 per cent, and the Koran and Education networks in less than 50 per cent.

Of the country's four main domestic TV channels, Network 3 (the youth channel) was the most popular with 88.2 per cent of adults watching at least once a week; it was followed by Network 1 (86.1 per cent), Network 2 (82.5 per cent) and Network 4 (70.9 per cent). The highest-ranking expatriate TV channel had a weekly reach of 13.4 per cent. When asked about the media as a source of news and information, the overwhelming majority (84.2 per cent) named domestic TV channels as their first choice. Domestic radio channels only registered in single figures and the US-funded Radio Farda was the only foreign radio or TV broadcaster to score more than one per cent.

Largely similar findings were produced by a survey conducted by the IRIB Research Centre in autumn 2007. Network 3 was watched by 85.2 per cent of viewers surveyed; Network 1 by 83.5 per cent and Network 2 by 82.8 per cent. The News Network, the 24-hour rolling news channel, was watched by 59.7 and Network 4 by 44.6 per cent.

The survey found that Iranians watched an average of just over four hours of television a day, compared to 2 hours 40 minutes of radio.

According to the website of the IRIB Research Centre, the most popular news bulletin is the 2100 (local time) news on Network 1, which is watched by 59.4 per cent of the population. The News Network is watched by 67.5 per cent of male viewers and 50.9 per cent of female viewers.

## Television

Iranian television expanded rapidly in the 1990s, adding more channels, starting international services and moving into satellite and digital broadcasting. IRIB currently operates five nationwide channels (which it calls networks), a 24-hour news channel, a number of provincial and specialist services and several external networks. Television and radio broadcasts are streamed live over the internet. These can be accessed from the sites of the individual services or via a live portal page at <http://live.irib.ir>. However, when checked by BBC Monitoring the reception of consistently streaming audio or video of national television channels has been found to be unreliable, with poor picture quality. Streams of IRIB World Service and domestic radio services were more reliable.

### **Domestic TV channels**

Most broadcasts are in Persian, with some brief news bulletins in English and some locally-produced provincial programming in languages such as Azeri, Kurdish and Arabic.

The main nationwide channels are:

**Network 1** also known as the National Channel, is IRIB's flagship channel. It caters for a general audience and broadcasts the main daily TV news bulletins at 1400, 1900 and 2100 (local time). Its terrestrial transmissions are believed to cover 96 per cent of the country, more than any of the other channels.

The news bulletins have a rather rigid and predictable format, with the main focus on the activities of key leadership figures, especially Ayatollah Khamene'i. They are very much scripted and studio-centred with few live reports from correspondents and little in-depth analysis or comment. As such, they serve the objectives of the IRIB, as defined in its charter, of representing "the general image of the state" and serving its objectives.

**Network 2** is also known as the Culture Network. It is similar to the first channel, but includes specialist programmes and some documentaries. It also broadcasts lengthy interviews and discussions with officials on issues such as events in Iraq or the nuclear issue.

The main evening news bulletin at 2030, local time, was noted in late 2004 to have adopted a slightly different tone in its reporting, covering a wider range of political views and offering more in-depth analysis of issues. However, in the run-up to the Majlis (parliamentary) elections of March 2008, it was observed to have a strongly anti-reformist bias. An official of the reformist Islamic Iran Participation Front claimed that the bulletin was being directed by "military institutions". (Iran newspaper, 23 Feb 08)

**Network 3** is the Youth Network and said to be the most popular channel. It broadcasts a combination of sports and light entertainment programmes and game shows, together with some programmes on health and religion. There is one 15-minute news bulletin at 2200, local time.

**Network 4** - the Knowledge Network - broadcasts mostly scientific, educational, religious and cultural programmes and documentaries. There are two short evening news bulletins.

**Network 5** is also known as the Tehran Network. It broadcasts light entertainment, local news and current affairs. Its midnight news bulletin is IRIB's last domestic news of the day. In other provinces of the country the fifth channel carries the local provincial television service.

**News Network** (IRINN) - also known as Khabar (News) or Channel 6, is a 24-hour news channel. Its format is similar to that of BBC World and CNN. <http://www.irinn.ir>

**Koran Network** - this began by producing programming which was broadcast on other IRIB outlets. In October 2005 it moved to 24-hour broadcasting on its own channel, initially for the Tehran area.

**Provincial TV** There are 28 provincial TV networks, of which over 20 are available on satellite. They are: Ardabil (also known as Sabalan TV), Azarbayjan-e Gharbi,

Azerbaijan-e Sharqi (Sahand TV), Bushehr, Chaharmahal-Bakhtiari (Jahanbin TV), Esfahan, Fars, Golestan, Hormozgan (also known as Khalij-e Fars TV), Ilam, Kerman, Kermanshah (or Zagros TV), Khorasan, Khuzestan, Kohkiluyeh-Boyer Ahmad (or Dena TV), Kordestan, Lorestan (Aflak TV), Mazandaran, Sistan-Baluchestan (or Hamoon TV), Tehran (also known as IRIB Network 5), Yazd, Zanzan (Eshragh TV).

The provincial networks generally broadcast for between 8 and 14 hours a day, from around mid-afternoon to midnight, local time. At other times they carry the News Network. There are some news bulletins and other programmes in local languages - for example, in West Azarbayjan almost two-thirds of the daily local output is in Azari.

A BBC Monitoring survey of provincial channels in 2008 found interesting variations in the output of these channels. A number of them, such as Fars TV, were in some respects more relaxed than the national networks in their cultural programming - broadcasting music and singing and Western films - and some were more critical in their reporting, prepared to cover public grievances and the shortcomings of local authorities.

### **Additional services**

**Educational Network** (Amouzesh) broadcasts secondary school courses and religious and scientific educational programming from 0930 to 2300.

**Labbayk** (Answering the call of God) describes itself as an internet television network of IRIB's Haj and Pilgrimage Organization. It offers news and information about pilgrimage affairs and online transmissions from holy sites in several countries. According to its website, [www.labbaik.ir](http://www.labbaik.ir), it broadcasts for six hours a day.

**Qods TV** is an internet TV service that carries programmes about Palestinian and Middle Eastern issues. [www.godstv.ir](http://www.godstv.ir)

### **International broadcasts**

IRIB began international TV broadcasts in 1997 with the Persian-language Jaam-e Jam service and the multilingual Sahar TV. The Arabic-language Al-Alam news channel started in 2003 and the English-language Press TV in 2007.

**Press TV**, a 24-hour English-language news channel, launched in July 2007. Its stated aim was to offer news "from another point of view" and to be an alternative to "the global media stranglehold" of Western outlets. The channel's editorial perspective, and its criteria for the choice of stories, very much reflect the Iranian government's view of the world and priority topics, such as the nuclear issue.

Press TV has been constantly critical of the US administration - and to a lesser extent of the UK - particularly with regard to their policies towards Iran and the Middle East in general. Analysis and discussion of these issues take up a major part of its current affairs output. The channel also seeks to promote an understanding of Islam as a

peaceful, tolerant religion and is critical, sometimes explicitly sometimes implicitly, of militant, jihadi Islamism of the type associated with Usamah Bin-Ladin.

It has studios in Tehran, Beirut, Damascus and Washington DC, and also in London, from where between 20 and 25 per cent of its weekly output emanates. A number of its programmes are hosted by British journalists and guests include prominent figures from the fields of journalism, academia and elsewhere.

Press TV transmits on 12 satellites around the world and is streamed live from its website ([www.presstv.com](http://www.presstv.com), [www.presstv.ir](http://www.presstv.ir)). A limited programme archive is also available from the website.

**Al-Alam** (The World) is IRIB's 24-hour Arabic news channel, targeting a pan-Arab audience. It transmits on a number of satellites and can be received in Europe, the Middle East, Asia-Pacific and North America.

Al-Alam began broadcasting in February 2003, shortly before the start of the Iraq war. Its style of presentation is similar to that of the major pan-Arab satellite news channels such as Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya. It has bureaus in Baghdad, Beirut and Ramallah as well as Tehran and correspondents in a number of other countries. Its news and programming centre is based in Beirut and many of its staff are Lebanese. Its news bulletins give extensive coverage to the Middle East, particularly Lebanon, Iraq and the Palestinian territories.

According to the channel's web site, Al-Alam is an "Islamic, international news channel" that is "independent" and "neutral" and is "determined to present precise and comprehensive information about events and developments of the world and region quickly". Managing Director Hasan Beheshtipur said that the purpose of the channel was to present the viewpoints of the Islamic world and "counter the monopolization of news channels by Western countries".

The IRIB Research Centre polled 1,400 adults in Beirut and southern Lebanon in September 2006, shortly after the Israel-Hezbollah conflict. Of these, 22 per cent said they watched Al-Alam and 13 per cent watched Al-Kawthar (see below); 2.5 per cent said they watched Sahar TV in English or French. An Intermedia survey in Iraq in 2004 put Al-Alam's total audience reach at 15 per cent, compared to over 60 per cent for the most popular channels, Al-Arabiya and Al-Jazeera. It only rated single figures for reliability and importance as a source of information.

Al-Alam's web site at <http://www.alalam.ir> has extensive news in Arabic and Persian on politics, economics, science and technology and other topics.

**Al-Kawthar/Sahar TV** Sahar TV began as an international television service broadcasting news and general programming on two satellite channels in several languages with the aim of "delivering the message of the Iranian revolution to the outside world".



In February 2006, Sahar 1 changed its name to Al-Kawthar (Fount of abundance, and the name of a Koranic sura). The revamped channel now broadcasts 18 hours a day in Arabic with the aim of promoting Shi'i Islam. Although the programming is mostly religious and cultural, the channel has six daily news bulletins and some political discussions and phone-ins. Some of the programming is produced in Beirut.

[www.alkawthartv.ir](http://www.alkawthartv.ir)

Sahar TV's daily broadcasts consist of transmissions, including repeats, in Azeri (5 hours), English (4 hours), Surani Kurdish (4 hours), French (3 hours) and Bosnian and Urdu (1.5 hours each).

While all broadcasts can be received via satellite, the Azeri programmes can also be received with regular terrestrial aerials in southern parts of the Republic of Azerbaijan. The Kurdish programmes are also broadcast from terrestrial transmitters in Marivan (western Iran) and Sulaymaniyah (Iraqi Kurdistan); while the English programmes are carried by IRIB Network 4 between 0100 and 0330, Tehran time. The Bosnian programmes may be carried by some local and cable TV services in parts of the former Yugoslavia.

Sahar's website describes the channel as basically a "religious" broadcaster, but there are some variations between the different language services. All of them broadcast brief news bulletins and a daily press review. But while the English programmes are mostly about religion and Shi'i Islam, some of the Azeri programmes such as Compass have a strong political and current affairs orientation. In other languages, the programmes are a mixture of serials and natural history and cultural documentaries. <http://sahartv.irib.ir/> English site at <http://setv.irib.ir/>

**Jaam-e Jam** (Jaam's Cup - named after a legendary Persian king) was launched in December 1997. It describes itself as broadcasting to expatriates, Persian speakers, and those interested in the culture and civilization of Iran. Jaam-e Jam has three channels, broadcasting a 24-hour mix of general programming, some with English subtitles.

Channel 1 (also called IRIB 1) broadcasts via Hot Bird 8 for viewers in Europe and the Middle East; Channel 2 (IRIB 2) broadcasts via Hot Bird 8, Telstar 12 and Galaxy 19 for Europe and North America; Channel 3 (IRIB 3) broadcasts via AsiaSat 3S and Intelsat 902 for the Middle East, Asia and Oceania/Australia. The three channels do not broadcast the same programming, though there is some overlap. [www.jjtvn.ir](http://www.jjtvn.ir)

### **Joint projects**

After a meeting in March 2008 in Dushanbe between the foreign ministers of Tajikistan, Iran and Afghanistan, it was announced that the three countries had agreed to set up a jointly-funded TV channel broadcasting in Farsi, Tajik, Dari and Pashto. Following a visit by IRIB director Zarghami to Tajikistan and Afghanistan in February 2009, there were

reports that the channel would be based in Tajikistan, with Iran providing the technical equipment, but the issues of content and funding had still to be resolved.

### **Satellite TV and private broadcasting**

Owning a satellite dish was declared illegal in a law passed in 1994. The reformist-dominated Sixth Majlis (2000-2004) adopted a bill to legalize dishes, but it was blocked by the Guardian Council, a body which vets legislation. However, viewing of satellite channels is widespread and has been largely tolerated by the authorities, although there are occasional crackdowns. Former IRIB chief Ali Larijani admitted to reporters in January 2005 that a total ban was unrealistic.

The Intermedia survey of 2005 said that 14 per cent of respondents admitted to owning satellite dishes, while 23 per cent said that they had "satellite dish access either at home or elsewhere". These figures are likely to be understated due to the legal situation. In a speech to a gathering of clerics in October 2007, IRIB chief Zarghami is reported as saying that figures showed that over 32.5 per cent of Iranians watched satellite television. (Tabnak website 25 Oct 07)

Since all broadcasting in Iran is controlled by the state, there have been attempts by some groups to establish private TV channels transmitting from foreign bases, principally Dubai, while maintaining offices and even production facilities in Tehran. But the authorities in Dubai have made it clear that they will not permit any Iranian media of a political nature. The only channel broadcasting from Dubai is PMC (Persian Music Channel).

In 2006, the Iranian Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance issued a circular banning cooperation with any Persian-language channels operating outside the country, "including participation in their programmes, placing of commercials, interviews and participation in the production of their programmes". (Fars agency 27 Aug 06)

In what could be seen as an indication of the ineffectiveness of the ban on commercials, the ministry repeated it in May 2008, singling out "many beauty saloons or other similar institutes" that placed advertisements on foreign-based satellite channels. (IRNA 14 May 08)

### **Persian-language broadcasts from abroad**

**BBC Persian TV** <http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/>

BBC Persian TV, broadcast on satellite and on the internet, launched in January 2009 with eight hours of daily broadcasting for Iran, Afghanistan and Tajikistan. It was heavily criticized by the Iranian authorities for its coverage of the presidential election in June and some of its satellite transmissions were subject to jamming from inside Iran. A Newsweek article in May ranked it as one of the top 20 "heavyweights" that dominated public discourse in Iran (most of the remainder were establishment figures). According

to a report by the New York Times on 28 June, it is reaching a daily audience of between 6 and 8 million Iranians.

**VOA Persian TV** [www.voanews.com](http://www.voanews.com)

Voice of America's Persian News Network has expanded its satellite television broadcasts in recent years and currently broadcasts seven hours of daily programming, repeated over a 24-hour period. The US Broadcasting Board of Governors budget request for fiscal year 2008 proposed extending the broadcasts to 12 hours a day. VOA says that one in four adult Iranians tunes in to one of its Persian radio or TV programmes at least once a week.

### **US-based channels**

There are some 20 Persian-language TV stations based in the USA, many of them in the Los Angeles area. They began in the 1980s as cable channels, principally serving the large expatriate community that emerged in California after the Iranian revolution. The general expansion of satellite broadcasting in the late 1990s brought the realization that there was a much wider potential audience in the Iranian Diaspora and in Iran itself.

In the early years of this century, these channels were themselves the focus of some media attention for their coverage and support of a series of student protests in Iran. Their accessibility via satellite spurred the Iranian authorities into attempts to jam the signals from these satellites, as well as launching periodic campaigns to confiscate satellite dishes. A report in the Rooz online newspaper (27 Apr 06) said the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps had been given an annual budget of around 10 million dollars for a project to establish a number of jamming stations in Tehran and other cities. The harsh reaction of the authorities could be an indication of the influence that, the government feels, these channels exercise.

However the potential influence of these stations should not be over-estimated. Those channels that are watched in Iran tend to be those offering entertainment programming and many of them feature presenters and entertainers who were popular over 30 years ago. Observers say that most Iranians do not turn to them as a source of news and indeed regard some of the more explicitly pro-monarchist and anti-regime stations as being out of touch with reality.

These expatriate stations range from low-budget, virtual one-man operations to large, well-staffed organizations. Some of the more overtly political channels consist of little more than a presenter seated at a desk, speaking to a fixed camera position, and delivering long lectures or answering telephone calls.

Although some of these stations take clear political stances, as noted below, most of them profess to have no specific political affiliations. The fact that some of them clearly struggle to survive financially has given rise to allegations that they are secretly funded by Iranian monarchists, US agencies, or even the government in Tehran.

Except where noted, all the stations below are based in the Los Angeles area. In addition to covering North America, most of them are also carried on satellites which make them available in Europe and parts of the Middle East.

**Channel One TV** [www.channelonetv.com](http://www.channelonetv.com)

Founded by journalist Shahram Homayoun, Channel One is one of the most politically outspoken of the LA channels. Among its programme hosts are Alireza Nourizadeh, a well-known journalist who also broadcasts on VOA, and Zia Atabay, former owner of the now defunct National Iranian TV (NITV).

According to media reports, Homayoun is associated with the Ma Hastim (We Exist) opposition movement which, before the 2009 presidential election, distributed thousands of camera pens to Iranian citizens, which were used to video and then email pictures of the post-election protests. Channel One's transmissions to Europe and the Middle East are carried by a Eutelsat satellite, where it is listed on the programme guide as Maa TV.

**Pars TV** [www.parstv.tv](http://www.parstv.tv)

Established in 1989 by Amir Shadjareh and one of the first channels to go on satellite, in 1998. Its programmes are pro-monarchist and highly critical of the Iranian government. Some of the channel's hosts are pre-revolution celebrities who are especially popular with older viewers.

**Rangarang** (Many-coloured) [www.rangarang.us](http://www.rangarang.us) (Virginia-based)

It began broadcasting on satellite in mid-2004; before that it had only been available in the Washington D.C. area. It was associated at the time with Ahura Piruz Khaleghi-Yazdi, who attracted attention in September 2004 when he announced that he was about to return to Iran with 50 chartered aircraft and the Islamic Republic would promptly disappear. This drew ridicule from the Iranian media and much of the expatriate community.

**Tapes TV** [www.tapeshtv.com](http://www.tapeshtv.com) (website "under construction")

Also known as PBC (Persian Broadcasting Company) it was launched in 1989 by Alireza Amirghassemi and Masoud Jamali; it went international in 2000 and launched a second channel in January 2005. Scheduling information shows a mix of sports, music, film, serials, lifestyle and talk shows. Surveys have shown that it is one of the most widely watched exile stations within Iran.

**Jaam-e-Jam International** [www.jaamejamintl.us](http://www.jaamejamintl.us)

Established in 1981 by Manouchehr Bibiyan, previously a major music producer in Iran; not to be confused with Iranian state TV's external network of the same name.

Programming is a mix of general entertainment, news, films, sports, talk shows and documentaries. Its San Fernando Valley studios are also used by other programmers.

**Iran TV Network** [www.irantvnetwork.com](http://www.irantvnetwork.com)

Broadcasting since 1982 ITN, describes itself as a "non-political and non-religious" channel. The network has several other channels, including PEN (Persian Entertainment Network) TV. Founder and director Hamid Shabkhiz was an Iranian pop singer before the revolution.

**Tamasha TV** (Spectacle) [www.tamashatv.com](http://www.tamashatv.com)

Tamasha is described as a general entertainment network that broadcasts documentaries, live talk shows, music videos, news and family programming.

**Omid-e Iran** (Hope of Iran) [www.oitn.com](http://www.oitn.com)

According to its website, Omid-e-Iran provides 24-hour "news and sports, entertainment and movie, economic, cultural and social-issue programs in both Farsi and English". It was founded by Nader Rafiee, who started as a newsreader on IRTV - one of the oldest LA-based stations, but not observed on satellite.

**Appadana TV** <http://appadanatv.net>

Based in the San Francisco area. CEO and president is Sattar Deldar, "veteran Iranian newsman and hard-hitting commentator". Schedule shows a mixture of lifestyle programmes, films, music and some news bulletins.

**IPN TV** International Programming Network [www.ipntv.tv](http://www.ipntv.tv)

Describes itself as a 24-hour ethnic programming network consisting of "social programming news, comedy shows, music, talk shows, game shows, and award winning movies and documentaries from around the globe".

**Andisheh TV** [www.andisheh.tv](http://www.andisheh.tv)

Launched in June 2006 and managed by Parviz Kardan, a popular star of the 1970s. Some programming is in Arabic, Turkish, Assyrian and Armenian.

Among other channels available on satellite are Didar Global TV, the Iranian Cinema Channel, Nejat TV (a Christian channel) and the Dubai-based PMC (Persian Music Channel), which is said to be the most popular of its type.

**Europe**

There are two politically-oriented satellite stations based in or with postal addresses in the UK. **Sima-ye Azadi Iran** (Vision of Freedom - National Television of Iran) ([www.iranntv.com](http://www.iranntv.com)) is opposed to the clerical regime of Iran and associated with the Mojahedin-e Khalq Organization. **New Channel TV** ([www.newchannel.tv](http://www.newchannel.tv)) is the TV of the Workers' Communist Party of Iran.

**Mohajer TV** ([www.mohajer-network.com](http://www.mohajer-network.com)) began broadcasts in 2004, when it was reported to be based in Germany. Part-owner businessman Hassan Aripnahi said he wanted to promote Iranian culture for Iranians around the world. Mohajer was given permission by the Ministry of Culture to open an office in Tehran and hoped to produce some programmes in cooperation with state TV; however, the Supreme Cultural Council objected to its activities.

### **Azeri, Kurdish and Arabic broadcasts**

**Gunaz TV** (Southern Azerbaijan TV) A Chicago-based channel which began transmission in 2005. Its stated aim is to oppose "Persian chauvinism" on behalf of the ethnic Azeri minority in Iran. Until March 2006 its broadcasts were carried on a Turkish satellite, but they were halted after protests from Iran. Gunaz gave extensive coverage to the protests that erupted in Iranian Azarbayjan in May 2006 after the publication of a cartoon that was seen as anti-Azeri. [www.gunaz.tv](http://www.gunaz.tv).

**Rojhelat TV** began broadcasting from Sweden in May 2006 in Kurdish and Persian. Reports have linked this station with the Komala group (Revolutionary Organization of Toilers of Iranian Kurdistan). <http://www.rojhelat.tv/>

**Komala TV** is also Sweden-based and associated with the Communist Party of Iran - Komalah. <http://www.tvkomala.com/>

**Tishk TV** is associated with the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan. The Paris-based channel began satellite broadcasts in 2006. Tishk (meaning Light) currently transmits from 1700-2000 gmt daily.

**Newroz TV** is a Swedish-based channel which broadcasts for 12 hours a day in Kurdish, Persian and English to "eastern Kurdistan and Iran". It is owned by the Stiftelsen Kurdisk Media (Kurdish Media Foundation) . [www.newroz.tv](http://www.newroz.tv)

The Canada-based **Ahwaz TV** ([www.al-ahwaz.com](http://www.al-ahwaz.com)) is affiliated with the National Liberation Movement of Ahwaz. Ahwaz (or Ahvaz) is the capital of the Iranian province of Khuzestan, whose population is largely ethnically Arab. The movement calls for independence and an end to 80 years of Iranian "occupation". It is believed to be based in Canada. Ahwaz TV currently broadcasts in Arabic on satellite for one hour a week, 1600-1700 gmt on Fridays. The broadcasts can also be accessed via its website at [www.al-ahwaz.com](http://www.al-ahwaz.com).

Radio

IRIB operates eight nationwide domestic radio networks, a number of provincial stations and an external service that broadcasts in 30 languages. They are known as the Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran (VIRI).

### **National radio**

Most channels broadcast round the clock, on FM and MW, with live internet streaming from the IRIB web site at <http://live.irib.ir>; archive audio and podcasts are also available from some channels.

**Radio Iran**, formerly known as Radio Sarasari (Nationwide), is the country's flagship national radio.

**Radio Farhang** (Culture) includes live relays from parliament.

**Radio Koran** broadcasts Koranic recitations and interpretations.

**Radio Ma'aref** (Islamic knowledge) broadcasts prayers and programmes on religion and ethics from Qom. In February 2008 it launched a daily three-hour English service The Call of Islam on satellite.

**Radio Javan** (Youth) The director of this network was replaced in May 2008, and subsequent media reports said that there had been criticism of the radio's satirical programmes and questioning of government officials.

**Radio Varzesh** (Sports)

**Radio Payam** (Message) is said to be one of the most popular stations. It broadcasts news, music and traffic information.

**Radio Salamat** (Health) broadcasts on FM in Tehran from 0600-1800 local time.

**Radio Goftogu** (Dialogue) broadcasts on the same FM frequency as Salamat from 1800 to midnight. Goftogu gained a reputation for broadcasting interviews with pro-reform politicians and other government critics. This was believed to be the reason behind the replacement of its manager in August 2008.

**Radio Tejarat** (Commerce) broadcasts economic news from 0600-1700 every day on FM. This includes discussion by experts on the economy, financial markets and government policy. According to the IRIB website, its frequencies are then allocated until midnight to **Radio Ava** and from midnight to 0600 to **Radio Nava**, but the home pages of these channels are still under construction.

**Seda-ye Ashena** (Familiar Voice) A light entertainment channel mainly intended for the Iranian Diaspora. Its broadcasts are only available on satellite or the internet.

**Iran Seda** (Iran Voice) is an internet-only radio that launched in January 2008. It has a number of separate streams that offer a mixture of talks, debates, music, drama and comedy, and a listen-on-demand news section.

### **Local radio**

Radio Tehran broadcasts 24 hours on MW and FM. Radio Alborz is a 24-hour FM service for Karaj and western Tehran Province. In addition there are studios in 29 centres producing programmes in Farsi and some local languages and dialects, including Azeri, Kurdish and Gilaki. These stations usually broadcast between 0230 and 1630 gmt and relay the Nationwide Network at night.

### **External radio**

**Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran World Service** broadcasts in 30 languages. Broadcasts are on satellite, streamed on the internet and on shortwave and mediumwave. Some broadcasts are also available internally on the domestic FM network (100.7 in Tehran).

According to the service's website ([www.irib.ir/worldservice](http://www.irib.ir/worldservice)) the languages are: Albanian, Arabic, Armenian, Azeri, Bengali, Bosnian, Chinese, Dari, English, French, Georgian, German, Hausa, Hebrew, Hindi, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese, Kazakh, Kurdish, Pashto, Russian, Spanish, Swahili, Tajik, Turkish and Urdu.

In addition there is a Turkmen service, which describes itself as broadcasting from Gorgan in Golestan Province, and an Uzbek service, which is believed to emanate from the VIRI studios in Mashhad, as do the Tajik and Dari services.

The service's website archive also has a link to broadcasts in Ghafghaz (Caucasus), which may be directed at Chechnya and the North Caucasus region.

The English service includes a daily programme called Voice of Justice, which is directed against "the US administration's interventionist policies".

The Arabic Service broadcasts round the clock on satellite, MW, SW and FM (for southeast Iraq, Tehran and Qom). It also broadcasts a daily programme called Voice of Palestine, Voice of the Palestinian Islamic Revolution. This is directed at Syria, Lebanon and Palestine and focuses exclusively on the Palestinian issue.

### **Broadcasts into Iran**

There are a number of international, opposition and expatriate radios broadcasting to Iran, mainly in Persian.

The most popular foreign radio in Iran is **Radio Farda** (Tomorrow). It was launched in December 2002 by Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) and Voice of America



(VOA). The radio's target audience is listeners under 30. Radio Farda broadcasts news, information and entertainment 24 hours a day on satellite, mediumwave and shortwave. A survey in May 2006 indicated that it has a weekly audience reach of 13.5 per cent, well short of that of state broadcasting. The Intermedia 2005 survey referred to earlier found that 2.4 per cent of respondents listened to Radio Farda via the internet.

Other major international broadcasters with services in Persian are the **BBC** (3 hours a day), **Voice of America** (5 hours), **Radio France Internationale** (1.5 hours), **Deutsche Welle** (1 hour), **China Radio International** (1.5 hours), **Voice of Russia** (2 hours) and **Voice of Israel** (1.5 hours). With effect from 31 March 2008 the Israel Broadcasting Authority terminated all its external shortwave broadcasts with the exception of the daily programming in Farsi, for which the government made emergency financial provision.

The external services of a number of other countries have broadcasts in Farsi and there are also a few Christian evangelical broadcasters such as Bible Voice Broadcasting and Adventist World Radio.

**Radio Zamaneh** broadcasts from Amsterdam via the internet and satellite. It was launched in August 2006 and is partly funded by the Dutch government. It also receives financial and technical support from Press Now, an international NGO supporting "independent media in regions of conflict and countries in transition".

Persian-language radio stations based in the USA include **KRSI - Radio Voice of Iran**, a pro-monarchist station based in Los Angeles and broadcasting on shortwave, satellite and the internet; **Radio Yaran**, also known as AFN Radio, run by Alireza Meybodi; **Radio Azadegan** (Free People), a radio supporting the Iran National Front (of the 1950s prime minister Mohammad Mossadeq), broadcasting on satellite, with archive available on the internet and the Baha'i radio **Payam-e Doost** (Message from a Friend) which broadcasts on satellite and shortwave.

### **Kurdish and other broadcasts**

There are a number of left-wing groups that used to broadcast clandestinely to Iran on shortwave but which have increasingly switched to satellite or to the internet - by posting audio recordings of broadcasts on their websites.

**Voice of Iranian Kurdistan** is operated by the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (PDKI), based in Salah al-Din, Iraq. According to its website (<http://www.rdkiran.com/>) it broadcasts for two hours a day in Kurdish and Farsi on shortwave and on satellite, carried on the sound channel of Tishk TV when the latter is not broadcasting.

**Radio Council Democracy** or Radio Soviet Democracy was first observed on shortwave in November 2006. It appears to broadcast on behalf of the communist Organization of Feda'ian (Minority). <http://www.radioshora.org>

The Scandinavia-based **Radio Barabari** (Equality) [www.radiobarabari.net](http://www.radiobarabari.net) is associated with the Revolutionary Workers Organization of Iran (Rahe Kargar).

## PART 3 Press

For nearly 20 years after the 1979 Islamic Revolution there were only a handful of national political daily newspapers, mostly conservative in nature. The years following the election of President Khatami in 1997 saw a dramatic growth of pro-reform newspapers, but many of these were shut down during a crackdown by judicial authorities in 2000 and 2001.

Given the lack of real political debate on state-controlled radio and television, the press (and, increasingly, the internet) has provided the main forum for debate and the expression of differing opinions. It reflects a range of political viewpoints, albeit within the limits allowed by the law and constitution and the unwritten rules or "red lines" outlined in the overview at the top of this guide.

### **Forum for debate, with limits**

It is important to stress that, within this "green zone" of the press, genuine debate does take place and there are a number of social and political areas where it is more lively than others, for example on economic issues. Areas open to discussion for journalists and politicians include criticism of the president and his government for their policies and style of management. There is also extensive inter-factional debate and exchange of criticism

Article 24 of the Constitution states that publications and the press have freedom of expression "except when it is detrimental to the fundamental principles of Islam or the rights of the public".

Print media are also subject to the Press Law of 1986. This stipulates, inter alia, that publications should advance at least one of a number of objectives, which include "advancing the objectives of the constitution" and "negating the drawing up of false and divisive lines".

Article 6 of the law details what may not be published, including items "encouraging and instigating individuals and groups to act against the security, dignity and interests of the Islamic Republic of Iran within or outside the country" and "insulting Islam and its sanctities, or offending the leader of the revolution and recognized religious authorities".

There are stringent conditions governing the issuing of licences and the qualifications of licence holders and managing directors. Implementation of the law is enforced by a Press Supervisory Board which operates under the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance (MCIG).

In its review of the Iranian year which ended on 20 March 2008, the Tabnak website said that 27 publications had either been shut down or had their licences revoked. This brought to 67 the total of publications closed by the Ahmadinezhad government since June 2005. The report said that the year could be described as "the year of saying goodbye to media critical of the government" and it noted that even media that had previously been supportive of the government had been affected.

In early March, it was reported that the MCIG had issued detailed guidelines on how newspapers should report political topics, such as the nuclear issue and the situation in Iraq. These directives were far more wide-ranging than the previous "red lines". The government has also made increasing use of its right to respond to "false statements" or criticism by having its response published and given equal prominence as the original article or report.

## **Circulation**

However, although influential among decision-makers, the press is not the main source of news and information for the population as a whole, with only a small percentage of the population reading a newspaper on a daily basis. According to Mashallah Shamsolva'ezin, spokesman of the Society for the Defence of Press Freedom, daily circulation fell from 3.8 million in 2000 to 1.2 million in 2007. The circulation figures for individual papers given below are either estimates or the newspaper's own claim and cannot be verified.

In addition to the global financial problems facing the newspaper industry, Iranian papers have been affected by a reduction of at least 25 per cent, sometimes more, in the subsidy they receive from the government. This has been felt particularly by pro-reform publications, which have been obliged to take steps such as increasing their cover price (E'temad), dismissing journalists (E'temad-e Melli) or temporarily suspending publication (Kargozaran).

There are some 20 major national dailies which represent various political views. Although in recent years it has been the practice to describe them as falling into either the conservative or reformist camps, these labels seem increasingly inadequate as more discrete groupings develop on both sides. A number of recently-launched publications represent the views of some of the parties or political pressure groups which have emerged across the political spectrum.

Most newspapers publish daily morning editions of between 12 and 16 pages, except on Fridays. Many of them also have online editions and the websites of most of these offer an archive of old editions and search facilities. The majority of the online sites have little or no updating on Fridays and public holidays.

## **RIGHT WING**

**Keyhan** (Universe) One of the country's oldest daily papers, associated with the office of the Supreme Leader, who appoints the managing editor (Hoseyn Shariatmadari). Read by a conservative, religious audience. It has consistently taken a hard line on domestic and foreign policy issues and published articles about those accused of working for the CIA or other agencies. [www.kayhannews.ir](http://www.kayhannews.ir)

**Jomhuri-ye Eslami** (The Islamic Republic) Ayatollah Ali Khamene'i, Iran's supreme leader, was the first licence holder and the paper is considered to still be closely linked to him, and also to former President Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani. The paper takes the line of adherence to Khomeyni's ideals and has consistently taken a radical position on foreign policy issues and a conservative position on domestic and religious issues. It supported Mirhoseyn Musavi in the 2009 presidential election. [www.jomhourieslami.com](http://www.jomhourieslami.com)

**Resalat** (Message) Established in 1985 and owned by the Resalat Foundation, which has strong links to the traditional bazaar merchants - conservative but in favour of a market economy. It reflects the views of the conservative Islamic Coalition Party and the Islamic Association of Engineers. Circulation 30,000-50,000, read by a conservative, religious audience. Managing editor Morteza Nabavi is a member of the Expediency Council. [www.resalat-news.com](http://www.resalat-news.com)

**Iran** An official government newspaper published by IRNA, the state news agency. Circulation of over 100,000; popular with government clerks and office workers. Managing director: Kaveh Eshtehardi.

After the election of President Mahmud Ahmadinezhad in 2005 - and given the fact that the president's political faction did not have a newspaper of its own - Iran turned into a political platform for the government. By mid 2007, the paper was reflecting the views of the president on foreign issues as well as domestic factional politics. On occasions, the president's private notes were used for the daily's editorial. In line with Ahmadinezhad's policies, the paper pursued a hard-line posture on foreign affairs and was openly opposed to the reformist and the centrist factions. It tried to appeal to a mass urban, middle class audience. This was particularly evident in the advertising the paper published for modern consumer goods. The 28-page mid-size publication seems well-financed, enjoying large colourful adverts paid for by state-affiliated financial conglomerates and leading private sector companies. The paper publishes regular large supplements (sometimes up to 50 pages) on provincial issues. In January 2008 it began publication of an afternoon edition. [www.iran-newspaper.com](http://www.iran-newspaper.com)

**Vatan-e Emruz** (Today's Homeland) was launched in late 2008 to provide political backing for President Ahmadinezhad. The paper's publisher and licence holder is Mehrdad Bazrpash, who is also manager of the state-owned vehicle manufacturer Saipa. This has led to criticism that the company is being used to subsidize the paper. [www.vatanemrooz.ir](http://www.vatanemrooz.ir)

Another pro-Ahmadinezhad daily, **Khorshid** (Sun) was launched in 2008 by the Social Security Organization. Publication was suspended in March 2009 after criticism of the use of public money for the paper.

**Jaam-e Jam** (Jam's Cup or The Crystal Ball) Owned by the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting. Its circulation of 450,000 makes it the biggest selling paper apart from the sports papers. Editorials and commentaries reflect the conservative approach of the IRIB. Its website, [www.jamejamonline.ir](http://www.jamejamonline.ir) describes itself as a cyber-newspaper and posts updates throughout the day. There are some pages in English.

**Hamshahri** (Fellow citizen) Owned by Tehran Municipality, its politics have changed with the mayoralty. Originally reformist, it became conservative after local elections in 2003. One of the best selling dailies with a circulation of about 350,000. It was the first to print in colour. An afternoon edition was launched in January 2008 but shut down just over a year later. Managing director Hoseyn Entezami resigned in June 2008 and was replaced by Ali Asghar Mahkami. [www.hamshahrionline.ir](http://www.hamshahrionline.ir)

**Siyasat-e Ruz** (Politics of the Day) Published by Ali Yusefpor, a member of the Islamic Revolution Devotees' Society. It reflects the views of the younger generation of Iranian conservatives. It changed from weekly to daily publication in 2001 and has become increasingly influential in recent years, although it has a limited circulation. A new editor-in-chief, Mohammad Pirali, was appointed in May 2008 and he announced that the paper's new policy would be one of "reformist principle-ism". Its website, [www.siasatrooz.ir](http://www.siasatrooz.ir), has some pages in English and Arabic.

**Hemayat** (Support) Conservative paper owned by the Prisons' Organization and reflecting the views of the judiciary. [www.hemayat.ir](http://www.hemayat.ir)

**Javan** (Youth) A hardline daily which is linked with the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps. A new managing editor, Seyyed Nezameddin Musavi, was appointed in January 2009 and the paper underwent a revamp in April, with more pictures and non-political stories. [www.javannewspaper.com/](http://www.javannewspaper.com/)

**Tehran-e Emruz** (Today's Tehran) A conservative daily which began publication in 2006. The paper is close to Tehran Mayor Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf and his pragmatic-conservative faction. The 24-page newspaper reports on the affairs of the capital.

The paper had its licence cancelled in June 2008 after it had criticized President Ahmadinezhad's economic policies. A court ruling overturned the decision, but the Ministry of Culture was reported to be still pressing the case. <http://tehranemrooz.ir>

**Khabar** (News) A daily that is seen as being close to Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani, who regularly receives prominent coverage. One of its board members is Hoseyn Entezami, who has worked with Larijani in some of his previous positions. [www.khabaronline.ir](http://www.khabaronline.ir)

**Hezbollah** Daily of Iran's Hezbollah party, which began regular publication in October 2006. <http://www.hnews.ir/fa/>

**Qods** (Celestial) A Mashhad-based daily published by and representing the views of the administration of the shrine of Imam Reza and the Mashhad seminary. It is on the traditionalist-conservative wing of the political spectrum. [www.gudsdaily.com](http://www.gudsdaily.com)

**Abrar** (The Righteous) One of the oldest post-revolution papers, it is an independent conservative daily mainly read by sports fans. [www.abrarnews.com](http://www.abrarnews.com)

## **CENTRIST/REFORMIST**

**Kargozaran** (Executives) The daily newspaper of the centrist Executives of Construction party, associated with former President Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani, was banned in December 2008 after publishing an article critical of the Palestinian Hamas movement.

After the banning of Kargozaran, it was reported that some of its staff had been moved to **Ham-Mihan** (Compatriot). This is a reformist paper, managed by former Tehran Mayor Gholamhoseyn Karbaschi, which itself was banned in 2000 and again in 2007. <http://www.hammihannews.com>

**E'temad** (Trust) A moderate reformist daily published by former Iran newspaper editors supervised by a leading member of the National Trust party, Elias Hazrati. By 2007, and along with E'temad Melli, the official organ of the National Trust Party, E'temad was the leading platform for the reform movement, which otherwise lacked a well-financed high-circulation newspaper. E'temad criticizes government policy on a regular basis and proposes alternative views. This quality newspaper targets the educated classes, and is a good source of news and analysis. [www.etemaad.com](http://www.etemaad.com)

**E'temad-e Melli** (National Trust) Launched in January 2006, it is the newspaper of the National Trust party, founded by former Majlis Speaker and defeated presidential candidate Mehdi Karrubi. It has proved to be comparatively outspoken and prepared to discuss sensitive issues. Quality, high-circulation newspaper targeting educated classes, good source of news and analysis. [www.roozna.com](http://www.roozna.com)

**Aftab-e Yazd** (The Sun of Yazd) A regional paper which went national in 2000 (ex-President Mohammed Khatami is from Yazd) as a way to circumvent the closure of other dailies; affiliated with the Militant Clerics Society and aides to Khatami. Circulation 160,000. [www.aftab-yazd.com](http://www.aftab-yazd.com)

**Mardom Salari** (Democracy) Organ of the centrist, pro-reform Mardom Salari Party. Managing editor Mostafa Kavakebian, who was formerly on the board of Hambastegi, is general secretary of the party. It has been very critical of President Ahmadinezhad, particularly his economic policies. Limited circulation. [www.mardomsalari.com](http://www.mardomsalari.com)

**Hambastegi** (Solidarity) Organ of the centrist Islamic Iran Solidarity Party, one of the pro-Khatami groups. The paper has been in crisis because of bitter infighting within the party. On 28 April 2008 it was reported that it had been ordered to stop publication because it had taken more than the legal maximum of three months to name a replacement for its managing director.

**Afarinesh** (Creation) Managing editor Abdollah Jasbi is chancellor of the Islamic Azad (Open) University and an original member of the conservative Islamic Coalition Association. However, Jasbi is now seen as a centrist. Limited circulation. In May 2009, the university converted its weekly paper into a daily, Farhikhtegan (Intellectuals), supporting Musavi's presidential candidacy.

**Kalemeh-ye Sabz** (Green Word) was launched in May 2009 by presidential candidate Mirhoseyn Musavi. It was banned shortly after the election.

**Yas-e Now** (New Jasmine) In April 2009, a Tehran court lifted a ban that had been imposed in 2004. The paper published one edition in May before being shut down again; it published four more issues in June before Tehran's public prosecutor, Sa'id Mortazavi, ordered it closed again.

**Farhang-e Ashti** (Culture of reconciliation) A pro-reform daily whose main coverage is of economic, social and technical issues. In late 2008 it changed into a non-political, cultural newspaper, but after a brief suspension of publication in April 2009, it reverted to its previous political line. [www.ashtidaily.com](http://www.ashtidaily.com)

**Seda-ye Edalat** (Voice of Justice) Weekly turned daily in 2001. Initially reformist, it then became more conservative, but is now considered to be less influential. Editor is Hoseyn Abdollahi. Limited circulation. It was banned in July 2009 for publishing an article that was deemed a "blatant insult" to Imam Khomeyni.

**Ettela'at** (Information) Iran's oldest daily, moderate, a newspaper of record; one of its popular features is the obituary section. Circulation 60-90,000. It also publishes an international edition in London and New York with an English section. It has always supported Hashemi-Rafsanjani and the Executives of Construction party but has little political influence. [www.ettelaat.com](http://www.ettelaat.com)

There are also a number of financial daily newspapers, of which the best-known is probably Sarmayeh (Capital). Its editor-in-chief, Sa'id Leylaz, has been very critical of Ahmadinezhad's economic policies and was one of many journalists arrested after the presidential election. Other titles include Abrar Eqtesadi (part of the Abrar group), Donya-ye Eqtesad, Pul, Jahan San'at, Asia, Eqtesad Puya and Hadaf va Eqtesad.

There are also around a dozen sports newspapers, concentrating mostly on football, which are generally believed to be the most widely-read newspapers in Iran. The most notable are: Navad (Ninety); Khabar-e Varzeshi (Sports News); Abrar-e Varzeshi (Abrar Sports); Iran-e Varzeshi (Iran Sports); Jahan-e Football (The World of Football).

## PERIODICALS

**Ya-Lesarat ol-Hoseyn** Very conservative Tehran weekly, organ of Ansar-e Hezbollah (Companions of Hezbollah).

**Partow-e Sokhan** A hardline weekly publication, associated with Ayatollah Mesbah-Yazdi, the head of the Imam Khomeyni Institute and said to be a mentor of President Ahmadinezhad. [www.partosokhan.ir](http://www.partosokhan.ir)

**Shahrvand-Emruz** (Today's Citizen) A weekly supported by leading writers and activists and a platform for serious political and ideological debate within the Islamic Republic. It was banned in November 2008.

### English-language newspapers

**Iran Daily** ([www.iran-daily.com](http://www.iran-daily.com)) published by the official news agency IRNA; useful for its editorials, which are pro-government and hard-line.

**Tehran Times** ([www.tehrantimes.com](http://www.tehrantimes.com)) published by the government-run Islamic Propagation Organization; close to the traditional conservatives, and hard-line on some policy issues.

**Iran News** ([www.irannewsdaily.com](http://www.irannewsdaily.com)) useful for editorials rather than news; has centrist or pro-reform positions on major issues.

**Kayhan International** English-language mouthpiece of the hard-line Keyhan family of newspapers, whose policies are reflected in its editorials.

**Provincial press** There are a large number of provincial publications which, in addition to national issues, give an insight into local, regional issues such as labour disputes, crime/drugs/AIDS, regional appointments, military exercises and ethnic issues. The most lively provincial press seem to be in the northwest (East and West Azarbayjan), the west (Kordestan, Kermanshah), the Caspian region, the centre (Esfahan), the south (Bushehr, Hormozgan) and Zanzan. In addition to Farsi, there are some publications in Kurdish and Azeri.

### News Agencies

The following is an overview of the four principal Iranian news agencies. Despatches from these agencies are used extensively by the national press in Iran.



All four agencies cover a comprehensive range of political, economic, social, cultural and sports news and interviews (IRNA, Fars and Mehr also carry commentaries and analyses). Their material is accessible on the internet without registration or subscription. They also contain archives, search facilities and photo sections. But access to the IRNA archive requires subscription.

Since the election of President Ahmadinezhad in June 2005 two of the agencies (IRNA and ISNA) have shifted the tone of their reporting from moderate or pro-reform to a conservative position; these changes have also been reflected in a number of management changes. In 2007, the government established a Non-Government News Agencies Supervisory Board, modelled on the Press Supervisory Board and under the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance.

**Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA)** is Iran's official state-run news agency. It was established in 1934 under the name of Pars News Agency, changing its name after the 1979 Islamic revolution. It is government-funded and operates under the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance and takes a hard-line, pro-Ahmadinezhad position.

During President Ahmadinezhad's time in office IRNA has had three different managing directors and has moved away from what had previously been regarded as a moderately pro-reform position. The current director, appointed in May 2008, is Mohammad Ja'far Behdad. He is a war veteran and ex-PoW in Iraq, who has previously served as a presidential press adviser and writes regularly for the Keyhan newspaper.

According to IRNA's guidelines, its principal objectives include securing the Islamic Republic's national interests, promoting Islamic culture and "encountering the cultural onslaught of enemies of the Islamic revolution".

In addition to Persian, IRNA also carries reports in English, Arabic, Chinese, French, Spanish and Turkish. It has over 20 foreign bureaus and bilateral agreements with news agencies from over 70 countries. IRNA publishes seven dailies and periodicals, including the Persian-language daily Iran, the English-language Iran Daily and the Arabic-language Al-Wifaq. [www.irna.ir](http://www.irna.ir)

**Fars News Agency** is a privately-owned, right-wing news agency which was launched in 2003 and has become one of the country's leading agencies. It is generally seen as supportive of the government, although it was suspended for three days at the start of June 2008 for publishing a report on the possible replacement of the governor of the Central Bank.

The current managing director, Hamid Reza Moqaddamfar, was appointed in December 2007 and said that Fars would follow "principle-ist" policies. Moqaddamfar served in the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps and the agency is known for its security contacts and military reporting. Reformists have accused it of misinformation in its reporting of their activities. Fars carries reports in Persian, Arabic, Turkish and English.

[www.farsnews.net](http://www.farsnews.net).

**Mehr News Agency** was officially launched on 22 June 2003, on the anniversary of the Islamic Propagation Organization (IPO), which owns the agency. Although the IPO is an independent legal entity, in practice it works in parallel with the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, as one of the ministry's affiliated agencies. The IPO director is hardline secretary of the Guardian Council, Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati.

According to the IPO website, the organization's main objectives are to promote the Islamic principle of "propagating virtue and prohibiting vice" and to "counter anti-Islamic and anti-revolutionary ideas".

The managing director of Mehr News Agency is Parviz Esmaili, who is also a member of the Non-Government News Agencies Supervisory Board and a regular writer for the hardline Javan daily. In October 2005, the Islamic Republic of Iran's Association of Muslim Journalists (AMJ) elected Esmaili as its new secretary-general.

According to Mehr's mission statement, the agency's aim is to "provide accurate and up-to-the minute information to the public, with an emphasis on news about Iran and the rest of the Islamic world". In addition to Persian, Mehr also carries reports in Arabic, English, Urdu, German and Turkish. [www.mehrnews.com](http://www.mehrnews.com)

**Iranian Students News Agency (ISNA)** was set up in December 1999. It is a semi-official agency partially funded by the University Jihad, a state-backed student organization, and staffed by students. ISNA gained a reputation as a leading reformist news agency during the presidency of Mohammad Khatami and its director was summoned by the courts several times over its reports. Since President Ahmadinezhad came to power, the agency has had several changes of leadership and become more conservative in its reporting.

When Jamal Rahimian was appointed managing director in November 2007, the Farda website reported that he had been instructed to "withdraw support from all persons critical of the government".

According to the pro-reform daily E'temad (23 Jan 08), the government planned to cut the agency's budget for the forthcoming year by 85 per cent, reducing it to the equivalent of around 300,000 dollars. ISNA carries reports in Persian, Arabic and English. [www.isna.ir](http://www.isna.ir)

**Iranian Labour News Agency (ILNA)** was launched in 2003. Affiliated to the Workers' House (Khane-ye Kargar), it was a centrist, pro-reform agency that reported on the activities of trades unions in particular. ILNA was first filtered and then banned in 2007. It reopened in July 2008, since when it has been more cautious and less pro-reform in its approach. [www.ilna.ir](http://www.ilna.ir)

INTERNET AND news websites

According to the Internet World Stats website, there were 23 million internet users in Iran as of March 2008, a penetration rate of 34.9 per cent of the population, and just under half-a-million broadband connections. This gives it one of the highest penetration rates in the Middle East region, outside Israel, and accounts for over half of the total number of internet users in the region. Between 2000 and 2007 internet use in Iran grew by over 7,000 per cent (from 250,000 users), by far the highest growth rate in the region.

The internet plays an important role in facilitating political discourse in Iran, being used by reformists to mobilize and disseminate information. The Iranian authorities routinely block, or filter, websites which they consider objectionable, whether the content be pornographic, anti-Islamic or expressing dissident political viewpoints. They are also concerned about the way the various forms of emerging media and technology - SMS text messaging, blogs, digital photography, YouTube - can be used to disseminate information and harness opposition. SMS services were suspended for three weeks after the 2009 presidential election. Legal action has been taken against a number of bloggers, just as it has against conventional print journalists.

In an attempt to exert some degree of control over the internet the authorities have, for example, limited the bandwidth available to users (thereby making the downloading of large audio and video files more difficult) and begun building a national internet network less dependent on connections with the outside world.

However, it must also be stressed that the state has played a key role in providing the infrastructure that has permitted internet usage to grow so rapidly. Although much foreign media attention has focused on the internet and blogs as a forum for free expression of opposition to the regime, the internet has been enthusiastically embraced as a medium by all parts of the social and political spectrum. A great deal of investment has been made in dozens of news and analysis websites, which are used politically by both the state and the opposition.

## **Blogs**

According to a study published in April 2008, there are approximately 60,000 routinely updated blogs in Persian. (Kelly and Etling, Berkman Centre for Internet and Society, Harvard University)

The study found an Iranian blogosphere with a political discourse that was "rich, contentious and varied". It identified four major types or "poles" of bloggers. One consisted of those labelled as secular/expatriate or interested in reformist politics. A second, almost as large, consisted of those labelled as religious youth or interested in conservative politics. The other two types were labelled as Persian poetry and literature and Mixed networks.

The authors found that blocking of blogs, particularly those of a secular/reformist nature, was "less pervasive" than they had assumed. The highest incidence occurred with blogs

of a secular/expatriate nature; 21 per cent of these were blocked, which meant that 79 per cent were visible to internet users in Iran.

## **News websites**

Internet-only news websites are becoming increasingly important in providing information and insight about Iranian affairs. The sites have strong political leanings in their reporting and reflect the policy outlook of their affiliated factions. Given the limitation imposed on the printed media, the net-only news sites play a crucial role in providing news.

These sites are not officially recognized by the Iranian government and some of them have been banned or blocked for periods of time. In September 2006, as part of a wider attempt to regulate the internet, the Ministry of Culture announced that newspapers would only be able to publish reports from "reliable and valid" news agencies which had official permission to operate. Those agencies included the four listed in the previous section, plus the Central News Unit of the state broadcaster.

The following list is selective and in alphabetical order.

## **RIGHT-WING**

**Ansar News** - [www.ansarnews.com](http://www.ansarnews.com)

A hard-line pro-Ahmadinezhad news platform for the Coordination Council of Hezbollah Forces. Not strong in terms of news and information, the site reflects the policies of pro-Ahmadinezhad groups.

**Khedmat** - [www.khedmat.ir](http://www.khedmat.ir)

Formed in April 2005 by Ahmadinezhad's associates to support his election campaign. The site is not a strong source of news and it relies on other news agency reports for its own copy. However, the hard-line editorials and commentaries generally follow the government line. Khedmat and Rajanews.com (see below) seem to work closely together, but while Khedmat represents the more official line of the government platform, Raja feels freer to express its views and ideas.

**Raja News** - [www.rajanews.com](http://www.rajanews.com)

The news outlet has emerged as the main mouthpiece for the government of President Ahmadinezhad despite its limited capabilities in terms of news dissemination. The editorials and commentaries provide a good indication of how the government looks at the world. Raja is seen to be close to the cabinet and its reports reflect government policy and outlook. Raja, however, is not an official site for the government. The name, Raja, is in reference to Mohammad Ali Raja'i, the post-revolution president who was killed by a bomb in August 1981.

### **Student News Network - [www.snn.ir](http://www.snn.ir)**

A pro-Ahmadinezhad site, affiliated to the paramilitary Basij Student Organization which operates at universities. The news operations of the site are not extensive but it is good in expressing the policies of the right-wing groups.

### **House of Justice - [www.adlroom.com/](http://www.adlroom.com/)**

A staunch supporter of President Ahmadinezhad, the House of Justice website sees itself as the flag bearer of an ideological struggle against capitalism and the United States. But there is a difference between House of Justice and other pro-government websites in the fact that House of Justice is influenced by a rhetoric that is possibly more at home among the radical movements of Latin America than the traditional religiosity of the Islamic Republic. In comparison with other pro-government websites, House of Justice is not as active or as close to Ahmadinezhad, but it represents a segment of the president's constituency.

There are a host of other websites which support the government with a similar right-wing outlook. They represent various centres of power in the institutions of the Islamic state, and their affiliated government organizations. These websites include: Sepehr [www.sepehrnews.ir/](http://www.sepehrnews.ir/) and Sharif News [sharifnews.com/](http://sharifnews.com/).

## **CONSERVATIVE**

### **Alef - [www.alef.ir](http://www.alef.ir)**

A conservative platform seen as a rival by pro-Ahmadinezhad groups. The site is affiliated to Ahmad Tavakoli, senior Majlis deputy. It has shown support for the Tehran Mayor Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf.

### **Arya News - [www.aryanews.com](http://www.aryanews.com)**

Conservative outlet, established in August 2005, reputed to be close to the ideologue and journalist Amir Mohebeyan.

### **Farda - [www.fardanews.com](http://www.fardanews.com)**

Affiliated to the pragmatic conservative platform. It has had a dual approach to the government, supporting it on some issues but critical on others. Raja news says the site is managed by Morteza Tala'i, a supporter of Tehran mayor Qalibaf.

## **CENTRIST**

### **Aftab - [www.aftabnews.ir](http://www.aftabnews.ir)**

Reputed to be close to Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, the head of the Expediency Council, the site reflects the views of the centrist tendency.

**Tabnak** - [www.tabnak.ir/](http://www.tabnak.ir/)

This site replaced Baztab in 2007 when the latter was banned on the orders of the public prosecutor. Tabnak is generally critical of the government but supports its policy on a number of issues. It is reportedly close to the pragmatic conservatives and Mohsen Reza'i, the secretary of the Expediency Council and former commander-in-chief of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps. He has regular articles on the site.

There are a number of less active sites which are reputedly affiliated to the centrist groups. They include: Sayeh [www.sayenews.com/](http://www.sayenews.com/).

## **PRO-REFORM**

**Emruz** - [www.emruz.info](http://www.emruz.info)

The website acts as the news platform for the "left wing" pro-reform groups, such as the Mojahedin of Islamic Revolution and the Participation Front. These groups have not been allowed their own newspapers and Emruz is, on many occasions, their only public information outlet. The site has limited news capacity but has some good roundup coverage of press reactions to major stories. It also has well-organized links to a number of political groups and think tanks as well as the blogs of pro-reform politicians.

**Nowrooz** - [www.norooznews.ir/](http://www.norooznews.ir/)

The site is the unofficial outlet for the pro-Khatami Participation Front. This pro-reform site has limited news capabilities and its coverage is haphazard. But given that the right-wing media engage in a good deal of misinformation about the reformists, Nowrooz provides authoritative information on the positions of Participation Front and the activities of its branches in provinces.

**Qalam News** - [www.ghalamnews.ir](http://www.ghalamnews.ir)

A website which supports Mirhoseyn Musavi and which has been one of the main outlets for his statements since his defeat in the presidential election.

**Sahamn News** - [www.etemademelli.ir](http://www.etemademelli.ir)

The official platform of the E'temad-e Melli party. It gives extensive coverage to the activities of Mehdi Karrubi, the party leader, and the activities of party supporters