

# GUIDE TO IRANIAN MEDIA AND BROADCASTS TO IRAN - MARCH 2007

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## 1. Overview

Broadcasting within Iran is controlled by the state and largely reflects the views of the Supreme Leader (Ayatollah Ali Khamene'i) and the conservative clerical establishment. Although satellite dishes are officially illegal, there is a big audience for foreign-based Persian-language satellite channels and international broadcasters.

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. There is a large number of daily and weekly newspapers and the press reflects a range of political viewpoints, albeit within the limits allowed by the law and constitution. All publications have to be licensed, and there have been periodic crackdowns on reformist newspapers and journalists seen as going beyond acceptable limits.

When the hardline conservative President Ahmadinezhad came to power there were fears in some quarters that this would see a renewed crackdown on pro-reform media. Although there has not been a repeat of the mass closure of newspapers that occurred in 2000, there have been reports of journalists being summoned by various official bodies and warned against publishing articles critical of the government.

Recent years have seen an increase in the number of news agencies and web-based news sites, the latter serving to promote the viewpoints of both conservative and reformist groupings. Politicians and private individuals have also taken advantage of the development of weblogs, to the extent that Persian is now one of the most widely used languages in this area of the internet. The authorities have been struggling to exert control over this newest form of media.

Political debate within Iran takes place within an area defined by certain written and unwritten rules. Criticism of Islam, the Supreme Leader or Imam Khomeyni is not tolerated, nor is questioning the legitimacy of the Islamic Republic. Common charges against those deemed to be dissidents are: propaganda against the regime, undermining national security, encouraging unrest and insulting sacred beliefs

## **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, Ayatollah Khamene'i.

### **Broadcasting chief**

Ezatollah Zarghami was appointed director of IRIB in May 2004, aged 45, replacing Ali Larijani (now secretary of the Supreme National Security Council and chief negotiator in the Iran-EU nuclear negotiations). 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 ruler.

## Changes

In a speech to IRIB officials in December 2004, Ayatollah Khamene'i said that the media had a central responsibility in confronting the propaganda and "cultural onslaught" the country and region were facing. He said it was important that young people did not feel that the country was backward; they had to feel that they were making progress, moving forward. Khamene'i said the media had to be trustworthy and competitive and to improve the quality and quantity of both national and international broadcasting.

The official news agency IRNA quoted Zarghami as saying in reply that Khamene'i's recommendations would form IRIB's strategy over the next five years and that upgrading the form and content of television programmes was under consideration.

Since Zarghami took over, changes have been noticed in 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 officials. There has also been a move towards 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.

## 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. Exact figures have not been made known. However, in 2001 there was a fierce dispute when the reformist-dominated Majlis tried to cut IRIB's budget allocation by some 20m dollars. IRIB had estimated its advertising revenue at 20m dollars, whereas some MPs reckoned it to be closer to 40 or 50 million. The Majlis later launched an inquiry into alleged misuse of some 500m dollars of funds, but it produced no result.

For the year 2005/6, it was reported that the Majlis had backed a 5m-dollar increase in the budget allocation for IRIB and the Islamic Propagation Organization, to be taken from the allocations for the promotion of cultural heritage and tourism.

A bill being prepared for debate in the Majlis seeks approval for 250m dollars of oil revenue to be used for the purchase of a satellite to broadcast the programmes of the Voice and Vision. The state broadcaster's channels are at present carried on a number of international satellites; the domestic and provincial networks have been carried for a

number of years by Intelsat 902 and, since August 2006, some have also been carried by AsiaSat.

### **Audiences**

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.

Of the country's four main domestic TV channels, Network 3 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.

According to the website of the IRIB Research Centre, the most popular news bulletin is the 2100 news on Network 1, which is watched by 59.4 per cent of the population. The News Network, the 24-hour rolling news channel, is watched by 67.5 per cent of men and 50.9 per cent of women.

### **3. 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 three 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>. When checked by BBC Monitoring in December 2006 the reception of consistently streaming audio or video of national television channels was unreliable, with poor picture quality. Provincial television and radio channels could not be accessed via the IRIB website. Streams of IRIB World Service and national radio sources 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 is also known as the National Channel. It caters for a general audience and broadcasts the main daily TV news bulletins at 1400 and 2100 (local time). Its terrestrial transmissions are thought to cover 96 per cent of the country, more than any of the other channels.

The news bulletins provide a bland, and sometimes selective, overview of the main domestic and international events of the day and activities of key leadership figures, especially Ayatollah Khamene'i. There is little in-depth analysis or comment, except for the final one or two items, which usually provide a brief look at a current international topic or a non-controversial domestic issue. <http://tv1.irib.ir>

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 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. <http://tv2.irib.ir>

Network 3 is the Youth Network and said to be the most popular channel. It broadcasts mostly sports and light entertainment programmes. <http://tv3.irib.ir>

Network 4 - the Knowledge Network - broadcasts scientific, educational, religious and and cultural programmes. <http://tv4.irib.ir>

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. <http://tv5.irib.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. <http://qurantv.irib.ir>

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. It began in 1999 as a new domestic network.

The channel is carried on several satellites, making it accessible across the Middle East, Europe and North America. In November 2006 it joined a number of other domestic outlets on AsiaSat 3S which, as a report on IRINN noted, made it available in the Caucasus, Central Asia and the Indian subcontinent.

**Provincial TV** There are 30 provincial TV networks, of which 14 are available on satellite. They are: Azarbayjan-e Gharbi, Bushehr, Esfahan, Fars, Hormozgan (also known as Khalij-e Fars TV), Kerman, Kermanshah, Khorasan, Khuzestan, Kohkiluyeh-Boyer Ahmad (or Dena TV), Mazandaran, Sistan-Baluchestan (or Hamoon TV), Tehran, Yazd. Some of the provincial channels may be available on the internet.

Transmission times are generally 1030-2030 gmt with a local news bulletin from 1215-1230. Khuzestan TV has an Arabic news bulletin at 1530 gmt. At other times the channels relay the News Network.

### **Additional services**

Payam (Message) Network is a teletext service. News and information on sports, finance and arts in Persian is accessible on Network 2, while an English-language teletext service can be found on Network 3. A selection of Persian teletext is also available as video-text on Network 5 before it begins transmissions. Also on the internet at <http://teletext.irib.ir/Teletext.asp>

Educational Network (Amouzesh) broadcasts secondary school courses and religious and scientific educational programming from 0930 to 2300. <http://www.irib.ir/amouzesh/default.htm>

Labbayk describes itself as an internet television network of IRIB's Haj and Pilgrimage Organization. According to its website, [www.labbaik.ir](http://www.labbaik.ir), it broadcasts for six hours a day.

### **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. An English-language news channel is expected to launch in 2007.

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 and Beirut 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.

In addition to satellite, it is broadcast from a terrestrial transmitter in Iran, making it easily accessible in large areas of southern and eastern Iraq and the only international channel available without a satellite dish. However, this fact is less significant than it was. An Intermedia survey in mid-2004 found that 78 per cent of Iraqi viewers had access to satellite dishes. Al-Alam's total audience reach was put 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.

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.

Al-Alam's web site at <http://www.alalam.ir> has extensive news in Arabic and English on politics, economics, science and technology and other topics. It offers live streaming at <http://live.irib.ir/alalam.asx> and <http://www.alalam.ir/livetv.ram>

A 24-hour English-language news channel, Press TV, is due to launch in 2007. An IRIB official said on 24 January that the channel, which would aim to "deal with propaganda broadcast by Western and some regional networks to tarnish the image of Iran," would launch within three months. The channel has a website under development at [www.presstv.ir](http://www.presstv.ir) and [www.presstv.com](http://www.presstv.com) and on 25 March it was observed testing on satellite with a screenshot of its logo and the announcement: "Coming Up Soon".

Al-Kawthar/Sahar TV Sahar TV began as an international television service broadcasting news and general programming on two 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. It is transmitted on Hot Bird 8 for Europe and Nilesat 102 for the Middle East.  
[www.alkawthartv.ir](http://www.alkawthartv.ir)

Sahar TV broadcasts on Hot Bird 8 and AsiaSat 3S in English, French, Kurdish, Bosnian, Azeri and Urdu. [www.saharirib.ir](http://www.saharirib.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 25 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.

IRIB seemed to realize that it also had a potentially large audience for Jaam-e Jam within Iran. A revamp of the TV pages of its website in March 2005 resulted in the channel being given equal prominence with the domestic networks. It may be that Jaam-e Jam is being used to compete against some of the popular expatriate satellite channels: it takes a more relaxed attitude on social issues such as showing musical instruments being played, which would not be allowed on the domestic channels.

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

### **Satellite ban**

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, mostly recently in the summer of 2006. Former IRIB chief Ali Larijani admitted to reporters in January 2005 that a total ban was unrealistic. The Majlis Cultural Committee in July 2006 was considering a bill which would allow suitable, authorized satellite channels to be carried by IRIB and on subscription cable networks.

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. According to the Sharq daily newspaper in May 2004, a Culture Ministry survey in



Tehran showed that over 70 per cent of respondents watched satellite programmes from abroad (although only 10 per cent admitted to doing so at home).

### **Private TV**

Although all broadcasting within Iran is, by law, controlled by the state there have in recent years been attempts by some groups to establish private, independent broadcasting operations. These involve transmitting by satellite out of Dubai, or other centres, while maintaining offices and even production facilities in Tehran.

One such was Homa TV, which was launched in 2005. Its coverage of that year's presidential election included interviews with politicians and journalists from Iran and it was seen as being associated with the reformist Islamic Iran Participation Front. A report on the Nasrema website on 14 May 2006 said that the station was to close by the end of the month. Japeh Yusefi, the TV's director, cited political and economic pressure as reasons for the closure.

It was frustration at the lack of air time given to those with reformist views that prompted defeated presidential candidate Mehdi Karrubi's attempt to launch his Saba TV channel in December 2005. Programmes would be produced in Iran and then broadcast by satellite from Dubai. However, the planned launch was aborted at the last minute, apparently due to strong pressure from the Iranian authorities.

Early in 2006, there were reports that the UAE had agreed to an Iranian request not to allow live transmissions in Farsi from Dubai. One of the reasons behind this was to thwart plans for a European-based satellite TV channel targetting Iran, funds for which had been approved by the Dutch parliament. (World Tribune.com 6 Feb 06)

At the same time, Iran's Hezbollah party said that it was making preparations to launch its own satellite channel, to be called Kheybar, after an early Islamic battle. Newspaper reports in July 2006 said that the channel's headquarters would be in Qom, but it would operate from a production office in Damascus.

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

#### General observations

There are over 20 Persian-language TV stations broadcasting on satellite and capable of being seen in Iran. Most of them are based in the Los Angeles area. The oldest were established in the early 1980s, principally to serve the large expatriate community that

developed there after the Iranian revolution. The 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.

These stations gained wider public attention in June 2003, when some of them gave extensive coverage to a wave of student protests in Iran and claimed to have been instrumental in encouraging them. Shortly after that, and just as VOA launched a daily TV news programme in Persian, the satellite beaming these channels into Iran was subjected to a period of jamming, believed to have emanated from an Iranian diplomatic facility in Havana, Cuba.

The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) has launched a project which uses "intelligent jamming" that can block specific satellite channels, according to a report in the Rooz online newspaper on 27 April 2006. The report said the project has an annual budget of around 10 million dollars and plans to increase the number of jamming stations in Tehran and other cities from the current number of 50 to 300 within two years.

However the potential influence of these stations should not be over-estimated. Those channels that are watched in Iran, despite the satellite ban, tend to be those offering entertainment programming. 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 run the 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.

It is not clear how much of the entertainment, if any, is produced in-house. Many of the serials would appear to have been produced in Iran by the state broadcaster. Although a number of them claim to be 24-hour operations, this is often not reflected in the programming information available. Similarly, a number offer live internet streaming but this is rarely accessible. Many of the websites do not appear to be regularly updated.

Although some of these expatriate 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.

One recent development is that some stations, such as PMC, Tamasha, Tapesh/PBC and Iran TV Network, are said to have started operating partly out of the UAE. They have been seen to carry advertisements from state-run Iranian companies, leading to speculation that they have arrived at some sort of modus vivendi with the Iranian authorities.

## US-based stations

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.

### National Iranian TV (NITV)

NITV is no longer broadcasting. Founded in 2000 and run by former Iranian rock star Zia Atabay, NITV was one of the exile stations credited in the US press with encouraging people onto the streets of Tehran on 11 September 2001, to protest against the attacks on the USA, and during the student protests of June 2003. But the channel ran into financial difficulties and stopped broadcasting in 2006, although some of its programmes were subsequently carried by Channel One TV.

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

Founded by exiled broadcaster Shahram Homayoun, who featured in US press articles in 2003 about exile stations' coverage of the student unrest in Tehran. Homayoun is also associated with Radio Pedar (Father) which broadcasts to Iran on shortwave for one hour a day. Channel One has a number of political commentary programmes, one of which is hosted by Alireza Nourizadeh, a well-known London-based journalist who also broadcasts on VOA.

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

Established in 1989 by Amir Shadjareh and one of the first to go onto 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.

Pars TV also broadcasts the programming of SOS Iran (of the Iran of Tomorrow Movement - IOTM), which was founded in June 2004 to support "the non-violent removal of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the establishment of freedom, human rights, and a modern, democratic and secular government in Iran," according to the mission statement on its website ([www.sosiran.com](http://www.sosiran.com)).

### Rangarang (Many-coloured) [www.rangarangtv.com](http://www.rangarangtv.com) (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 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.

It seems that Ahura-Yazdi is no longer associated with the channel. He has established Hakha TV ([www.ahura.info](http://www.ahura.info)), named after his movement, and his lectures on politics, ancient Iranian civilization and Zoroastrianism have also been broadcast on Payam TV.

The remaining stations offer mostly light entertainment programming and have no explicit political affiliations.

Tapesht TV [www.tapeshtv.com](http://www.tapeshtv.com) 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.com](http://www.jaamejamintl.com)

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 (as it calls itself) says: "Our programmes deal with everyday events in the entertainment world, music concerts and the latest movie releases both in United States and around the world." Founder and director Hamid Shabkhiz was an Iranian pop singer before the revolution.

Tamasha TV (Spectacle) 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

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".

Payam TV (Message) [www.payamtv.com](http://www.payamtv.com)

"Provides popular programming for all major multicultural markets of diverse ages and cultures and ethnic backgrounds."

Markazi TV (Central) [www.markazitv.com](http://www.markazitv.com)

Television production and broadcasting company based in the San Francisco area.

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

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

Voice of America TV has expanded its broadcasts in Persian and currently broadcasts four hours of daily live programming, which includes news, discussions and interviews. Transmissions begin at 1900, Tehran time, and are also simulcast on VOA radio. The US Broadcasting Board of Governors budget request for fiscal year 2008 proposes extending the broadcasts to 12 hours a day.

BBC World Service has announced plans to launch a Persian TV service in early 2008, broadcasting initially for eight hours a day.

## Europe

There are three 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. Ma TV (also known as Your TV) is a forum for the Monarchist Association of Iran and the fiercely anti-clerical Foroud Fooladvand, who has been the subject of Iranian protests to the British authorities.

Mohajer TV ([www.mohajer-network.com](http://www.mohajer-network.com)) began broadcasts in 2004, when it was reported to be based in Germany, although its website now gives a London contact address. It offers a mix of general programming and 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 and in July 2006 Majlis deputy Sa'id Abutaleb denounced it, along with Homa TV and Iran Music, as an example of private broadcasters operating illegally inside Iran.

### **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 Azerbaijan in May 2006 after the publication of a cartoon that was seen as anti-Azeri.

Broadcasts are streamed live on the internet at [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), which operates a radio station, Voice of Komala (see below).

Komala TV is also Sweden-based and associated with the Communist Party of Iran - Komalah.

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.

In March 2007 there were media reports about the imminent launch of another station broadcasting in Kurdish and Persian, called Newroz TV. This was said to be based in Europe and aimed at "eastern Kurdistan" i.e. Iran. At the same time, the Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq announced the relaunch of its Harem TV service under the name of Newroz (or Nowruz) Satellite TV.

Two television stations which targetted the Arabic-speaking area of southwestern Iran, the Canada-based Ahwaz TV and the UK-based Al-Ahwaz TV, are no longer on satellite.

## **4. 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 is also available.

Sarasari (Nationwide) radio, the country's main radio channel, also identifies itself as Radio Iran.

Farhang (Culture) radio, which includes live relays from parliament.

Koran radio - Koranic recitations and interpretations.

Ma'aref (Islamic culture) broadcasts prayers and programmes on religion and ethics from Qom.

Javan (Youth) radio.

Varzesh (Sports) radio.

Payam (Message) radio, said to be one of the most popular stations; broadcasts news, music and traffic information mainly for the Tehran area.

Seda-ye Ashena (Familiar Voice) A light entertainment channel for the Iranian Diaspora. It carries mainly music with some news bulletins and broadcasts on satellite and the internet.

Salamat (Health) radio, broadcasts on FM only from 0630-1030 gmt.

Goftogu (Dialogue) A radio channel for debate and discussion, it started transmission on 17 May 2006 using the same FM frequencies as Salamat from 1430 to 2030 gmt. Goftogu has been observed to broadcast debates between journalists, academics and politicians on topical issues, including Iran's nuclear programme.

### **Local radio**

The Tehran Network broadcasts 24 hours on MW and FM. 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.

Also, the Listen Live section of the service's website site has been observed to refer to broadcasts in Ghafghaz (Caucasus), which may be directed at Chechnya and the North Caucasus region.

The Hebrew service, also known as Voice of David, began broadcasting on 10 June 2002.

The English service includes a daily 30-minute programme called Voice of Justice aimed at North America.

The Arabic Service broadcasts round the clock on satellite, MW, SW and FM (for southeast Iraq, Tehran and Qom). It also broadcasts a daily 30-minute 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 (6 hours a day) , Voice of America (5 hours) , Radio France Internationale (1.5 hours) , Deutsche Welle (2 hours) , Voice of Israel (1.5hours) , China Radio International (1.5 hours) and Voice of Russia (2 hours) . A BBC survey in April-May 2006 found that BBC broadcasts had a weekly audience reach of 6.0 per cent.

The external services of the following countries have broadcasts in Farsi: Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Egypt, India, Japan, Kuwait, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkey, Uzbekistan. 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, satellite and shortwave. 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; Radio Voice of Women (broadcasting 1 hour a week on shortwave, with internet archive); and the Baha'i radio Payam-e Doost (Message from a Friend) which broadcasts on satellite and shortwave.

In addition, Voice of Iran of Tomorrow Movement - associated with XTV - and Radio Pedar (Father) - associated with Channel One TV - have daily 60-minute broadcasts on shortwave.

### **Kurdish and other broadcasts**

There are a number of clandestine radios broadcasting to Iran on shortwave. Their transmissions are often jammed by the Iranian authorities. The following stations broadcast in Kurdish and Persian:

Voice of Iranian Kurdistan is operated by the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (PDKI), based in Salah al-Din, Iraq. In January 2007 it was observed on the Hot Bird 6 satellite, carried on the sound channel of Tishk TV when the latter is not broadcasting.

A station calling itself Voice of Kurdistan was observed on shortwave in January 2007. It is thought that this may be operated by a group that broke away from the PDKI the previous month.

Voice of the Struggle of Iranian Kordestan is the radio of the Revolutionary Struggle Organization of Iranian Kurdistan.

Voice of Komalah (or Komala) - there are two stations using this name.

1. Voice of Komala representing the Revolutionary Organization of Toilers of Iranian Kurdistan; [www.komala.org](http://www.komala.org). Broadcasts 2 hours a day, plus repeats, with archive available on the internet.

2. Voice of Komala ([www.komalah.org](http://www.komalah.org)) broadcasts weekly via a CIS transmitter and is associated with the Communist Party of Iran.

These stations are believed to operate from the Kurdish areas of Iran and Iraq.

Voice of the Iranian Revolution - broadcasts 1 hour a day in support of the Communist Party of Iran. It shares frequencies with the Sweden-based Voice of the Communist Party of Iran, which broadcasts 1 hour a day in Persian.

Radio International is the radio of the Workers Communist Party of Iran and associated with the UK-based New Channel TV.

Radio Council Democracy or Radio Soviet Democracy was observed on shortwave in November 2006. It appears to broadcast on behalf of the communist Organization of Feda'ian (Minority).

There are two radios linked to the Revolutionary Workers Organization of Iran (Rahe Kargar). They broadcast on shortwave until 2003/4 and now offer archive audio on their web sites. They may also broadcast via satellite, but this has not been verified. They are the Scandinavia-based Radio Barabari (Equality) [www.radiobarabari.net](http://www.radiobarabari.net) and Radio Sedaye Kargaran Iran (Voice of the Workers of Iran) [www.sedayekargaran.com](http://www.sedayekargaran.com).

## 5. Press

For nearly 20 years after the 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.

All publications are required to apply to the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance for a licence and are also subject to the Press Law which, among other things, bans the publication of articles which "violate Islamic principles" or "might damage the foundation of the Islamic Republic".

The head of the Iranian Guild of Journalists, Rajabali Mazru'i, said on 12 March 2007 that the preceding year had been a bad period for the press, with over 20 publications banned by the Press Supervisory Board, a branch of the Ministry of Culture.

While critical of the actions of the press board, and of the attitude of the Ahmadinezhad government, Mazru'i said that the judiciary's conduct towards the press had been more favourable, with the reactivation of the press courts and an attempt to deal with a backlog of pending cases.

Mazru'i's remarks were made in the same week that the courts lifted bans on a number of newspapers. Tehran's press courts have, since early 2005, appeared to be following judiciary guidelines that recommended taking action against individual journalists or executives rather than closing down publications completely.

But since the election of President Ahmadinezhad, much of the responsibility for controlling the media has been taken over by the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance and its hardline conservative minister Hoseyn Saffar-Harandi. In addition to making management changes at the official news agency IRNA, he has repeatedly warned journalists against writing articles that are not in the national interest.

The Supreme National Security Council has also intervened. In particular, it has warned the media against publishing analyses on the nuclear issue and negotiations with the US that differ from the country's official policy (Rooz 16 Apr 06). There have also been reports of journalists being called in and interrogated by intelligence officials and warned not to publish criticism of President Ahmadinezhad or Iran's nuclear programme.

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. Circulation is said to be declining and publications are suffering from a fall in advertising revenue; newsprint (which is subsidized and distributed by the Ministry of Culture) has increased in price and is

sometimes in short supply, since most of it is imported. Most daily publications are between 12 and 16 pages.

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.

(Note: publications are daily except Fridays unless otherwise noted; all circulation figures are unverified, usually the paper's own claim.)

**Keyhan (Universe)** One of the country's oldest daily papers, run by the office of the Supreme Leader, who appoints the managing editor (Hoseyn Shariatmadari). Circulation 60-100,000; 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) - pages in .htm format; two-year archive

**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. 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.

[www.jomhourieslami.com](http://www.jomhourieslami.com) - pages in .htm format; three-year archive

**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) - limited archive

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

Publication of the paper was suspended for five months in 2006 following publication of a cartoon which provoked protests from the country's Azeri community.

[www.iran-newspaper.com](http://www.iran-newspaper.com) pages in .htm and .pdf format and a six-year archive

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.

[www.jamejamonline.ir](http://www.jamejamonline.ir) The website describes itself as a cyber-newspaper and posts updates throughout the day. There are some pages in English, French and Arabic. It offers a PDF version of the printed paper and a six-year archive.

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.

Managing editor Hoseyn Entezami is also the spokesman of the Supreme National Security Council.

[www.hamshahri.org](http://www.hamshahri.org) (and .net) pages in .htm format with an archive going back to 1996

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.

Publication was suspended for several weeks in February 2007 after it published an article seen as offensive to Sunni Muslims.

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

Hezbollah Daily of Iran's Hezbollah party, which began regular publication in October 2006.

Tehran-e Emruz A conservative daily which began publication in November 2006.

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.

Seda-ye Edalat (Voice of Justice) Weekly turned daily in 2001. Initially reformist, it then became a leading conservative daily, but is now considered to be less influential.

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.  
[www.qudsdaily.com](http://www.qudsdaily.com)

Afarinesh (Creation) Managing editor Abdollah Jasbi is chancellor of the Islamic Azad (Open) University and a member of the conservative Islamic Coalition Association.

Kargozaran (Executives) Daily newspaper of the centrist Executives of Construction party, launched in April 2006. Prominent members of the party include former Tehran Mayor Gholamhoseyn Karbaschi and it is also associated with former President Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani and members of his family and his political associates.

Sharq (East) A leading reformist daily with a circulation of about 100,000, Sharq was banned in September 2006, soon after it had published a cartoon seen as insulting President Ahmadinezhad. The Press Supervisory Board said it had committed "repeated offences". A short-lived successor, Ruzegar, closed down after three days. The ban on Sharq was lifted in March 2007 but it has not yet resumed publication.

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.

[www.etemaad.com](http://www.etemaad.com) - pages in .asp format, archive back to 2002

Mardom Salari (Democracy) Organ of the centrist, pro-reform Mardom Salari Party. Managing editor Mostafa Kavakevian was formerly on the board of Hambastegi. It has been very critical of President Ahmadinezhad, particularly his economic policies.

[www.mardomsalari.com](http://www.mardomsalari.com) - pages in .pdf format; limited archive

Hambastegi (Solidarity) Organ of the Islamic Iran Solidarity Party, one of the pro-Khatami groups.

[www.hambastegidaily.com](http://www.hambastegidaily.com) - pages in .pdf format, two-year archive

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.aftabyazd.com](http://www.aftabyazd.com) - the site has .pdf version of pages within frames; full archive

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.

[www.roozna.com](http://www.roozna.com)

**Ayande-ye Now (New Future)** A reformist daily that launched in August 2006. Managing editor Abdolrasul Vesal was formerly managing editor of Iran daily.

**Towse'eh** A pro-Khatami daily managed by Qoli Sheykhi, who was deputy minister of labour in the early years of the revolution.

**Nasim-e Saba (Breeze)** Reflects the views of the Militant Clerics Society, of which its proprietor Rasul Montajabnia is a prominent member.

**Roos (Day)** [www.roozonline.com](http://www.roozonline.com) - a daily internet newspaper which launched in May 2005. It is produced by "independent reformist journalists supporting freedom and human rights". Some of them are living in exile in Europe and Canada, while other contributors still work in Iran. A number of articles are translated into English.

**Abrar (The Righteous)** One of the oldest post-revolution papers, it is an independent conservative daily mainly read by sports fans.

**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.

[www.ettelaat.com](http://www.ettelaat.com) - pages in .pdf format

**Farhang-e Ashti (Culture of reconciliation)** Launched in 2003. Pro-reformist but with no specific political affiliation; its main coverage is economic, social and technical issues.

[www.ashtidaily.com](http://www.ashtidaily.com) - .pdf format; archive available

The most widely-read newspapers in Iran, however, are the sports journals. Some two million copies of them are read every day. Their circulation can double after a major football match. 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)**, this newspaper, a best-seller, covers only football news.

There are three main English-language newspapers: **Tehran Times** ([www.tehrantimes.com](http://www.tehrantimes.com)) published by the government-run Islamic Propagation Organization; **Iran Daily** ([www.iran-daily.com](http://www.iran-daily.com)) published by the official news agency IRNA; and **Iran News** ([www.irannewsdaily.com](http://www.irannewsdaily.com)).

Provincial press There is 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.

## 6. News Agencies

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

All the five 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 archive, search facilities and photo sections. But access to IRNA archive requires subscription.

Since the election of President Ahmadinezhad in June 2005 three of the agencies (IRNA, ISNA and ILNA) have shifted the tone of their reporting from moderate or pro-reform to a more conservative position; these changes have also been reflected in a number of management changes.

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.

Ahmad Khademolmelleh was appointed managing-director after the election of President Ahmadinezhad. Following this change of management, IRNA reporting was observed to move away from what had previously been regarded as a moderately pro-reform position. Khademolmelleh resigned in September 2006, citing differences with Culture Minister Saffar-Harandi. He was replaced by Seyyed Jalal Fayyazi, formerly chief editor of the Mashhad-based Qods newspaper, who was described by Aftab news agency as an "active Principle-ist".

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, Russian, Chinese, French, Spanish Turkish and Serbo-Croat. 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 was officially launched in February 2002 to correspond with the anniversary of the Islamic revolution. On its website, Fars describes itself as the first privately-owned news agency in the country, but it is close to the judiciary. The managing director of the agency is Sa'id Nowbari, a disabled veteran of the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war and former head of the public relations office of the conservative-controlled Tehran Justice Department.

Other individuals associated with Fars News Agency share a similarly conservative background. Managing Editor Mehdi Faza'eli is the former editor-in-chief of Javan and also the spokesman of the Association of Muslim Journalists.

Nowbari has described the objective of the agency as "promoting the principles of the Islamic revolution and safeguarding national interests". Fars carries reports in Persian and English. [www.farsnews.com](http://www.farsnews.com).

Fars has a good record of being quick and accurate in its reports, which are widely used by newspapers.

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 "counter anti-Islamic and anti-revolutionary ideas".

The managing director of Mehr news agency is Parviz Esma'ili, who also runs the conservative English-language Tehran Times daily. In October 2005, the Islamic Republic of Iran's Association of Muslim Journalists (AMJ) elected Esma'ili 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, a few months after the wave of student demonstrations. It is a semi-official agency partially funded by the University Jihad, a state-backed student organization.

While taking a reformist view of events, ISNA has managed to remain politically independent. It has, however, maintained its loyalty to the former president and carries a section devoted to "Khatami's perspectives". ISNA's former director-general, Abolfazl Fateh, was summoned to court several times over the agency's reports.

Fateh resigned in September 2005 and was replaced by ISNA's head of political and international news, Mehdi Nad'alizadeh. On the agency's website, Nad'alizadeh says that "despite financial difficulties" and government obstacles the agency will remain politically independent and maintain its "politically moderate" coverage of events. Nad'alizadeh resigned in February 2007 and was replaced by Hamid Hasan-Zadeh

ISNA reports are widely used by Iranian and foreign media. It has some reports in English. Moreover, the agency offers free access to its photo archive. [www.isna.ir](http://www.isna.ir)

Iranian Labour News Agency (ILNA) was launched on 24 February 2003. It is affiliated to the Workers' House (Khane-ye Kargar), Iran's main labour organization.

According to its managing director, Mas'ud Heydari, ILNA does not receive any financial backing from any centres and operates under the supervision of the Labour Higher Education Institute.

When ILNA started its operation, Heydari said that the agency would focus on workers' demands. But the agency's coverage has since extended to include the same range of news as the other main news agencies, although it continues to devote a section to workers. [www.ilna.ir](http://www.ilna.ir).

In April, over 30 reporters were dismissed, ostensibly on financial grounds. A number of other journalists subsequently resigned, claiming that the sackings were politically motivated. (Rooz 18 Apr 06)

## 7. News websites

This group consists of websites which usually identify themselves as "news agencies" but are better described as news websites. They 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 five listed in the previous section, plus the Central News Unit of the state broadcaster.

Aftab News ([www.aftabnews.ir](http://www.aftabnews.ir))

A moderate, right-of-centre website financed by the Research Centre of the Expediency Council, which is headed by ex-President Hashemi-Rafsanjani. It is seen as the mouthpiece of Hasan Rowhani, formerly secretary of the Supreme National Security Council and chief negotiator in the Iran-EU nuclear talks.

Advar News ([www.advarnews.com](http://www.advarnews.com))

This reformist website covers mainly the developments in the universities across Iran as well as the top stories about the Iranian political scene. It belongs to the veteran members of the Office for Fostering Unity, which was once the country's only student organization. Towards the end of President Mohammad Khatami's term of office, signs of a split in political loyalty emerged within the union, breaking it down into initially two, and then three, groups of which two demanded reforms in the Iranian political establishment. As the mouthpiece of a group which is a part of the Islamic Iran Participation Front, Advar News advocates secular reforms within a religious society. The site was temporarily shut down in September 2006 after a raid by intelligence agents and was also blocked for three days in January 2007.

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

Supportive of President Ahmadinezhad's government, this website contains few actual "news" items on recent developments. The most important part of the site is its gossip column which is a review of behind-the-scene developments with a hard-line view. Most of these stories end up on page two of *Ya Lesarat Ol-Hoseyn*, the vigilante group Ansar-e Hezbollah's weekly newspaper. However, there are always a few that remain exclusive to the website.

Aref News ([www.arefnews.com](http://www.arefnews.com))

This website carries news stories which appear to be exclusive. The nature of the stories that appear on this site and the presence of a few writers such as Abbas Salimi-Namin and Abdollah Shahbazi, who are believed to have been in contact with the Intelligence Ministry at some point during their career, indicate its access to an inside account of domestic political developments. In early November 2005 Aref News published the family network of President Ahmadinezhad's cabinet. A few days later, the website announced that "it was not going to be as open as before in order to ensure its survival".

Baztab ([www.baztab.com](http://www.baztab.com))

Widely known for its tabloid style of news writing, Baztab was banned for eight weeks in 2005 after former Supreme National Security Council (SCNS) Chief Hasan Rowhani sued it for libel. When authorized to run again, it claimed that Iranian internet users had turned to foreign and "counter-revolutionary" sites for news and information in its absence. While it was not being updated, over 150 MPs demanded the lifting of the ban on Baztab. Although some of its stories are widely quoted by other Iranian and non-

Iranian media, the news on Baztab is rarely if ever substantiated. Its reports have been refuted on many occasions, at least once by the British government when it carried an "exclusive" report about a meeting with Prime Minister Blair which turned out never to have happened.

The site was reported to have been banned and filtered in February 2007, but the ban was lifted the following month.

Entekhab ([www.entekhab.ir](http://www.entekhab.ir))

Launched to support Ali Larijani during the presidential election campaigns in June 2005, Entekhab website did not simply disappear like many other websites that had been launched as tools for the election campaign. It stayed on the net to replace Entekhab daily newspaper, the only Iranian daily which stopped publication without being banned. After the election, Entekhab became a news website with no clear political orientation. However, its politically right-of-centre editor-in-chief, Mohammad Mehdi Faqihi, is known to be a devoted follower of Iran's supreme leader and maintains close ties with liberal clerics at the Qom Seminary.

Farda News ([www.fardanews.com](http://www.fardanews.com))

Farda News was launched almost simultaneously with Khedmat News, another hard-line conservative news website. Its news reports about the developments in the cabinet office have proved to be reliable. It is mildly critical of the government but generally supportive of the Islamic regime. The website resumed activity in December 2006 after a two-month hiatus.

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

In the months following the election of Mahmud Ahmadinezhad as Iran's president, Khedmat News has proved to be the most reliable source of inside information about the developments within the cabinet. It updates regularly and frequently. While Ahmadinezhad was introducing his ministers to the Majlis, Khedmat News published their profiles online before they were read out in the parliament. The site's gossip about the appointments and assignments within the cabinet turned out to be invariably true.

Sharif News ([www.sharifnews.com](http://www.sharifnews.com))

Sharif News is a hardline conservative news agency associated with the basij students of Sharif Industrial University in Tehran. The site has been linked with former IRGC commander Mohsen Reza'i and has published articles by Hoseyn Shariatmadari, the managing editor of Keyhan.

*Source: BBC Monitoring research 27 Mar 07*