

# Iranian students' death sentences confirmed

**Ute Reissner**  
**11 January 2000**

The Supreme revolutionary court in Iran has confirmed the death sentences of students Akbar Mohammadi and Ahmed Batebi. The news was communicated by telephone by relatives of Akbar Mohammadi to solidarity groups outside the country.

The two students had taken part in protests in Teheran last July. A photo of Batebi, holding aloft the blood-soaked T-shirt of a fellow student, was widely circulated in the international press at the time of the demonstrations. The death sentence against him was based on charges of endangering national security and giving support to anti-government propaganda.

Akbar Mohammadi was accused on a number of counts, including throwing Molotov cocktails. His family report evidence that he has been tortured—apparently attempts have been made to force him to make a confession. Akbar is confined in the notorious Tohid prison, mainly occupied by political prisoners. He is the brother of Manusher Mohammadi, the chairman of the illegal National Student Organisation of Iran, who himself has been sentenced to 13 years imprisonment.

In 1998 Manusher Mohammadi visited Germany following an invitation from the Heinrich-Böll foundation, which is close to the German Green party. Gholamresa Mohadsheri Nedshad, who accompanied Mohammadi at that time and was also arrested by Iranian authorities, is reputed to have been freed from confinement.

Nevertheless the majority of the 1,500 students arrested in connection with last summer's protests remain incarcerated. The exact details of their imprisonment are hard to come by, because the relevant authorities often refuse to release the names of those imprisoned while holding the accused in isolation.

Judicial proceedings, when they take place at all, are a mockery of elementary democratic rights and do not even correspond to the requirements laid down in

Iranian law. In the cases of the two students mentioned above, together with two other unnamed students also condemned to death by hanging, all their trials were closed to the public and the accused were refused the right to choose their own defence lawyer. Iranian human rights groups fear a wave of further death sentences under similar circumstances.

The unfortunate students have been the grist in the mill of a power struggle which has been raging inside the leading elite in Iran for a number of years and which is currently assuming an especially virulent character in the run-up to parliamentary elections planned for February 18. The conflict centres on the group which has up until now controlled the levers of power opposing a faction of so-called reformers around state president Muhammad Khatami who, according to observers, can count on winning a large majority of the 270 seats in the Iranian parliament (Majlis). Already in the presidential elections in May 1997 Khatami emerged as victor with a landslide majority.

Khatami's popularity waned, however, when after a brief hesitation he came down firmly on the side of the government in its conflict with students who had taken to the streets following the banning of an opposition newspaper last summer. Khatami ended up fiercely condemning the protests. While government paramilitary forces proceeded in a brutal and bloodthirsty manner against the students, Khatami declared the students to be a threat to the state and called for law and order.

In Iran over half of the population is less than 19 years old. Voting age is 16.

The united front of the “reformers” and the Islamic hard-line spiritual leaders against the protesting students results from the explosive social crisis and widespread popular dissatisfaction that threatens the interests of both privileged factions. Both groups see no way out of the crisis apart from increasingly opening up

the country to American and European interests. However, the issue of how to proceed along this path and who stands to benefit has explosive implications.

A week ago Iranian newspapers reported a decision by the 16-strong state “Council of Guardians [of the revolution]”, whose powers include checking the lists for parliamentary elections. The council declared it would only permit those candidates to stand who had taken part in the latest pro-government celebrations. A special commission was appointed to investigate who was eligible.

Over the past months there have been a series of further moves to censure the media and ban publications. Frequent arrests of former members of the government or other members of the establishment have taken place. At the end of November the well-known former interior minister and friend of Khatami, Abdullah Nuri, was arrested on a charge of “insulting Islam”. He announced his candidacy from his prison cell, but is unlikely to be accepted for the February elections.

Moves to accommodate to the US and Europe are making progress even as the no-holds-barred internal conflict escalates, and have made clearly discernible progress following the brutal suppression of the opposition movement.

In the middle of October news agencies reported that the section leader for the Middle East in the US State Department, Martin Indyk, declared that the US and Iran should approach one another as two great nations on the basis of equality and mutual respect. Indyk repeated the offer of US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright to re-establish relations on a new level.

At the end of October State President Khatami was the first Iranian head of state to be greeted in Paris since the overthrow of the Shah in 1979. French police used Khatami's visit as the basis for the persecution of protesting Iranians and a series of raids and arrests took place. In a unique action the French government annulled the Schengen agreement, which permits the free movement of persons inside the member European countries. For the period of October 23-29 France closed its borders to all suspected members of the Iranian opposition. On the eve of Khatami's visit Iranian citizens were turned back at the French border and French police even went so far as to refuse entry to American and Canadian citizens of Iranian origin.

A number of important trade deals were concluded in the course of Khatami's visit to Paris. In a meeting with representatives of the employers' organisation Medef, a deal was concluded for the purchase of 100 locomotives from the company Alsthom (which also manufactures France's high speed train-TGV) as well as the allocation of a credit totalling 1.5 billion francs. Additional deals were made for the purchase by Iran of four European Airbus type A-330 passenger planes. (Normally the US has acted to block sales of civil aircraft to Iranian Air on the grounds that more than 10 percent of the airplane parts are of American origin. To get round this restriction Airbus offered machines with engines finished in Great Britain and European electronics facilities. French foreign minister Hubert Védrine answered criticisms of the deal with the words: “I cannot see that democracy advances any quicker if the country buys Boeing instead of Airbus.”)

Following the coming to power of a Social Democrat-Green coalition the German government has continued its policy of expelling Iranian asylum-seekers. A few weeks ago an Iranian woman was mishandled by police in Nuremberg because she refused to obey a decree of the Iranian government that all women wear a veil. Roya Mosayebi had fled to Germany with her two sons after she had been accused of an “immoral anti-Islamic” attitude. In order to expel the Iranian woman the Nuremberg Immigration Office required a pass photo for return documents issued by the Iranian foreign department. Because Iran refuses to accept any photograph of a woman without a veil police officials employed considerable violence to force the woman to wear a veil for the necessary photo. She refused and subsequently suffered injuries to her shoulder, pulled muscles and bruises.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](http://wsws.org/contact)**