

RELEASE IN FULL

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FYI

From: Eyre, Alan E
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IRAN DAILY BRIEF - Iran Reporting Office - Dubai - Sunday, March 4, 2012 = 14 Esfand 1390

NINTH MAJLIS ELECTIONS:

Summary: *Despite what seems to have been a relatively low turnout in major cities, the regime has claimed an elevated and enthusiastic turnout for the Ninth Majlis elections. Although the vote count is ongoing, results so far indicate the relative success of conservatives opposed to the President over those supporting him.*

TRIUMPHANT TURNOUT...:

INTERIOR MINISTER: TURNOUT 64.2%...: Interior Minister Mostafa Mohammad Najjar said on March 3 that, according to the latest figures, 64.2% of eligible voters nationwide cast votes on March 2, compared to slightly higher than 50% in the last legislative elections. Electoral Board Head and Deputy Interior Minister Solat Mortazavi revised the figure to 64.4%, after 90% of the votes had been counted, by the evening of March 3. Interior Minister Najjar said that the turnout for Tehran Province was 52%, while IRGC-linked Fars News wrote on the same day that the figure for Greater Tehran was 'at least 48%, almost double the traditionally low turnout for the capital.

...REGIME HAPPY:

HIGH FIVES ON HIGH PARTICIPATION: Officials, organizations, and some domestic press praised on March 3 and 4 the high turnout and stressed its international importance. Khamenei-linked Keyhan Newspaper wrote, 'The nation's unprecedented participation stunned the enemy,' adding that the turnout represented 'the nation's historic presence at the most sensitive point moment in history.' The newspaper added the election added to the revolution's mythology, reporting that two teams of election officials had walked for five hours to get ballot boxes to fifteen villages in the Kouhrang area which had been snowed in and had become inaccessible to helicopters; and that a one-hundred-year-old man had died in Hamedan, shortly after casting his vote. Keyhan reported that voting hours had to be extended from 6 PM to 8 PM or 9 PM in many districts because of the large numbers of voters. On March 4, the newspaper wrote, 'International press broadly covered the elections and wrote that the regime's legitimacy had increased because of the high turnout.' The Basij Organization issued a statement on March 3, saying, 'Once again, the heroic and mobilized nation of Islamic Iran, through its enlightened and revolutionary presence at the ballot boxes, has shown its high political intelligence to the world and has proved that it is the main support for the regime and the wise Leader of the revolution. It has rightfully shaken the enemies' foundations.' The Followers of the Imam and Leader was among the many political groups which lauded and thanked the Iranian nation for its 'glorious participation,' writing, 'Our people's strong slap to the enemies' unsightly visage on March 2 was of the same kind as the blow delivered to their filthy mouths on February 11 [revolution's anniversary].'

SENIOR OFFICIALS VOTE AND (ALMOST ALL) MAKE TRIUMPHANT COMMENTS: While Ayatollah Rafsanjani struck a perhaps unintended sour note on March 2, saying that the next Majlis would be a good legislature if the vote cast by the

people was the same as that which would later come out of the ballot boxes, most senior officials were shown on state television as they voted and commented positively on the elections. A selection:

- **Leader Ali Khamenei:** 'Elections in Iran, in addition to illustrating realities about the country, carry messages for friends and foes. For this reason they have even greater importance in today's circumstances.'

- **President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad**, who unlike other officials did not make an appearance as soon as polling stations opened at 8 AM, did not make any statement after he placed his vote in the ballot box just before 1 PM..His office published a short statement simply informing the public that he had voted and that he had been accompanied by **First Vice President Mohammad Reza Rahimi**.

- **Judiciary Chief Hojjatoleslam Sadegh Larijani:** 'Participating in elections is an extremely important religious duty and, given our country's influence on the Islamic Awakening, these elections will be very effective on a political level.'

- **Speaker Ali Larijani:** 'In circumstances where the enemy has its covetous eyes on Islamic Iran, we must show through our behavior that we are all in the age of protecting the rights of the Iranian nation and that the officials are working for the progress of the country, and that no one can deny this.'

- **Guardian Council Chairman Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati**, employing the terms *aslah* (fittest) and *saleh* (righteous, or confirmed by the Guardian Council) which have been used increasingly in the lead-up to elections to signify that not even candidates who have been screened necessarily deserve to be in the Majlis, said: 'Being revolutionary, or in other words a 57er (referring to 1357, the year of the revolution), is among the qualities of the fittest. [A candidate] may be confirmed, but not the fittest.'

CLAIMS OF FRAUD & LOW TURNOUT / 'POTEMKIN' POLLING STATIONS:

...WHILE QUESTIONS VOICED CONCERNING NUMBER OF ELIGIBLE VOTERS: Meanwhile, some observers continued to question the official statistics for eligible voters, saying that they were lower than the true figures. In the weeks leading up to the elections, opposition and expatriate news sites had surmised that the Interior Ministry's figure for eligible voters had been artificially downsized to give the impression of a higher turnout. But on March 3, Baztab news site, affiliated with former IRGC Chief Mohsen Rezaei, also wrote that Tehran Province Governor Morteza Tamaddon had stated that there were 6.345 million eligible voters in Tehran and Alborz provinces (Tehran Province was split into Tehran and Alborz provinces in 2010), while in the June 2009 presidential race, officials had said that the same geographical area had 8.796 million eligible voters. Baztab wrote, 'Has something happened in Tehran Province and Karaj (capital of Alborz Province) to eliminate 2.45 eligible voters there in the past two years?' The news post was subsequently taken off Baztab's site.

... FRAUD, TURNOUT FIGURE FALSE, SAY CRITICS...: Opposition news site Jaras questioned on March 3 the Interior Ministry's voter participation figure for Tehran (52%). The news site wrote that the statistics for the last three Majlis elections showed that participation had been consistently declining in the capital from 46.88% to 36.78% to 30.32%. Anecdotal information from blogs, expatriate radio and TV call-in programs, photos, and videos posted to the Internet on March 2, 3, and 4 indicated that voter turnout may not have been as great as reported by domestic news outlets. Photos and videos from around the country purported to show polling stations with very few voters. Mehr News, linked to the Islamic Propagation Organization, wrote on March 3 that 380,000 votes had been cast in Ilam Province and applauded the people for participating in great numbers. But as opposition news sites reported on March 3, the same news agency had written on February 29 that there were 373,000 eligible voters in that province.

...'HIGH TURNOUT IN VOTING WHICH WERE SHOWN, AND EMPTY POLLING STATIONS WHICH WERE NOT SEEN'... Opposition observers and news sites claimed on March 2 and 3 that the regime had set up busy 'Potemkin' polling stations for domestic TV cameras and international press, but that participation in other sites was far from overwhelming. These reports contend that large numbers of government workers, Basij members, and other regime supporters had been bused to or asked to go to particular voting locations, and that the process had been made easier by the Interior Ministry's official statements on March 2 that voters could go to polling stations outside their usual

districts and that national ID cards would not be required to vote. Some international reporters were bused in to various polling stations and were returned to their hotels at 4 PM local and told to stay put, according to articles and tweets by journalists. One opposition news site wrote, for example, that its correspondent had found 'about 20 voters inside the polling station' at Tehran's Al Rasoul Mosque at 11 AM, although state television and domestic press reported that turnout was so high at that location that they had asked for more ballots to be delivered.

...AS AHMADINEJAD SISTER CLAIMS FRAUD...: Parvin Ahmadinejad, the President's sister, was among the noteworthy losers on March 2, especially since she was defeated in the Ahmadinejad family's hometown of Garmsar. She said, 'On the day and evening of elections in Garmsar, certain candidates committed electoral violations. These acts were illegal and I have submitted my objections concerning this matter to the relevant authorities.' Some domestic press cited her loss, as well as the failed bid by Seyed Ahmad Mousavi, husband of Ahmadinejad's niece, to win a seat in Ahvaz as proof of the elections' fairness.

...AND SOME SENIOR CLERICS DO NOT VOTE: A number of grand ayatollahs and 'Sources of Emulation' refrained from voting, according to news reports on March 2. They are:

- Hossein Vahid Khorasani
- Seyed Moussa Shobeiri Zanjani
- Seyed Abdol Karim Mousavi Ardebili
- Youssef Sanei
- Seyed Mohammad Sadegh Rohani
- Seyed Sadegh Shirazi
- Seyed Ali Mohammad Dastgheib Shirazi
- Assadollah Bayat Zanjani

RESULTS: PRESIDENT TAKES A BEATING?:

ELECTION RESULTS NATIONWIDE...: Initial figures indicated on March 4 that the (anti-Ahmadinejad) Unified Principlist Front (UPF) had earned a relative victory over the (pro-Ahmadinejad) Islamic Revolution Permanence Front (IRPF, *Paydari*) in the March 2 elections, which had been a battle between Principlist camps for control of the 9th Majlis's 290 seats. But it was difficult to gauge the extent of the domination, given that the UPF and IRPF lists shared many common candidates whose ultimate allegiance was unclear; some races extended beyond the Principlist appellations and involved tribal, family, and local affiliations; and some elected candidates ran as alleged independents. Electoral Board Head and Deputy Interior Minister Solat Mortazavi said in the evening of March 3 that, after 90% of the votes had been counted, 196 representatives in the country's 31 provinces had been elected to the 9th Majlis, but that races in over 30 districts in 12 provinces would go to a second round which would be held within a month (according to the law, first-round winners must have at least 25% plus one vote of the total votes cast). He added that the final tally would be announced on March 5, even though the bulk of the votes would be counted by the afternoon of March 4. Reformist groups had not fielded or supported any candidates, but some Reformist incumbents and pseudo-Reformist groups, such as the Mardomsalari Party, ran in the elections.

Domestic press reported the following breakup of 203 elected candidates following Mortazavi's statement and as more results came in on March 3:

- 154 Principlists
- 49 'Reformists' and independents

Larijani-linked Khabar Online reported that independents had had significant success, despite their lack of affiliation with known parties. Khabar's analysis of the provisional figures at noon on March 3 claimed that 46 independent candidates had won seats in the first round of voting. Some domestic press broke down the figures even, and stated that 2 of the 154 Principlist winners were member of the 'deviant current,' led by Chief-of-Staff Esfandiar Rahim Mashai. They also reported that of the 49 Reformist and independent candidates, 39 were Reformists and 10 were independents.

Domestic press provided the following provisional breakup among the Principlists on March 3:

- UPF (Mottahed): 44%
- IRPF (Paydari): 5%
- Common UPF-IRPF candidates: 51%

... **WITH SOME NOTABLE LOSERS...**: 77 incumbents lost their seats in these elections, among them:

- Ahmad Nategh Nouri, seven-term Majlis representative, brother of former Speaker and current Leader's Supervisory Office Head Ali Akbar Nategh Nouri
- Ghodrattollah Alikhani, Imam's Line faction, vocal critic of Ahmadinejad government
- Mostafa Kavakebian, (reformist) Mardomsalari Party Head

Other notable losers in the March 2 vote were:

- Parvin Ahmadinejad, the President's sister
- Mohammad Reza Hejazi, brother of senior Khamenei aide Asghar Hejazi
- Mohammad Karamirad, former IRGC Amir ol-Momenin Corps commander
- Hossein Jalali, Ayatollah Mesbah Yazdi's Chief-of-Staff

...**AS UNIFIED PRINCIPLISTS AND PAYDARI DOMINATE IN TEHRAN...**: In Greater Tehran, 10 of the district's 30 seats were expected to be won in the first round of voting, with 20 going to a second round. The breakup of the provisional top thirty candidates was:

- UPF (Mottahed): 13
- IRPF (Paydari): 10
- Common UPF-IRPF candidates: 6
- Nation's Voice: 1

The top ten candidates in Tehran included Khamenei confidant and former Speaker Gholam Ali Haddad Adel, who is seeking to take over current Speaker Ali Larijani's position, Paydari's number one candidate and former Ahmadinejad Government Morality Guide Hojjatoleislam Morteza Agha-Tehrani, former Ahmadinejad Oil Minister Massoud Mirkazemi, vocal government critic and Majlis Research Center Head Ahmad Tavakoli, and Nation's Voice's Ali Motahari.

...**SPEAKER LARIJANI ELECTED IN FIRST ROUND IN QOM**: Speaker Ali Larijani was elected in the first round in Qom, obtaining over 270,000 votes and the top slot in the district. His rival for the speakership of the Majlis, Gholam Ali Haddad Adel (see above) also came in first and was elected in the first round of the Tehran race, with over 400,000 votes (he cleared over 800,000 votes the last two Majlis elections)

...**AND UNIFIED PRINCIPLISTS DO WELL IN TABRIZ, SHIRAZ**: Two of three candidates elected in the first round in Tabriz are UPF members, the third a Reformist, according to domestic press. Six Tabriz candidates will be pitted against each other in the second round of votes. In Shiraz, two of three elected candidates are UPF, while the third is independent. A UPF and a IRPF (Paydari) candidate will face off in the city's second round.

...**JOINT CANDIDATES WIN IN MASHHAD**: Khorasan Razavi Province Electoral Board announced on March 4 that three candidates in Mashhad had won Majlis seats in the first round and that four candidates would go to the second round for the remaining two seats in Leader Khamenei's hometown. The three victorious candidates were UPF (Mottahed), but had later been added to the IRPF (Paydari) list.

...**AS ISTADEGI CLAIMS 78 WINS**: The Resistance Front (*Istadeqi*), affiliated with former IRGC Chief and 2009 presidential candidate Mohsen Rezai, claimed on March 4 that its candidates had won 78 seats, and that 15 of its candidates would go to a second round of voting. It was difficult to discern who the 78 were and whether *Istadeqi* was simply claiming some independents or candidates on other lists which it had included on its own lists. The group's Spokesman Hassan

Biadi said, 'The Islamic Iran Resistance Front, along with other formations and independents, paved the way for a competitive, healthy, and enthusiastic electoral climate.'

MISC/REACTIONS:

KHATAMI VOTE PROVOKES DESPAIR; KHATAMI SAYS HE WILL EXPLAIN SOON: Following reports that former President Mohammad Khatami had voted on March 2, observers, political figures, and the general public reacted with shock, despair, and at times understanding. Khatami had never called for a boycott of the elections, but he had stressed that the minimum requirements for free and fair elections were not in place. Mir Hossein Mousavi-linked Kaleme news site published an article on March 3, headlined 'Observers' amazement at Khatami's participation in elections.' Khatami's office posted a statement on his website in this regard: 'Kaleme website published an article concerning Mohammad Khatami's participation in the elections which has led to comments, objections, and questions by readers. While thanking all these dear ones, his explanations will be published at the soonest opportunity.'

FOREIGN MINISTRY REJECTS BRITISH FOREIGN SECRETARY'S CRITICISM: Foreign Ministry Spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast rejected on March 3 British Foreign Secretary William Hague's description of the Iranian elections as neither, nor fair. Hague said, 'The climate of fear, created by the regime's crushing of opposition voices since 2009, persists. [...] The field of candidates for this election has been limited by the intensified vetting of candidates, and the ongoing repression of dissent, including the continued house arrest of two of Iran's opposition leaders since February 2011.' Mehmanparast responded that Hague had attempted to tarnish 'the great and glorious broad participation of the people in free and fair elections.' He called on Hague to respect the Iranian people's vote and 'to bow his head' before the nation's defense of independence and national interests.

ECONOMICS:

US Dollar, Central Bank rate: 1,226 tomans, no change from yesterday
US Dollar, open market: 1,940 tomans, up from 1,910 tomans yesterday
Bahareh Azadi gold coin, bank: 598,000 tomans (eight-month delivery), no change from yesterday
Bahareh Azadi gold coin, open market: 812,000 tomans, up from 810,000 tomans yesterday
Tehran Stock Exchange index: 25,417 points, up 52.4 points (0.21%) from 25,365

SELECTION OF HEADLINES:

Conservative:

Kayhan: International reactions to 65% turnout: Iran takes lead in the world in legitimacy race

Jomhuri Eslami: The Guardian reports: Iranian oil exports to Europe increase (*Note: Smaller headline, but large photo: One-week protests start in Bahrain*)

Resalat: Interior Minister to reporters: 65% turnout in ninth Majlis elections

Javan: Elections' message: Trust in regime

Moderate:

Mardomsalari: Latest election results (*Note: Smaller headline, but large photo: Russian presidential election*)

Tehran Emrouz: Latest election results

Shargh: 5th session of Expediency Council comes to an end (*Note: Smaller headline, but large photo: Interview with Leila Hatami [A Separation' actress]*)

Rouzegar: Banned by Tehran Prosecutor for one month (Feb 6 – March 6)

Etemad: Three unsuccessful candidates: [President's sister] Parvin Ahmadinejad, [seven-time incumbent] Ahmad Nategh Nouri, and [Mardomsalari Party Head] Mostafa Kavakebian

Pro-government:

Iran: Housecleaning in Baharestan (referring to Majlis, situated at Baharestan square)

Financial:

Donyayeh Eghtesad: Majlis election winners
Jahaneh Sanat: 20 Tehran candidates in second round of elections

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