

# IRAN: Persecution of Baha'is in March

By Willy Fautré

HRWF (27.03.2017) – Throughout the whole month of March, Baha'is were arrested, jailed, sentenced to prison terms and expelled from university; homes were raided and businesses were sealed, just because they were Baha'is.

## *Navid Moallem arrested in Minudasht*

Based on a Bahai News report, **Navid Moallem**, a Baha'i resident of Minudasht in Golestan Province, was arrested on March 13, in front of his place of business, and transferred to prison.

Mr. Moallem and his wife, Kamelia Bidelian [also reported as Bideli], had previously been sentenced to one year and six-months imprisonment as part of a case named "Baha'is Arrested in Golestan Province."

During the original court hearing, 22 Baha'is of Golestan Province who were arrested on October 17, 2012 were sentenced to a total of 193 years of imprisonment. Following their hearings at the court of appeals, it was announced that

**Farah Tebyanian, Puna Sana'I, Mona Amri Hesari, Behnam Hassani, Parisa Shahidi, Mojdeh Zouhori, Parivash Shoja'i, Tina Mohabati and Hana Aqiqiyan**, all from Gorgan;

**Shohreh Samimi** from Minudasht;

**Bitu Hedayati, Vesaq Sana'i and Hana Kushkabaghi** from Gonbad-e Qabus

had their prison sentences reduced from 9 years to one year

and nine months.

However, the one year and nine month prison sentence of **Tina Mohabati** was later overturned, and she was sentenced to pay a three million tuman (approx US\$925) fine.

**Rufeya Pakzadan, Soudabeh Mehdinezhad, Mitra Nouri, Shiva Rouhani, Houshmand Dehqan, Mariyam Dehqan and Nazi Tahqiqi**, all from Gorgan,

**Kamelia Bideli and Navid Moalem** from Minudasht, had their sentences reduced from 6 years to 18 months.

The review court did not announce its decision on the cases of **Shahnam Jadhani** from Minudasht and **Shayda Qodousi** from Gorgan, who were sentenced to 11 years in prison.

The Baha'is were charged with collaborating with hostile governments, effective activities to promote the goals of a sect and of anti-Islamic and anti-Shia hostile governments, and with making propaganda in favour of the Baha'i Faith and against the regime of the Islamic Republic, by participating in the 'Ruhi program' (Baha'i catechism) in Golestan Province. The sentencing by the court of appeals of **Shahnam Jazbani** (from Minudasht) and **Shayda Ghoddousi** (from Gorgan), who were each sentenced to 11 years of imprisonment, has yet not been communicated to them. (Source: Iran Press Watch, March 23, 2017)

### ***Liza Tebyanian arrested in Karaj***

According to a Bahai News report, **Liza Tebyanian Enayati**, a Baha'i resident of Karaj in Alborz Province, was arrested by security officers on Wednesday, March 14, 2017.

Bahai News reports that six security officers entered her home with a warrant, and after searching it and confiscating her personal property, including religious and non-religious books; laptops and so forth, arrested her. Her family still

does not have any information about her whereabouts.

Previously, the business of her husband, Mansour Enayati, was sealed by government agents from the Office of Public Places because he is an adherent of the Baha'i religion. In September, 2016, his daughter and her husband, Ahdiyyeh Enayati and Sahba Maslahi, were arrested in Shiraz.

She was freed on bail on March 26 after being held in Raja'i Shahr prison. (Iran Press Watch, 15 March 2017 – Sen's Daily, 26 March 2017)

### ***Two Baha'i businesses shut by authorities in Karaj***

On March 9, police and agents from the Ministry of Intelligence and the Ministry of Penal Affairs, along with a judge, went to one business in Karaj that is run by two Baha'is, Farid and Farnush Pasha'i in the Gohardasht neighbourhood of Karaj, where they sealed the premises.

The pretext was 'sexual contraband.' Although the owners presented invoices of their purchases to show that the articles were not contraband, the officers were uninterested, and returned on March 10 to confiscate all the business stock. [Under Iran's economic apartheid system, Baha'is are not permitted to provide many items of food, drink and personal services to Muslims, since Baha'is are 'unclean.' The rules are unwritten, or what is written is circulated confidentially, making it difficult for Baha'is to know what they may and may not sell. A broad list of market sectors closed to Baha'is was published on the blog of Sen's Daily (See <http://bit.ly/2nh4of8>) in 2015, but the rules are constantly changing).

Government officers also went to a newly-opened business run by another Bahai, Arash Kazemi in the "Golshahr Metri 45" neighbourhood of Karaj. They shuttered the premises. (Source: Bahai News, March 10, 2017)

### ***One arrest in Rey: Mrs. Sima Keyani***

**Sima Keyani**, a Baha'i living in Rey (on the outskirts of Tehran), was arrested at her home by security forces on the morning of March 8. Her home was also searched, and a pickup truck was used to take away her religious books, along with religious images and family photographs. Her place of detention is not yet known, but it is likely she would be taken to Evin prison. (Source: Bahai News, March 8, 2017)

### ***Haleh Gholami free on bail***

**Haleh Gholami**, a Baha'i from Tehran who has been detained in Evin Prison since January 27, was freed on bail on March 6. She was arrested because of her activism in child protection matters, such as the care of orphans, and for participating in a charity working to suppress child labour. At the time of her arrest her home was searched by security agents who confiscated her mobile phones and tablets. (Source: Bahai News, March 7, 2017)

### ***Two more Baha'i students expelled from universities***

In separate reports dated March 4 and March 6, Bahai News reports on the expulsion of Mahsa Sha`erzadeh and Puya Azami Aqjeh.

Ms. Mahsa Sha`erzadeh, a Bahai living in Ramhormoz, in Khuzestan, was expelled from the campus of Payam-e Nour University in Rahhormoz because of her Baha'i beliefs. She was taking a bachelor's course in Applied Chemistry, and had passed her final exams and gained 70 credits. She was summoned by the Ministry of Intelligence in the city and pressured to officially withdraw from her course. She refused, but was expelled on March 1, 2017, and was given no documentation.

Mr. Puya Azami Aqjeh, a Baha'i from Tehran, was expelled from the Rudehen campus of the Free Islamic University. He was in the first semester of a bachelor's degree in Civil

Engineering. In January 2016, he found himself barred from the final examination for the semester, and was told that he had no right to university education because he was a Baha'i. He is the sixth Baha'i student expelled from this University in recent months. (Source: Bahai News, 4 and 6 March 2017)

### ***Baha'i home raided in Shiraz***

At 8 a.m. on Friday, March 3, a number of agents from the Revolutionary Guards raided the home of Mrs. Anusha Afshar-Reza'i in Shiraz. They forced an entrance and searched her home, seizing religious books, personal and religious photographs, a laptop, mobile telephones and memory sticks. (Source: Bahai News, March 3, 2017)

### ***Contradictory statements by Mazandaran Attorney General on the closure of 94 Baha'i businesses***

According to HRANA, the news arm of Human Rights Activists in Iran, over 100 days have passed since the simultaneous closing of 94 business units belonging to Baha'is in Mazandaran. During this time, the Attorney General of Mazandaran, Assadollah Jafari, has issued contradictory statements regarding his role in the closure and sealing of the businesses of Baha'is.

Under Article 32 of the Code of Criminal Law, management and oversight of the judiciary is up to the prosecutor. Also, according to Clause 1 of Article 28 of the Law on trade, the closure of any trade unit must be done with the knowledge of trade unions (trade guilds), and the Office of Private Property is the executive liaison to the unions. The unions said that they had no knowledge of the reason for the sealing of the Baha'i Businesses in Mazandaran and they had no role in these closures. (Source: Iran Press Watch, March 3, 2017)

### ***Keyvan Pakzadan sentenced to 5 years in prison***

**Keyvan Pakzadan**, a Baha'i from Tehran, who was arrested as he

was leaving his sister's home on June 1, 2016, has been sentenced to 5 years in prison by Judge Moqayesseh. Judge Moqayesseh was also responsible for the sentencing of the seven 'Yaran' (national facilitators for the Baha'is in Iran) and more recently the artist Shahriar Cyrus, who was also given five years in prison.

At the time of his arrest, agents not only searched his home and workplace and seized some of his personal effects, they also searched through his sister and brother-in-law's effects and seized a laptop, flash drives, contracts, a Will, receipts, signed cheques and working notes. He was held for 34 days before being released on bail. Some of his possessions and those of his sister were also returned to them. He was tried on January 22, and the sentence was handed down on February 27, on the charge of "membership of Baha'i organisations." (Source: Bahai News, March 1, 2017)

.....

**If you want to be regularly informed about different violations of human rights in the world, click here for a free subscription to our newsletters!**

**Also:**

**HRWF database of news and information on over 70 countries: <http://hrwf.eu/newsletters/forb/>**

**List of hundreds of documented cases of believers of various faiths in 20 countries: <http://hrwf.eu/forb/forb-and-blasphemy-prisoners-list/>**