

Tehran University, Tehran. July 9th 1999. At this time, students were at unrest due to the closure of one of the nation's newspapers, the *Salaam*, causing student riots to occur. Five people were confirmed dead due to the riots. To date, at least nine people are still imprisoned as a result. Why was the paper shut down? The main reasons for the closure of the *Salaam* include media censorship, governmental mandations on speech and religion, and the lack of basic human rights.

The *Salaam* fell victim to censorship. According to the *World Press Freedom Review*, the *Salaam* was forced to close by the government. Allegedly, the newspaper published a confidential document held by the government regarding the murders of people who challenged the government. The article that they published showed a link between "several members of Parliament and the murder of several dissidents."¹ The closure of the *Salaam* was not a calamity in the President of Iran's eyes as "At a public appearance shortly after the closure of Salaam Khatami grinned when asked by a journalist what he believed was going to happen to Salaam. The journalist then asked him why he was grinning and the president responded, 'What do you want me to do, cry?'"² The president of Iran at the time didn't care that people were at unrest due to the closure of the *Salaam*. This affected the University of Tehran on July 9th 1999 when students were killed and imprisoned for protesting the closure of the newspaper as,

¹ World Press Freedom Review, "World Press Freedom Review," *International Press Institute*, 1999, http://www.freemedia.at/cms/ipi/freedom_detail.html?country=/KW0001/KW0004/KW0092/&year=1999. (accessed March 15, 2008).

² Ibid.

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“Islamic fundamentalists attacked students protesting the shutdown on Wednesday [the 9th] of the leading pro-Khatami newspaper, *Salaam*.”³This shows that at the time, the Iranian government was killing people for standing up for what they believed in and censored anything revealing the Iranian government.

In 1999 and in Iran’s history thus far, the government in Iran did not allow freedom of speech and religion. The only religion allowed was Shi’ism. An article published in the *Salaam* had a headline that allegedly insulted Islam: “Two Parallel Lines do not Cross Unless God Wills It.”⁴ Since freedom of speech and religion were not present in Iran, this allowed the government to censor what the media published. The *Salaam* was owned and written by the Militant Clerics League. To date, they are a pro-reform political group. Since they wanted change in the government, the government censored their content. This led to unrest in the student population of Tehran University and eventually caused a student protest leading to death and imprisonment of protestors.⁵ The censorship of media by the government played a key role in the discontinuation of the *Salaam*.

Another crucial reason for the closing of the *Salaam* was the lack of basic human rights. For example, women’s rights were nonexistent, and they remained so just up until

³ New York Times, "Iran Students and Police Clash Over Press Curbs," *The New York Times*, July 10, 1999: A3.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ BBC News, "BBC News," *Iran student protests: 5 years on*, June 9, 2004, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/3879535.stm (accessed April 1, 2008).

April of 1999.⁶ Up until this point, women were not allowed to have custody of their children after a divorce. Also, education was segregated and girl's schools had to have female staff and teachers. "In 1997, Parliamentary deputies submitted a plan to make girls' schools a 'no-male zone.'" ⁷ Another example of a lack of human rights was that in this era, the government would treat reporters poorly, as they looked at them to be preachers of "unfounded accusations against [the government]." The government would attack every part of the reporters writing through censorship, most likely in fear of the reporters unleashing the truth and causing rioting in disgust with the government.

In conclusion, the *Salaam* was forced closure as it did not meet government mandations, government censorship, and the lack of human rights in Iran. The tragic events that ensued after the closure of the *Salaam* at Tehran University could have been prevented. If the aforementioned chain of events were different, that is, if there were human rights in Iran at the time, the *Salaam* would have never been closed and the riots would not have commenced. In a 2008 interview, Arash Sigarchi talks about the current state of journalism censorship in Iran, "At present, the work atmosphere is so disappointing that most journalists have chosen to remain silent. Press agencies are under strict surveillance and scrutiny by the Public Prosecutor of the Tehran Judiciary. At the same time, we must not forget that, in Iran, censorship is carried out in a completely

⁶ Human Rights Watch, "Iran Human Rights Development," *World Report 1999*, 1999, <http://www.hrw.org/worldreport99/mideast/iran.html>. (accessed April 1, 2008).

⁷ Donna M. Hughes, "Women and Reform in Iran," *University of Rhode Island*, February 2000, <http://www.uri.edu/artsci/wms/hughes/reform.htm> (accessed April 1, 2008).

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systematic way. The Supreme Council on National Security regularly issues warnings to newspapers about topics they should not write about.”⁸ This shows that censorship is still a big problem in Iran today. Studying the events in 1999 in Iran is important as history has a tendency to repeat itself, but learning from the past can help prevent the chain of events that lead to unnecessary protest for something that violates basic human rights.

⁸ Fariba Amini, "INTERVIEW: An Iranian journalist speaks out against censorship," *Payvand Iran News*, February 11, 2008, <http://www.payvand.com/news/08/feb/1075.html> (accessed April 14, 2008).

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Recipe for Disaster*

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Joann Cornejo's Humanities II