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ARTICLE 19

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Iran: Reformist Newspaper Closed as Rape Allegations Reverberate through the Corridors of Power

ARTICLE 19 is concerned about reports that authorities have closed *Etemad-e Melli*, a leading reformist newspaper Iran.

Etemad-e Melli (National Trust) is published by a political party of the same name, run by Mehdi Karrubi, a candidate in the controversial presidential elections that took place in June this year. The newspaper, which did not appear on the streets yesterday, was due to publish allegations that protestors had been raped while incarcerated in Tehran's prisons during the country's ongoing post-election upheaval.

Religious and political leaders have widely condemned Karrubi for making allegations about rape, and he was due to publish a statement in his defence in yesterday's edition. There are suggestions that Karrubi may be prosecuted for libel for making these allegations.

According to Saham News, the news agency of Etemad-e Melli, the paper's office, was visited by a representative of the prosecutor's office and they were told that they were being temporarily shut down. It is reported that prosecutors had written to the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, claiming that the newspaper had printed material against "national security" and "public peace".

Mohammad Qouchani, one of the daily's editors, has also reportedly been in detention since the week after the elections.

There has been an overwhelming deterioration of freedom of expression in Iran since the popular uprising linked to the re-election of incumbent President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. The government and its militia have clamped down on civilian protestors, as well as journalists and media workers covering the events. Newspapers have been closed, websites and broadcasters blocked, and dozens of journalists arrested or attacked. Currently, there are more than 100 opposition activists, journalists, lawyers, human rights defenders and foreign embassy workers in jail and mass trials have already begun.

"ARTICLE 19 calls on the Islamic Republic of Iran to adhere to the provisions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which protects freedom of expression, and which the government has ratified," says ARTICLE 19 Executive Director, Dr Agnès Callamard.

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- ARTICLE 19 is an independent human rights organisation that works around the world to protect and promote the right to freedom of expression. It takes its name from Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees free speech.