



COMMUNICATIONS IN PERSIA

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Post, telegraph, and telephone

The growth of post, telegraph, and telephone service in Persia was closely linked with the growth of railway and highway networks and other modern transportation systems; it was thus a central element in the development of a modern infrastructure in Persia.

The postal service. Until the 1860s communications in Persia were still quite limited. There were few carriage roads, no railways, and no post offices; an irregular private domestic mail service depended upon merchants and travelers. The first organized delivery of letters and packages dates from about 1266/1850, when regular postal service was established between Tehran and the main provincial cities (see *čāpār*). It was initially the need for swift communication with regions outside Persia that created the need for an organized post. In particular the British legation in Tehran was linked to England and India by means of a system of mounted messengers, who carried mail once a month to Constantinople and Shiraz, where they handed it over to couriers who took it respectively to London and to Būšehr and on to India. In 1379/1862 regular steamship sailings between Bombay and the Persian Gulf were initiated, and there was pressure on the Persian government to permit Indian-controlled post offices in the Persian Gulf ports to handle mail destined for Bombay. The entire system was controlled by the postmaster general in Bombay, letters were franked with Indian stamps carrying pictures of Queen



Victoria, and Indian postal rates were charged. The British service thus became a semipublic postal system between Būšehr and the rest of Persia, as the legation couriers would deliver mail along their return routes to Tehran (Wright, pp. 135-36). The Russians also had an embassy postal service from Tehran to St. Petersburg via Tbilisi, and the French established a route to Paris through Istanbul (*Awwalīn resāla*, 1332/1914, pp. 1-3). The rapid development of international trade, particularly with Russia, Turkey, and the rest of Europe in mid-century (see [commerce vi](#)) created strong demand for improved communications.

In 1290/1873 the government inaugurated a national postal system, and the following year Gustav Readerer, an Austrian consultant, was hired to direct it. Under Readerer's direction Persia soon joined the International Postal Union, in August 1879. Mīrzā 'Alī Khan Amīn-al-Dawla was awarded the contract to operate the post office, from which he profited handsomely; he set the rates and collected the receipts, paying a percentage of the receipts to the government (usually 10,000-20,000 tomans a year; Taqīzāda, p. 331). The domestic postal service initially depended upon riders and delivery on foot and was limited to the main routes throughout Persia. In 1308/1890 the government signed a postal agreement with the Ottoman empire, and similar agreements were later signed with other countries. Reports of irregularities and unreliable deliveries encouraged the Persian government in 1320/1902 to place the postal system under the direct management of Joseph Naus, the Belgian director of customs, with instructions to reorganize it. In 1325/1907 the postal service was separated from the customs department, and later it was elevated to a ministry (*Awwalīn resāla*, 1332/1914, pp. 1-3). By 1330-31/1912-13 the system had expanded to include 158 offices, 15 substations, 263 post houses (*manzel*), 2,370 horses, 632 coaches and carts, and 260 riders and postmen. Tehran was the hub of the road network, which connected it to cities like Rašt, Mašhad, Tabrīz, and Kermānšāh. It took a letter from Tehran eleven days to reach Berlin (Jamālzāda, p. 178). Early in the century the Persian government began to issue its own postage stamps, which, however, the British refused to accept. The operation of private foreign postal services aroused considerable opposition within Persia, but it was not until 1301 Š./1922 that they were finally closed down (Wright, pp. 135-36).

When the Pahlavi dynasty was established in 1304 Š./1925 Rezā Shah sought to modernize the postal service and to staff it, as well as the entire government apparatus, with Persians. He established central post offices in the ten



provincial capitals and, in 1313 Š./1934, substituted automobiles for horse-drawn carriages on the main routes and extended horse-drawn delivery to smaller towns throughout the country. On 11 Dey 1313 Š./1 January 1935 the international branch of the Ministry of post, telegraph, and telephone (Wezārat-e post o telegrāf o telefon) signed an international agreement establishing common postal rates and exchanges. By March 1953 there were 537 post offices and 839 post boxes throughout Persia (*Rāport*, p. 11). The service continued to expand through the 1970s, in response to increased demand and population growth. In 1343 Š./1965 there were 756 post offices and 4,497 post boxes in Persia; about 172.1 million pieces of domestic mail and 22.6 million pieces of foreign mail were delivered (*Sāl-nāma-ye āmārī-e kešvar*, 1345 I, p. 479). A decade later there were 147 general offices for post and telegraph, 200 urban and 436 rural post offices, 6,435 urban and 4,946 rural public post boxes, 630 agents of the postal service, and 214 fee-for-service mailboxes. Altogether about 308.6 million pieces of domestic and 31.7 million pieces of foreign mail were delivered, as well as 548,000 domestic and 82,000 foreign parcels (*Sāl-nāma-ye āmārī-e kešvar*, 2535, pp. 420-22).

After the establishment of the Islamic Republic in 1358 Š./1979 the postal service continued to expand at a slower pace. In 1368 Š./1989 there were 209 general post-and-telegraph offices throughout the country, with 251 branches in the cities and small towns, 1,121 rural branches, 219 one-man urban substations, and 2,020 private postal agencies (*Sāl-nāma-ye āmārī-e kešvar*, 1368, p. 330). A total of 315.8 million pieces of mail and 1.9 million parcels were delivered. Fast pickup and delivery of parcels, fax services, and facilities for transferring money are also now available.

The telegraph. The telegraph was brought to Persia by the Persian minister to London, Malkom Khan; Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shah (1264-1313/1848-96) was impressed and ordered a line to be established between the Golestān Palace and the Lālazar garden. Between 1275/1858 and 1296/1879 telegraphic cable was laid between many towns, receiving a mixed reception; the population of Kermān rejoiced, but there was public resistance in Nā'in and Yazd (Maḥbūbī, *Mo'assasāt* II, pp. 191-98). The main impetus for expansion of the telegraph in the early 1860s was a British desire to strengthen its control over India (Sykes, *History of Persia* II, pp. 366-70; Issawi, pp. 152-54). Between 1276/1859 and 1278/1861 Great Britain tried to lay undersea cable from the Red Sea via Muscat to Karachi, but the operation failed for technical reasons. The alternative was an overland cable, and the British negotiated with the Turks



and the Persians for the necessary right of way. In December 1862 Great Britain and Persia signed an agreement for the construction of a line consisting of a single cable, to connect Istanbul with Karachi (see *čāh-bahār*). By the end of 1281/1864 the Persian portion of this line was 1,100 miles long, from Kāneqīn in Iraq to Tehran, Isfahan, Shiraz, and Būšehr. Persia was to pay the cost, estimated at 100,000 tomans, and to purchase the necessary materials in England, but the line was to remain under British supervision, in exchange for an annual royalty and fees for all local and foreign messages (Sykes, *History of Persia* I, p. 369). By 1289/1872 there was so much telegraph traffic that three lines had been erected, and three years later the director of the Persian telegraph estimated that 2 million pounds sterling had been invested. A telegraphic connection had been established with Russia in 1277/1860 with a line from Tehran via Tabrīz; it was later extended south to Isfahan. In 1287/1870 a line was constructed beyond the Caspian to Tashkent, Samarqand, and Bukhara. After the Russian Revolution in 1917 all agreements between the two countries were canceled, and the Soviets gave all the telegraph equipment to the Persians (Maḥbūbī, *Mo'assasāt* II, pp. 214-15).

By the 1880s Persia was thus well equipped with telegraph lines connecting it with various parts of the world and linking together its towns. In Denis Wright's assessment (p. 128), "[f]rom the mid-1860s until the end of the Qajar period the Indo-European telegraph was Britain's most precious interest in Persia, outranking in importance both the Imperial Bank and the Anglo-Persian Oil Company." The Indo-European Telegraph Department was actually a branch of the government of India, though its headquarters were in London. Like the postal service, the telegraph was a source of considerable hostility between the British and the Persians; there were acts of sabotage and robbery on the lines, and men had to be employed to guard the property and repair the lines (Wright, pp. 132-33). Mainly British and Armenians manned the Persian telegraph stations, which also served as way stations for intrepid 19th-century European travelers, including George Curzon. "The telegraph not only provided valuable revenues for the Persian treasury but also greatly strengthened the Shah in dealing with his far-flung provinces. Additionally it brought Persia into contact with the outside world as never before and was probably more responsible than any other single factor in stimulating those reformist and nationalist movements which began to stir in the last quarter of the nineteenth century" (Wright, p. 133). Indeed, Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shah had required that telegraph operators should, in addition to their obvious duties, provide reports twice a week on political activities in their areas (Maḥbūbī,



Mo'assasāt II, p. 221). New titles were devised for the director general of the telegraph: Moḵber-al-Molk, Moḵber-al-Dawla, and Moḵber-al-Salṭana (Taqīzāda, p. 329). By the end of the shah's reign the telegraph was an established channel for both court and government, and fixed prices per word had been established (*Awwalīn resāla*, 1299/1882, passim). In 1313/1896 Persia joined the International Telegraphic Union.

The telegraph also furthered the establishment of newspapers in Persia (see below); the first daily was established in 1316/1898 and included foreign news coming in over the wires from Reuters en route to India (*Awwalīn resāla*, 1299/1882, pp. 1-9). By 1331-32/1914-15 there were 9,730 km of telegraph cable in Persia, though less than half that total was controlled by Persians; the rest belonged to foreign companies or governments (Jamālzāda, p. 180; Issawī, p. 153). Lines servicing foreign interests extended to strategic locales, like Jāsk on the Persian Gulf, and not necessarily to areas with the largest concentrations of population. Evidence of the perceived power and influence of the telegraph was the frequent choice of telegraph offices as places of asylum (see [bast](#)) and refuge, as during the Shiraz bread riots of 1311/1893, often to the embarrassment of both British and Persian officials (Wright, p. 133). These offices provided not only means of direct communication with the governor or the shah, and thus a conduit for political demands, but also access to the outside world: messages could be sent to London and Paris, requesting that pressure be exerted on domestic rulers.

Rezā Shah brought the post, telegraph, and telephone services under the umbrella of a single ministry. In Tehran and certain large provincial centers the telegraph and telephone systems were located for technical reasons in single office buildings, sometimes separate from the post offices. This trend continued until the end of Pahlavi rule in 1357 Š./1979. In January 1935 the first international telegraphic code book became available for all telegraph offices (*Rāport*, p. 11). At about the same time the government broadcast via the international telegraph office in Bern the change of the country's name from Persia to Iran (*Rāport*, p. 12). By March 1953 there were 310 cable-telegraph offices and 98 wireless-telegraph offices throughout Persia (*Sāl-nāma-ye āmārī-e kešvar*, 1332, p. 11). In 1354 Š./1975 there were 590 telegraph offices in Persia; 75 stations had direct connections with Tehran, 129 had indirect connections, and 14 were equipped with Morse-code machines. In addition, 372 stations were also connected to Tehran by telephone (*Sāl-nāma-ye āmārī-e 2535*, pp. 425-26).



After the Revolution of 1357 Š./1979 the telegraph service continued to expand. By 1368 Š./1989 there were 723 offices throughout the country, in addition to about 2,851 private telex and 4,695 public telex stations. These facilities are still inadequate to meet demand (*Sāl-nāma-ye āmārī-e kešvar*, 1368, p. 332).

The telephone. Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shah was introduced to the telephone by his son Kāmṛān Mīrzā Nāyeb-al-Salṭana, minister of war, who set up a telephone link between his Kāmṛāniya palace in Šamīrān and the office of the ministry in the heart of Tehran (Pežmān Baḳtīārī, p. 465). Later connections were established between the Golestān Palace and the shah's summer palace at Salṭanatābād, as well as between the prime minister's residence and the chancery (Maḥbūbī, *Mo'assasāt* III, p. 1).

The first telephone system for public use seems to have been developed in Tabrīz by a private company that was granted rights for a fifty-year period to develop and operate a system over an area extending 24 km from the city. The company soon went bankrupt, but one of the partners, Ḥājj Sayyed Mortažā Mortažawī, took over its assets and continued operating the service (Maḥbūbī, *Mo'assasāt* III, p. 2). Later systems were established in Mašhad, Urmia, and Tehran by private entrepreneurs. Telephone lines were installed just before World War I, and by 1332/1914 the Société Anonyme des Téléphones Persans had nearly 1,000 subscribers in twelve towns; the Angle-Persian Oil Company had its own lines, and the Russian-owned Lianazov fishing industry in Āstārā and Anzalī also had a private telephone system (Jamālzāda, p. 184; Issawi, p. 154).

At the time of Režā Shah's accession in 1304 Š./1925 the beginnings of point-to-point communications had been established across Persia. Although such systems continued to expand, they were rapidly outdistanced by a mediated (centralized) telephone system. In 1302 Š./1923 a public company that had been established in Tehran entered into an agreement with the German firm Siemens to develop such a system, which became the basis for a national public telephone system. From the beginning demand for telephones always outstripped supply; long waiting lists and payment in advance were the norm. The rapid rise in demand for telephones pressured government to establish a new office, Edāra-ye telefon, within the Ministry of post, telegraph, and telephone. In 1316 Š./1937 automatic telephone service from Germany was established, and a telephone directory became available in Tehran. Nearly twenty years later, in 1334 Š./1955, major provincial cities were equipped with centralized automatic telephone service (Maḥbūbī, *Mo'assasāt* III, pp. 10, 12).



In 1332 Š./1953 there were only sixty-three public telephone offices in Persia (*Sāl-nāma-ye āmārī-e Wezārat-e post o telegrāf o telefon*, 1332, p. 11). By 1354 Š./1975 there were 590, including those on both automatic and magnetic systems; there were also 594,000 private and 3,215 public telephones (*Sāl-nāma-ye āmārī-e kešvar*, 2535, pp. 425-26).

Immediately after the Revolution in 1357 Š./1979 there were 10,753 public telephones in towns and cities, 2,305 of which were capable of long-distance connections, but only 3,220 in villages. Approximately 131 telephone centers were equipped with microwave systems, and there were 449 other urban telephone centers, 24 wireless stations, and 3,220 rural telephone centers (*Sāl-nāma-ye āmārī-e kešvar*, 1367, pp. 327-29). According to UNESCO figures from the late 1980s, more than 377,000 people were on the waiting list for connection to the main lines. There were still fewer than 2 million telephone sets in the country, about 65 percent of them residential and 88 percent equipped for direct international dialing (UNESCO, *World Communication Report*, 1989, pp. 453-54).

The press and broadcasting

The press. It was not until some time after the introduction of printing (see [čāp](#)) in 1233/1820 that the first newspapers were published. Mīrzā Šāleḥ Šīrāzī, a London-trained diplomat, began to issue *Aḵbār-e waqāye'* on two pages in 1253/1837 (Šadr Hāšemī, *Jarā'ed o majallāt* I, p. 2), but it is unclear for how long he continued to do so. In the reign of Nāšer-al-Dīn Shah the government introduced the official publication *Aḵbār-e dār-al-keḷāfa-ye Tehrān*, later succeeded by *Rūz-nāma-ye waqāye'-e ettefāqīya*, which was subsequently renamed *Īrān-e solṭānī* and then *Īrān* (Šadr Hāšemī, *Jarā'ed o majallāt* I, p. 2). In Isfahan, Tabrīz, and Shiraz the provincial governors supervised publication of similar papers. A new ministry was established to control and supervise newspapers (Wezārat-e enṭebā'āt; Šadr Hāšemī, *Jarā'ed o majallāt* I, p. 2). Until the 1890s there was almost no independent private press in Persia, though *Madanīyat*, founded in 1884 in Tabrīz, served the Armenian community. The government-controlled organs, on the other hand, failed to build a substantial readership. The first daily newspaper (not published Fridays and Sundays) was *Kolāšat al-ḥawādet*, first issued on 11 Jomādā 1316/31 October 1898 by the Press ministry; it continued to appear for five years (Šadr Hāšemī, *Jarā'ed o majallāt* II, p. 245). Under Moẓaffer-al-Dīn Shah (1313-24/1895-1907) permits for private newspapers were introduced, but the government still supervised these publications.



As the European presence and influence in Persia increased and Persian domestic problems worsened, however, liberal opinion and modernizing sentiments found an outlet in a substantial exile press, in particular *‘Orwat-al-wotqā*, the organ of Jamāl-al-Dīn Asadābādī’s pan-Islamic movement, with headquarters in Paris, which carried editorials against Persian tobacco concessions to the British. Other examples included such secular, nationalist, and modernizing journals as Mīrzā Malkom Khan’s *Qānūn* (The law) from London, Mīrzā Mahdī and Moḥammad Ṭāher’s *Aktar* (The star) from Istanbul, and Jalāl-al-Dīn Kāšānī’s *Ḥabl al-matīn* (The firm cord) from Calcutta (Browne, *Press and Poetry*, pp. 36,73-74; Ṣadr Hāšemī, *Jarā’ed o majallāt* I, pp. 63-65, II, pp. 200-08).

Beginning in 1310/1892 there was also an underground press in Tabrīz, with the issuing of *Šab-nāma* (Evening paper). As the Constitutional Revolution unfolded, other clandestine newspapers began to appear as well; *Lesān al-ġayb* (The unseen tongue), *Ġayrat* (The zealous), *Ḥammām-e jennīān* (The genies’ bath), and *Ketāb-e ġaybī* (The booklet of the invisible), all published by revolutionary nationalist groups (Ṣadr Hāšemī, *Jarā’ed o majallāt* IV, pp. 59, 177). It is estimated that about 200 newspapers and weeklies were circulating during the constitutional period (see [constitutional revolution of 1323-29/1905-11 vi](#)). At the end of the Qajar period, in 1300-03 Š./1921-24, 173 Persian-interest dailies and magazines were being published in Persia and abroad (*Sāzmān-e barnāma*, 1352 Š./1973, p. 74).

Rezā Shah once again brought the independent partisan press under authoritarian control, and all materials critical of the government or thought potentially disturbing to the population were severely curbed. Newspapers were required to publish material supporting a strong state, progress, and specific notions of the social role of individuals, the duties of women, and morals. Editors thus turned from politics to culture, from criticism of the government to criticism of literature and art. In 1304 Š./1925 ‘Abbās Mas‘ūdī founded *Eṭṭelā‘āt* (Ṣadr Hāšemī, *Jarā’ed o majallāt* I, p. 202), which, along with *Īrān*, the government paper recently privatized by Zayn-al-‘Ābedīn Rahnemā, and *Kūšeš*, edited by Šokr-Allāh Ṣafawī, were the journalistic mainstays of Rezā Shah’s government (Ṣadr Hāšemī, *Jarā’ed o majallāt* IV, p. 146).

In modern Persian history, whenever the government has been weakest and the influence of foreign powers greatest, a free press has flourished, but the converse is also true. In 1321-32 Š./1942-53 the political press flourished once again. Circulating were ‘Abbās Kālīlī’s *Eqdām*; several Tudeh party (see



communism ii) papers, of which *Mardom* was the most important; royalist publications like *Ra'd-e emrūz* (Today's thunder) and other right-wing papers like *Kārvān*, *Kānūn*, *Hūr*, *Wazīfa*, and Aḥmad Kasravī's *Paṛčam*; and a variety of socialist, democratic, and fringe newspapers like *Emrūz wa fardā*, *Bahār*, *Mīhanparastān*, and others (Elwell-Sutton, 1968, p. 65). Indeed, L. P. Elwell-Sutton listed 454 periodicals in Persian published in the period 1320-26 Š./1941-47 (1968).

After the *coup d'état* of 1332 Š./1953 and the reinstatement of Moḥammad-Rezā Shah the privately owned press was subject to increasingly severe restrictions enforced by the military government of Tehran, the state security organization (SAVAK), and the Ministry of information; all criticism of the government was banned (see *censorship*). Because of such recurring political constraints and the resulting problems of economic viability the Persian press has been quite unstable; some newspapers folded, but new ones opened with some frequency. By the 1970s there were twenty-eight daily newspapers, eighty-eight weekly papers, and twenty-nine weekly and fifty-seven monthly magazines being published in Persia, as well as thirteen foreign newspapers in circulation there. Two daily newspapers were dominant: *Keyhān* and *Eṭṭelā'āt*, and other major organs included *Āyandagān*, *Rastākīz* (the paper of the Rastākīz party), and *Bāmdād*, a widely distributed morning paper. In 1355 Š./1976 there were 198 daily, weekly, and monthly papers (Barzīn, pp. 7-13), yet the size of the reading public was and is still limited by high illiteracy, despite much-publicized literacy campaigns; in 1355 Š./1976 the estimated proportion of the population ten years or older that was literate was 57 percent for men and 32 percent for women (*Markaz-e āmār*, p. 25).

From 1357 Š./1979 until the closing of the universities in the summer of 1359 Š./1980, 237 daily, weekly, and monthly newspapers were appearing in Tehran and provincial towns (*Hafta-nāma-ye oṭāq-e bāzargānī wa šanāye' wa ma'āden-e Īrān* 7, Mehr 1369 Š./October 1990, pp. 13-15). Then the government of the Islamic Republic adopted a policy of Islamicization of culture and media under the authority of the Ministry of Islamic guidance (*Wezārat-e eršād-e eslāmī*), which is still evolving. After the brief "Tehran spring" of open publishing in 1357 Š./1979 the independent press suffered a serious setback, as new repression and severe censorship led to the closing of many papers and the total Islamicization of others.

The terms "private" and "public" are misleading when applied to the Persian press because, both under the Pahlavis and under the Islamic Republic,



controls on the availability of newsprint and zinc plates, as well as government support through advertising, have always undermined newspapers' strict political or financial independence. The most important "private" daily newspapers in 1361 Š./1992 included *Keyhān*, *Eṭṭelā'āt*, *Abrār* (formerly *Āyandagān*), *Jomhūrī-e eslāmī*, and *Resālat*. Government-sponsored daily papers include *Ḳabar-e jonūb*, *Nāma-ye Īrān*, and *Tehran Times*.

There are a number of weekly and monthly publications, and foreign-language publishing is also developing to serve non-Persian communities and to extend the global reach of communications from the Islamic Republic. Nevertheless, it has been estimated that by 1367 Š./1988 the total number of daily, weekly, and monthly periodicals had shrunk to 163 (*Hafta-nāma-ye oṭāq-e bāzargānī wa šanāye' wa ma'āden-e Īrān* 7, Mehr 1369 Š./October 1990, pp. 14-15).

Radio. Radio and television have developed in very different ways in Persia, although since the early 1970s both have been subject to a single national broadcasting monopoly, a pattern familiar in many parts of the developing world. Wireless telegraph, or long-wave radio, was introduced into Persia for military purposes by the Germans in Rajab 1333/May 1915, when they established a connection between Isfahan and Germany. The basic infrastructure of radio broadcasting was, however, established under Reżā Shah. In 1303 Š./1924 the Ministry of war purchased from the Soviets a 20-kilowatt wireless telegraph for Tehran and 4-kilowatt systems for Tabrīz, Mašhad, Kermān, Shiraz, Kermānšāh, and Moḥammara (Ḳorramšahr; Pežmān Baḳtīārī, p. 507). The inauguration of the Tehran station, which came to be known as Bīsīm-e Pahlavī, coincided with the celebration of Reżā Shah's coronation in April 1926. An antenna 120 m high was erected in Tehran; a cannonball at its base contained an essay in which Reżā Shah described his love for Persia, his service to the country, and his hopes for the future (Pežmān Baḳtīārī, pp. 506-07). Messages were broadcast, inviting receiving stations to communicate with Persia. Moscow responded with messages of congratulation (*Rādīō Īrān*, pp. 14-15). The ministry also established an army wireless school. In 1305 Š./1926 the wireless department was transferred from the Ministry of war to the Ministry of post, telegraph, and telephone. In 1309 Š./1930, with French help, Persia adopted a short-wave system with more powerful transmitting capacity, which was further enlarged in 1314 Š./1935. There is some evidence that returning travelers and the growing Persian middle class had developed a taste for Western music: Colonel Fażl-Allāh



Zāhedī broadcast Western classical and dance music from Rašt (Pežmān Baḳtīārī, p. 506; Maḥbūbī, *Mo'assasāt* II, p. 232). By 1313 Š./1934 merchants were importing radio sets, and individuals could obtain permits from the ministry to install antennae on their houses. In that year the Ministry of foreign affairs took over the Pārs news agency, which subscribed to the main Western news services and became the central supplier of foreign news to the press and radio. On 4 Ordībehešt 1319 Š./24 April 1940 Crown Prince Moḥammad-Rezā formally inaugurated Radio Iran in Tehran (National Iranian Radio and Television [NIRT], pp. 2-4), and in September Dr. 'Īsā Ṣadiq was named to direct the station. Among his accomplishments was the amalgamation of the Correspondence office (Edāra-ye nāma-negārī) of the Ministry of the interior, the Pārs news agency of the Ministry of foreign affairs, and the Radio office of the Ministry of post, telegraph, and telephone in a single Department of broadcasting and communications (Edāra-ye tablīgāt wa entešārāt). He also formed a council (Šūrā-ye 'alī-e entešārāt) of leading intellectuals like Moḥammad-'Alī Forūgī and 'Alī-Naqī-Wazīrī to oversee the quality of broadcasts (Maḥbūbī, *Mo'assasāt* III, pp. 76-77). The station was on the air five hours a day; programming included news and internal-affairs broadcasts, Persian and Western music, religious sermons, and traditional sports. Eventually there were discussions of economic and political subjects as well. Loud-speakers were set up in provincial centers and public places to broadcast the radio programs to the public (*Rādīō Īrān*, pp. 14-15). Radio was the first truly national modern medium of communication in Persia. According to UNESCO estimates, there were 20,000 radio sets in Persia in 1319 Š./1940 and about 60,000 a decade later, approximately one set per 300 people (*Statistical Yearbook*, 1950, p. 278). By the year 1355 Š./1976 an estimated 76 percent of urban dwellers and 45 percent of rural people owned radio sets (Markaz-e āmār, p. 144).

After the establishment of the Islamic Republic there was a gradual increase in the number of radio broadcasting stations. In 1367 Š./1988 eighty-nine Persian stations were carrying Programs I and II (*Sāl-nāma-ye āmār-e kešvar*, 1367, p. 325). By 1369 Š./1990 radio signals, enhanced by satellite delivery, could reach almost the entire population. Programs covered news, public affairs, science and technology, sports, and Islamic information. Foreign-language and ethnic programming was increased to sixteen languages (*Kār-nāma-ye Jomhūrī-e eslāmī*, 1367, p. 776).

Television. Whereas in many countries the development and organization of



television broadcasting have followed the pattern of radio, in Persia they did not. Television broadcasting was introduced by private entrepreneurs, rather than the government. In 1337 Š./1958 the well-known merchant Ḥabīb-Allāh Ṭābet Pāsāl and his son, a graduate of the Harvard University Business School, obtained permission to establish the first Persian television station, *Televīzīōn-e Īrān*, which was to operate tax-free for the first five years. It was managed by an American, and other Americans trained Persian staff, though a shortage of skilled personnel constantly plagued the station. Programming consisted half of imported serials and films from the United States and half of domestically produced quiz and other shows borrowing heavily from Western genres. The station was on the air six hours a night, seven nights a week, and carried considerable amounts of advertising (Kimiachi, 1978, pp. 39-94). Ṭābet Pāsāl held the RCA franchise in Persia and was able to supply the household receivers for which he was creating a market. The first regional television station was opened in Ābādān in 1339 Š./1960 to serve an audience of well-paid oil workers, potential customers for the advertised consumer goods. Early commercial television thus contributed significantly to the spread of a Western-oriented consumer culture in Persia.

On 1 Farvardīn 1346 Š./20 March 1967, in time for the New Year celebrations, Moḥammad-Rezā Shah formally inaugurated National Iranian Television, which had begun trial broadcasting six months earlier. At first all station hardware was controlled by the Ministry of post, telegraph, and telephone, and the programs came under the Department of broadcasting and communication. The necessity of developing a nationwide broadcasting system eventually led to the creation, in June 1971, of National Iranian Radio and Television to control all electronic broadcasting (Mohammadi, pp. 120-22). The first director general was appointed directly by the shah; he was Rezā Qoṭbī, a French-trained engineer and cousin of the queen. Broadcasting time on both radio and television increased rapidly. With the expansion of transmission facilities it was projected that by 1357 Š./1978 more than 95 percent of urban areas and large villages, accounting for about 75 percent of the total population, would be able to receive television (NIRT, p. 42). By the late 1970s there were two main channels (*Barnāma-ye awwal* and *Barnāma-ye dovvom*), and a special summer channel in the Caspian area.

Before 1346 Š./1967 private television had reached about 2.1 million people in Persia; when NIRT began regular transmissions that year coverage increased to 4.8 million, and by 1353 Š./1974 it had risen to more than 15 million people,



approximately half the total population (NIRT, p. 30). By the mid-1970s, owing to new production centers, transmission facilities, and relay stations, Persia boasted the second largest broadcasting system in Asia, after Japan. Studies showed that approximately 40 percent of programs were imported (33 percent for Channel 1, 60 percent for Channel 2; see Katz and Shinar, pp. 56, 50; Motamed-Nejad, 1977, pp. 10-44). They included old films, serials, and musical shows; *Tarzan* and *Marcus Welby* were particular favorites. Much of the domestic programming was modeled on foreign formats, for example, consumer-oriented quiz shows. Serials reflecting domestic concerns and issues, like *Morād Barqī* and *Şamad*, were also extremely popular (Katz and Shinar, pp. 21-29).

Both channels carried advertising, not only encouraging the growth of consumer culture, but also introducing foreign images of beauty and foreign lifestyles. Channel 2 was partly devoted to English-language programming; although it was aimed mainly at the huge foreign labor force, it nevertheless intensified still further the percolation of foreign images and influences throughout the country. The Center for public-opinion surveys (Markaz-e sanješ-e afkār) within NIRT and the Iran communications and development institute (Pažūheškada-ye 'olūm-e ertebaṭī wa tawse'a-ye Īrān) were beginning to produce audience analyses in the mid-1970s, but their reports are more suggestive than exact. Television was extremely popular in all age groups and at all professional levels in Persia; in 1353 Š./1974 the average time spent watching television was six hours a day, and there was an average of seven viewers per set (NIRT, p. 57). In Tehran the press and television had become the main sources of information for the population, but radio and word-of-mouth ranked higher in the provinces (NIRT, p. 65). Since the Revolution there have been few surveys, and the current size and media preferences of the broadcast audience are matters of speculation.

During the eight-year war with Iraq (1359-67 Š./1980-88) war propaganda dominated television broadcasting. In 1369 Š./1990 Channel 1 was broadcasting eight hours a day and Channel 2 five hours in the evening plus offering three to five hours of education programming for schools during the daytime. There is a high proportion of religious programs as well, though light-entertainment programs are increasing, children's programs are numerous, and a feature film is regularly shown in the evening. Even some imported programs are shown, most originating in Europe (Sreberny-Mohammadi and Mohammadi). International broadcasting, begun under the Pahlavis in 1354



Š./1975 in English and French, has been expanded to include programs in Urdu, Armenian, German, Pashto, Turkish, Russian, Kurdish, Spanish, and Arabic (*Sorūš* 140, Farvardīn 1361 Š./April 1982, p. 66).

The national news agency, renamed Islamic Republic news agency (Kābargozārī-e Jomhūrī-e eslāmī-e Iran) operates bureaus in twenty world capitals. In 1368 Š./1989 the television agency (Şedā wa sīmā-ye-Jomhūrī-e eslāmī-e Īrān) began renting a satellite transponder from INTELSAT to improve its transmission. By that time there were 578 broadcasting channels and 159 satellite channels (*Sāl-nāma-ye āmārī-e kešvar*, 1367, p. 325) in Persia.

Certain areas of programming are still controversial, for example, the representation of women and the playing of music; the government is still struggling to create a distinctively Islamic television. At the same time there is still also considerable interest in Western cultural products in Persia, and communities of Persian exiles are extremely active media producers.

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