



FĀṬEMĪ, ḤOSAYN

FĀṬEMĪ, ḤOSAYN (1296-1333 Š./1917-54; [Figure 1](#)), journalist, a leader of the National Front, and the minister of foreign affairs under Moḥammad Moṣaddeq. Ḥosayn Fāṭemī was born in Nāʾin into a family with a tradition of religious learning. His father was Sayf-al-ʿOlamāʾ Sayyed ʿAlī-Moḥammad Nāʾinī. Fāṭemī received his elementary education in his home town and then moved to Isfahan for his secondary education. There he began to work for the newspaper *Bāktar*, which was published by his elder brother Naṣr-Allāh Sayfpūr Fāṭemī (Sayfpūr Fāṭemī, pp. 1-15). In 1316 Š./1937 he moved to Tehran and joined *Setāra*, a newspaper published by Aḥmad Malekī. His journalistic skills impressed the censors, but soon provoked suspicion and anger (Malekī, pp. 78-79; Afrāsīābī, pp. 82-84). Fāṭemī returned to Isfahan to take over the management of *Bāktar* from his brother. Following the abdication of Reżā Shah in Šahrīvar 1320 Š./September 1941 and a brief imprisonment for publishing a statement considered injurious to the government, undeterred by financial constraints, Fāṭemī decided to publish *Bāktar* in Tehran. His editorials expressed a nationalist oppositional stand, emphasized constitutionalism and the role of the intelligentsia, and criticized corruption and cabinet instability. *Bāktar* did not survive the absence of Fāṭemī, who went to Paris in 1323 Š./1944 to study political science and journalism. Upon his return four years later, he began to publish *Bāktar-e emrūz* on 8 Mordād 1328 Š./30 July 1949; his first editorial was entitled “Either death or freedom.”

Fāṭemī broached the issue of protesting against the government rigging of the elections for the Sixteenth Majles with Moṣaddeq (Moṣaddeq, pp. 245-46),



helped to mobilize support, and in Mehr 1928 Š./October 1949 was one of a delegation selected to accompany Moşaddeq in a sit-in (*bast*) at the royal palace protesting the conduct of the elections. On Faṭemī's suggestion, this group came to formalize itself as Jabha-ye mellī (National Front, Malekī, p. 56). *Bāktar-e emrūz* became its chief vehicle, promoting objectives such as electoral and press freedom, opposition to martial law or to the government of Ḥājī-'Alī Razmārā and, eventually, the nationalization of the oil industry, an initiative proposed by Fāṭemī to Moşaddeq and the National Front (Moşaddeq, pp. 229-30). Soon after Moşaddeq's assumption of the premiership in Ordībehešt 1330 Š./May 1951, Fāṭemī was appointed the prime minister's parliamentary and political under-secretary. As oil negotiations with Britain bore no fruit and the British-backed parliamentary and press opposition to the government increased, Fāṭemī's editorials in *Bāktar-e emrūz*, which had become the third largest paper in the country, acquired a more defiant tone, particularly in their opposition to Britain. In an editorial Fāṭemī described the closure of British consulates in Persian provincial centers as marking the country's day of independence (*Bāktar-e emrūz*, 29 Day 1330 Š./20 January 1952, p. 1).

An admirer of the controversial, anti-establishment journalist Moḥammad Mas'ūd, Fāṭemī narrowly escaped an attempt on his life carried out by a member of the Fedā'īān-e Eslām (q.v.), while attending the fourth anniversary commemoration of Mas'ūd's assassination (5 Bahman 1330 Š./15 February 1952). The Fedā'īān blamed the firmness of Moşaddeq's government towards them on Fāṭemī and his "resolute and uncompromising" stand ('Erāqī, pp. 116-20). The injuries he sustained resulted in prolonged hospitalization in Tehran (Makkī, p. 413; Najātī, p. 113). Fāṭemī also received treatment abroad but did not fully recover. He was elected as a deputy to the Seventeenth Majles and on 19 Mehr 1331 Š./11 October 1952, was appointed minister of foreign affairs as well as government spokesman. Soon after, diplomatic relations with Britain were cut off. The foreign ministry, traditionally considered a bastion of privilege, did not, however, readily prove amenable to reforms which the government, and particularly the new foreign minister, attempted to pursue.

A believer in party politics, Fāṭemī favored transforming the National Front into a cohesive political party (*Bāktar-e Emrūz*, 17 Esfand 1328/8 March 1950). This was not achieved, but he played a crucial role both in running the Front and maintaining its cohesion; in his absence "nothing positive could be achieved" (Malekī, pp. 59-60, 72). He represented the radical reformist strand in the Front, a group which George Middleton, British chargé d'affaires,



referred to as the “Young Turks,” who were dissatisfied with the “inequalities of wealth, the corruption and maladministration,” and who hoped to see “a genuine revival in the country” (Public Record Office, Kew, U.K., FO371/98606, F.O. to New York, 19 November 1952). Despite his efforts, frictions within the Front continued to intensify, eventually resulting in several key figures overtly defying the government. His ailing health forced Fāṭemī to seek treatment abroad, returning a few days before the first stage of the coup of Mordād 1332 Š./August 1953 (see [COUP D’ETAT OF 1332 Š./1953](#)) after an absence of almost six weeks. His presence during this critical period might have enhanced the government’s preparedness to cope with the coup. Detained by the royalist forces and released later following the failure of the initial stage of the coup and the shah’s departure from the country, Fāṭemī vehemently denounced the royal court and the shah both in his editorials, which were regularly broadcast on the radio, and at public meetings.

With the overthrow of Moṣaddeq’s government, Fāṭemī went into hiding but was arrested on 6 Esfand 1332 Š./25 February 1954. While under police escort, he was attacked by a knife-wielding gang in front of police headquarters, seriously injured and hospitalized (Personal defense in court, text in Afrāsīābī, pp. 309-31; statement by Fāṭemī’s sister, text in Jabha-ye mellī-e Īrān, pp. 47-48; Makkī, p. 418; Mokrī, pp. 39-41). Transferred to a military prison, he was subsequently brought into the court on his sick bed and tried by a military tribunal on the charge of acting to subvert the constitutional monarchy. His letters, smuggled out of prison, indicate an unflinching spirit (text in Afrāsīābī, pp. 333-55; Mūsawī Zanjānī, pp. 220-30; see also Mokrī, p. 38). His vigorous defense immediately resulted in the trial being held in camera (text in Afrāsīābī, pp. 309-31). On 18 Mehr 1333 Š./10 October 1954, after twelve days of hearings, Fāṭemī was condemned to death by firing squad; an appeal was not successful, and the sentence was carried out a month later. He was survived by his wife, Parīvaš Saṭwatī, and their two year old son, ‘Alī.

Fāṭemī was a skilled and bold journalist (Šifṭa, pp. 43-44); as a colleague he was praised by Moṣaddeq and others for his “loyalty and sincerity,” his “bravery and bluntness,” and his “crucial” role in the national movement (Bozorgmehr, 1984, II, p. 289; idem, 1986, p. 594; Moṣaddeq, p. 289; Sanjābī, pp. 172-73; Amīr ‘Alā’ī, pp. 151-54). Believed capable of exerting considerable influence over Moṣaddeq, Fāṭemī was referred to by an American Embassy report as “virtually an alter-ego of the Prime Minister” (Public Record Office, Kew, U.K., FO 371/98606, British Embassy, Washington to F.O., 24 December 1952). He



espoused republican ideas (Najmī, 71-72; Public Record Office, Kew, U.K., FO 371/104564, Rumbold [Paris] to F.O., 24 March 1953), and increasingly resented the influence of the royal court. He was equally impatient with what he considered to be improper foreign interference in Persian affairs. The American Embassy, denouncing as “scurrilous” and “disgusting” his articles (of August 16-18, 1953) on the Pahlavi family, described him as “one of the most unscrupulous and most detested men Iran has ever known” (National Archives, Washington, D. C., 788.00/10-2853, American Embassy, Tehran, to the Department of State, 28 October 1953). In the same vein, soon after the overthrow of Moṣaddeq’s government, Sam Falle, British Ambassador to Lebanon and the last British Oriental Counselor in Tehran before the suspension of diplomatic relations, wrote to the Foreign Office: “A cold-blooded execution, apart from being inhuman, might be unwise in Mossy’s [Moṣaddeq’s] case, although it might be the best answer for Fatemi if he is ever caught. As long as these boys are alive and in Persia there is always the danger of a counter-coup. Toughness is necessary” (Public Record Office, Kew, U.K., FO 371/104584, Falle to Gandy, 30/9/53).

See also [BĀKTAR](#); [BĀKTAR-E EMRŪZ](#); and [NATIONAL FRONT](#).

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