

## Iranian publications shut down during reform strike

TEHRAN, Iran (AP) — Iranians searched street kiosks in vain for their favorite newspapers Monday, after hard-liners closed down 14 pro-democracy publications in a strike against a major pillar of the reform movement.

The shutdown of pro-reform newspapers, part of a crackdown that has seen two journalists jailed in the past three days, is a strong backlash by Islamic hard-liners trying to preserve their power and is a blow against popular President Mohammad Khatami.

The move also showed how much power the hard-liners still hold, despite a crushing defeat by Khatami supporters in recent legislative elections.

The judiciary, which handed down the ban against the newspapers Sunday, has been the hard-liners' most powerful instrument in the power struggle against the movement for social and political reforms that has swelled since Khatami's 1997 election.

"The power struggle in Iran is entering dire straits," said Saeed Leylaz, an analyst and writer for several reformist newspapers. "The press has been the main instrument for Khatami to speak to the people, and if that is taken away from him he is in serious trouble," Leylaz told the Associated Press.

Khatami spoke in public Monday to mark Armed Forces Day, but made no mention of the closures or the future of his reforms.

Ten major daily newspapers and four weekly or biweekly magazines were closed down by order of the hard-line judiciary in Tehran late Sunday and Monday, the official Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA) reported.

Only two reformist newspapers — *Mosharekat* and *Bayan* — escaped the ban. It was not clear why they were not included. Azad, which was banned, was on sale Monday, because the daily already had gone to print before the ban. It is unlikely to appear Tuesday.

Judiciary statements quoted by IRNA said the publications were closed for "printing material against the lofty Islamic principles and commands."

"Khatami is still strong and very popular among the people, but now he is handicapped without his main pillars of support," said Hossein Qaragozlu, a shopkeeper, who was buying papers.

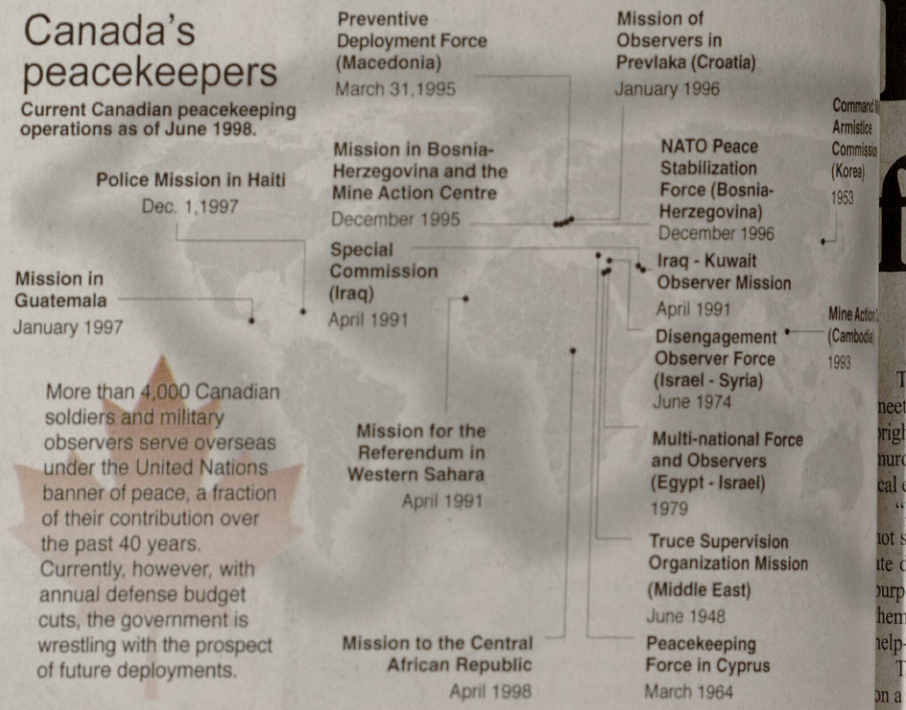
The closures came three days after Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the hard-line supreme leader whose powers supersede those of the elected president, said there were 10 to 15 reformist papers undermining Islamic principles.

Hard-liners were outraged after footage from the conference was aired last week on state television, showing Iranian exiles criticizing Iran's religious government and a woman dancing in a skimpy outfit. In Iran, women must adhere to an Islamic dress code.

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Source: Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, 1999

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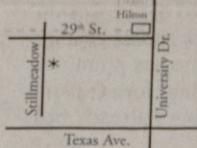
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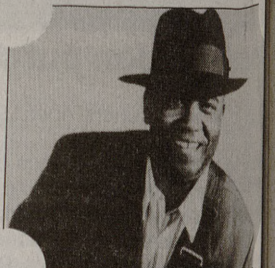
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