



FEATURES

The Islamic Republic of Sex Scandals

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The corridors of power within the Islamic Republic are ablaze with a series of sex scandals – seemingly more with each passing day.

Fresh revelations spotlighting the moral and sexual transgressions of high-ranking officials within the system continue to threaten or even topple yet another leader or pillar of Iran's ruling Islamic system.

The latest jolt came on August 19 when a new shockwave of explicit images in contravention of Sharia law emerged.

The central figure in the latest scandal was Mohammed Masoudianfar, director general of the state radio and television educational and welfare complex, who featured in images of an act of sexual intimacy with a veiled woman. The woman was later revealed to be a married employee of state radio and television – amplifying the shock. The exposé surfaced through the Radio Gilan Telegram channel.

The Iranian government quickly dismissed Masoudianfar from his position. But he was only the latest of such revelations.

The scandals began with a video spotlighting Reza Saghati, director general of Culture and Islamic Guidance, in northern province. Saghati was seen in the video engaging in a sexual encounter with a young man. The Gil Khabar news site reported that Saghati had been fired.

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Iranian officials had previously been dismissed for extramarital affairs. But Saghati's dismissal raised eyebrows among many social media users who criticized the hypocrisy of government officials.

The scandal also fueled speculation that Saghati could be the victim of a power struggle in Gilan province. Accusations of same-sex relations have been used in the past to eliminate players in political struggles.

Brothers-in-Law, Clerics, or Lovers? Unveiling a Complex Reality

For over four decades, the Islamic Republic has suppressed the country's LGBTQ+ community and purported to uphold religious laws and jurisprudence.

Iran's Islamic Penal Code stipulates that engaging in same-sex relationships carries penalties ranging from flogging to execution. But documents in the public domain – in particular, reports of interrogations by Iranian security agents, as well as sermons by Shia clerics, and other documents – show that authorities within the Islamic Republic display a peculiar fascination with this type of sexual relationship.

In the case of Reza Saghati, the circumstances surrounding his male partner's age, and whether Saghati used his position to coerce the partner, both remain uncertain. IranWire cannot independently confirm any allegations of "assault" or "sexual assault" that have spread online.

The case of Seyyed Mehdi Haqshenas, former secretary of the Headquarters for Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice in Gilan province, exposes an even more lurid scandal at the heart of Iran's religious government.

Video footage showing a sexual relationship between Haqshenas and Abbas Baghipour, his brother-in-law, both of whom are also Shia clerics, has also surfaced. Messages between the two provided further and explicit insight into their sexual relationship.

The Gilan Radio Telegram channel reported: "The wife of Mehdi Haqshenas confirmed the authenticity of the images, identifying their private residence during her appearance in the specialized clerical court."

The director of Gilan Radio further remarked, "The case involving the moral corruption of Seyyed Mehdi Haqshenas initially fell under the jurisdiction of the clerical court, but with the involvement of Ayatollah Falahati, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei's representative in Gilan, the case was not taken seriously."

Quran Reciters: Navigating Murky Waters of Scandal

Seyyed Shahabuddin Seyyed Mousavi stands apart in a growing list of Quranic reciters whose reputations have been tarnished due to extramarital liaisons. But he was not the first, nor the only, as in recent weeks two videos linked to another Quranic reciter, Mohammed Safari, a member of northern Bandar Anzali's local council, have also emerged.

The first video shows two almost naked individuals smoking opium beneath a window. The second portrays one of the same individuals lying in the same spot, engrossed in mobile phone imagery, and masturbating. The videos, which have circulated since July 21 via the Telegram channel of Radio Gilan with over 110,000 followers, have caught considerable attention.

One of the most prominent Quran reciters in recent memory is Mohammad Gandomnejad Tousi, commonly known as Haj Saeed Tousi, a Quranic reciter at the Islamic Republic's Supreme Leader's residence who has been accused of sexual misconduct involving minors. And even though he is a member of the Supreme Council of the Quran, he has faced "sexual harassment" allegations for nearly a decade.

Following the exposure of certain instances of "sexual harassment" linked to Tousi, parents of young Quran reciters filed formal complaints against him. But the Islamic Republic's judiciary controversially "acquitted" him in February

questioning. But this Quran reciter was released after denying any connection to the images that had spread.

Unchecked Corruption: A Tale of Impunity

Amid the ranks of numerous officials within the system who indulge in corruption with brazen impunity, those whose illicit actions come to light are at worst relieved of their duties. In most instances, however, the veneer of accountability is thinly upheld through news of arrests and pledges of punishment, rarely resulting in actual consequences.

In 2020, for instance, a video surfaced depicting the governor of northern Langrood city exploiting his position and sexually assaulting women. During that time, media reports asserted that "the corrupt governor had been dismissed."

The Langrood prosecutor also vowed an investigation by the Intelligence and Public Security Police, with a court case initiated to ensure justice as per the Islamic Penal Code. Yet, despite these assurances, no information about the governor's punishment has been disseminated to date.

Similarly, in August 2018, the Friday imam of northern Babol city exposed a "major scandal" during his Friday prayer sermon, revealing the entanglement of four local council members in a relationship with a woman.

Following this revelation, the number of arrests within the council and municipality surged. Even the brother of Marmar Firozpour, a council member, was implicated in the case. The saga unfolded with Roxana, a woman from an atelier, luring council members to a pre-prepared house and capturing their misconduct on film through strategically placed cameras. Eight individuals faced arrest in connection to the Babol city council case.

Dating back to early 2013, a brief video circulated on social media attributed to Kamran Daneshjoo, the Minister of Science in the Mahmoud Ahmadinejad administration.

The footage, widely shared on platforms like YouTube and Facebook, featured an individual with a clerical appearance standing beside a woman inside a lift, clandestinely recorded by a hidden camera.

Despite its spread, the claims made in the video were neither verified nor debunked.

One of the most baffling but forgotten cases, meanwhile, involves the "moral corruption" of former Tehran Police commander Brigadier General Reza Zarei.

News of his arrest emerged in February 2010 when, according to reports at the time, Zarei, Tehran's police chief, was apprehended at a property during a sexual encounter involving six women. Media sources quoted the detained women recounting unsettling experiences and Zarei's strange requests – including urging them to conduct group prayers in the nude.

In many of these cases, the Islamic system appears inclined to maintain a shroud of silence, allowing matters to fade from public memory without substantial follow-up.

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