Since the start of the nationwide protests of Dec 2018 and Jan 2019 in Iran which was around workers’ and citizens’ economic demands for a better life, Zamaneh Media (Stichting Radio Zamaneh, ZM) has decided to monitor, analyze and publish on local labor rights developments in Iran in a bi-monthly brief in both Persian and English. These bi-monthly briefs detail the state of labor rights and legislation in Iran to develop alliances of knowledge sharing in order to promote and build public pressure for the adoption and enforcement of internationally-recognized treaties related to labor rights in Iran.

Zamaneh has identified several key areas of concern for Iran’s workers which will be prioritized in these bi-monthly briefs to include workplace security and health; discrimination in the workforce and fair wages; labor legislation; women in the workforce; child labor; contractual issues and unemployment; and freedom of association/unionization. Zamaneh monitors, collects and reports labor news through our platforms daily. This brief is intended to be a thematic ‘big-picture’ and is published in two languages to increase the knowledge and awareness of workers situation in Iran.

The current bi-monthly report covers events in the approximate range of August-September 2019. The newsletter does not claim to be inclusive of all labor events that took place during this period.
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Major Issues

The summer season for workers and workers' rights defenders in Iran was marked by more severe repression and long prison terms. The head of the judiciary, Ibrahim Raisi, defended the factory owners who delayed workers' wages and ordered them to be fired in statements that the Iranian news media covered in large numbers. He demanded workers to confront the protesters. Like other senior political and security officials in the Islamic Republic, he accused the protesting workers of "pursuing other goals."

The remarks came as several workers at the Haft Tappeh Sugar Cane Complex were tried in Shush and Tehran. Workers detained on May 1 have also been tried and sentenced to long prison terms and flogging.

During the past two months, the Iranian judiciary has sentenced several members of the Tehran Bus Syndicate, the Free Trade Union of Iran, workers at various manufacturing units, students, and labor rights defenders to prison and flogging.

Despite the intensification of repression, labor protests continued in various cities. In the city of Arak, Hepco and AzarAb workers returned to the street to protest their deferred wages. In Qazvin, the workers of the Electricity Meter Manufacturing Company / SHERKAT-e-KONTORSAZI-e-IRAN(SKI), the municipal workers for the maintenance of lines and technical
facilities in several cities, retirees, and expelled workers also rallied to protest the prevailing conditions.

Workers' protests are increasing day by day as the consequences of economic sanctions become more pronounced. The number of manufacturing plants that have been shut down has increased and about 130,000 workers are at risk of losing their jobs, according to the director general of the Office of Support for Jobs at the Ministry of Co-operation, Labor and Social Welfare.

A Collective Trial and Long Prison Sentences

Mohammad Reza Moghiseh, a judge at Tehran’s Revolutionary Court, has sentenced the Haft Tappeh detainees to more than a century in prison in total. Jamal Heidari-Manesh, the lawyer for Sepideh Gholian (a social activist and student who was arrested in December 2018 for her support of the Haft Tappeh workers and has been kept in jail ever since) announced her prison sentence of 19 years and six months on 7 September 2019. According to Heidari-Manesh, seven years of that sentence is mandatory (based on laws in the Islamic Penal Code of Iran that allocated the maximum sentence among all sentences for all charges, the sentence to be served by the prisoner).

Ismail (Esmail) Bakhshi, a worker and member of the Haft Tappeh Sugar Cane Workers' Assembly, is sentenced to 14 years in prison and 74 lashes.

Mohammad Khanifar, another Haft Tappeh worker, is sentenced to six years in prison.

Editorial staff of the Gaam Internet magazine who were arrested in connection with the protests of the Haft Tappeh workers and Ahwaz Steel Company were also sentenced to long prison terms:

Amir Hossein Mohammadi-Fard, editor-in-chief of Gaam Magazine: 18 years imprisonment;

Assal Mohammadi, editorial member of Gaam Magazine: 18 years imprisonment;

Sanaz Alahyari, editorial member of Gaam Magazine: 18 years imprisonment;

Amir Amirgholi, editorial member of Gaam Magazine: 18 years imprisonment.

These sentences triggered a wave of public outcry. Even some MP lawmakers expressed misgivings. With extremely harsh verdicts, the government seems to be aiming at cutting off the bonds between the journalists and the labor protests.

Following the verdicts, Gholamhossein Esmaili, a spokesman for the Iranian judiciary, said the head of the judiciary had ordered a "fair review" of the case. However, he described the trial as an instance of a "state security" case.
Farzaneh Zilabi, the lawyer of Ismail Bakhshi and Mohammad Khanifar, said she has not received the verdict through the official channels and hence the Revolutionary Court had no jurisdiction over the case. Ms. Zilabi herself was summoned to court in July this year.

In public opinion, the "fair review" order by the head of the judiciary is seen as “theatrics.” There has long been a concerted effort among the top officials of the system to clean up the image of Ibrahim Raisi. He is mentioned as a likely successor to current Supream Leader, Seyyed Ali Khamenei. Ibrahim Raisi is well known as the "Judge of Death" for of his role as a member of the decision-making committee on the mass execution of political prisoners in the summer of 1988.

Long-term Prison for May Day Detainees

Atefeh Rangriz, Neda Naji, and Marzieh Amiri, three of the Labor Day detainees, remain in jail. The Tehran Revolutionary Court sentenced Marzieh Amiri, a journalist of the Shargh Daily who was covering the protests, to 10 years and six months in prison and 148 lashes. A social affairs researcher, Atefeh Rangriz, was sentenced to 11 years and six months in prison and 74 lashes. Neda Naji, a labor rights activist, is still being held in Evin Prison.

Other detainees were also tried and sentenced to jail, corporal punishments like flogging, deportation to harsh rural towns and/or prisons and deprivation of their social rights:

Nasrin Javadi, a retired worker, sentenced to 7 years in prison and 74 lashes;
Hassan Saeedi, a member of the Syndicate of Employees of Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company, sentenced to 5 years imprisonment and two years deprivation of social and trade union activities;

Rasool Taleb Moghaddam, a member of the Syndicate of Employees of Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company, sentenced to two years imprisonment and two years of exile;

Farhad Sheikh, one year imprisonment;

In Karaj, the Revolutionary Court sentenced Parvin Mohammadi, Haleh Safarzadeh and Alireza Saghafi to one year of imprisonment for participating in the April 26 rally. Jafar Azimzadeh and Ehsan Shapouri Rad, two board members of the Free Trade Union of Iranian Workers, had already been sentenced to six years in prison. Jafar Azimzadeh is currently in prison.

Behnam Ebrahimzadeh, a member of the Coordination Committee for the Creation of Workers' Organizations and a member of the Working Group for the Defense of Working Children, was sentenced to five years in prison and transcribing the books "Da", "the Knowledge of the Enemy" and "Winter's Tale" (this is a form of sentencing in which political prisoners are forced to copy and transcribe in hand writing entire books that have affinity with the Islamic Republic's ideologies and politics).

On August 28, security forces arrested the activist Aram Zandi violently and transferred him to detention. Zandi had previously been arrested and sentenced to prison for being a member of the Coordination Committee for the Creation of Workers' Organizations.

On September 5, security forces arrested Kamran Sakhtemangar and Ali Hosseini, two labor activists in Kurdistan province. Hosseini has been temporarily released on bail, but Kamran Sakhtemangar is still being held in prison.

In other news, a teacher in Mahabad, Yasser Amini Azar, was sentenced to 15 months in prison. Mahboubeh Farahzadi, a retired teacher in Mashhad, has also been summoned to the city's revolutionary court. Eskandar Lotfi, a member of the Marivan Teachers' Association, who had been arrested earlier, has been summoned to the Revolutionary Court again. Arrested after the teachers' rally, he has been charged with propaganda against the system, disturbing public opinion, and spreading lies.

In addition, Houshang Koushki, another teachers' union activist who was arrested on July 15 this year, is released on bail and on a temporary basis.

Mohammad Taghi Fallahi, secretary general of the Tehran Teachers' Trade Union, who was arrested in April this year during a teachers' gathering, was sentenced to eight months in prison and 10 lashes. The sentence has been suspended for three years.
Collective Trial of Steel and Sugarcane Workers

A year ago, workers of the Ahwaz National Steel Industrial Group protested for nearly a month in the streets of Ahwaz, opposing the privatization of the industrial complex. Among the demands of the workers were disbanding National Bank as the owner of the plant, payment of wages, and removing the barriers to the re-opening of the production line. Following the protests, security forces arrested more than 32 workers in two days. The arrested workers were later released on bail. But according to the steel worker Maysam al-Mahdi, four workers have been summoned to the Ahvaz Revolutionary Court to receive their ruling. None of these workers had been summoned to court before.

2580 Lashes and 344 Months Imprisonment for Farmers

The Criminal Court of Borujen in Kohgiluyeh and Boyer Ahmad Province sentenced 86 detainees in connection with the 2016 summer farmers’ protests, each to four months in prison and 30 lashes.

Farmers residing in the village of Baldaji on July 19, 2016, protested the plan to transfer the water from Choghakhor to Sefidasht in Borujen. The protest was marred by violence by security forces. One person was killed, 108 were injured and more than 70 were arrested. The Criminal Court of Brugen has charged the farmers with "disturbing public order" and "disobeying government officials while on duty" and sentenced them to prison and corporal punishments like flogging.

Hepco and AzarAb Workers Return to the Streets

Hepco and AzarAb workers in Arak began a new round of protests in late August, after nearly a year of silence. In 2017 and 2018, Hepco workers had engaged in protests for days. Following the protests, the Central Provincial Prosecutor’s Office announced charges against several workers. Ali Rabi’i, then minister of Cooperatives, Labor and Social Welfare, traveled to Markazi province to mediate the problems of Hepco and AzarAb workers, promising to resolve the issues with government measures. Two years later, however, the government promises are still unfulfilled.
Hepco workers rallied in front of the governor's office on August 24 to protest the non-payment of six months' wages. They protested for four days until August 28. After the authorities promised to fix the problems and pay the arrears, protesters announced that they would suspend their protests for 10 days.
At the same time as Hepco protests, AzarAb workers also rallied on September 3 this year in the central street of Arak to protest the non-payment of wages, the uncertain status of the company and its privatization. They spread an empty table with no food on it as a sign of their desperation.

The protests by the Hepco and AzarAb workers made the Minister of Industry, Mining and Trade travel to Markazi province. On September 3, Iranian Students News Agency (ISNA) reported that the shares of AzarAb, owned by the Agricultural Bank, were to be transferred within 48 hours. This announcement came following the visit of the Minister of Industry.

Hepco workers went on strike after the ten-day deadline. They gathered at their workplace on September 15th and blocked the North-South railroad the next day in protest. Security forces attacked them, wounded and arrested about 30 workers. The following images show the state of the injured workers following the attack of security forces:

![Injured Hepco workers, after security forces attack, September 15, 2019](image)

**Wages Not Paid, Workers Fired**

From late June to mid-July, workers from industrial units, municipalities, railways, the oil and gas industry and retirees from all the aforementioned sectors held rallies and portets in various parts of Iran. The protests lasted a day or longer in some places. The main demands were the
timely payment of wages, the return of the expelled workers to their job, the increase in pensions and efficient insurance.

According to a report, by the end of June this year, 1,193 firms across Iran are delaying wages and 130,413 workers have not been paid for several months.

According to Iranian news media, workers' wages in oil and gas development projects will be delayed. Workers in South Pars' Phase 12 in Bushehr province, North Drilling Project, and Farabi Petrochemical Project have all protested the non-payment of their past two months wages. On August 27, the Farabi Petrochemical workers rallied to protest the dismissal of 12 of their colleagues. The workers were fired on the orders of the manager, after protesting the company's failure to comply with the job rating scheme and delaying their pay.

On August 23, the government affiliated Labor News Agency announced a four-month delay in the payment of wages for South Pars Phase 12 workers. The situation of the North Drilling workers was similar; they had not been paid since April this year.

Qazvin electricity metering manufacture workers have been gathering in front of the governor's office and in Alborz Industrial City several times since July this year. Protesters, who have not been paid for about a year, had already rallied in front of government buildings many times before. On July 23, factory managers prevented 200 workers from entering the workplace. The metering workers' protests, whose employments have repeatedly been "adjusted" after privatization, continue on course.

Six workers on Railway Maintenance and Technical Facilities in Ahmedabad, Rafsanjan, were fired after a new round of workers' sit-ins began. Workers of Railway Maintenance and Technical Facilities in Hormozgan, Kerman, Arak, South Khorasan, Khorasan Razavi and Sistan and Baluchistan, and Lorestan provinces rallied for their unpaid wages. These workers are employed by temporary contractors that have refused paying wages, in some areas for up to eight months.

In July this year, 270 Shafaroud foresters were fired. The dismissed workers, with more than 15 years of employment history, rallied and demanded their return to work.

In the Persian Gulf International Shipping Company, 150 workers who had previously worked directly with the company were fired and asked to work on a temporary basis through a contracting firm if they like to stay at work. The expelled workers rallied in front of the privatization building on August 20.

135 workers in Qazvin-Tehran Highway project were laid off in July. Officials said the toll payment automation caused the layoffs. The fired workers rallied on July 23 to protest the company's decision.

Six staff members of the Housing Foundation's Natural Disasters Institute were also fired in August.
Medical Centers Unable to Pay Wages

Declining governmental health budgets, and the plans for hospitals and medical universities to operate independent of the state assistance, have made it difficult for them to pay their staff regularly. In Birjand, Razi Hospital has not paid its employees for eight months.

Aria Rasht Hospital staff salaries were cut in July this year without prior notice. The hospital staff also has three to six months of unpaid wages and deferred benefits.

In the city of Bonab, 17 contracted health workers were fired because of what was described as a "lack of liquidity and workforce reductions."

On August 27, President of Kohgiluyeh and Boyer Ahmad University of Medical Sciences announced a 19-month delay in paying public-sector doctors.

On September 1, the State Labor News Agency (ILNA) reported that public sector nurses have not been paid since April this year.

Unpaid Municipal Workers

The wages of municipal workers, often employed on a temporary basis by contracting companies, are paid with long delays. For the past two months, workers in the municipalities of Ardestan, Sisokht, Rasht, Manjil, Lushan, District 17 of Ahvaz, Pars Abad, Gonaveh, Bijar, Mohammadyar Naghadeh and Marivan have rallied to protest their unpaid wages.

Seven workers of Kalaleh municipality in Golestan province, demanding deferred salaries, were fired.

Municipal managers cite lack of cash and lack of forecasted revenue for municipalities as a reason for delayed pay.

Teachers

Despite summer holidays, teacher protests continued in July and August in various parts of Iran. Preschool teachers rallied in Khuzestan, and in Isfahan and Tehran. The purchased-service teachers, whose pay comes from private companies, demonstrated. The protesters are demanding formal employment in education. Iran's education for the next school year is facing a shortage of teachers and plans to hire the needed teachers through private sector contracting companies and in the form of purchasing services. The teachers are demanding contracts with benefits.
On August 26, both working and retired teachers in Isfahan rallied to demand decent subsistence-level wages and the right to adequate insurance. In July, several retired teachers in Tehran rallied in front of the Plan and Budget Organization to protest the non-payment of retirement bonuses.

In August, the retirees of the Social Security Pension Fund rallied in front of the Majlis to protest the failure to implement a wage-matching plan. More than 80 percent of Social Security pensioners live below the poverty line, according to statements by government officials.

**Work Accidents**

Between July 23 and September 6, 70 workers died in work-related accidents in different parts of Iran. During that same period, at least 95 workers were reported injured. As in previous months, most accidents occurred in the construction sector. Work accidents killed 27 construction workers and injured 18.

In the service sector, 48 workers were injured while doing work and 17 people, including three municipal workers, were killed in various areas. 24 industrial workers in production units and five well-diggers were also injured. In addition, four miners, 10 workers in industrial units, 66 farmers and 5 well diggers died as a result of work accidents.

Among the dead were five Afghan refugees, three child laborers, and two women.

Mehr State News Agency reported on July 30 that 421 workers lost their lives in the first quarter of the year (Iran calendar - roughly March 21 to June 21). Compared to the same period a year earlier, it shows an increase of 17.9%.

Nizamuddin Moinzadeh, head of the Kerman Coal University of Applied Science and Technology, also said that 1,400 workers die in accidents every year in Iran.
In the first five months of this year (Iranian calendar), 105 Kulbars (human mules at the borders) were killed and wounded by border guards’ gunshots, frostbite, falling from heights, or landmine explosion. According to Kulbar News, which specifically covers the state of kulbars, 34 were killed and 71 injured in this period. 21 kulbars were killed and 66 injured when targeted by border guards.

On August 29 in Marivan, the Iranian border police commander Qassem Rezaei defended the shootings, saying the guards had a duty to control the borders, to prevent unauthorized traffic and entry of smuggled goods. The remarks came as the MP from Saghez and Baneh, Mohsen Bigleri, told Tejarat-e-Emrouz newspaper that the closing of the kulbars operations has led to the closure of the border markets and an increase in the unemployment rate in Kurdistan province. He declared the real unemployment rate in Kurdistan province to be over 40%.

"Unemployment is rampant in Kurdistan today and educated youth are suffering from depression," another Iranian parliament member, Hassan Alawi, told Fars News Agency.
In Sistan and Baluchistan province, border guards killed at least 10 *sukhtbars* (human mules for fuels) and injured 17. Similar *tokulbars* on the western borders of Kurdistan, *Sukhtbars* are the poor Baluch fuel-carriers using motorbikes or small vans on the Sistan-Baluchistan border East of the country.
Please comment on this report and let us know what you think. What suggestions do you have for future reports?

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