



Following the publication of insulting cartoons in the nationwide newspaper “Iran”, hundreds of thousands of Azerbaijanis protested against “Persian chauvinism” in the streets of Tabriz on Monday, May 22nd. The cartoons made analogies such that the Azerbaijani people were compared to cockroaches who should be exterminated by cutting off their food source (excrements). The May 22nd demonstration was a continuation of protests by Azeri students in Tabriz, Urmia, Ardebil, Tehran and Zanjan. Below is a report describing this demonstration:



Hundreds of demonstrators started to protest in front of “Rasteh kucheh” and the Bazaar of Tabriz and moved towards the Eastern Azerbaijan’s governor’s house. At the same time and in other part of the city, students of Tabriz



University began peaceful demonstrations by asking for basic human rights for the Azerbaijani nation. Many onlookers joined in while they were moving from the University towards the governor's house. Special Forces and the police blocked the university movement and did not let the groups to unite.

By the time the "Rasteh kучeh" group had reached the governor's house, their numbers had increased several times. The protesters shouted slogans such



as: "Down with Chauvinism!", "Azerbaijani nation will not bow to such abasements!", "When North and South Azerbaijan will unite, Tabriz will be its center!" [*Translator's Note: "Northern Azerbaijan" is the Republic of Azerbaijan which is located in the north of Araz river and "South Azerbaijan" lies in North western Iran, south of Araz River*], "Death or Independence!", "Coward governor, come and answer to this!", "Iran newspaper has to be closed!" and "Sattar khan, Bagher khan, your sons have all been awakened!" [*Translator's Note: Sattar khan and Bagher khan are two Azerbaijani Freedom heros who foughted for democracy and freedom in "Constitutional Revolution". They were honoured by the title of "Sardar-e Melli" (National General) and "Salar -e- Melli" (National Leader) respectively by the order of the Assembly.*]



None of the governor's officials appeared in front of the protestors. Meanwhile under police attack, the demonstration's path changed to "Bank -e- Melli" (National bank) and Amin's T-section (name of the street). Interference by fire trucks and the attack of the police using tear gas, caused chaos among the protestors. The tear gas had caused

people to run from the governor's office. Some of them started to throw stones at the government building and resulted in an increased force from the police. Police pursuit forced demonstrators to move towards Shariati Ave. Confronting a huge crowd of people, the officers from the Police Station #12 refuged inside the building, which allowed people to go on. Demonstrators reaffirmed their slogans and without any violence continued moving towards Tabriz University passing through Clock Tower Square, Mansour crossway and Abresan crossway. Special forces and revolutionary guards quietly continued to repress the movement by stopping and arresting those who were filming and photographing. Some shootings had been heard around Tabriz University. Forty-eight people have been reported injured. Some unconfirmed sources talk of six people killed. Approximately 187 demonstrators were reported to have been arrested. Some of injured at the Behbood hospital (police hospital) are under arrest, three of them are injured as a result of gun shootings. The number of demonstrators has been estimated to be between 200 and 300 thousand people. This is the largest protest of Azerbaijanis against the violation of their human rights since 1979.

The cartoon showed a boy repeating the Persian word for cockroach in different ways, while the uncomprehending bug in front of him says "what???" in Azeri.



This newspaper, like all other governmental newspapers, must have all of its content thoroughly checked and approved by the Iranian government prior to publication.

Although this is not the first time a cartoon of this nature has been published, it has infuriated University students in Azeri cities in Iran, and has raised protests and hunger strikes in Tabriz, Urmia, Tehran, Ardebil, Maragheh and Zanjan Universities



Students have not forgotten the racist survey that was distributed by the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) in 1995 that insulted Azeri Turks. Students have also seen their mother language ridiculed in movies and in soap operas which are broadcast by the single TV outlet which is government monopolized.

Today, “Persian” is the only official language in Iran even though articles #15 and #19 of the constitution specify that education and the development of culture and language of other ethnic groups are guaranteed. This article has never been implemented towards Azeri-Turks and other minorities in Iran.

Azerbaijanis (also Azeri(s), or Azeri-Turks) are the largest ethnic “minority” group in Iran. Of the sixty million total population of Iran, the Azeri nation comprises over 30 million people, residing mainly in Western and Eastern Azerbaijan, Ardebil and Zanjan provinces. As a comparison, the population of the neighboring Republic of Azerbaijan (north of Iran) is eight million. During the last few decades, Azeris in Iran have been subjected to humiliations under the chauvinistic rules of the Shah and Islamic Republic. Attached is the translation of a part of the controversial cartoon and its accompanying article. It was published in the ‘Iran Newspaper’, on Friday May 12th 2006.

Appendix:

Iran Newspaper, Friday May 12th 2006, Special edition for kids

First Method: Discourse

Some people think one shouldn't seek violent methods at the first hand as it kills the mood. So we should first try to sit down at the table and talk to "roaches" in a very civilized manner. But the problem is that "roaches" don't know language of human. Grammar of roaches' language is also such tough (still nobody understands right which one of their verbs get "-ing") that eighty percent of roaches themselves don't know it and



prefer to talk in other languages. When roaches don't understand their own language, how do you want to understand? That's why dialogue reaches dead-end and sweet methods of violence become necessary!

Second Method: Cutting food sources

Before you get your hands on slippers and start bloodbath, it is not a bad idea to use more fundamental methods like cutting the food sources. You know that roaches usually live in toilet holes and their main food is ... yes, right exactly! So to cut their hands off their food for some time you should shut down their food products. Meaning you shouldn't go toilet. When for two months you do your "job"



under the bushes and trees instead, roaches will run out of food and exterminate starving, flowers will grow much better and your little garden will be greener.