**Dissident's Arrest Illustrates Influence of Ayatollah, Conflict with President**  
By Daniel Pearl

TEHRAN, Iran -- Iran's most prominent internal dissident has been jailed, in an escalating battle over the hold Iran's top clergyman has on Iranian politics.

Dr. Ibrahim Yazdi, leader of the Iran Freedom Movement, was summoned to the Islamic Court Sunday evening, associates said. His lawyer was sent home, and Dr. Yazdi hasn't communicated with associates since phoning them that night to ask for fresh clothes, one aide said.

"We have had no contacts telling us what he is charged with," Dr. Gholam Abbas Tavasuli, a university professor and member of the Freedom Movement, said in Tehran Tuesday evening. "We don't know whether he will be held for a long time or a short time." Under the Iranian constitution, a suspect is entitled to know the charges and have the case referred to a judge within 24 hours. Iranian officials Tuesday had no information on Dr. Yazdi's case.

**Ties to Ayatollah**

The court that brought in Dr. Yazdi is closely aligned with Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. The arrest may deepen the divisions between Ayatollah Khamenei and the country's elected leader, President Mohammed Khatami, who has called for freedom of speech and the protection of civil liberties. Mr. Khatami also has presented a friendlier face to the U.S. On Sunday, he called for a "dialogue among civilizations," though he stopped short of calling for political discussions between the two governments.

President Khatami has sought to play down his differences with Ayatollah Khamenei. But others, including student activists and a few religious figures, have been pushing him toward a confrontation. Last month, Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri, an Iranian religious figure who once was in line to be supreme leader, gave a lecture painting Iran's presidential election as a repudiation of Ayatollah Khamenei. According to a transcript of the lecture printed in an underground student newspaper, Ayatollah Montazeri called for a "government of the people" and said the leader "should not enjoy a royal life and spend billions of riyals on various trips."

In reaction, a mob pillaged Ayatollah Montazeri's home and office in Qom, Iran's theological center. Street demonstrations were held throughout Iran in support of Ayatollah Khamenei, who said critics of the country's theocratic system were guilty of "acts of treason." But the political crisis subsided because of Iran's surprise qualification for the World Cup soccer finals, which brought huge street celebrations, and because of a desire for calm in advance of last week's Organization of Islamic Conference meeting in Tehran.

**A Warning?**

Dr. Yazdi's detention could be a warning by Ayatollah Khamenei that he won't hesitate to move against critics now that most of the international press corps has left Tehran after the OIC
meeting. The arrest is significant because before this, Dr. Yazdi, whose group favors the separation of religious and civil leadership, hasn't been detained for more than a few hours. Iranian officials have pointed to Dr. Yazdi as evidence dissent is tolerated in Iran, though he was denied permission to run for president and his Freedom Movement can't have its own offices.

Dr. Yazdi's troubles are possibly linked to Ayatollah Montazeri's lecture. Dr. Yazdi is a personal friend of Ayatollah Montazeri and paid him what aides describe as a routine visit in Qom 10 days before the controversial lecture. Some conservative newspapers have suggested Dr. Yazdi planted the seed of dissent in the Ayatollah's mind. Freedom Movement members deny that.

The Islamic Court had questioned another civil-liberties activist about any links to Ayatollah Montazeri: Heshmatollah Tabarzadi, publisher of a three-year-old student newspaper. Mr. Tabarzadi says that, a few weeks after an October student demonstration against actions of Khamenei-controlled institutions, his office was ransacked by 40 thugs carrying cables and brass knuckles. In an interview in his office, where a blood-stained shirt hangs on his wall as a reminder of the attack, Mr. Tarbazadi said there is "no connection" between him and Ayatollah Montazeri, who he said may have crossed the line of appropriate criticism.

Ayatollah Criticized

Ayatollah Montazeri isn't the only cleric critical of Ayatollah Khamenei, though. The dying Ayatollah Khomeini, leader of the Iranian revolution, named Ayatollah Khamenei his successor after a rift with Ayatollah Montazeri. But some mullahs have long doubted Ayatollah Khamenei's religious credentials, and suggest a committee be set up to replace the single leader. Also, while no religious leaders question Ayatollah Khamenei's hard-line foreign policy, some have criticized the police forces he controls, which watch over and sometimes harass clerics and citizens.

In particular, the top cleric in Esfahan is reported to have given a stern warning Friday to the officially tolerated vigilantes who have ransacked newspaper offices in that city, which is a stronghold of President Khatami.

In an interview in Qom, one of Iran's top clerics, Grand Ayatollah Mohammed Taghi Mezdah, defended Ayatollah Khamenei, saying religious accomplishment isn't the most important quality in a supreme leader, and that citizens shouldn't blame the leader for all the country's economic and social problems.

Ayatollah Mezdah, a top member of the committee that chooses the leader, said citizens are allowed to criticize Ayatollah Khamenei, but that Ayatollah Montazeri used "degrading phrases" and issued his comments as part of "a conspiracy by the enemies of the whole system."

Putting Ayatollah Montazeri on trial would be a risky move, though. As one of seven top religious authorities in Iran, he has silent adherents throughout the country, many of whom send charitable donations to him for distribution. A further crackdown on dissidents could lead
to protests in universities, where students are frustrated that Mr. Khatami has been able to win only small gains in civil liberties.

Mr. Khatami and Ayatollah Khamenei may face more conflicts next year. Persian Gulf diplomats are already offering to broker a rapprochement between the U.S. and Iran. Also, an aide to Mr. Khatami said Sunday that the president will decide soon whether to seek membership for Iran in the World Trade Organization, a move hard-liners almost certainly would oppose as a breach of Iran's independence.