

Persian Racism and "Aryan Supremacy" Irritate the Largest Ethnic Minority in Iran

By Umud Duzgun

WASHINGTON. November 16, 2015: Once again, the Iranian State TV aired a racist show insulting Iran's largest ethnic population – the Azerbaijani people. An Iranian State TV aired a "comedy show" where an Azerbaijani was portrayed as someone who mistakenly uses a toilet brush instead of a toothbrush because according to the comedy show an Azerbaijani wouldn't know the difference between a toilet brush and a toothbrush. For decades, racism, discrimination and harsh treatment of non-Persian ethnic minorities in Iran became the Persian-dominated regime's official state policy. Every now and then, the media outlets controlled by the regime openly deliver a racist message in the form of TV shows, movies or kid's educational programs on state media sparking angry protests by an offended non-Persian minority.

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In the case of the Azerbaijani people in Iran (the Azeri Turks or simply Turks, as people call themselves in Iran), there is a powerful background to provide an explanation for the current oppression. Up until World War I, the Azeri Turks ruled Iran for more than 900 years. The Qajar Empire of Iran was the last Azeri Turks-dominated regime which collapsed during World War I and most of Iran came under the British military occupation. In 1921 the British installed Reza Khan Pahlavi as a new ruler of Iran. The Pahlavi regime backed by the British were dominated by the Persian nationalists. The new regime demolished the traditional federal system where all ethnic groups were treated as equal subjects of Iran's Shah, replacing it with a centralized system based on Persian supremacy. The new regime implemented the policy of "one nation one Language and one identity" to impose the Persian hegemony all over the country at the expense of destroying the non-Persian ethnic groups, especially targeting the largest minority of Iran – the Azeri Turks.

The Persian dominated (Pahlavi and Khomeini) regimes have now been ruling Iran for the last 94 years with harshness towards the country's national minorities comparable to the Assad regime in Syria and Saddam era in Iraq . Racism and discrimination

Racism in Iran is based on the idea of pan-Iranism or pan-Farsism ideology. The idea was formed at the times when Europe was heavily influenced by the ideas of fascism and Nazism based on Aryan supremacy of late 1920s early 1930s. The idea of Persian supremacy as a supremacy of a Indo-Aryan race was first introduced by the Persian intellectuals in early 1920s, about the time when Pahlavi's came to power in Iran. The idea stuck with the ruling regime of Iran and carried on to influence the post-revolution Iran of Khomeini as well. By now, the idea of Persian supremacy is a part of the modern Persian culture.

As a result, one can see ethnically targeted discrimination in all aspects of life on a daily basis spread through the Persian literature, schools, media and books. As a part of the forced assimilation policy, Azeri Turkish schools are banned throughout Iran. The largest minority in Iran cannot have schools in their own language and cannot use that language in official communications in the territories largely populated and dominated by the Azeri Turks. Mockery of non-Persian minorities as backward, and outright stupid is a part of the same policy of racial supremacy pedaled by the ruling regime in Iran. The Iranian state-controlled media has compared the Azeri Turks to donkeys and cockroaches. No similar "jokes" are made to describe the Persian people in Iran.

In the past, there were many offensive shows, movies, jocks, hate speeches and books. The theme of such insults has never changed, but the angry reactions from the insulted minorities are becoming harsher by the time.

"Educational TV Show"

On November 6, 2015, in one of the latest ethnic insults, a show aired on Iran's state TV used a children's educational program to carry out the insult. The official purpose of the program was to teach Iranian kids how to use a toothbrush! The "Fitileh Hotel " story portrayed the Azerbaijani father with his son who complains to a Persian hotel receptionist (or manager) about a very bad smell in the hotel room and saying they would leave the hotel because of the bad smell. The receptionist says your room has a nice view to the sea and has comfortable beds. However, the father and son insist that they hate the hotel's conditions and that they want to leave because of the disgusting smell of hotel.

Then the receptionist approached the boy and realizes that bad smell comes from the mouth of the boy. The father asks if his son brushed his teeth and son says yes he did it with a big brush. The Persian receptionist says there where a small brush for people and a big brush for toilet and you shouldn't use the toilet brush..." In the same show, the boy says, "I think last night they brought us food from sewage," And finally the receptionist spray an air freshener in the boy's mouth and gives him a candy to refresh his mouth and the father apologizes, saying it was all his fault..." To better to understand the controversy and a deliberate racist policy behind it, one must look at the format of characters and the narratives. 1) Hotel- means country of Iran 2) Hotel Manager-means Persian ruler 3) Guests- means Azerbaijani Turks (and Persian nationalist ideology that Azerbaijanis in Iran are guests and subject to leave or subject themselves to the Persian rule). 4) Red shirts-Mean the Azeri symbol color. All dialogue goes on in the mixture of Farsi and Azeri Turkish languages.

Protests

Protests started immediately after the program as the Azeri Turks took on social media platforms to slam the state TV show which insulted the Azerbaijani people. As usual, the officials quickly apologized calling the show an "unintentional offense" caused by the TV program and sacked a low-level editor of the program and suspended the TV show temporarily. But this was not enough because Iran's State Radio and TV Broadcasting is under the direct supervision of the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, from whom the Azerbaijani people expected a proper apology. As the Azerbaijani people took their protests to the streets in the Azeri cities of Iran, the Iranian officials repeatedly asked people not to get involved in the protest actions and warned against any such protests.

In Iran repression and fear are the main factors in preventing people from confronting the regime. It looks like the Azerbaijani people overcame the fear this time and large protest actions took place in Iran for several days. As expected the massive protest was sparked all over of South Azerbaijan including the major cities of Tabriz, Urmia, Ardabil, Zanzan and Maraqa. Police clashed with protesters resulting in dozens of people receiving injuries and hundreds of protesters being arrested. The protests continued during the weekdays at local universities and sports arenas.

Similar demonstrations took place in Iran in May 2006, when an Iranian state-owned newspaper published a that depicted a cockroach speaking the Azerbaijani language with a Persian boy and in written text with different cartoons suggesting nine different methods to kill cockroaches(the Azerbaijani people). The Iranian government insisted that this insult was also unintentional.

Unfortunately, racism and discrimination in Iran is heavily institutionalized. And this is not the first and will not be the last insult towards the Azerbaijani Turks by the Iranian state media which is guided by the backward ideas of Persian Aryan supremacy. The protests of the oppressed national minorities of Iran will also continue until major changes are made to Iran's political system. -0-