

NewsGuard

tehrantimes.com

The website for the Tehran Times, an English-language daily newspaper controlled by the government of Iran. The site does not disclose its connection to the Iranian government.

 7.5 / 100

Proceed with Maximum Caution: This website is unreliable because it severely violates basic journalistic standards.

-  Does not repeatedly publish false or egregiously misleading content 22 points
-  Gathers and presents information responsibly 18
-  Has effective practices for correcting errors 12.5
-  Handles the difference between news and opinion responsibly 12.5
-  Avoids deceptive headlines 10
-  Website discloses ownership and financing 7.5
-  Clearly labels advertising 7.5
-  Reveals who's in charge, including any possible conflicts of interest 5



The site provides names of content creators, along with either contact or biographical information 5

Ownership and Financing

The Tehran Times is part of Mehr Media Group, which is owned by the state's Islamic Development Organization (also known as the Islamic Ideology Dissemination Organization). Mehr Media Group also includes the national news agency Mehr News Agency.

The Islamic Development Organization says that it works to “revitalize and promote Shia history and culture while seeking unity among all Islamic religions.” It also states that it “conducts in-depth studies on the enemies’ cultural onslaughts and anti-Islam propaganda to make policies to thwart their conspiracies and to enlighten the general public,” according to a June 2006 Mehr News Agency article.

The Council on Foreign Relations, a U.S.-based think tank, describes the Tehran Times as one of many Iranian newspapers “funded by and ideologically connected to political parties or politicians.”

The Tehran Times runs display advertisements and publishes sponsored posts.

Content

The Tehran Times describes itself on its homepage as “the voice of the Islamic Revolution.” The website’s tagline is “Straight Truth.” The site covers social, economic, cultural, and political issues related to Iran, as well as international news.

The site generally provides positive coverage of Iran and echoes the Iranian government’s narratives on domestic and foreign affairs, including the claim that

Israel is not a legitimate state and that, despite international condemnation, Iran is in compliance with the International Atomic Energy Agency's guidelines.

Typical articles have spotlighted Iran's diplomatic efforts, awards won by Iranian artists, social problems in the West and in Israel. A December 2021 story, headlined "Just one wrong move!", included a map of Israel marked with targets that Iran could presumably hit with missiles.

The Tehran Times's coverage of the protests that broke out around Iran in September 2022, — which were sparked by the death of Iranian woman Mahsa Amini in police custody — has aligned with state narratives. For example, the site has not challenged the Iranian government's claims that Amini was not beaten in custody and that the West is behind the protests.

Credibility

The Tehran Times frequently interviews Iranian government officials, military personnel, and pro-Iran academics, researchers, and historians. Articles also often cite coverage from Al Jazeera, Al-Monitor, China-owned broadcaster CGTN, and Russia-owned TASS. Headlines accurately represent story content.

However, as noted above, the Tehran Times regularly promotes the interests of the Iranian government and focuses on events that present Iran's rivals in a negative light, sometimes distorting or misrepresenting information to achieve this aim. Indeed, in September 2022, NewsGuard found a number of recent articles on the site that included false and misleading claims.

For example, the Tehran Times published a series of articles in August 2023 claiming the Tehran Times had obtained a U.S. State Department document that revealed the U.S. had instigated the 2022 anti-government protests in Iran. However, there is no evidence that the U.S. or any foreign power orchestrated the 2022 protests, which were sparked by the death of 22-year-old woman Mahsa Amini and Iran's mandatory hijab law, according to multiple Middle East experts.

The Tehran Times did not publish any images of the document, nor did it provide any information about how the outlet obtained it. However, regardless of its authenticity, the document's purported contents fall short of substantiating claims that the West instigated protests in Iran. The U.S. actions that the Tehran Times said were discussed in the State Department "document," such as sanctions on Iranian officials and measures to provide internet access to protesters in Iran, were publicly announced initiatives by the Biden administration, and not "confidential plans," as the outlet claimed.

A U.S. State Department spokesperson also told NewsGuard in an August 2023 email: "Since last year, Iran's leadership has been pushing a false narrative that the United States is instigating the protests. These [Tehran Times] articles appear to be part of a similar disinformation campaign."

The site has also published articles in July and August 2023 claiming the Swedish government encouraged and supported a series of Quran burnings in Sweden. A July 2023 article criticized Sweden for its "supportive role in desecrating the Quran." Similarly, an August 2023 article said Sweden "allowing Quran burning is also motivated by political goals." These articles followed a string of protests in Sweden where anti-Islam activists desecrated copies of the Quran, including a notable June 2023 incident of a Christian Iraqi refugee setting fire to a Quran outside of a mosque.

However, the Swedish government repeatedly publicly condemned the Quran burnings before many of the articles were published. "The Swedish government fully understands that the Islamophobic acts committed by individuals at demonstrations in Sweden can be offensive to Muslims," Sweden's foreign ministry said in a July 2, 2023, statement. "We strongly condemn these acts, which in no way reflect the views of the Swedish government." Also prior to the articles' publication, Sweden had been considering changing Swedish law — which currently favors freedom of speech and does not criminalize blasphemy — to stop Quran burnings, according to Reuters.

A September 2022 article, headlined “Bogus allegations must end, Iran tells IAEA,” quoted the chief of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, who said, “Iran has always supported complete and impartial implementation of the [nuclear] Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the Safeguards Agreements, and its track records in cooperation with the [International Atomic Energy] Agency are impeccable.” The article did not challenge the statement.

However, Iran’s history with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) is spotty at best. In May 2022, an IAEA report accused Iran of possessing over 18 times the amount of enriched uranium outlined in a 2015 agreement between Iran and several world powers, according to France24. NBC reported that the resulting stockpile of uranium enriched to 60 percent — a little over 40 kilograms — would be “roughly enough material for an atomic bomb if Iran took the additional step of enriching the uranium to 90 percent purity.”

The IAEA also said that Iran had not provided clarification about allegedly undeclared nuclear material at three sites in the country. In early June 2022, the IAEA censured Iran for refusing to answer questions about the three sites, with 30 of the agency’s 35 members voting for the measure, France24 and Bloomberg reported. The signatories cited “insufficient substantive cooperation by Iran,” according to the official resolution.

An August 2022 TehranTimes.com article, titled “The Rushdie affair, America’s security fault and policy signalling,” stated that “One does not need to look far to notice Trump’s exposure of the Obama administration’s role in forming, equipping and arming ISIS to serve the very same goals of sedition, with the basis of injecting huge doses of hatred and grudges amongst the people they wish to conquer.”

The article was likely referencing claims by former U.S. President Donald Trump that former President Obama is the “founder of ISIS.” Trump made the unfounded allegation in 2016.

Not only is that claim baseless, but Trump never said, as the article claimed, that the Obama administration was responsible for “forming, equipping and arming” ISIS.

A May 2022 article titled “We are at the end of unipolarity: Turkish historian,” included an interview with historian Mehmet Perincek, who said, “The first reason for [the Russia-Ukraine] conflict is that the USA wants to use Ukraine as a bridgehead against Russia and all of Eurasia. In order to make this plan work, the USA needed a neo-Nazi government in Ukraine that was completely under its control.”

Similarly, a March 2022 article, titled “Expert: U.S. mafia regime is responsible for Ukraine crisis,” quoted University of Tehran professor, Fouad Izadi, who said that the Ukrainian government “that came to power was influenced by the extreme right, many of whom were neo-Nazis.”

Neither article challenged these claims.

Far right groups do exist in Ukraine. However, according to a 2018 Freedom House report, far-right extremists have poor political representation in Ukraine and no plausible path to power. Indeed, in the 2014 parliamentary elections, the far-right nationalist party Svoboda received 4.7 percent of the vote. In the 2019 presidential election, the Svoboda candidate, Ruslan Koshulynskyy, won just 1.6 percent of the vote, and in the parliamentary elections, Svoboda won 2.2 percent of the vote. Svoboda currently holds one parliamentary seat.

Moreover, in a February 2022 letter published by U.S. news site the Jewish Journal, over 300 scholars of the Holocaust, Nazism, and the Second World War wrote that “the equation of the Ukrainian state with the Nazi regime” is “factually wrong, morally repugnant and deeply offensive to the memory of millions of victims of Nazism and those who courageously fought against it.”

An April 2022 article, titled “Asymmetrical guerrilla war against S. Arabia have been successful: ex-Senate candidate,” advanced the false claims that the U.S. runs biolabs in Ukraine, and that the Russian massacre of Ukrainian civilians in Bucha was staged — a “false flag” operation.

The article included an interview with Mark Dankof, who ran for the U.S. Senate in 2000 in Delaware on behalf of the Constitution Party. Dankof stated that “Putin had no choice but to invade Ukraine,” citing “the Bio-Labs exposés since the invasion” and “this Bucha False Flag video operation.” The Tehran Times article did not question the claims.

There are no known U.S. military biological programs in Ukraine. Russian propagandists have claimed the presence of U.S.-run secret biolabs in Ukraine since at least 2018. Many of these claims are based on misrepresentations of the U.S. Department of Defense’s Biological Threat Reduction Program, which has helped improve Ukrainian labs studying outbreaks of dangerous pathogens – not to develop bioweapons, according to the Ukrainian government and the US’s Defense Threat Reduction Agency.

Moreover, the massacre of civilians in Bucha was not a “false flag operation.” The Agence-France Presse reported that its journalists saw at least 20 dead bodies on one street, including one man with his hands tied, in April 2022. The Associated Press reported seeing at least six “burned and blackened corpses” on a residential street, also in April 2022. Both outlets published photos of civilian bodies.

In addition, Bucha residents who spoke with Human Rights Watch said that civilians were killed by Russian forces in March 2022. For example, one witness told the human rights group that Russian forces rounded up five men on March 4 and, after making them kneel on the side of the road, executed one of them. In August 2022, officials in Bucha said they had recovered 458 bodies, of which 419

had markings of being tortured, shot, or beaten to death, The Washington Post reported.

As noted earlier, while the Tehran Times discloses its pro-Iranian government editorial perspective, stating that it “airs the voice of the Islamic Revolution,” it does not acknowledge that it is ultimately controlled by the government.

Additionally, despite having opinion sections, opinionated content often appears elsewhere on the site. For example, an August 2023 article, headlined “Africa rises from the ashes of neo-colonialism like phoenix,” criticized Western colonization of Africa while casting Chinese and Russian presence on the continent in a positive light.

The article claimed African nations have turned to Russia and China to “combat terrorism on their soil in an effort to find a long-lasting solution to security challenges.” It said that Russia and China are helping end “the intervention of former Western colonial masters,” as Africa is “seeking foreign powers that help economic development and not plunder its resources.”

A September 2022 article, titled “Serial killer of women cries for Iranian women!” stated, “The United States is misusing the tragic death of an innocent girl in Iran to achieve political gains. ... Statistics show that every year, 50 American women are killed by police violence. However, we don’t see any U.S. officials condemning that! Sheer hypocrisy.”

An August 2022 article, headlined “U.S. warships sail in Taiwan Strait,” stated, “The principle is very clear: there is only one China on the planet, Taiwan is part of China, and the Government of the People's Republic of China is the sole legal government representing all of China.”

Neither of these articles was labeled as opinion or published in a section dedicated to opinion content.

Because TehranTimes.com has published numerous false claims, uncritically promotes the Iranian government and disparages Iran's rivals without disclosing that it is government-owned, and because it posts opinionated content outside of dedicated opinion sections, NewsGuard has determined that the site repeatedly publishes false claims, does not gather and present news responsibly, does not handle the difference between news and opinion responsibly, and does not avoid deceptive headlines.

The most recent correction NewsGuard found on the site was from 2019. Therefore, the site does not meet NewsGuard's standard for regularly publishing corrections.

TehranTimes.com did not respond to four emails from NewsGuard, including one in 2023, inquiring about the articles cited above, the site's approach to corrections, its lack of disclosure regarding its ownership by Iran, and its handling of opinion.

Transparency

As noted above, the Tehran Times does not clearly disclose its relationship to the Iranian government. Instead, the About page says that "the Tehran Times (TT) is the Islamic Republic of Iran's first English daily newspaper, which began its work in 1979 to air the voice of the Islamic Revolution." (The Islamic Revolution refers to a popular uprising in Iran that resulted in the replacement of the monarchy with the current Islamic Republic.) This does not meet NewsGuard's standard for disclosing ownership in a transparent manner.

The Tehran Times does not name any editorial leaders. Most articles are not bylined, and the site does not provide biographical or contact information for its content creators.

Advertisements and sponsored posts are distinguishable from editorial content.

The site did not respond to four emails inquiring about the lack of disclosure regarding ownership, editorial leadership, and content creators.

History

The Tehran Times was established in 1979, the year of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, according to the website's About page. The Islamic Development Organization, which oversees the newspaper, was established in 1981, by order of then Supreme Leader Ruhollah Khomeini, to promote Islamic culture and ideology.

Editor's Note: This Nutrition Label was updated on Sept. 19, 2023.

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