

# Dishes in Iran

by A.G.



*For preparing this report I've interviewed more than 20 persons, who are dish installers, website and weblog owners, receiver and dish sellers and finally receiver servicemen. They all face many problems and we go this in a minute. In accordance to a decision by the Iranian government, selling, buying, installing, repairing and even the possession of satellite dishes are forbidden and against the law, but obviously there are many people in Iran, who watch satellite tv. In fact, the number of Iranians, who decide to use a satellite systems, has even rapidly increased.*

■ This is the 190cm mesh dish of Daryoush in Tehran/ Iran. He has pointed his dish to YAMAL at 90E and receives that satellite's 47 tv channels. Daryoush uses a satellite receiver by Starsat, model X95. He uses a STRONG L972 LNB.



■ The roofs of Tehran (eastern part). How many dishes do you see? We counted 40, some are only partly visible. Hiding a dish is the best option in Iran.



People in Iran use, sell, buy and even install dishes discreetly. They mostly set up dishes on roofs and balconies and hide the system, if it's visible from the street. Legislators defined, that only Iranian telecommunication companies, the state-owned broadcaster IRIB, newspapers, banks, scientific and governmental associations are eligible to officially use satellite systems. But for common people, any type of transaction or possession of satellite reception equipment is forbidden and illegal.

This is somehow even contradicting,

because Iran has a very active history of space activities:

Oct 2005: a Russian rocket launches Iran's first satellite SINA-1

Feb 2007: Iran announced it launched a rocket capable of reaching space

Feb 2008: Iran launched a research rocket as part for satellite launch preparations

Aug 2008: Iran launched a rocket ,capable of carrying satellite'

Feb 2009: Iran declares launch of its first home-built satellite

So although the regime in Iran has

started some activities in the satellite world, it is still blocking channels and tries hard to prevent people from watching satellite tv. The Iranian government even so far and sat up large transmitters on high positions in various cities to disturb the transmission frequencies of Persian speaking satellite channels, mostly coming from Europe via HOTBIRD.

All of the people I interviewed were 20 to 30 years old and only one of them was 45 year old. As they themselves said, they had entered the satel-



■ A wall around the roof helps to make dishes invisible





■ Dishes in Iran blend in with the color of the buildings and roofs

lite world in average between 2 to 12 years ago. Mohsen from Tehran said: „I started with satellite installation, when I was only 10 years old. All my family members were interested in my work and were sitting, watching me working”.

Although satellite receivers are illegal in the country, they are still widely available. There are even a lot of satellite fans in Iran. It’s an interesting point, that almost all of the interviewees have studied or are studying in courses which are not related to electronics or communication, for example some took courses such as accounting, agronomy and fishing, chemistry, English translation and so on. They simply got involved in satellite reception because of their strong interest in satellite channels. One of my interview partners was Milad, who was the youngest, 20 years old, and he said: „I really love satellite”. Another one, Mokhtar: „I do it as an entertainment and have the love of doing this”.

As mentioned before, the government blocks Iranians’ access to foreign

news and political networks such as the BBC Persian Service and the Voice of America (VOA). According to my survey, the least jamming takes place in the Markazi Province, whilst in Shiraz and Tehran the signal distortion is highest. Mehdi, an installer and a serviceman from Shiraz: „These parasite signals are really annoying and they disable the receivers”.

Now a closer look at dish installers in Iran. On average, an installer does 5-6 dish installations or adjustments in a week. Mohsen from Lorestan, who is working in this field for 9 years since he turned 16 years old, said: „I have 10 to 15 installations in a day”. Almost all of the installers do their work and the dish adjusting as a hobby or fun. All of them said, they are crazy about satellite tv and also because in most Iranian families, the younger members have learned to setup their own satellite systems.

Among those almost 20 persons I interviewed, only Davood from Arak and Mehdi from Shiraz do it as their first

job - although it cannot be named as a formal job in Iran. According to Mehdi’s affirms: „My life expenses can hardly be provided with this job”. Davood claimed: „I’m married and our cost of living is not provided at all. After 12 years I cannot change my job”. Only these two persons also were selling receivers, dishes and LNB. Milad from Khozestan said: „My cousin works in a Oil Company, but he does installations as a second job”. It’s interesting that although he is an employee in a state-owned company, he does something against the governmental law and secretly installs dishes.

The most favorite satellites in Iran, which the installers have been asked to install, are HOTBIRD (at 13.0 degrees East), EUTELSAT W3 (for BBC Persian), ARABSAT (at 26.0 E), TURKSAT (at 42.0 E), NILESAT (at 7.0 W), SIRISU and recently provincial channels on INTEL-SAT 902 (62.0 E) gained some friends. The brand of receivers people are using depends on each city, because there are different sources that distribute receivers, dishes and LNBs, so each city takes it from the nearest source. For example

in Markazi Province (Arak) most of the receivers are of the STARSAT brand. Esmail from Tehran: „In capital cities like Tehran you can find many different brands of receivers such as ICLASS and HIGHVISION.” Morteza from Lorestan: „Before all the receivers were by STAR-SAT, but now more brands appear.”

About gaining new clients Amir said: „Customers themselves find us. For example when they are satisfied with my work, they recommend me to their friends, families or neighbors”. Milad from Khozestan: „We don’t need any kind of advertisement and even don’t try for it”. Yasin from Yazd: „I’m a student and install dishes for students for free”. Ahmad said: „I do it only for those who I know, like my families and close friends”.

In Tehran you can find both offset and prime dishes and some of them even mounted on a motor, but in smaller cities or far from a source to provide a receiver, dish or other equipment, people only use prime fixed dishes

(mostly 95cm in diameter) and hardly ever one finds an offset dish. In general, most dishes used in Iran are very simple and cheap metallic models, which are self-made in small workshops. The risk for the equipment to be confiscated or destroyed is too big, this is the reason why most people prefer not to spend too much money for their satellite system. The cost of installation in Iran, like the brand of receivers, is different in each city and even in each region of a city, but generally it’s from 5 U.S. Dollars up to 20 for setting up a satellite dish.

So how does the equipment arrive in Iran? Alireza said: „My cousin imports receivers and all what’s needed from Dubai to the free zone in Kish Island and then brings them to Tehran to sell to others or use for his own installations”. I heard this statement from several others too. Mokhtar from Kermanshah said: „Here is a border region and we get all our equipment from the Baneh Border”. Receivers are smuggled from Dubai and the Emirates to Kish

Island in Iran and even via the Soleimanieh Border in Iraq to Genaveh Port in Iran and then the equipment is brought to capital cities like Tehran, Esfahan and Shiraz and from there again spread to other cities. So you can only find wholesaler in these big cities, especially in Tehran. But all of them work in privacy and you never would find any LNB or any receiver’s brand in shop windows. Dishes in Iran are made in underground workshops or places, which manufacture pans especially in big cities such as Tehran, Shiraz, Esfahan.

In recent years after Tehran, Shiraz has became one of the biggest sources where could find anything related to satellite in the Electronic Bazaar.

The interesting point in this report is that almost all the interviewees have learned adjusting and installing satellite dishes from the Internet, including reading the Persian edition of TELE-satellite magazine. Besides the Internet, some of them had the help of a friend or family member skillful in this field.





Milad: „I have a cousin who is very professional in satellites. Alongside the Internet I've learned what I know by the help of him“.

Mehdi from Shiraz who started this job when he was only 18, said about his competitors: „In Shiraz you can find more than 10 wholesalers. There are a lot of installers in Shiraz maybe more than thousand, but I can't rank them. There isn't competition between us to gain clients, we all work together friendly“. Milad from Khozestan: „I can say that people who work in this state are the best, number one in Iran“. When I asked Davood from Arak how many installers are in his city, he only laughed!

I asked the installers, sellers and website owners, if they are under pressure or limitations by their families and what was thinkable here is that most of their parents are not aware or disagree with their activities in satellite tv. Alireza from Tehran is a young boy from a religious and famous family. His parents are not aware their son is a satellite installer. X from Esfahan said: „I don't care what my parents say, in my view it's an art“. Amir from Kerman: „My parents are well-known in my city and I've not let them know that, although I'm a student I'm an installer too. Maybe it would be bad for their name in my city“.

There are a lot of sites and weblogs and even electronic magazines about satellite in Iran. Saeed from Esfahan who is editor of one of the best electronic magazines and weblog in Iran said: „We are an eight-person group. I myself spend half of my day working and another half working on the satellite group completely for free“. He continued: „A strong feeling of love guides us through this way“.

When I asked his thoughts or ideas about the future of satellite tv in Iran he answered: „The government should accept the reality and it's better to leave them alone, who are active and interested in this field“. Other interviewees said the same and most of them had a hopeful view about the future of satellite reception in Iran. Sadegh from Kerman: „They will be forced to accept this situation which is out of control for lawmakers“. It is obvious that police raids and fines have not stopped dishes



■ Mehdi in Shiraz just installed this dish on a balcony, invisible from the street

springing up like mushrooms on the roofs of homes especially in the big cities.

All of the website owners were complaining about filtering on the Internet. One of them said (for his security he asked me not to mention his name and website address): „We were repeatedly threatened but still continue this way. Now we are a big group because after 4 years we have 140000 users“. Another site owner said: „The government has to accept our activities. To prevent backtracking I always enter my website by a London IP so I'll never be arrested by the police“.

Davood from Arak said: „At least once a year I'm arrested by the police guard and have to pay different amounts of fines from 200 thousand Toman to 3 Million Toman“. The amount of the fine is different in each city. Alireza from Esfahan: „I was several times arrested, the police confiscated all my equipment and fined me more than the amount of all my materials“. Saeed from Esfahan: „They rushed into my house, seized and confiscated all my work's equipments then penalized me“.

Recently a satellite TV station, Farsi 1, is pulling in Iranian viewers by show-

ing soaps and sitcoms but has incensed the dissatisfaction of the clergymen and state television executives. Farsi 1 broadcasts popular Korean, Colombian and U.S. shows and also dubs them in our national language, Farsi, rather than using subtitles. Its popularity has increased since its launch in August last year.

The stateowned Iran TV has reacted and started to produce more attractive TV programs, popular homegrown comedies and soaps to catch the viewers and avoid them watching Farsi 1. Officials acknowledge that they jam many foreign channels, but Farsi 1, which operates out of the Hong Kong-based headquarters of Star TV, is still receivable in Tehran.

According to this research, unofficial reports and statistics, the number of satellite dishes in Iran is more than 8 millions. It can be estimated that around 85% of the population have access to satellite channels. This percentage is up to 95% in the southern and border regions. The increasing number of users has lowered the sensitivity of the officials and it seems that they unofficially decided to be more tolerant and patient against satellite reception in Iran.



## Dishes in Zanzan

