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Mashgh-e Shab
(Homework)
(IRANIAN-DOCU)

Tehran Produced by the Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Adults. Written and directed by Abbas Kiarostami. Camera (16m, color), Iraj Safavi; editor, Kiarostami; music, Mohammad Reza Aligholi; production manager, Mohammad Tolu Behbud. Reviewed at the Fajr Film Festival, Tehran, Feb. 7, 1990. Running time: 89 MIN.

■ **"Homework,"** one of two new Abbas Kiarostami films finished this season, uses simple documentary technique to highlight the problems of Iran's educational system. Pic's success in so doing has prompted the education ministry, which financed it via the Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults, to hold up release.

Most foreign audiences will have a hard time understanding in what way this gentle pic is controversial, although they should be charmed by the heartfelt complaints of dozens of little boys who feel overworked with homework. The underlying issue is how much discipline and rigor ought to be expected of tykes, and how unfeelingly adults treat them. Pic also points to the economical gap separating rich kids from poor.

Film is loaded with face-on monologues with the boys explaining why they haven't done their homework. One familiar excuse is that mom and dad are illiterate and can't correct their work.

Most moving child is a cry-baby, afraid to stand in front of the camera without his friend, who explains that ever since the teacher beat his pal with a ruler, he's been nervous and fearful. In pic's lyrical ending, the first boy recites an Islamic poem, demonstrating his perfect memory, while his friend solemnly looks on.

Less interesting are the long harangues of a few fathers who concur with their kids.

Kiarostami constantly foregrounds his camera and crew. In a memorable scene in the schoolyard, he uses a telephoto lens to catch the boys being boys during group prayer. Sequence was criticized by the authorities as disrespectful, but is the pic's clearest demonstration that everything has its proper place, and children must be treated like children first of all. — *Yung*.
