

## Chronology of Events in Iran, December 2004\*

### December 1

#### **Iran releases two internet journalists. (ISNA)**

Two of those arrested for internet-related charges have been released. It was reported that Omid Me'marian and Shahram Rafi'zadeh were released on a 50m-tuman bail [approximately 58,000 dollars].

**Agence France Presse (AFP) report of the same news on December 4:** Four jailed Iranian reformist journalists, three of them recently released, have written letters of repentance, saying they were "brainwashed" by foreigners and "counter-revolutionaries". The Iranian press has carried the letters, allegedly written by imprisoned Javad Qolan Tamimi, Omid Memarian, Shahram Rafizadeh and Roozbeh Mir-Ebrahimi, freed in recent days, to the head of Iran's judiciary. "I was brainwashed by hardline elements to destroy the image of the regime by relating with counter-revolutionaries and talking to foreign radio," said the letter by Memarian, who maintained a controversial weblog. "I spread lies. As I was influenced and encouraged by the ones who have for years been wounding the Islamic regime," read a letter written by Rafizadeh. Tamimi, who worked for the *Mardomsalari* daily, wrote of his "abhorrence" of the head of the Iranian journalists association who tried to organise a demonstration on behalf of his jailed colleagues. He called for criminal proceedings to be initiated against "those who poison the atmosphere by ... supporting criminals like me". "If I committed this crime in another country, I would have been sentenced to death or life in solitary confinement, but under the indulgent Islamic system, people in charge of my case and prison officials are convinced that I converted honestly," he said. "I was not kept in solitary confinement and treated very nicely by prison officials who provided us with all facilities and even let us have a television," read Rafizadeh's. The journalists expressed deep regret for their past deeds and hoped they could reconcile themselves with the Islamic regime. "I have understood my mistakes and I regret what I have done." Mir-Ebrahimi's letter said. The state IRNA news agency said it had received a fax from the director of Tehran's Evin prison in which Tamimi confessed to supplying the military attache of a foreign embassy with documents in exchange for cash.

#### **Hezbollah threat cancels "Religion, Democracy" seminar in Iran. (Iranian newspaper *Jomhuri-ye Eslami*)**

It was reported that the people who were planning to host a number of Americans in a seminar under the title of "Religion and Democracy in Iran" in the Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, have been forced to cancel the event. It was said that Abdol Karim Soroush and a group of Americans, who have been described as researchers, had

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received invitations to attend the event. It was reported that the threats by a group they describe as the Hezbollah has been the reason behind the decision to cancel this seminar.

**Alleged “armed robber” publicly hanged in Saravan. (Islamic Republic News Agency / IRNA)**

An “armed robber”, convicted of murder and holding illegal fire arms, has been publicly hanged at Saravan, Sistan- Baluchestan. Ababakr Razi was executed at Zaboli region of Saravan after being found guilty of murdering a man as well as keeping firearms and creating insecurity in the region. A local revolutionary tribunal found him as 'mohareb' or someone who wages a war against God and '*mofsed fel arz*' or the source of corruption on the Earth, both punishable by death according to the Shari'ah law. The execution was carried after the death sentence was upheld by the state supreme court.

**December 2**

**Reformist Democratic Party reelects secretary-general. (Iranian Mehr news agency)**

Mostafa Kavakebian was elected as Democratic Party secretary-general for a second time at a third congress held in Tehran University. Kavakebian said Democratic Party is not affiliated to the government and that patriotism, expertise and democracy form the backbone of his party.

**December 3**

**Arrest warrant issued for former Tehran mayor. (Iranian Students News Agency / ISNA)**

An arrest warrant has been issued for Mohammad Hasan Malekmadani, the former Tehran mayor and the former managing editor of the daily *Hamshahri*. The warrant was issued following repeated complaints lodged by individuals and after Malekmadani failed to appear in court when summoned. Malekmadani's case is being investigated at Bench 1083 of Tehran's general court judged by Judge Eslami. Malekmadani's charges are press-related. Based on a decision by the Majlis Press Faction to suspend the jury law passed by the sixth Majlis for a year, press courts will probe into press cases as before.

**Members of Ansar al-Islam, Al-Qa'idah arrested in Iran's Kordestan. (Iranian Fars News Agency)**

Head of Justice Department in Kordestan Province Mohammad Mehdi Khamesi reported that most crimes committed in the province include the smuggling of drugs and alcoholic drinks and the illegal entry of members of political groups. He said: “The Justice Department, with respect to [opposition] political groups, is only allowed to deal with [judicial] cases. He said unlike other areas, the [Islamic Revolution] Guards Corps is responsible for the protection of borders and stopping such crimes.” He said: “Based on a decision by the Supreme National Security Council, the cases of non-Iranian Al-Qa'idah members is investigated centrally by special judges in Tehran. If such people are arrested in the province, their cases will be sent to Tehran to be investigated.” The head of the Justice Department of Kordestan Province said the

number of [Al-Qa'idah members] is less than five, and added: The files on these people have already been sent to Tehran.

#### **December 4**

##### **Armed groups active in West Azarbaijan. (Iranian Labour News Agency / ILNA)**

The head of Justice Administration of West Azarbaijan Province, Hojjat ol-Eslam Akbar Feyz, said that, “The activities of the obstinate, militant and anti-revolutionary groups on the border of West Azarbaijan are among the special problems of this province. For this reason, the security forces devote a great bulk of their activities to neutralizing the operations of these groups.” He claimed the West Azarbaijan security forces are currently involved in countering the activities of armed groups such as Pejak, PPK, and Aggressor, which are active on the western border.

#### **December 5**

##### **Iran journalists stop rally after Judiciary threatens them. (Iranian newspaper *Shargh*)**

The Association for the Defence of Press Freedom and the Journalists' Professional Guild, in separate statements, announced that their gathering at the Palace of Justice was suspended. The statement which was faxed by the Association for the Defence of Press Freedom says: “The call for the gathering has been suspended temporarily because the release of journalists has begun.” In a similar statement, the Journalists Professional Guild said the gathering will be suspended. Meanwhile, Sa'id Mortazavi, the Tehran prosecutor, has sent a letter to Rajab Ali Mazru'i, the head of the Journalists Professional Guide, saying: “In connection with the statement of your association, confirmed in your letter number 83/3846 dated 10/09/1383 [30 November 2004], you are hereby informed that supporting individuals who have been convicted of espionage and acts of treachery against the country and who have confessed to acts against the law, and where evidence has been discovered and registered - and calling for a gathering, particularly at the Palace of Justice, in support of such criminals falls under article 618 of the Islamic penal code. Therefore should this gathering take place - which will only disturb social peace and order - your excellency and other elements responsible for the illegal invitation will be dealt with seriously and legally for disturbing public security. It is appropriate that you maintain public peace and order, and refrain from issuing such illegal and illegitimate invitations which will only cause public disturbance and disquiet.”

##### **Hashem Aghajari not allowed to speak at Student Day programme. (Iranian Fars News Agency)**

Iranian “Supreme Leader”'s representative to Sharif University, Javad Payandeh, said: “The official in charge of universities is against the presence of Hashem Aghajari [leading academic who was sentenced to death for his alleged blasphemy] at the university for 16 Azar [6 December, Student Day] anniversary.”

#### **December 6**

##### **Student Day at Tehran University. (Reuters)**

Students harangued President Mohammad Khatami, accusing him of lacking the courage to deliver promised democratic reforms in the Islamic state.

Student groups shouted slogans against Khatami as he attempted to address some 1,500 students at Tehran University.

### **December 7**

#### **Seven “drug smugglers” hanged in Zahedan. (Reuters)**

Iran's judiciary hanged seven drug smugglers in Zahedan. Some of the men had reportedly killed a policeman in a gun battle.

### **December 8**

#### **Head of Khuzestan Culture Department arrested, released on bail. (Fars News Agency)**

Managing director of the Culture and Islamic Guidance Department in the southern province of Khuzestan Ali Reza Azhang and two of his colleagues, Ali Yari and Mehdi Shafi'i have been released on bail. The three men were arrested the previous night following a complaint filed by one of the local Basij Resistance Force commanders and a series of complaints by the people of the province for "spreading indecency" during a recent festival of Iranian theatre in the province. The three men were taken to Station 16 of Ahvaz Police and charges were read to them.

#### **Iranian reporter released. (Iranian newspaper *Etemaad*)**

Fereshteh Qazi was released after spending 40 days in detention. In an interview with the reporter of the *Iranian Women* site, her husband said: “We transferred her to hospital immediately as she was not in a good physical and mental state.”

### **December 9**

#### **Dancing theatre group members arrested. (Reuters)**

Iran's judiciary has arrested three cultural officials for organising a festival containing a brief display of dancing by a male and female theatre group. Festival organiser Alireza Ajang, head of the Culture and Islamic Guidance Ministry in southern Khuzestan province, and two of his colleagues were arrested on charges of "encouraging immorality". The three were later released on \$19,500 bail. Deputy Culture Minister Mohammad Haqshenas said, "The whole festival should not be questioned due to three minutes out of an Armenian group's 70-minute performance."

#### **Iranian woman deported from Vancouver was reportedly arrested on her return in Tehran. (Canadian news agency *The Canadian Press*)**

The lawyer for an Iranian woman deported from Vancouver says his client was arrested on her return in Tehran. Peter Larlee says 30-year-old Haleh Sahba was taken into custody just minutes after getting off the plane. He says after being questioned by customs officers she was transferred to a jail cell at the Revolutionary Court at the airport. Sahba left Iran illegally and lived in the Vancouver area for three years. But she was refused refugee status by Immigration Canada despite fears from her supporters that she could be arrested on arrival in Iran. Sahba had been an activist for women's rights in Iran, and was arrested during a protest several years ago.

## **December 12**

### **Iranian sympathisers reportedly sentenced in Al-Qaeda trial. (AFP)**

The Iranian foreign ministry said that the Islamic Republic's judiciary has only sentenced Iranian sympathisers of Al-Qaeda and not foreign members of the network. "They were Iranians. They were not members, they were just sympathisers. There were fewer than ten," spokesman Hamid Reza Asefi said. A week ago Tehran's justice department announced that "sentences have been pronounced" on Al-Qaeda suspects detained on Iranian soil and that the cases were handled by a special judge in a secret trial. But officials refused to say who the accused were, how many of them there were, nor what verdicts were reached or sentences handed out.

## **December 14**

### **UN refugee agency closing camps in Iran as Iraqi refugees return home. (AFP)**

The UN refugee agency is closing several camps for Iraqi refugees in Iran because more than half the 202,000 registered Iraqis have left the country since the fall of Saddam Hussein, a spokeswoman said. Some 42,000 of the 50,000 refugees who were staying in camps have returned home to Iraq, Jennifer Pagonis, a spokeswoman for the office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), said. Six out of the 22 camps in Iran are empty and another two are expected to be closed by the end of December 2004. Only a total of 95,000 Iraqi refugees now remain in neighbouring Iran despite the UNHCR's attempts to discourage the refugees from returning home because of insecurity and violence in Iraq, she added. "UNHCR does not encourage Iraqis abroad to repatriate now, but we do provide assistance to refugees in some neighbouring countries who are determined to go back despite the difficult conditions inside Iraq," she said.

### **Iran's 2 Khordad Front changes name into Reform Front. (Iranian newspaper *Resalat*)**

Secretary-General of the Islamic Republic Mojahedin Organization Mohammad Salamati announced that the name of the Coordinating Council of 2 Khordad has changed to the Coordinating Council of Reform Front and said: "Change in the name of the 2 Khordad Front does not mean that the programmes and methods of the front have changed."

## **December 15**

### **Widow of murdered Iranian Sikh demands justice. (Indian newspaper *The Hindustan Times*)**

The widow of a murdered Iranian Sikh has written to Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh seeking the government's intervention to ensure that justice is done when a Tehran court takes up the case. The widow, Damanpal Kaur Anand, stated from Tehran that she had been given to understand by her lawyers that since her husband was a Sikh and his killer a Muslim, the court may rule in favour of paying compensation to the victim's family. Her husband, Kultaran Singh, who dealt in automobile spare parts, was murdered Aug 7, 2003. The killing shook the small Sikh community that has been living in Tehran for three generations and created a sense of insecurity among them.

**December 18**

**Iranian adulteress faces noose or stoning. (Reuters)**

An Iranian official said he was waiting for orders on whether to stone or hang a woman convicted of adultery, the latest in a chain of death sentences passed against women for "fornication". The official from Iran's judiciary said Hajieh Esmailvand's prison sentence, that began in January 2000, would end in less than a month - a jail term in the northern city of Jolfa that was always intended as a precursor to execution. "Her sentence is approved by the Supreme Court, but there are no orders to carry out the sentence. We do not yet know if it is by stoning or hanging," he said. Judiciary spokesman Jamal Karimirad said the death sentence could still be quashed by the special authority of Ayatollah Mahmoud Hashemi-Shahrudi, head of the judiciary.

Nineteen-year-old "Leila M" in the central city of Arak is appealing to overturn a death sentence for fornication, her lawyer said. The lawyer said Leila had been forced into prostitution by her mother aged eight but rejected newspaper reports that she had a mental age of eight. Those close to the case said Leila's case could also be quashed by Hashemi-Shahrudi.

Atefeh Rajabi, believed by lawyers and diplomats who saw her death certificate to have been only 16, was hanged in August 2004 in the Caspian Sea port of Neka for sex before marriage. Iranian officials insisted she was in her early 20s.

**UK newspaper *The Observer* report of the same news on 19 December:** Amnesty issued an urgent warning that time was running out for both women and urged the international community to tackle Iran over its executions of women and child offenders. In August 2004, another mentally ill girl, 16-year-old Atefeh Rajabi, was hanged in a street for having sex before marriage.

The 19-year-old, known as 'Leyla M', was a prostitute by the age of eight and was raped repeatedly, according to a Tehran newspaper report. She gave birth when aged nine and was sentenced to 100 lashes for prostitution at about the same time. When she was 12 her family sold her to an Afghan to be his 'temporary wife', while her mother became her new pimp, 'selling her body without her consent', the report said. At 14 she became pregnant again, receiving a further 100 lashes before giving birth to twins. When her temporary marriage ended, her family sold her again, to a 55-year-old man who was married with two children and did not object to Leyla's clients coming to his house. In November 2004, Leyla, appearing at a court in the central Iranian city of Arak, was sentenced to death on charges of 'acts contrary to chastity' by controlling a brothel, having intercourse with blood relatives and giving birth to an illegitimate child. The sentence has now been passed to the Supreme Court for confirmation. She apparently 'confessed' and faces being flogged before being executed.

Iran has executed at least three child offenders in 2004 and 11 others are believed to have been sentenced to death, according to Amnesty. Under the Penal Code, girls as young as nine and boys as young as 15 can be executed. Interviewed by an Iranian journalist in her cell, Leyla was asked if she understood she was to be put to death. "Yes, that's what they are saying," she replied. "But people in prison say this is a lie. They want to frighten you a bit." "I haven't done anything. My mother told me to go to a man's house and I did. If she said don't, I wouldn't have. I was frightened. If I didn't listen to her, she would have harmed me. She beats me - my father, too." Asked

when she was first forced to have sex, Leyla said: “I was eight, the first time my mother took me to a man's house. It was a horrible night. I cried that night. Cried a lot. The day after she [my mother] came after me and took me home and bought chocolate and crisps for me.”

The International Committee Against Stoning is to meet officials of the European Union on December 20 in an attempt to build diplomatic pressure on Iran over the imminent execution of Hajieh Esmailvand, whose sentence for adultery was upheld by the Supreme Court and changed from death by hanging to death by stoning. The man with whom Hajieh had the affair, who was 17 at the time, has been sentenced to death by hanging.

**AFP report on the same news on December 23:** Iranian authorities have temporarily stayed the execution by stoning of a woman convicted of adultery while her case is studied by the judiciary pardons commission. Hajieh Esmailvand, whose plight has been taken up by rights group Amnesty International, was originally sentenced by a court in the northwestern town of Jolfa to be flogged 100 times, jailed for five years and then hanged. Her lover, identified only as Ruhollah G., who was 17 years old at the time of the affair, has been sentenced to hang and is still awaiting execution. The Supreme Court later changed Esmailvand's sentence to stoning because of the adultery, as is permitted under Islamic law. Amnesty said reports suggested that the Supreme Court has ordered that the remainder of her prison sentence be annulled so that the stoning sentence could be carried out before December 21. But an unnamed judiciary official said the "stoning has been stayed pending a decision by the pardons commission."

## **December 19**

### **Spokesman says Iranians held by Mojahedin-e Khalq released. (IRNA)**

Foreign Ministry Spokesman Hamid Reza Asefi said a group of Iranians in custody of the Mojahedin-e Khalq Organization [known as MKO or People's Mojahedin Organisation of Iran, PMOI] were released due to government's continuous efforts and with the collaboration of International Committee of Red Cross (ICRC). "We call for the expansion of mutual ties between ICRC and Iraqi officials and Iran to repatriate those remanded in MKO custody and their family members to their homeland," he added.

**IRNA report on the same news on December 20:** MKO members who have recently renounced the group in Iraq arrived in Tehran. The repatriation was conducted under supervision of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). It was reported that the group consisted of MKO veterans who had ideological challenges with their high-ranking figures and voiced readiness to return to Iran. These members will join their families after “medical tests” which may last five to seven days, said a security official at Mehrabad International Airport. Another 600 MKO members are in coordination with ICRC to leave Iraq and repatriate, said Behruz Soltani a former MKO member.

### **Three Iranian groups protest outside parliament. (Iranian newspaper *Mardom Salari*)**

Three protesting groups gathered in front of the Majlis. A number of shrimp and other fishermen and sailors from the fishing industry in Dir Port, families of the detained pilgrims in Iraq and laid-off personnel of the post and telecommunication company

gathered in front of the Majlis and announced their protest. The families of the detained pilgrims called for the release of members of their families. The laid-off personnel of the post and telecommunication company announced that the redundancies of the year 1374 [1995] had been illegal. Moreover, the fishermen protested against the policies of the national fishing company and asked for compensation.

**Police ordered to pay compensation for Semirom clash victims. (Iranian newspaper *Kayhan*)**

Law Enforcement Forces have been ordered by a court that was investigating the instances of unrest and violent clashes in the city of Semirom to pay blood-money to its full extent to the blood relatives of four Muslim men. The clashes occurred in August 2003. The aforementioned court also acquitted the officials of the time in Semirom of the charge of disrupting internal security and referred their case to authorities that deal with administrative offences.

**Worker demonstration in Khomein. (Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty RFE/RL *Iran Report*)**

The employees of a textile factory in Gilan Province have not received their wages for seven months and are threatening to march from the provincial capital of Rasht to the capital city of Tehran. The factory workers have complained to the local House of Labor. In the city of Khomein, workers at the Nakh-i Talai (Golden Thread) factory in Khomein have not worked for almost four weeks because they have not received their wages. There is no electricity at the factory and it is not operating. Issa Kamali, a House of Labor official in the southern city of Bushehr, cited cases in which workers there have not been paid for months. He said this is an especially risky situation in the Asaluyeh area, where there are more than 50,000 Iranian and foreign workers, because this affects national security and the oil sector.

**December 20**

**UN Assembly denounces abuses in Iran. (Reuters)**

The U.N. General Assembly criticized Iran for public executions, torture, arbitrary sentencing, flogging, stoning and systematic discrimination against women. Sponsored by Canada, the human rights resolution was adopted by a vote of 71 in favor, 54 against with 55 abstentions in the 191-member assembly. The measure also rebuked Iran, a Shi'ite Muslim country, for discrimination against minorities, including Christians, Jews, Sunnis and especially the Bahais, who are subject to arbitrary arrest and detention. The resolution also said there was a "worsening situation with regard to freedom of opinion and expression and freedom of the media and noted the "targeted disqualification" of reformists in Iran's parliamentary elections. The Geneva-based U.N. Commission on Human Rights has adopted annual resolutions on Iran's human rights record from 1984 to 2001, and the assembly followed suit.

**Tehran students stage sit-in. (ILNA and *Iran Report*)**

An unspecified number of students at Shahid Rajai University in Tehran have staged a sit-in. They are objecting to the 2 1/2-year suspension of Majid Ashrafzadeh, political secretary of the university's Islamic Student Association. Ashrafzadeh was suspended



on December 19 for publishing and directing *Dipar*, and the charges against him include “spreading rumors against the system and officials, promoting apostasy, propagating for grouplets, and causing tension and rioting at the university”. The students at the sit-in unsuccessfully have demanded a meeting with the vice-chancellor for student affairs.

## **December 22**

### **Iran says 10 arrested nuclear spies on US, Israeli payroll. (AFP)**

Ten people arrested on suspicion of spying on Iran's nuclear programme were working for US and Israeli intelligence services, Intelligence Minister Ali Yunessi said. "More than 10 nuclear spies were arrested during the current (Iranian) year," which started on March 20, Yunessi said. "Three of them were working for the (Iranian) Atomic Energy Organization, the rest of them were not public servants ... They were working for the CIA and Mossad. They were arrested in Tehran and Hormuzgan," in southern Iran, he said. "They are currently in the custody of the revolutionary court, and we will not announce their names before their trials ... There is no prominent person among them," Yunessi added. He said the People's Mujahedeen [aka MKO or PMOI] had played the central role in the espionage. The group's political wing, the National Council for Resistance in Iran, in 2002 revealed two nuclear sites Iran had been hiding, including a uranium-enrichment plant in Natanz.

## **December 23**

### **Iranian reformist released on bail in Qom. (ISNA)**

The head of the youth branch of Islamic Iran Participation Front [IIPF] in Qom, Abbas Kusha, who was arrested a few days ago, has been released on bail. Allegations against Kusha include "insulting sanctities" by keeping an internet article in his personal computer. However, he has not written the article himself and it has not been distributed further. According to Ali Reza Ra'isi, another allegation against Kusha is that he has been "planning to invite [writer and Islamic scholar] Dr [Abdolkarim] Soroush, then causing self-inflicted harm and assaulting Soroush".

## **December 24**

### **Court summons two Iranians accused of internet offence. (ILNA)**

Hanif Mazru'i, one of defendants in the so-called internet offence case, has been summoned to the Government Employees and Press Court. It was reported that another defendant of the case, Fereshteh Qazi has also been summoned to the Government Employees and Press Court for disturbing the public opinion.

## **December 26**

### **Three political cases reactivated. (Iranian newspaper *Etemaad*)**

The cases of political activists Mostafa Tajzadeh, the adviser to the president, Mohsen Armin, member of the Central Council of the Islamic Revolution Mojahedin Organization, and Masha'allah Shams ol-Va'ezin have been placed on the agenda of the prosecutor's office for government employees. The prosecutor had previously

lodged separate complaints against Tajzadeh, Shams ol-Va'ezin and Armin for distributing false reports and disturbing public opinion. The cases have been put on the agenda of the third investigating branch of the prosecutor's office for government employees headed by Inspector Qadami.

## **December 27**

### **Seven MKO dissidents return to Iran. (Iranian newspaper *Etemaad*)**

Seven members of the Mojahedin-e Khalq Organization [MKO or PMOI] have returned to Iran. It was reported that the return of individuals to the country was due to the efforts of the unknown soldiers of Imam Mahdi in Sistan and Baluchestan Province. These individuals were handed over to their families in a ceremony in one of the towns in the province.

## **December 28**

### **Rapist, “sodomite” publicly hanged in Iran. (AFP)**

Two Iranians convicted of rape and “sodomy” were hanged publicly, watched by cheering crowds, in the northwestern city of Mashad. The first man was named as Mohmmad Reza, who was convicted of “repeated sodomy”. The second man, who was identified by his first name of Mostafa, was convicted of “repeated rape”.

### **Twenty-eight members of opposition group Mojahedin-e Khalq return to Iran. (Iranian TV Vision of the Islamic Republic of Iran Network 1)**

Twenty-eight former members of the Mojahedin-e Khalq Organization [MKO or PMOI] group joined their families in a ceremony held at Tehran's Olympic Hotel attended by envoys from Palestine, Syria, the Netherlands, Italy and France. Families of the MKO members have staged rallies in Tehran over the past months, calling for diplomatic efforts to contribute to the release of their families, lured by MKO leaders in Iraq. Iran's Foreign Ministry, the Red Crescent Society and the International Committee of Red Cross have been involved in the arrangement for the return of these people. More than 500 MKO members, willing to return to Iran, are being held at Iraq-based Ashraf camp.

### **Iranian radio Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran report of the same news:**

These people were released in two stages on 19 and 20 December. Ebrahim Khodabandeh, one of the people who has been released and a [former] members of the National Council of Resistance, said: Around 1,000 people have left the [Mojahedin], however, because of negative propaganda, they are afraid of returning to Iran. An official said, “The people who returned to their families today are free.”

## **December 29**

### **Iran busts 4 people-trafficking and forging rings. (Reuters)**

Iranian authorities have broken four people-trafficking and forging rings, whose ploys included faking death sentence documents for those seeking asylum in the West, state radio said. "Those arrested include six Iraqis, three Turks, nine Iranians and one Finn," state radio quoted an officer from the foreign nationals' bureau of the Interior Ministry. He did not give the total number arrested.

*UNHCR Ankara  
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