

Chronology of Events in Iran, November 2003*

November 2

Majlis approves articles of penal law for military personnel. (Iranian television *Vision of the Islamic Republic of Iran Network 1*)

Deputies of the Islamic Consultative Assembly approved of another two articles of the penal law for armed forces personnel. According to the bill, military courts can act upon the request of convicts and operating basis of the prosecutor's proposal, while observing principles of open and semi-open prisons, they can modify prison sentences, which are not more than one year, to imprisonment plus service. Moreover, military courts can sentence police officers, who have committed crimes, by preventing them from serving in certain area or areas from three months to two years. They can also deny them promotion from three months to one year.

Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty RFE/RL *Iran Report on November 10:* The Iranian legislature has already approved several parts of a 137-article bill regulating military offences. These articles of the bill are intended to prevent political and electoral activities by military personnel. Article 40 of the bill bans military personnel from membership in political organizations or parties, forbids their interference with or participation in "political line-ups and disputes," and bans them from engaging in election publicity. Article 17 states that military personnel who use armed forces' assets to engage in planning intended to change or overthrow the Islamic republican system and who form an association of more than three people with this intention will be subject to the punishment for those who are "at war with God" (*muharib*; the penalty is death). Under another article, military personnel found to have created an association of more than two people with the intention of undermining national security or "causing fear, riots, or murder" will serve three to 15 years in prison unless they are found to be *muharib*. Military personnel who try to damage the country's independence or territorial integrity will, according to the new regulations, also face the punishment for those who are at war with God.

Iran woman in controversial death row case spared from execution. (Agence France Presse / AFP)

An Iranian woman condemned to death for killing a police officer she says was trying to rape her has had her case sent back to the Supreme Court by the Islamic Republic's judiciary. The reports said the head of the judiciary, Ayatollah Mahmoud Hashemi-Shahrudi, ordered that the death sentence be lifted following "doubts" over the original court ruling. "I also have doubts regarding the case, so I want it to be

* *Disclaimer: Reports contained in this document are selected from publicly available resources and edited by country experts. The information provided here is not, and does not purport to be, either exhaustive with regard to conditions in the country of origin surveyed, or conclusive as to the merits of any particular claim. Further information may be obtained from BO Ankara*

reviewed," the judiciary chief wrote to the Supreme Court after intensive lobbying by female reformist MPs. In March, a court condemned 32-year-old Afsaneh Noruzi to death by hanging for the stabbing to death of a high-ranking officer she testified had tried to rape her in his office on the Gulf island of Kish in 1997.

November 3

Mixed-sex party busted in Iran, 36 arrested. (AFP)

Thirty-six young people have been arrested after Iranian police raided a mixed-sex birthday party near the capital Tehran following complaints from neighbours. The paper said the raid was carried out in the satellite city of Karaj after local residents called a police hotline to complain of noise. Among those arrested was the owner of the home, who argued that she was merely throwing a birthday party for her children. It said she was released on bail of 150 million rials (17,850 dollars) while the other partygoers were let out after posting 10 million rials (1,190 dollars).

Sons of Iran's leading dissident cleric arrested. (Reuters)

Unidentified plainclothes officers arrested two sons of Iran's leading dissident cleric Hossein Ali Montazeri in the religious university city of Qom, Montazeri's office said. A spokesman said the men sped up in three cars and drove off with mid-ranking clerics Ahmad and Saeed Montazeri, after they entered a house that had been confiscated from the family of the dissident cleric.

Associated Press report on the same news on November 4: Iranian security agents freed all but one of the close aides to Iran's most senior dissident cleric - including two of his sons - but sealed off a private building that he planned to use as a seminary, one of the cleric's son said. Ahmad Montazeri, Grand Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri's son, said that he, his brother Saeed, and several others were freed, but Reza Ziaei, one of Montazeri's close aides, was blindfolded, handcuffed and beaten during interrogation and his whereabouts remain unknown. Ahmed Montazeri said the authorities gave no reason for the arrests, but the move came after his wife, Zahra Rabbani, had decided to turn a private building next to their home into a seminary where the elder Montazeri planned to teach. Rabbani had said that security agents detained four people but Ahmad said that two more aides and five construction workers were also detained but freed several hours later.

November 4

UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression. (AFP)

A top United Nations human rights official began a week-long visit to Iran to conduct a key probe focusing on press freedoms and freedom of expression, maintaining the spotlight on the Islamic Republic's human rights record. During his visit, UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression Ambeyi Ligabo is lined up for talks with senior Iranian government officials and magistrates as well as members of the media and academics. In a statement, the Special Rapporteur said he would be "gathering relevant information on, among other issues, discrimination and threats or use of violence and harassment directed at persons, including professionals in the field

of information, seeking to exercise or to promote the exercise of the right to freedom of opinion and expression."

November 9

Fifty arrested in Iran town after tiger-woman execution rumours prove false. (AFP)

Some 50 people have been arrested in Iran's clerical capital of Qom after police broke up a crowd that had assembled to watch the rumoured execution of a half-woman half-tigress. It was reported that a large crowd turned up in a square in the city to watch the hanging of the woman-beast, only to be met by police who attempted to convince them that the bizarre rumour was in fact absolutely false. In the ensuing attempt by security forces to disperse the crowd, the would-be spectators struck back and several windows of surrounding buildings were reported to have been smashed. Police made 50 arrests. A local journalist explained that elaborate rumours had been circulating whereby a woman had "insulted religious values" during the fasting month of Ramadan and met the divine punishment. An official said "that drawings of the woman with the head of a tigress were even distributed in the city, especially in schools".

Students gather to support jailed dissidents. (Reuters)

About 500 Tehran University students, often the public face of Iran's battered reform movement, gathered to protest against the detention of political prisoners. The students made speeches, linked hands and sang anthems on the first anniversary of the death sentence handed down to dissident Hashem Aghajari after he told Muslims not to follow Iran's clerical leadership "like monkeys". He has said each generation should forge its own interpretation of Islam and not rely on the nation's leadership for guidance. The students also called for the release of reformist journalist Akbar Ganji and pollster Abbas Abdi, jailed for publishing a survey suggesting three-quarters of Iranians favoured rebuilding bridges with the United States.

November 10

Guardians Council rejected amendments to the Press Law. (RFE/RL *Iran Report*)

The Guardians Council, which confirms the compatibility of all legislation with Islam and the constitution, has rejected an article of the amended Press Law that would allow jury trials in an open court for journalists. The council noted that the article contradicts Article 57 of the constitution -- which calls for the separation of powers between the legislature, the judiciary, and the executive branch, functioning under the supervision of the "Supreme Leader" -- as well as Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's August 2000 letter to the legislature. Khamenei said in his letter that the Press Law protects the system from infiltration by "the enemies of Islam, the revolution, and the Islamic system".

November 11

Four sentenced to death by stoning. (Turkish Anatolian News Agency)

Despite Iranian judiciary authorities' earlier suspension of the death sentence by stoning, four persons were committed to death by stoning in Mashhad, the capital of Khorasan province. The four have been convicted of serial rape.

Amnesty International information on the same news on November 18: The four men are reportedly part of the group associated with the "Plum Garden Case" (*Parvande-e Bagh-e Alou*) which carried out the kidnappings and rapes of a number of women and young girls in the city of Mashhad. They faced charges including adultery (*zina-ye mohaseneh*) and were sentenced by Branch 19 of the Mashhad General Court. The case has been sent to the Supreme Court following complaints by the accused. According to a 13 May 2003 report, eight other individuals associated with the gang were hanged following a decision by the Supreme Court to uphold the sentence against them. According to a report on 11 November, nine gang members had already been executed in connection with the case. They were reportedly found guilty on charges which included kidnapping and pimping. Up to 25 October, Amnesty International had recorded 98 executions in Iran.

Iranian student who met with UN rights envoy goes missing. (AFP)

A prominent Iranian student activist who met with a visiting UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression over the weekend has gone missing. The student activist, Ahmad Batebi, was reported by his father to have gone missing on November 9 after meeting with Ligabo. He had been on prison leave for medical reasons when he met with Ligabo. His father said his prison leave had been due to expire on November 11.

Iranian Students News Agency (ISNA) report on the same news on November 14: After going to the office of the prosecutor-general of the Tehran Public and Revolution Court, the father of Ahmad Batebi was informed that his son had been arrested by the office of the prosecutor. He said that after responding to various questions for an hour, he was accused of being involved in the kidnapping of his own son and threatened with arrest. The prosecutor then announced that his son was in prison. He said he was told not to contact any media outlet or newspaper regarding this matter. He said that he had been threatened. Batebi's father later said that his son contacted him when he was back home.

November 14

Students allegedly attacked at Shiraz University. (Student Movement Coordination Committee for Democracy in Iran/ SMCCDI)*

A group of plainclothes men and Bassij students attacked several students gathered at Shiraz University in order to put an end to their local electoral meeting.

* Editor's note: This report has not been confirmed by any major information source.

November 15

Seven Iranian women sentenced to 50 lashes for undermining Ramadan codes. (AFP)

Seven Iranian women in the city of Shiraz were sentenced to 50 lashes each for undermining Islamic codes during the holy month of Ramadan. The women, wearing heavy makeup, were dancing and listening to loud music at the time of "iftar", the evening meal that breaks the day-long fast during Ramadan, making fun of fasting Muslims. They were arrested by police.

November 19

Military court to probe killings in Iran's Kurdish town. (Iranian Students News Agency / ISNA)

The governor of Sardasht has announced that the case involving recent incidents in that town which led to the killing of three people during clashes with the Law-Enforcement Force, has been referred to the military prosecutor's office. Esma'il Mirza'i described the security situation in the town of Sardasht following these incidents as calm. The Majlis deputy for Sardasht and Piranshahr, Hasel Daseh, said the president has ordered the Interior and Intelligence Ministries to investigate the incident. He added that the Majlis National Security Committee has also set up a subcommittee to investigate the recent events in Sardasht. The deputy head of West Azarbaijan's administration of justice said that the Justice administration of the province has not opened any cases involving official entities as part of investigations into the incidents.*

Iranian security force postpones death anniversary of serial killings victims. (ISNA)

The director-general of the political department of Tehran Province's Law-Enforcement Force has announced the postponement of ceremonies marking the death anniversary of Dariush and Parvaneh Foruhar [two prominent political activists who were victims of the serial killings in 1998]. Ali Ta'ala said: "Given that Friday [November 21] coincides with rallies marking the Qods Day, attended by many of our forces, it has been decided to postpone ceremonies marking the deaths of the late Dariush and Parvaneh Foruhar to November 23. He noted that the Foruhar family have been informed of the change of date.

November 21

UN Human Rights Committee approves resolution condemning Iran on human rights. (Reuters)

UN Human Rights Committee approved a Canadian-drafted resolution rebuking Iran for alleged human rights abuses, including torture, suppression of free speech and discrimination against women and minorities. The vote in the General Assembly's human rights panel was 73 in favor, 49 against and 50 abstentions. Most European and Latin American nations as well as the United States supported Canada, while

* See October 27 for the first reference to the incident.

Islamic countries voted against the measure as did Russia, China and India. Adoption by the panel, which includes all U.N. members, is a virtual guarantee of passage by the full General Assembly. The Geneva-based U.N. Commission on Human Rights adopted annual resolutions on Iran's rights record from 1984 to 2001 and the assembly followed suit. But last year the draft was narrowly defeated in Geneva and not revived by the assembly. Specifically, the Canadian resolution calls on Iran, dominated by Shi'ite Muslims, to eliminate religious discrimination against minorities, including Bahais, Christians, Jews and Sunni Muslims. It expresses concern at continuing public executions, the use of torture and amputation, arbitrary sentencing of political dissidents, suppression of press freedom and systematic discrimination against women and girls "in law and in practice." Co-sponsors of the draft resolution with Canada were the United States, the Czech Republic, Iceland, Ireland, the Netherlands, Portugal, Sweden, Andorra and Micronesia.

November 22

Montazeri's daughter-in-law blasts Revolution Guards for violating human rights. (ILNA)

The daughter-in-law of dissident cleric, Ayatollah Hoseyn Ali Montazeri, has written a strongly-worded letter to the commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps in Qom, accusing the corps of violating human rights and the constitution and of torturing and imprisoning innocent people. Rabbani-Amlashi, whose property has been confiscated by the guards, mocked the Guards commander by listing several cases involving imprisonment, torture, and unlawful seizure of property and accusing him of perpetrating such acts under the cloak of upholding the law, with the assistance of the Special Court for Clergy. She said that the confiscation of her house was implemented on the basis of an order by the Special Court for Clergy despite the fact that she was not a clerical. She also mentioned the case where the heirs of the late Ayatollah Azari-Qomi refused to sell their house to the Special Court for Clergy, and the court confiscated that house. She also said: "Despite the fact that your officials announced formally that the IRGC does not have a detention centre, the officers under your command, as executive officers of the Special Court for Clergy, beat up some of the individuals arrested on November 4 in the home of Ayatollah Azari-Qomi.

November 23

Iranian man hanged publicly for raping girls. (AFP)

An Iranian man has been hanged publicly in a square in the northwestern city of Tabriz after being convicted of raping 23 girls ranging in age from six to 11. The man is only identified by his first name of Reza.

Fate of 1,000 Mojahedin-e Khalq reportedly on agenda of Iran-Jordan talks. (ISNA)

The Jordanian Foreign Minister Marwan al-Mua'shir's visit to Iran reportedly focused on the issue of 1,000 opponents of the Islamic Republic of Iran, affiliated with the

Mojahedin-e Khalq Organization (PMOI) who escaped from Iraq. Currently, they are under supervision in the border area between Jordan and Iraq.

November 24

Iranian dissident has jail term increased to 15 years. (AFP)

It was reported that Manoochehr Mohammadi, who was arrested and sentenced to 13 years in prison in July 1999 for acting against the national security, got another two years in prison, his lawyer Nemat Ahmadi said. "One year for talking to foreign media during his leave from prison and another year for issuing statements while in prison," he said. He added that his client, who was no longer a student during the riots, was also fined 300,000 rials (36 dollars) for insulting prison officials. He was lashed before the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan. After his arrest in the aftermath of the 1999 student unrest, Mohammadi was shown on state television confessing to contacts with the illegal monarchist movement. It also showed footage of him speaking at a monarchist gathering in the United States.

November 25

Majlis deputies complain of maltreatment. (Iranian newspaper *Iran Daily*)

A law-maker said the mistreatment of parliamentarians deteriorated in the past two years. "I and my colleagues have been repeatedly attacked and insulted by certain clerics and military personnel," Mohammad Reza Alihoseyni-Abbasi said in his pre-agenda speech at the parliament. The parliamentarian further said that a senior military commander has said 40 members of the parliament do not say their prayers and another has hurled the worst insults at the people's representatives in the parliament. He said that he lodged a complaint with the Special Court for the Clergy against two clerics who attacked him in 2002, adding that after several months, the court has not yet brought the culprits to justice.

Iran reportedly ready to offer amnesty for low ranking PMOI members. (AFP)

The Iranian government is ready to offer an amnesty for low ranking members of the rebel Mujahedeen-e Khalq Organization (PMOI), the current head of Iraq's interim Governing Council said. Jalal Talabani said the leadership of the Mujahedeen, whom Saddam Hussein had allowed to have bases in Iraq from which to launch attacks against Iran, had committed a "deadly mistake by tying their fate" to the toppled Iraqi president. "But the masses of the organization deserve sympathy on humanitarian grounds; I have asked the Iranian brothers to offer a general amnesty and they said they are ready to grant one for those who return" to Iran, Talabani said. The group has been disarmed and confined to camp in its bases close to the Iranian border in the northeastern province of Diyala. U.S. press reports have spoken of anger at the U.S. State Department that attacks by the group, listed by Washington as a "terrorist organization", have continued despite the measures, but U.S. commanders have vigorously denied that its fighters are in any position to launch any more attacks against Iran from Iraqi territory. Iran has several times expressed its willingness to

pardon members of the People's Mujahadeen who repent, but the group has dismissed the offer as a trick.

November 27

Iran's "Supreme Leader" grants amnesty to a group of inmates. (Islamic Republic News Agency / IRNA)

Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamene'i has agreed to a proposal to grant amnesty and commute sentences of a group of inmates on the occasion of *Eid al-Fitr* marking the end of fasting month of Ramadan. The proposal was made by Judiciary Chief Ayatollah Mahmud Hashemi-Shahrudi and approved by the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution. The amnesty did not include those jailed for armed robbery and banditry, drugs and arms smuggling, spying, kidnapping, rape, graft, setting up prostitution centres and threatening national security.

November 29

Iranian mothers win better child custody rights. (IRNA)

Divorced Iranian mothers have been granted the right to the custody of their children up to the age of seven. The arbitral Expediency Council sided with the parliament after the bill was twice quashed by the supervisory Guardians Council on the ground that it went against the Islamic Shari'ah law. Divorced mothers have already the custody right to their daughters up to the age of seven and the new law incorporates the same right to their sons. "Mothers will be given priority in custody rights of their children among divorced couples and after age seven, the custody will be held by fathers," the secretary of the Expediency Council, Mohsen Rezae'i, said.

*UNHCR Ankara
Country of Origin Information Team
Revised April 2004*