

Chronology of Events in Iran, December 2003*

December 3

Iran: Imprisoned journalist Ganji taken to hospital. (Iranian Students News Agency / ISNA)

Badrolsadat Mufidi, member of the management board of the Journalists' Guild has reported that in a telephone conversation with a cell mate of Akbar Ganji she was told that Ganji had become very ill and taken into hospital. In the past week, Ganji's kidney and asthma problems had reportedly deteriorated, and all medicine given to him had proven ineffective. Ganji was reportedly transferred to a hospital after many complaints by other prisoners.

Azeri dissident sets up new body to unite Iran's national minorities. (Azerbaijani newspaper *Ekho*)

It was reported that the prominent Iranian dissident of Azeri descent, Mahmudali Chehraghani, has stepped up his activities. He is currently in the USA where his National Revival Movement of Southern Azerbaijan (NRMSA) has set up a new organization called the Supreme Council of Peoples of Iran (SCPI). An SCPI office was opened in Washington on 30 November. Addressing a conference on this occasion, Chehraghani said that Azeris were demanding the recognition of their national rights in Iran and were not going to give up their demands. The leaders of other non-Persian national movements of Iran supported Chehraghani's address. The organizations of Turkomans, Baluchis, Kurds, Arabs and Lors are said to have joined the SCPI. The same day saw consultations with several organizations of Iranian Kurds. The subject of discussion was Tehran's ongoing deliberate policy of settling Kurds in the provinces of Western and Eastern Azarbaijan.

Militant Clerics Association hold first congress. (Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty RFE/RL *Iran Report*)

The Militant Clerics Association (*Majma-yi Ruhaniyun-i Mubarez*), the less-conservative of Iran's two main clerical political organizations, held its first annual congress at the Shahid Bahonar Park in Tehran. Also in attendance were political activists, parliamentarians, and leaders of several other reformist political organizations, including the Islamic Iran Participation Party, the Mujahedin of the Islamic Revolution Organization, and the Solidarity Party. Association Secretary-General and Speaker of Parliament Hojatoleslam Mehdi Karrubi gave the opening speech of the congress.

* *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*

December 4

Police close popular fast-food restaurants in Iran. (Reuters)

Police have shut down four of the Tehran's Western-style fast-food restaurants, popular with youngsters as meeting places to mingle with the opposite sex, in an apparent crackdown on un-Islamic behaviour. Restaurant owners said the closures were ordered 12 days ago by a branch of the police notorious for closing down shops and eating places deemed to have contravened the Islamic Republic's moral code.

Tired of such costly closures, some restaurants in Tehran have begun to employ soccer-style penalties for diners who could jeopardise their business. Girls deemed to be improperly dressed or men flirting too openly with the opposite sex may receive a "yellow card" on their table warning them to modify their dress or behaviour. Repeat offenders receive a "red card", and are asked to leave at once.

Pro-reform journalist to go to jail for "propaganda against system". (ISNA)

The Islamic Revolution Court has sentenced Emadeddin Baqi to one year imprisonment for "activity in favour of opposition groups and propaganda against the system". In its verdict, branch six of the Islamic Revolution Court said the accusations made against Baqi regarding activity in favour of opposition groups and propaganda against the system were definitely proven as stipulated in article 500 of the Islamic Penal Code.

Four killed in clash between protestors and police in Sistan-Baluchistan province. (Agence France Presse / AFP)

Four people were killed in clashes with police in Iran's southeastern Sistan-Baluchistan province which broke out after a local driver was shot dead. The clashes erupted in the city of Saravan, near the Pakistani border, said Jafar Kambouzia, a reformist MP from the provincial capital Zahedan. "The police shot and killed a motorist who refused to obey an order to stop. After this incident, people started to protest and there were clashes between residents and the police," Kambouzia said. "Unfortunately, despite the appeals to the police by local authorities for moderation in restoring calm, some of (the police) intervened and there were four deaths from gunfire," he said, adding that no police were killed.

Iranian Labour News Agency (ILNA) report on the same news on December 6:

The Majlis deputy from Zahedan Ja'far Kambuzia said that he asked President Mohammad Khatami and the Interior Ministry to investigate an incident which led to the killing of four or five people in Sistan va Baluchestan Province. Kambuzia said: "This is not the first time that something like this has happened. Things like this have happened in the past as well. In fact, they led to revenge attacks on the Law-Enforcement Force throughout the city. According to local sources, five people were killed and 15 others were injured in clashes in Saravan in Sistan va Baluchestan Province. A number of banks and shops were damaged as well. The incident started when the Law-Enforcement Force shot at a person who did not have a license. The first victim reportedly did not stop when he was ordered to stop. He was shot and killed. Kambuzia pointed out that the officers' decision to transfer the corpse to a van provoked those present on the scene. He added: "In recent months, the Law-

Enforcement Force has resorted to violence and it has caused many problems as a result.”

December 5

Supporters of killed Iran writers vow to continue fight. (AP)

The families and supporters of two dissident writers murdered by Intelligence Ministry agents have vowed not to abandon their effort to find who ordered the killings, saying justice won't be done until the truth is known. More than 500 relatives, friends and admirers paid homage at the graves of Mohammad Mokhtari and Mohammad Jafar Pouyandeh in Karaj. Mokhtari and Pouyandeh were kidnapped in late 1998. The killers apparently strangled them and dumped their bodies on the outskirts of Tehran. In November 2003, the head of a parliamentary committee that probed the murders, Hossein Ansari, said that his committee had to cease its investigation after it encountered senior people whom it had no power to deal with.)

Vigilantes assault aide to Iran President. (Dow Jones International News)

Islamic vigilantes assaulted a prominent reformist lawmaker and close aide to Iran's President, causing him to be taken to hospital with a cut head and torn clothes, his wife and a witness said. Mohsen Mirdamadi, who heads the parliamentary National Security and Foreign Policy Committee, was attacked as he began a speech in Yazd, central Iran, his wife, Elaheh Mojarradi, said. It was reported that around 15 vigilantes rushed into the hall where Mirdamadi was to speak, and they began punching him and kicking him. Mirdamadi was in Yazd to meet local officials of his party, the Islamic Iran Participation Front, and to make a public speech. Mirdamadi is a senior member of the party, the country's largest reformist group. Mojarradi said the assault showed the political situation in Iran "where hard-liners have a free hand to commit crimes without punishment, while reformist intellectuals and writers are punished for expressing their opinion."

Agence France Presse report on the same news on December 6: The Islamic Iran Participation Front (IIPF) accused the Ansar Hezbollah group of attacking Mohsen Mirdamadi. It was reported that the aggressors scaled the wall of the university in the central city of Yazd and broke down a door before attacking Mirdamadi as he was giving a speech. He was replacing another leading reformist, Ahmad Shirzad, who had been tapped to make the speech at Yazd marking the fifth anniversary of the embattled IIPF. But authorities in Yazd cancelled Shirzad's visit following threats provoked by controversial remarks by the deputy in parliament on November 24. He accused conservatives of giving Tehran's opponents "the arguments for presenting Iran as an oppressive regime that violates human rights, opposes freedom of speech and is anti-democratic." Conservatives hit back when deputy Ali Emami-Rad accused some reformists of being "Zionists" and Khatami's government of supporting "counter-revolution." The IIPF switched Shirzad's speech to the city of Sanandaj but the authorities banned him there too, citing security fears. A Sanandaj deputy, Kazem Jalalizadeh, said a military officer had told him beforehand he would go personally to the airport to "break Shirzad's legs". The IIPF meeting in Sanandaj was matched by a counter-demonstration of protestors calling for "death to the hypocrites".

Reuters report on the same news on December 7: Iran has arrested five men for beating up a leading reformist MP in an attack before parliamentary elections, Parliament Speaker Mehdi Karroubi said.

December 7

Iran students rally in Tehran for free speech, prisoners. (Reuters)

Around 1,000 pro-reform students rallied in Tehran calling for freedom of speech and the release of political prisoners. The protesters in Tehran chanted "Free all political prisoners" and "Death to despotism" on the annual Student Day, which marks the death of three students during a protest against then U.S. Vice-President Richard Nixon's Iran visit in 1953. Under tight police security, protesters inside the Tehran University campus carried pictures of their jailed classmates.

Iranian Labour News Agency (ILNA) report on the same news: The Law-Enforcement Force has dispersed dozens of plainclothesmen [reference to vigilantes] who were ensconced in the west wing of Tehran University. They had prevented the university students from participating in the 16 Azar ceremony [ceremony to mark the anniversary of the killing of a number of students on 7 December 1953], but they were dispersed in the street. After the move made by the Law-Enforcement Force, the university students left the western entrance gate of the university and moved towards the Kargar-e Shomali Street. In the southern part of Enqelab Street, the Law-Enforcement force brought together dozens of reporters and photographers who had gone there to cover the ceremony organized by students in a pre-designated location. They were given special cards and their activities were monitored in that area.

Press detainee's wife says he has been in solitary for 154 days. (Iranian Labour News Agency / ILNA)

The wife of Iraj Jamshidi, editor in chief of the banned newspaper *Asia*, said that her husband had been in solitary confinement for 154 days. Saqi Baqerinia, managing director of the banned newspaper "Asia", said she was able to see her husband only once during that time. According to Baqerinia, her husband is not allowed to see any newspapers but he can speak briefly to his family once a week by telephone.

December 8

MP attacked while speaking in Masjed-e Soleyman. (Islamic Republic News Agency / IRNA)

The Majlis deputy from Izeh, Isa Qoli Ahmadi-Nia, was attacked while delivering a speech in Masjed-e Soleyman] at a meeting entitled: "The role of the Bakhtiari tribe in the growth of democracy in Iran". The attackers wanted to beat up Ahmadi-Nia, but the police intervened and directed him to his car.

December 9

New Iranian political group appears. (IRNA)

A political group calling itself Association of Technocrats came into existence. Secretary-General of the Association of Technocrats Khosrow Nassiri-zad said that

the association will uphold the rights of the people by developing alliance with different groups within the framework of the constitution. He said that the Association of Technocrats will take part in the parliamentary elections with the slogan of "Economic Reform with the Prospect of Iranian Year 1400 (2021)". Nassiri-zad said that the association is a non-governmental organization (NGO).

Iraqi Governing Council decides to expel members of the Iranian opposition Mujahidin-e Khalq Organization. (Qatari *Al-Jazeera* satellite TV)

Muwaffaq al-Rubay'i, member of the Iraqi Interim Governing Council (IGC), defended the IGC's decision to expel members of the Iranian opposition Mujahidin-e Khalq Organization (PMOI) from Iraq, denying that the decision was part of a deal between Baghdad and Tehran. He stressed that the Iraqi authorities will not turn over any of the organization's members to Iran. He maintained that there are contacts with some European countries to secure residency of those members there. Al-Rubay'i said they "will not turn over any of the organization's members to Iran against their will or desire. We deal with this issue in a cultural and democratic way".

Mohammad Shari'ati, adviser to the Iranian president, said "The Islamic Republic of Iran had announced an amnesty for the ordinary members of the PMOI. The officials of this organization must be tried for their crimes and the terrorist operations they perpetrated in Iran and elsewhere and which they admitted."

Qatari *Al-Jazeera* satellite TV report on the same news on December 10: Sana Barq Zahidi, spokesman for the Iranian opposition Mujahidin-e Khalq Organization (PMOI) in London says that the PMOI presence in Iraq is subject to international laws, and that this presence is under the supervision of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Geneva Conventions.

Iraqi newspaper *Al-Zaman*'s report on the same news on December 11: The Governing Council gave members of the PMOI until the end of this year to leave Iraq and close the organization's offices. The council also banned the organization from carrying out any activity. Based on this decision, the organization's assets and weapons would be confiscated and its assets deposited in the fund for the victims of the former regime. Observers noted that the council made this decision following visits by members of the council to Iran, including visits by Jalal Talabani during his rotational presidency of the council and by council member Ahmad al-Chalabi. Many members of the organization, who later left Iraq via Jordan, were detained at a refugee camp built near the border. Bloody clashes took place between fighters of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan and members of the Mojahedin-e Khalq during the previous regime.

Iranian news agency IRNA report on the same news on December 21: Prosecutor-General Abdolnabi Namazi warned that the transfer of the criminal members of the PMOI to Europe from Iraq will cost Europe and the USA dearly. Namazi said protection of the MKO members by any system would entail many political, economic and security consequences. He said that based on the Supreme National Security Council's approval, those PMOI members who have not committed any crime can return to Iran. Namazi said the approval concerns PMOI members "who have been deceived by the outlawed organization out of emotion and unawareness but

have not taken part in any terrorist operation.” He said “Iranian soldiers, deceived by the PMOI during the eight-year war”, can also return home.

December 10

Three flogged in Tehran. (Turkish Anatolian News Agency).

It was reported that three persons were flogged in Iran. Akbar Ansari, a member of the Democratic Front, was flogged 30 times in execution of his sentence he received for participating in anti-regime demonstrations.

Two other persons, Riza R. and Hadi Z., were flogged 148 times publicly in Qom city in implementation of their sentence for thievery.

December 11

Plainclothes attack two Majlis deputies in Kordestan. (Iranian Labour News Agency / ILNA)

Several plainclothesmen attacked a session of the Assembly of Kordestan Province's Majlis Deputies in the town of Gharaveh, moments after the assembly had began its session. It was reported that, in the course of the incident, which took place in Gharaveh's local cinema, two of the province's Majlis deputies, Jalal Jalalizadeh and Sallahodin Ala'i, who represent the cities of Sanandaj and Saqqez respectively, were beaten up by the attackers. According to the report, the local authorities have announced the arrest of five of the assailants, one of whom heads a revolutionary organization.

Four hanged in public in Iran for gang rape. (AFP)

Four men convicted of gang raping a married woman after breaking into her home and tying up her husband have been hanged in front of a crowd of 3,000 people in northern Iran. The four men, identified as Mohammad N., Ahmad N., Alireza N., and Mujtaba S., were strung up in the main square in the town of Gorgan. The report added that the crime had only taken place two weeks before on the night of celebrations marking the end of the Muslim holy fasting month of Ramadan. It explained the gang had been apprehended just hours after the crime, convicted by a local court and the verdict confirmed by the Supreme Court.

December 12

Marchers arrested in Tabriz. (Iranian Baztab web site)

Baztab's correspondent in Tabriz reported that a ceremony was held in the evening to mark the anniversary of the end of the activities of Azarbaijan's Democratic Party [communist *Ferqeh-e Democrat*]. It was reported that the party's supporters organized a march between Tabriz's Emamiye cemetery, where one of the party's leaders is buried, and the Mashruteh Park. The report said that after the march, 34 people who had participated in the march, were arrested by the Law Enforcement Force.

December 13

Worker Communist Party of Iran holds fourth congress. (Worker Communist Party of Iran / WCPI website).

The Fourth Congress of the Worker-communist Party of Iran (WCPI) took place in Germany on 12 to 13 December 2003. The Congress, which was open to the public, was attended by hundreds of delegates and observers from different parts of the world. Its proceedings were also broadcasted through a live internet TV broadcast. Revolution was the main theme of the Congress. Koorosh Modaresi, the WCPI's leader, initiated the Congress. Mansoor Hekmat was also commemorated with the showing of a film of his speech at the last Congress and with a speech by Hamid Taghvaie, the head of the Political Bureau.

The Congress moved to elections and chose a 46-strong Central Committee composed of: Mina Ahadi, Rebwar Ahmed, Mohamad Asangaran, Fateh Bahrami, Nader Baktash, Shahla Daneshfar, Siavash Daneshvar, Abdullah Darabi, Mohsen Ebrahimi, Ali Farhang, Iraj Farzad, Mohamad Fatahi, Mahmood Ghazvini, Asad Golchini, Khaled Hajmohammadi, Rahman Hoseinzadeh, Majid Hosseini, Salah Irandoost, Nasreen Jalali, Ali Javadi, Keyvan Javid, Parvin Kaboli, Aman Kafa, Azam Kamgoyan, Asqar Karimi, Khalil Keyvan, Maryam Koosha, Azar Majedi, Azar Modaresi, Bahram Modaresi, Koorosh Modaresi, Siavash Modaresi, Mozafar Mohamadi, Mehrnoush Moosavi, Hossein Moradbeigi, Maryam Namazie, Kazem Nikkhah, Asad Nodinian, Nesan Nodinian, Nasrin Ramzanali, Mostafa Saber, Saleh Sardari, Soraya Shahabi, Sohaila Sharifi, Fateh Sheikh and Hamid Taghvaie.

The newly elected Central Committee met immediately after the Congress and unanimously chose Hamid Taghvaie as the WCPI leader.

The Plenum chose a 21 strong Political Bureau namely, Mina Ahadi, Fateh Bahrami, Shahla Daneshfar, Abdullah Darabi, Mohsen Ebrahimi, Iraj Farzad, Asad Golchini, Rahman Hoseinzadeh, Majid Hosseini, Ali Javadi, Asqar Karimi, Azar Majedi, Azar Modaresi, Koorosh Modaresi, Mozafar Mohamadi, Hossein Moradbeigei, Maryam Namazie, Kazem Nikkhah, Mostafa Saber, Soraya Shahabi and Fateh Sheikh. The Political Bureau elected Azar Majedi as its head.

December 13

Registration of Majlis election candidates begins throughout Iran (IRNA)

Registration of nominees for the upcoming Majlis elections began throughout the country, and will run for one week until 19 December. Registration of applicants for the 20 February Majlis election will be held at the Governor's Offices in Tehran and other cities. Belief in and commitment to Islam and the Islamic Republic of Iran, allegiance to the constitution and velayat-e faqih (Islamic jurisprudence), having good physical health, holding at least an Associate of Arts/Science degree or its equivalent, lack of criminal records and being between ages of 30 and 75 are among prerequisites for the nominees. Those nominees holding government posts should resign at least two months before the registration date. Iranians living abroad may deliver their applications to Iranian embassies and consulate-general offices. Those whose applications are rejected will have four days to lodge their complaints with the Governor's Office. The supervisory board will start examination of the complaints

from 4 January for one week. The Interior Ministry will release the final list of candidates on 10 February.

Associated Press (AP) report on the same news on December 21: Interior Ministry began screening about 8,200 prospective candidates who want to run in crucial February legislative elections. But the list of candidates approved by the Ministry must be ratified later by the Guardian Council, which has disqualified past parliamentary hopefuls considered opposed to the absolute rule of Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. The Council has in the past refused to provide evidence or give reasons for disqualifying candidates.

December 14

Armed men attack home of minister. (Iranian *Baztab* web site)

The home of the Minister of Economy, Tahmasb Mazaheri, was the target of an armed attack. A group of unidentified armed men attacked the home of the Minister of Economy, Tahmasb Mazaheri, in the early hours of the morning last week on Pasdaran Street. A guard at the house was injured in the arm and the attackers then left the area quickly.

December 16

Outlawed Iranian dissident group bids to contest parliamentary elections. (AFP)

A prominent outlawed Iranian dissident group, the Iran Freedom Movement, said in a statement that it intended to contest February's parliamentary elections, even though its candidates are likely to be barred from standing. The statement said a number of their members registered as candidates in Tehran and other cities for the February 20 Majlis elections. The group's candidates, however, are expected to be weeded out from electoral lists by the Guardians Council, an unelected body controlled by conservatives which has the power to vet all prospective MPs. The group continues to function despite a ban as a liberal, nationalist opposition movement seen as close to Iran's reformers. The group was tolerated until 2001 but is now banned because it questions certain foundations of the Islamic Republic.

December 17

Refugee agencies are leaving Iran due to increasing difficulties. (UNHCR and RFE/RL *Iran Report*)

Tehran is reportedly making it more difficult for nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that deal with refugees to work in the country. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), says about half of the international NGOs operating in Iran have been forced to leave the country because of administrative obstacles, government pressures, and funding problems. Aid workers warn that thousands of refugees will be deprived of the socio-economic assistance they were receiving. Peter Kessler, a spokesman for the UNHCR in Geneva, said on 17 December that many international aid agencies have had to pull out of Iran because of a variety of

problems: "The main problems have been administrative formalities that are simply without end -- various obstacles and objections to work plans, visa requests, and visa extensions." Kessler added that administrative hurdles are putting off even the most experienced NGOs, each with years of experience in crisis zones and refugee assistance operations worldwide. Kessler declined to reveal the names of the NGOs who have been forced to leave, for fear, he said, of jeopardizing the work of the local staff that remains behind. He says there are currently only seven international NGOs operating in the country, although the UNHCR has expressed its concern to the Iranian government about the problems they faced. Kessler says that, despite the high level of official government support, refugees in Iran are being affected by the problem, since the Iranian government is not able to fill the gap left by the pullout of the aid agencies: "Refugees are going without medical care and other necessary assistance, so it is having an impact." Administrative obstacles are not the only problems international aid agencies are facing in Iran. According to the UNHCR, some NGOs have discontinued their activities following government pressure.

Nazanin Kazemi is the representative of the International Consortium for Refugees in Iran (ICRI), an international agency that coordinates and facilitates the work of NGOs and disseminates information on the refugee situation in Iran. Kazemi says several NGOs have had to leave Iran because of a lack of funds. Hussein al-Shahristani is the representative in Iran of the Iraqi Refugee Aid Council (IRAC), an organization that provides help to Iraqi and Afghan refugees in Iran. Al-Shahristani says his organization has a good working relationship with the Iranian authorities. However, he adds that receiving needed funds from the international community is becoming difficult because of so-called "donor fatigue." The UNHCR is warning that unless the situation with the NGOs is resolved soon, the agency's capability to complement the Iranian government's assistance efforts will be seriously hampered.

December 18

Iranian man faces jail for car sticker. (Reuters)

An Iranian man faces a possible lengthy prison term or even the death penalty for attaching a sticker to the rear window of his car proclaiming "The era of arrogant rulers is over", his lawyer said. "My client faces jail for acting against national security just because of that sticker," attorney Mohammad Ali Dadkhah said. Dadkhah said Ali Akbar Najafi, 27, an unlicensed taxi driver, was arrested in June in southern Tehran. He said his client had thought up the slogan himself, but that it was not specifically aimed at Iran's clerical establishment. "After being kept blindfolded in solitary confinement for 53 days he now suffers psychological problems," said Dadkhah, who was asked by Shirin Ebadi, to represent Najafi. Najafi was released on bail of \$25,000 and ordered to appear before a branch of the Revolutionary Court on December 28.

Political activist granted sick leave; requests conditional release. (Iranian newspaper *Mardom Salari*)

Yusefi-Eshekvari's wife reported that her husband had been granted five days of sick leave and said her husband was being kept in Cell 325, which is the special cell for clerics or people who are related to clerics. Mohtaram Gol-Baba'I said that, after Abdollah Nuri's release, no other political activist shared a cell with Yusefi-Eshkevari, and he is in a secluded cell.

December 19

Police arrest 40 after reception at Ivorian embassy. (ILNA)

Forty Iranian guests of the Ambassador of Cote d'Ivoire to Tehran were arrested after a reception at the Embassy on the orders of Tehran's General and Revolutionary Prosecutor's Office on the grounds of the violation of the moral codes. The Prosecutor said the arrests were made without violating the embassy. The Prosecutor's Office stated that the Law Enforcement Force "was informed about the gathering at the embassy by popular forces".

December 21

Iranian Majlis amends bill on joining anti-torture convention. (IRNA)

The Majlis amended a bill calling on the government to sign up to a UN Convention Against Torture by including in the bill that UN will cover the administrative costs for joining the Convention. The supervisory Guardian Council (GC) had returned the bill to the chamber in August arguing that it had failed to determine how the costs for joining the convention will be supported. Under the single article of the bill, the Iranian government is authorized to join the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment that comprises an introduction and 33 articles.

Iran launches probe into jails. (AFP)

Iran has launched a probe into conditions in its jails, President Mohammad Khatami said, adding that he hoped "the day will come when we no longer have political prisoners." "I am in contact with judicial chief Ayatollah Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi, and with his agreement we have set up a team to conduct inquiries into the situation in prisons, and there have been considerable improvements," Khatami said. Khatami said that following meetings with Shahroudi, two political prisoners, Ahmad Batebi and Akbar Ganji, were freed.

December 25

Female dancer detained for public dancing. (Dow Jones International News)

Iran's best-known female dancer and 24 of her students have been detained on charges of dancing in public - for an all-female audience. Farzaneh Kaboli and 24 of her students were detained at the night of December 24 as they were performing folk

dances. The students were reportedly freed after signing statements pledging not to perform again but Kaboli was taken to Evin Prison. The program had been authorized by the Culture Ministry. Kaboli was performing on the second night of a two-week program at Tehran's prestigious Vahdat Hall when the police detained the group. Although Kaboli has acted in some films shown on state-run television, she was banned from working for several years in the 1990s after the circulation of a video that showed her dancing before a male audience in a private party. Kaboli's dance programs, available on bootlegged video, are widely watched by Iranian women.

December 27

Non-Muslim Iranians now entitled to equal blood money. (IRNA)

The Expediency Council (EC) approved a Majlis bill on equal "blood-money", or *diyeh*, for Muslim and non-Muslim Iranian nationals. EC Secretary Mohsen Reza'i said that that under a state verdict by the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamene'i, Iran's religious minorities can enjoy a "blood-money" equal to that of Muslims. He said the EC had completed and clarified the bill that the supervisory Guardians Council (GC) had earlier rejected. The GC in April 2003 had returned the bill to the Majlis, arguing that it contradicted the *Shari'ah* law because the amount of *diyeh* for recognized religious minorities in Iran is known in that law. "If the *Vali-ye Faqih* (the supreme jurisprudent) deems it right that a certain amount should be paid to the family of a non-Muslim victim in addition to his *diyeh* to equal that of a Muslim, we will act according to his directive," the GC had stressed in a letter to Majlis Speaker Mehdi Karrubi.

The Parliament had first submitted the bill, which is an additional note to the Article 297 of Iran's Islamic Penal Code, to the GC in January 2003, but the Council later rejected it citing certain discrepancies with the Constitution and the Islamic *Shari'ah* law. Under the bill, the blood money for recognized religious minorities in Iran - Jews, Christian and Zoroastrians - has become equal to that of a Muslim Iranian national. Under the *Shari'ah*, the family or relatives of a murdered person can either pardon the murderer or demand blood money or capital punishment.

December 30

Iran says escaped Bam prisoners 'on leave'. (Reuters)

Iranian officials said they were revising the status of about 600 prisoners missing since their escape from an earthquake-damaged jail in Bam to "on leave". A spokesman for the judiciary said that prisoners from the stricken area whose relatives were hurt or killed in the earthquake may be given amnesty. The prisoners have been on the run since the walls of their jail crumbled. An unknown number of inmates were killed.

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