

Chronology of Events in Iran, December 2002*

December 1

Guardian Council approves women divorce rights bill. (Reuters)

Guardian Council approved a bill [amending the relevant sections of the Civil Act] giving women greater rights to divorce their husbands. Currently in Iran a man can divorce his wife whenever he wishes. Iranian women are allowed to seek a divorce if their husbands had signed a contract granting them that right, or if their husband was a drug addict, insane or impotent. The courts also allowed divorces for other reasons, including if the husband could not provide financially for the family. But the divorce applications were granted on a case-by-case basis without the protection of a law, and usually involved long and costly lawsuits requiring strong evidence to support the claim.

Freedom Movement leader complains to Majlis committee about improper trials. (Islamic Republic News Agency / IRNA)

Secretary-General of Freedom Movement of Iran (FMI) Ebrahim Yazdi lodged a complaint with the parliamentary Commission 90 [Majlis Article 90 Committee] against the absence of the jury in the court hearings against FMI defendants. "Our rights stipulated in Note 168 of the constitution of the Islamic Republic concerning the court procedures against the FMI members have been ignored," Yazdi said in his complaint to the parliamentary commission. The parliamentary commission is constitutionally responsible for examination of complaints lodged against the three branches of the government. "We have objections to the form and content of the charges brought against FMI members. Article 168 of the constitution requires the court hearings against the political crimes to be held open and in presence of the jury. Our constitutional rights have been violated," Yazdi said. According to the approval of the Expediency Council, the court hearing should be held in presence of the defence lawyer, while the lawyers of the FMI members have been barred from attending the court.

Islamic Labour Party elects new leader. (Iranian Students News Agency / ISNA)

Hoseyn Kamali was elected as the secretary-general of Islamic Labour Party for three years in the last meeting of their Central Council meeting. The party's second congress had been held on 24 Mehr [16 October], at which time the members of the party's central council were elected. At the third Council meeting, Abolqasem

* *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.*

Sarhaddizadeh was elected as the chairman of central council, Abbas Taqizadeh and Mohsen Sorkhu as deputy chairmen, and Salimi and Hoseyni-Khatibani as secretaries.

December 3

Mian-do-Ab sugar refinery closes following strike. (Student Movement Coordination Committee for Democracy in Iran / SMCCDI)*

Authorities declared temporary closure of the Mian-do-Ab sugar refinery following the strike of several workers protesting official management. The workers demand better work and social conditions as well as the release of all prisoners of opinion in Iran and the jailed religious scholar Hashem Aghajari. Security forces affiliated to the elite Mohamad Rasso-Olah brigade intervened in the workers' strike [on December 3]. Several workers and members of the strike committee, including Fariborz Moradi and Ali Nikoo-i were beaten and arrested.

December 4

Hospital reports rise in incidents of self-immolation among women. (ISNA)

Forty out of the 50 cases of self-immolation in Khorasan Province in the [year beginning 21 March 2002] were carried out by women. The head of the burns unit of Mashhad's Imam Reza Hospital, Dr Amuzegar, noted that there was an increase in the number of such cases in comparison with the figures registered for the previous year. He said that the causes of these acts were family disputes and quarrels, forced marriages, economic and cultural poverty and poor standards of living.

Majlis member criticizes Prison Organization over unlisted prisons. (Iranian newspaper *Etemaad*)

An MP for Tehran criticized the Prisons Organization for not knowing about an [Islamic Revolution Guards] Corps [IRGC] detention centre in Evin prison. Ali Akbar Musavi-Kho'ini was referring to the inquiry of a number of MPs about where and exactly when Behruz Geranpayeh, Hoseyn Qazian and Abbas Abdi were detained at the IRGC security detention centre in Evin. He said that the only response by the Prisons Organization was that they were in the IRGC detention centre. Speaking about the rumours that said the chairman of Prisons Organizations could not easily enter this detention centre, he said that two of the chief wardens of Tehran Province and a chairman of Evin Prison Organization who insisted on controlling this detention centre were removed from their positions after eight months. Furthermore, he also said that it should be determined where the four students who had been detained at noon time on 5 Azar [26 November] were detained before being released in the morning of 6 Azar [27 November]. He said: "This gives rise to the rumour that these two individuals had been kept somewhere outside Evin prison and probably in Prison Number 66 of IRGC's Military Police in Afsarieh [Southeast of Tehran] and had been moved to Evin later."

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

Ansar declares war to "clean up" Iran of reformers "promoting Western democracy". (Associated Press / AP)

Ansar-e-Hizbollah, best known for disrupting reformist gatherings and beating up students, declared a "holy war" to rid Iran of reformers who promote Western democracy and challenge the country's "Supreme Leader". The declaration in the weekly newspaper [*Ya Lesarat*] of the Ansar-e-Hizbollah, the chief organization of the so-called vigilante movement, appeared to be a direct challenge to Iran's reformist president, Mohammad Khatami. The declaration warned that the time came for a "revolutionary Jihad," or holy war, to remove reformers from power and replace them with "idealist and religious" officials. The declaration added that the "revolutionary clean up" entails a "comprehensive attack on the cultural invasion bases of liberal and secular intellectuals."

Student Day rally banned in Tehran Province. (ISNA)

The Office for Fostering Unity, Allameh faction, asked the Office of the Governor-General of Tehran Province to hold a rally to mark 16 Azar [7 December, Student Day] anniversary but the general manager of the Office of the Governor-General, in a letter to the public relations of the [student] office, has said that it is not possible to issue a permit for the rally.

December 5

Several students summoned to Information Ministry. (Iranian newspaper *Iran*)

A number of student activists have been attending the Information Ministry in the past few days for discussions about the recent demonstrations. Hadi Kahalzadeh, the secretary of Alam'eh Tabataba'i University's Islamic Student Association, Mojtaba Tardast, political representative of the Science and Technology University's Islamic Students Association, and Arash Pahlavan-Nasir, member of the central council of the Office for Fostering Unity, visited the Information Ministry. On [2 December], a student from Shahid Beheshti University also attended the Information Ministry. It was reported by students that the inquiries made by the Information Ministry directors during these visits centred mainly on the dimensions of the recent events in universities. Some of the student activists have said that those summoned had to fill out inquiry forms.

December 6

Iran's "Supreme Leader" pardons 341 prisoners. (AP)

Iranian supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has pardoned 341 convicts to mark the Muslim feast of Eid el-Fitr. The pardon was for prisoners convicted by civil, revolutionary and military courts.

December 7

Demonstrations, clashes, arrests on the Student Day. (AFP)

Iranian police violently dispersed a crowd outside Tehran University and arrested around 70 people after demonstrating on-campus students called for the head of the judiciary to resign. About 2,000 people gathered on Enqelab (Revolution) Avenue

outside the campus where police had formed a barrier of buses to block views of students protesting inside. On campus, roughly 3,000 students authorized to hold a rally on university grounds to mark National Student Day also protested the death sentence against Hashem Aghajari. After calling for the resignation of judiciary chief Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi, whom they blame for the harsh sentence, students urged those in the street to "come and join us". Some in the street shouted "free political prisoners" in solidarity with the students, while others showed up out of curiosity. In mid-afternoon, the situation degenerated when students hurled rocks at vigilante groups gathered outside the gates and took aim at the buses, breaking some windows. Around 2,000 police and anti-riot forces deployed around the campus then violently dispersed the off-campus crowd with truncheons and tear gas. Some 60 to 70 people were arrested during the intervention, "but very few were students", Interior Ministry official Ali Taala said. Basij militia members -- who clashed with students in November during earlier Aghajari protests -- gathered in larger numbers around the campus, prompting the university vice-president to urge students to disperse because he feared the Basij would intervene. Basijis pursued street protestors into the ISNA's offices near the campus, beating those who had taken refuge there. The students dispersed in the early evening. State television aired past speeches of Supreme Leader saying Iran's enemies have tried to mobilize students against the Islamic revolution, but have always failed. The students demanded the liberation of political prisoners and called on President Mohammed Khatami to push through political and economic reforms. Students also staged rallies at universities in Shiraz and in Isfahan.

Reuters report of the same news: The mixed gathering of young and old, men and women - many of whom wore chador - occasionally chanted slogans such as "Political prisoners must be freed!" Baton-wielding police made several charges, forcing people to dart into side streets and seek shelter in nearby buildings. Late in the evening a crowd of about 500 relatives and friends of those arrested gathered outside a central Tehran police station, clamouring for their release.

SMCCDI report on the same news:* Violent clashes occurred in Mashad as members of the Bassidj and plainclothes men attacked a peaceful protest gathering in front of the Ferdowsi university. In the Namazi district of Shiraz, several protesters were reported as beaten and arrested by the Bassidj members.

In Tehran, tension was acute especially in the Enghelab, Narmak, Vali Asr, Madar and Karadj district. In Enghelab and Madar, several members of LEF were seen showing the "V" sign to the youth shouting slogans. Hundreds of workers joined by supporters and schools students gathered in front of the Social Administration to start a protest action. The area was locked by the regime forces but many reached the area by passing via detours.

Sporadic clashes and arrests were reported from Ahwaz. Several demonstrators trying to reach the university were beaten and arrested by plainclothes, allegedly affiliated to the Iraqi Islamic Council. Students were heard shouting slogans against the regime inside the university but the security forces blocked the area.

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Reuters report of the same news [December 8]: Ali Taala, general director of security and political affairs at the Tehran's governor's office, said that about 200 protesters were arrested in the city on [December 7]. "Most of them have been released after being questioned but 30 of them are under arrest and 40 of them were released on bail," he said. "They are being charged with participating in an illegal gathering, carrying weapons such as knives and also some of them are accused of clashing with the police," Taala said. He said the protesters numbered about 5,000. Another 3,000 students held a separate rally inside Tehran University to coincide with National Students' Day and call for a referendum on the country's political future. Taala said most of the demonstrators had turned out after calls for protests by U.S.-based Iranian television stations. The opposition television channels are illegal in Iran but are avidly watched by many Iranians via satellite dishes, which are also illegal but widely available.

Islamic Republic News Agency / IRNA report of the same news [December 8]: Managing Director of Tehran Province Governor-General Office for Political and Security Affairs Ali Ta'ali said that arrest warrants are out against certain people who cause trouble in authorized students gatherings. "A number of such people have been identified and will be arrested if they are seen again on the sidelines of these events."

AFP report of the same news [December 9]: Hundreds of Iranian student activists forced their way into Tehran university, defying attempts by authorities to limit access to a pro-reform rally. Guards posted at the gates of Amir Kabir university had attempted to prevent students from other campuses joining the latest in a series of political demonstrations directed against Iran's religious hardliners. Some 1,500 students then gathered in a university lecture hall, but the atmosphere was tense due to the presence of some 150 members of the hardline Islamist Basij militia, who were heckling orators.

AFP report of the same news [December 10]: A group of Islamist vigilantes attacked a gathering of pro-reform students at a Tehran University for the second consecutive day, the latest in a string of assaults to crush protests against the Islamic regime. Around 400 student activists had gathered at Alameh university to hear a speech by Ebrahim Yazdi, who heads the Iran Freedom Movement (IFM) calling for "respect of the constitution and freedom of speech". But the students were forced to barricade themselves inside a lecture hall when about 15 members of the Basij militia tried to storm the meeting. "Let us in," attackers shouted as their ranks swelled. "We will show you what we do with people who want a referendum." The students were able to evacuate the hall through another exit.

AFP report of the same news [December 11]: Tehran MP Ali Akbar Mussavi said that since Student Day rallies, at least 10 students had been arrested. He said two other students were also detained before the demonstrations. A second reformist MP, Ahmad Shirzad, from the central city of Isfahan, said a further two activists had also been picked up. Meanwhile, Tehran police have ordered the closure of two bookshops near Tehran university and warned two others after store owners allegedly let demonstratings students seek refuge.

December 7

Daughter of the Farouhars banned from exiting Iran. (SMCCDI)*

The Islamic Republic Intelligence banned the daughter of the late Farouhars to exit Iran. Parvaneh Farouhar was notified about the ban in the Tehran Airport as she was getting ready to pass the check point in order to catch her plane.

December 9

Students protest against continued detention of a fellow student. (ISNA)

A group of students from Tehran University's College of Social Sciences took part in a hunger strike in protest against the continued detention of Behnam Amini, one of the college's students. The protesting students placed their eating utensils in the college's yard to declare their protest against the continued detention of Behnam Amini. Amini was detained on the sidelines of the ceremony commemorating the Foruhars [political activists killed in 1998]. A member of the central council of the Islamic Association of Students of Tehran University's College of Social Sciences delivered a speech in which he claimed that the representative of the deputy head of the College of Social Sciences was not allowed into Bench 26 of the Revolution Court.

December 10

Judge resigned. (British Broadcasting Corporation / BBC)

A senior Iranian justice official offered his resignation in protest against the death sentence passed on Hashem Aghajari for blasphemy. The official, Hussain Mir-Mohammad Sadeghi, who is the spokesman for the judiciary, said the ruling has damaged Iran, and criticised what he called the growing politicisation of the Iranian judiciary.

December 12

Iranian police free Azeri reporter. (Azerbaijani newspaper *Sarq*)

Ali Suleymanli [or Suleymani], a journalist from Tabriz whose whereabouts have been kept secret for a month, has been allowed to go home, the defence committee of the National Revival Movement of Southern Azerbaijan said. The chairman of the defence committee, Cahandar Bayoglu, said that the journalist was allowed to go home a few days ago. Contrary to disseminated reports, the committee chairman said that the criminal case against him had not been dropped. Suleymanli was fined 20m tumans [200m riyals - 25,000 dollars], and court hearings into his case will resume soon.

Iranian students concerned with suspicious arrests. (*International Herald Tribune*)

Leaders of Iran's student movement who led protests over the past month appealed to the public for help, saying that their movement was on the verge of suppression. At a news conference, the students said that more than 12 of their members had been taken

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

away in a terrifying manner in the past three days and that they feared rogue elements at the Ministry of Information were behind the arrests. They said that the students had been kidnapped on the streets and that many others were watched and followed. Reza Delbari, a member of the Islamic Association of Amir Kabir University, said students could have been arrested with a judicial warrant if there were legal grounds for their arrests. Some of those who had contacted their families had said that they were under pressure, Delbari said. Ali Farrokhi, 22, who had disappeared [on December 9], contacted his family in the city of Qazvin [on December 11] and asked for help to get him released. The students said that only one member of Parliament, a former student leader, Aliakbar Moussavi Khoini, had been vocal in their support. Khoini had reported the arrests to Parliament. But his efforts to track down the arrested students apparently had failed.

Iran Press Service (IPS) report of the same news: Two leaders of the Office for Fostering Unity (OFU) confirmed that at least seven student activists have been rounded up in the past 24 hours by agents of the Information Ministry, unidentified plainclothes men or agents acting on orders from the Islamic Revolution Court. They named Mr. Ali Farrokhi and Farid Tirgar Nezhad of the Amir Kabir University, Khabir Dadbin and Sa'id Moradi of the Medical Faculty and Soroosh Azizi of the Sharif Technical University, adding that some had been abducted in the streets.

Law Enforcement Force stops holding of "illegal" rally. (ISNA)

The Law Enforcement Force [LEF] stopped the holding of an "illegal" rally at the Enqelab-Hafez crossroads. A few days ago, the Teachers' House issued an announcement inviting teachers to participate in a gathering to be held inside Heydariyan Sports Hall situated at Hafez Street in protest of some of the problems associated with guilds. However, considering the fact that a permit was not issued for the gathering, it was called off... However, some of the people who had come to participate in the gathering, held a rally at Hafez-Enqelab crossroads between 09:30 a.m. and 11:30 am, and shouted slogans for some 20 minutes. During that time, many times the LEF announced that the rally, in which some 500 people participated, was illegal and called for the participants to disperse. However, finally the LEF intervened and dispersed the crowd.

Iranian police, army reportedly clash with Azeris. (Azerbaijani newspaper *Azadliq*)*

During a gathering in front of Mammadtagi Zehtabi's grave to mark of the 57th anniversary of the 21 Azar movement in the city of Shabustar, security forces, armed policemen and revolutionary guards launched an armed attack on the participants in the gathering, the Baku office of the National Revival Movement of Southern Azerbaijan (NRMSA) said. When the police failed to disperse the rally after encircling Zehtabi's grave, the authorities sent troops to Shabustar. Tear gas was used against the demonstrators who tried to continue their rally. Shots were fired in the air. Servicemen at checkpoints set up along the road leading to Shabustar prevented people from joining the rally. NRMSA members were arrested after the clash on Zehtabi's grave and on the roads. The leaders of the movement, Yurus Mehrambayli,

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Karim Xalilli and Azizulla Valipur, were arrested too. Mehrambayli was violently beaten up and taken into custody. Several people were injured.

Azerbaijani newspaper *Hurriyyat* report on the same news [December 18]: The people arrested for holding an action to mark the 57th anniversary of the 21 Azar movement in Shabastar on 12 December launched an open-ended hunger strike. The movement's activists, who launched a "hunger strike to the death" in protest at their illegal arrest, are also demanding the immediate release of all prisoners arrested together with them, including women. The hunger strikers decided to continue their action until their demands are met. Iran's special agencies are applying pressure on the hunger strikers' families to stop the action. Reportedly, more than 300 people were arrested during violence in the action and hundreds of people suffered various injuries.

Iranian newspaper *Hambastegi* [December 18]: The political-security deputy governor-general of Eastern Azarbayjan announced that 50 people were arrested at an illegal rally in Shabestar [on 12 December], but only four still remain in custody; the rest have been released. Karim Abedi said: "Some groups known as 'Pan Turkist' announced in a statement in early Azar [month beginning 21 November] that they were planning a rally by the tomb of Dr Zehtabi, who had similar tendencies, on 21 Azar [12 December]. But there was no occasion to the date. Therefore, considering the fact that there is a movement forming which casts its eyes on the outside world, and also since no permit had been obtained, the governor-general's office declared the rally illegal. Out of about 50 people arrested, 35 were released the same evening after signing an undertaking. Of the 15 remaining, 11 were released on 14 December with third-party guarantee. The cases of the remaining four are being further investigated. They had previously been warned that their action was illegal, but they had not taken any notice."

Azerbaijani newspaper *Azadliq* report on the same news [December 26]: Huseyn Turkelli, head of the Baku bureau of NRMSA, said that "Two seriously ill participants in the protest action were hospitalized on 23 December. They are Yurus Mehralibayli and Arkin Musavi. Four other activists of the NRMSA, Alirza Aslani, Teymur Nasrifard, Aziz Valipur and Mahmud Fazli, were taken to hospital in a serious condition today. Yurus Mehralibayli and Arkin Musavi, who were hospitalized two days ago, are still in a life threatening condition. The medical treatment of the six activists of the NRMSA, who are in a serious condition, is continuing in a Tabriz hospital." Turkelli said that 30 of the 300 NRMSA activists detained after the 12 December events were still in prison: "Some people were released on bail after paying 200m rials [25,000 dollars]," he added.

December 14

Interrogators sentenced for death of prisoner. (AFP)

An Iranian court has sentenced four judicial interrogators to four years in jail for killing an alleged smuggler by using torture to get him to confess. According to medical reports, the man was subjected to repeated torture and beatings, including blows with metal bars. "These four people killed an accused while they were forcing him to confess by using physical torture", the head of the court in Mashhad, Ahmad

Sadr-Zadeh, said without giving further details. He said the four escaped the death penalty because all of them denied the charges, and investigators were unable to determine who was principally responsible. The interrogators were acquitted from other charges, including unlawful arrest and giving false evidence. Two other officers were sentenced to one year in jail as accomplices and for giving false testimony.

Revolution Court issues verdicts for Freedom Movement members. (IRNA)

The Revolution Court issued court rulings for 52 defendants of the banned Freedom Movement of Iran (FMI) party, stressing that none of the charges against the party members had been "political". Head of the Branch 21 of Tehran Revolution Court Hasan Baba'i said that the court had dropped charges of taking up arms against the system on FMI, adding that the amount of arms and ammunition seized from the group did not deserve the conviction. Baba'i added that the group members had received sentences up to 10 or 11 years prison terms and cash fines and that 11 of the group members had been acquitted. He further stressed that all groups members have been released on bail. The head of the Branch 21 of Tehran Revolution Court further said that the case of Ebrahim Yazdi, the head of the group, is still going through preliminary investigations.

December 15

Majlis adopts revised anti-torture bill. (ISNA)

Iran's parliament adopted a revised anti-torture bill banning the use of physical or psychological pressure to extract confessions from prisoners. A first draft was approved by the parliament in May but was later shot down by the conservative-controlled Guardians Council. The council sent the bill back for clarification, after complaining it did not give a clear definition of torture or cite examples. In the revised draft, "any physical or mental pressures against detainees in all stages of the legal process including interrogations, investigations, trial and the execution of the verdict are subject to law-based sanctions." "Physical pressures, solitary confinement, keeping more than one person in solitary confinement, night interrogations, and any act that can be considered as exerting pressure on a prisoner, are examples of torture." Officials who practice torture or do not report acts of torture will be subject to three to six months in prison and a one-year ban from public office. A second violation means six months to one year in jail and a three-year ban from public office. A judge can only order solitary confinement in exceptional cases for seven to 10 days to protect the secrecy of an investigation. If a prisoner is kept in solitary confinement through a judge's error, the judge is to be brought to justice. When parliament first adopted the bill in May, it was seen in Iran as an implicit recognition that authorities practice torture. Under the new bill, families have a right to know where their relatives are detained following frequent complaints that this is kept secret. The bill must now be re-examined by the Guardians Council.

Student meeting in Kerman while demonstration called off. (Iranian newspaper *Hayat-e Now*)

After the arrest of a few students, a protest rally which was due to be held by the student Islamic Society of Kerman's Martyr Bahonar University outside that city's

governorate-general office, was not held. The rally was due to be held in protest at the harsh treatment of students by particular individuals when Engineer Ezzatollah Sahabi arrived at Kerman Airport, the weak performance of the province's security council as well as the arrest of Ezzatollah Sahabi at the airport. Six members of the central council of the Student Islamic Association were amongst those arrested. The students held a gathering inside the university in protest at these issues and remarks by Kerman's governor-general in which he had called the protesting students "outsiders".

Information Minister says recent students rallies "authorized". (IRNA)

Minister of Information Ali Yunesi said that recent student demonstration at the Tarbiyat Modarres (Teachers Training) University opposing the verdict against academic Hashem Aghajari had been authorized. "Outside the universities any unauthorized gathering are illegal and should be prevented," he said. The students cases are being examined through standard legal channels and there is no concern in this respect, he said. Some of the cases handled by the Information Ministry also did not face any special complication, Yunesi remarked.

December 16

Majlis votes bill on political crimes. (AFP)

Iran's parliament voted a revised bill defining political offences in a bid to fix strict limits for judicial action. Acts such as giving a speech, publishing an article or criticising officials are excluded as offences under the revised law. A previous bill passed in June was rejected by the Guardians Council oversight body on the grounds that it went against existing laws. In particular, the Council objected to an article stating that to "express an opinion on political, social, cultural and economic subjects and to criticise the actions of officials and institutions is not an offence." According to the new text, defined political offences include taking part in gatherings that "threaten state security", "insulting a visiting head of state", engaging in "propoganda against the regime in support of groups hostile to the regime" and "publishing state secrets". Also defined as an offence is "insulting the president or vice-president of the executive power, ministers, deputies, members of the Experts Assembly and the Guardians Council."

Iranian TV Vision of the Islamic Republic of Iran Network 1 report of the same news: The Islamic Consultative Assembly [Majlis], discussed and approved the bill on political crimes, which had been returned by the Guardian Council, after making a number of changes. On the basis of the bill, if individuals perpetrate an action - or refuse to take an action - for which punishment can be meted out, for political motives and against the existing political system or against the sovereignty of the government or the political management of the country or the political, social and cultural interests or rights of the citizens or their legal rights, then their action will be considered as a political crime. Violent crimes, such as attempts against the lives of individuals or pre-meditated murder, kidnapping, hijacking and hostage-taking, planting bombs or threatening to do so, arson, espionage and secessionism - albeit for political motives or for the purpose of committing a political crime or achieving the aims of a political crime or planning for such an eventuality - will not be considered political crimes. According to another article of the bill, between 50 and 100 individuals will serve as

members of the jury of the court which will be responsible for investigating political crimes. They will be elected for two-year terms...

Assassination attempts on Majlis Speaker, ex-minister denied. (Iranian newspaper *Aftab-e Yazd*)

[Former Interior Minister and leader of the reformist, pro-Khatami 2nd Khordad Front] Seyyed Ali Akbar Mohtashamipur said that he knew nothing about the rumours of attempts on his life and that of [Majlis Speaker] Hojjat ol-Eslam [Mehdi] Karrubi.

December 17

Iran barber arrested for helping girls pose as boys. (Reuters)

Iran's [Vice and Virtue] police arrested a male barber who gave short haircuts to young women so that they could pass as boys and go out in public without having to cover themselves from head to toe. Police in the central city Isfahan arrested the barber and his assistant, herself a woman dressed as a man, after they received reports of sightings of short-haired girls flouting the dress code. Enforcement of the female dress code, known as hejab, has become more relaxed in recent years, allowing women to wear their scarves further back on their heads and shorter, tighter coats, often in bright colours.

Majlis approves bill lifting satellite dish restrictions. (AP)

Iran's parliament approved a bill to lift restrictions on the public's access to most satellite television channels. It still must be approved by the hard-line Guardian Council before becoming law. The measure was approved after a heated debate broadcast live on Tehran radio in which the measure's opponents said it would "legalize sin." The bill prohibits channels that are anti-government or those that carry pornographic material. But it reverses the outright ban on all satellite dishes passed by a previous parliament in 1995 in an effort to purge the Islamic Republic of Western influences. That law is largely ineffective. Rooftops and balconies throughout the Iranian capital have satellite dishes despite threats by the authorities of fines or confiscation. Many residents in Tehran hide satellite dishes under tarps or disguise them as air conditioning units.

Teacher gathering dispersed by security forces. (SMCCDI)*

In Tehran, hundreds of teachers and students gathered in front of the parliament with heavy presence of the security forces. Militiamen are trying to stop groups of young and teachers to join the main gathering in front of the Islamic parliament. Clubs and chains of the troops under the command of General Tala'i are used against those not respecting their injunctions or persisting to join the gathering.

Tension in Piranshahr. (SMCCDI)**

Special troops have been deployed in Piranshahr following the clashes that rocked the city over the night. The riot started following the killing of a resident by members of the security forces.

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

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December 22

Two Iranian students jailed for supporting death row dissident. (AFP)

Two Iranian student activists have been handed jail terms for issuing a declaration protesting the sentencing to death for blasphemy of a prominent pro-reform academic. The report said Hojatollah Rahimi, an educational science student from the western city of Hamedan, was convicted of "insulting religious sanctities and issuing an insulting declaration which condemns the Hashem Aghajari verdict". He was ordered to spend 18 months of his term in the isolated southeastern desert province of Sistan-Baluchestan, and six more months in the northeast of the country. The court also sentenced him to 70 lashes. The second accused, civil engineering student Parviz Torkashvand, was handed a jail term of four months as well as 40 lashes.

Rafsanjani alleges SAVAK role in student activism. (Iranian newspaper *Iran Daily*)

"Sons of former SAVAK [Farsi: 'Sazeman-i Ettelaat va Amniyat-i Keshvar, English: National Organization for Intelligence and Security] agents are creating trouble in the universities", head of the State Expediency Council said. Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani said: "We don't expect the sons of SAVAKis to remain idle. Some who themselves are against freedoms cannot deceive the people with their slogans," the former president told a meeting of the elite Revolution Guards. SAVAK is the acronym for the feared intelligence agency of the ousted Pahlavi dynasty. Conservative sources claim some pro-democracy students arrested during the recent disturbances in universities are offspring of the former secret agents. Sections of the anti-reform press have claimed that the alleged SAVAK elements have also penetrated the Office for Fostering Unity, the country's largest pro-reform student movement.

December 23

Six flogged publicly in Tabriz. (AFP)

Six male bikers convicted of harassing families and women have been publicly flogged in the city of Tabriz. They were given a total of 120 lashes in a city park.

December 24

Exiled Iranian Azeri leader arrested in Azerbaijan. (Azerbaijani newspaper *Hurriyyat*)

The head of the National Liberation Movement of Southern Azerbaijan [Iran], Piruz Dilanci, has been arrested. Dilanci is reportedly accused of fraud - undermining confidence. The head of Baku office of the National Revival Movement of Southern Azerbaijan, Huseyn Turkelli, confirmed the report. He said that Dilanci had created a bad image for himself.

Court suspends reformist daily. (Arabic news site *Al-Bawaba News*)

An Iranian court suspended a reformist daily and banned its director from press activities for a period of five years for "spreading lies, disturbing the public mind and defamation". The director of the *Aftab-e Emruz* newspaper, Farhat Fard-Nia, was

accused of "propagation against the Islamic regime" by publishing an article entitled "Leader can never be above the law", which questioned the supreme leadership of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Furthermore, he was also convicted of defamation for publishing an article entitled "Details of terrorist bases in Shahr-e Rey", a district on the southern edge of Tehran. Aside from being handed a five-year ban, he was also ordered to pay ten million rials (some 1,250 US dollars). Meanwhile, his lawyer said he would appeal the verdict.

Students continue 2nd week of protest against expulsion of 240 colleagues.
(*Entekhab*)

Last week the academic vice-chancellor of Science and Technology University announced that the expulsion of 240 students from that university was in accordance with the regulations of the Higher Education Ministry because they had failed to reach the necessary standards in three consecutive terms. However, despite his remarks, the students of the university have maintained their sit-in protest since [17 December]. The protesting students gathered outside the administrative building of the university on 26 Azar to stage a sit-in against the expulsion of, according to them, 300 students. They have remained outside the chancellor's office round the clock despite the rain and snow falling in the past few days. The security unit of the university is preventing any reporters from entering the university campus. Even the cameras of the students have been confiscated so as to boycott any news on the sit-in protest. The students say that the expulsions were the outcome of the wrong method of approach adopted by the management in the university. They say that the students lack proper educational facilities, health care and accommodation. Moreover, they add that the protest will continue until their demands are met.

December 26

Iran suspends death penalty by stoning. (Reuters)

Iran [suspended] stoning as a form of capital punishment in an apparent bid to ease European Union human rights concerns ahead of a possible breakthrough trade agreement. Qorbanali Dorri Najafabadi, the former Intelligence Minister who now heads the Supreme Administrative Court, said "The practice has been stopped for a while." It was reported that the head of Judiciary had sent a directive to judges instructing them to stop issuing death verdicts by stoning. "To the best of my knowledge, Ayatollah Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi has ordered that execution by stoning should be stopped," said MP Jamileh Kadivar. Officials in the Islamic Republic refuse to say how often stonings are carried out, but at least two women were reported to have been stoned to death last year.

Iranian newspaper *Hayat-e Now* report of the same news [December 29]: A jurisconsult member of the Guardian Council said: "Stoning to death is a preventive sanction which should leave its impact on the society". Ayatollah Gholamreza Rezvani, a jurisconsult member of the Guardian Council said: "There is no replacement for stoning as a sanction because the ruling of Islam does not depend on the tastes of the society. Perhaps the same ruling was not favoured by the people even in the early days of Islam. Stoning is a sanction for ethical problems such as adultery, and there is no other sanction for having intercourse with a married person. No other

punishment could be suggested as a replacement for stoning. There is a special ruling for stoning and if the [condemned] person is still alive after stoning, no other sanction will be administered. The conditions of time and place are not effective in this sanction unless the interests [of Islam] call for not carrying out this sanction. And this does not mean changing the verdict. It is a discussion of interests.”

AP report of the same news [December 29]: A senior Iranian cleric has ruled that death by stoning is not the only possible punishment for adultery, opening the way for women lawmakers who have campaigned against the practice to propose a bill banning stoning. "In certain circumstances, death by stoning can be replaced by other methods of punishment," Grand Ayatollah Naser Makarem Shirazi said in a written fatwa, or religious ruling. Shirazi is a highly influential cleric in the city of Qom. Earlier this month, Iran's 11 women lawmakers asked Shirazi's blessing before submitting a bill to the 290-seat legislature to abolish stoning. "This is a victory for reformist lawmakers who seek to end discrimination against women," reformist lawmaker Fatemeh Rake'i said. Ayatollah Hussein Mousavi Tabrizi, another senior cleric in Qom, said stopping stoning was a response to the "demands of modern age." "Any punishment, including stoning, that defames Islam or depicts a bad picture of the religion in the world is harmful to Islam and it is fully Islamic to stop it," he said.

Forty-seven sentenced to lashes, hundreds arrested in crackdown against “immoral” films in Ahvaz (AFP)

A court in Iran sentenced 47 people to lashes and closed down their video club for selling "indecent and obscene films". The prosecutor general of Khuzestan province, Amir Abbas Sohrab, said the conviction followed a massive sweep by 1,000 police and Revolutionary Guards of 102 video clubs in the city of Ahvaz. He added that during the crackdown, young protestors angered over the operation clashed with police. He said some 100 people had been arrested and were still being detained. It was not clear how many lashes the convicted film dealers would be subjected to.

AFP report of the same news [December 31]: Ahvaz has been hit by widespread rioting following a crackdown on shops selling illegal videos and CDs. Urging government action to end the tensions, reformist MP Jassem Shadidzadeh said at least 300 young people had been arrested in the unrest, during which one bank was set on fire and a major road link cut. "Clashes broke out after the judiciary in Khuzestan province ordered the police, without coordinating with the Khuzestan governor's office and the Intelligence Ministry, to shut down centers producing and distributing CDs in Ahvaz," Shadidzadeh said. "Security forces resorted to violence and used tear gas to stop people, mostly young students. Three hundred students ranging in age from 12 to 18 have been arrested and seven schools have been closed," he told deputies. "For about a week, Ahvaz city has been tense. One bank has been burned down and the road from Khorramshahr to Ahvaz has been blocked for two days," he added.

Press reports said the rioting broke out when hundreds of police and militia launched a crackdown on scores of shops distributing foreign video cassettes and video CDs. The operation was also aimed at owners of banned satellite television equipment in residential areas. The clampdown led to 47 people being sentenced to lashings. Local chief prosecutor Amir Abbas Sohrab Beigh was also quoted last week as warning that the operation was only the beginning of a major clampdown which would also target

underground alcohol producers and distributors. Shadidzadeh last week accused the judiciary of seeking to spark a crisis as a "pretext for declaring a state of emergency".

It was also reported that the rioting had spread to a prison in Ahvaz, with about 300 prisoners preventing an inmate convicted of murdering a policeman from being taken at the gallows for execution.

December 27

Majlis deputy says psychological pressure changed prisoner's views. (ISNA)

Ali Tajernia [Majlis deputy for Mashhad] has said remarks made by the detained pro-reform politician Abbas Abdi were broadcast in order to destroy the effective organizations operating within the reformist faction and to tell the people that the reformists are unreliable. Tajernia said: "One feels that there was a difference between what Abdi said at court and his previous analysis... We knew about his views before the trial and we also know that his statement at the trial was the consequence of a psychological condition."

December 28

Revolutionary Guard general allegedly dismissed and arrested. (Iranian opposition website Iranian Press Service / IPS)*

Revolutionary Guard's general Mohammad Reza Naqdi, the Commander of the Law Enforcement Forces (LEF) Counter-intelligence Section, is reported to have been arrested and "confessed to at least" 12 cases of murders. General Naqdi is also accused of attempts to kill Hojjatoleslam Abdollah Noori and Mr. Ata'ollah Mohajerani, respectively former Interior and Islamic Guidance ministers. The news of his arrest has neither been confirmed or denied by the authorities.

December 29

Robber hanged, killer reprieved at gallows in Iran. (AFP)

A convicted armed robber was publicly hanged in southern Iran, as another man sentenced to death for murder was given a last-minute reprieve. Shahin Sarihpour was hanged in Khuzestan. He was one of a gang of 15 men accused of "stealing from houses, shops and automobiles." A convicted killer was given a last-minute reprieve by the family of his victim just seconds before he was to be strung up. The victim's family had finally agreed to accept the payment of 250 million rials (31,250 dollars) from the murderer's family in return for sparing his life.

SMCCDI report on the same news:** The public execution of Shahin Saripoor led to violent clashes in the city of Mahshahr. Groups of youth clashed with special forces as they intervened to put an end to their protest action and slogans against the Islamic Republic and its leaders. Several demonstrators have been reported injured, and

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

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transferred to the military hospitals. The riot started as the regime executed the victim despite he had a stroke and was unable to stand up for his sentence.

Two Iranian women hanged for murder. (Al-Bawaba News)

Two Iranian women have been executed for taking part in the murder of a friend's husband, while the wife behind the plot escaped with a light prison term. Zahra Baghshirin and Farahnaz Yuly were hanged in a prison in Gachsaran in southwestern Iran. The two were found guilty of assisting a friend get rid of her husband by stabbing him in the back and beating him with batons. Another woman who participated in the murder received a 15-year prison term. However, the wife of the murder victim, who had enrolled her friends to commit the killing, escaped with a three-year jail term given that she was not present at the scene of the crime.

Ministry says turning away AIDS patients is against the law. (IRNA)

Authorities warned health officials against rejecting AIDS patients, saying it will deal with any violations. "Any refusal to accept those infected with the AIDS virus is against the law and because of the social problem which it creates, any violation will be followed up," the ministry said in a directive, sent to the heads of the country's medical universities. According to the directive, all Iranian health units, including private and state-owned, are required to accept and provide medication for those who consult for infection with HIV. Iranian Blood Transfusion Organization said in October that there were 4,237 AIDS patients in Iran and that 585 people had died of diseases related to acquired immune deficiency syndrome in the country thus far...

Esfahan art students resume strike. (SMCCDI)*

Hundreds of students of the Art University of Esfahan reportedly resumed their strike and are boycotting the classes. The action took place in order to protest against the expell of tens of students and the surveillance by the "Herrasat" (Intelligence) members.

December 30

Several killed and injured in prison fire in Gorgan. (AP)

A fire broke out in an Iranian prison, killing 27 prisoners and injuring 50 others. The fire broke out at around 3:20 am in the prison in Gorgan, capital of northern Golestan province on the Caspian sea, the prison's director Abbas Ali Arab said. "Unfortunately, at least 27 prisoners were killed and 50 others injured in the incident," Arab said, adding that the death toll was likely to rise. The official said the victims were all inmates, aged 20 to 69, convicted by local courts on various charges, including smuggling drugs, theft and robbery. Akbar Nikqadam, a Gorgan resident, said police cordoned off the area, blocking access to the streets leading to the prison.

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

December 31

Vigilante group members to be identified by security forces. (*Entekhab*)

It was reported that the Deputy Minister of Information for political affairs sent a directive to the ministry's provincial offices asking their agents to gather information about Hezbollah [Islamic vigilante] groups and the active members of Ansar-e Hezbollah in various cities and provinces and send the information to the capital.

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