

Chronology of Events in Iran, March 2005*

March 1

Journalist summoned to court. (Iranian news site Iran Daily News and Iranian newspaper *Hambastegi*)

Reformist journalist Keyvan Samimi Behbahani has been subpoenaed by a Tehran Administrative Court. Behbahani is charged with propagation against the Islamic establishment. He has three days to appear before the court or face a warrant arrest. The journalist is also the deputy head of the Center for Prisoners of Conscience.

March 2

Explosion at office of Iranian women's rights activist. (AFP)

A prominent Iranian women's rights activist said that her office has been badly damaged by a bomb overnight. "Some kind of a handmade bomb has been thrown into my office through the ventilator, burning up all my documents and files," Shahla Lahiji said. Lahiji, 62, is a writer, translator and director of *Roshangaran*, a prominent publishing house of books on women's issues. She was among a group of dissidents and activists arrested for taking part in a conference on Iran sponsored by the Heinrich Boell Institute in Berlin in 2000, and charged with propagating against the regime and acting against national security.

Provincial land dispute ends violently. (Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty RFE/RL Iran Report)

Chalus and Noshahr parliamentary representative Anushiravan Mohseni-Bandpey complained on 2 March that the police shot at demonstrators in his constituency, wounding 20. People from the villages of Salaheddin-Kala, Tajeddin-Kala, and Pey-Kala were protesting a grant of 70 hectares of village land to the Oppressed and Disabled Foundation, which is in charge of building the Tehran-North freeway, when the shooting began. Mohseni-Bandpey asked the interior minister, who is responsible for the police, who gave the order to shoot.

Kurdish human rights activist summoned to court. (Amnesty International)

Diba Alikhani has been summoned and interrogated in connection with her defence of women's and children's rights.

Female university students stage sit-in in Tabriz. (Iranian Student News Agency / ISNA)

The Sahand University's female students have continued their sit-in for the third consecutive day. The strikers are calling for a safe and appropriate dormitory, located

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in the city of Tabriz. One of the strikers claimed they will continue their 24-hour sit-in until appropriate measures are taken.

Judiciary will only punish managing directors for press offenses. (Iranian news site Iran Daily News and Iranian newspaper *Sedaye Edalat*)

Head of the Judiciary, Ayatollah Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi, said: "From now on, the Judiciary will only take punitive measures against the newspapers' managing directors".

March 3

An editor banned from working for two years, a daily suspended and nine journalists summoned. (Reporters Without Borders)

A high court in Tehran on 1st March upheld a suspended jail term imposed in March 2004 against Mohammad Hassan Alipour, editor of the daily *Aban*, along with a two-year ban from working. He could end up serving the sentence since he is being questioned in a new case.

The daily *Nedai Azarabadegan* was suspended for two months by a court in East Azerbaijan Province in north-east Iran while nine journalists in Iranian Kurdistan were summoned to appear before the courts. Daily *Nedai Azarabadegan* received its two-month suspension order from a court in East Azerbaijan Province around ten days ago. It was also ordered to pay a fine of 3 million rials (around 257 euros). Several official bodies had laid complaints against the paper for "publishing false reports" after it had criticised the management of some ministers and exposed several cases of corruption. Its editor, Abolfazel Vesali, said, "All this harassment is aimed at silencing an independent and critical newspaper".

In a separate case, nine journalists were summoned before a court in Sanandaj, in Iranian Kurdistan, western Iran for "publishing false reports" and "blasphemy". They were the former editor of the *Payam-e mardom-e Kurdistan*, Mohammad Sadegh Kabovand, and eight of his journalists, Tonya Kabovand, Ejlal Ghavami, Namo Hedayati, Yosef Azizi, Kaveh Hosinpanahi, Jahangir Hashemi Jamsid Vaziri, Hasan Amini and Majid Mohamadi. The authorities published summons notices in the local newspapers, saying that the journalists had gone into hiding, without even attempting to send summonses to their homes. Some of the journalists had previously been threatened with arrest in June 2004, when the newspaper was suspended.

The head of Tehran's judiciary, Abbas Ali Alizadeh, said on 28 February that Iran's chief justice, Ayatollah Mahmud Hashemi Shahroudi, had given instructions that "journalists should not be treated like criminals". However the following day, Tehran prosecutor Saeed Mortazavi, denied it, saying he had received "no order to halt suspensions of newspapers".

Bomb Blasts in Husseinieh. (Iranian news site Iran Daily News and Iranian news site *Baztab*)

A hand-made bomb was hurled at a Husseinieh in the city of Marivan, in Kurdistan Province. No significant financial losses or casualties have been reported as the result of this bomb's explosion, to date.

Three striking students hospitalized. (Iranian news site Iran Daily News and Iranian news site Baztab)

A number of students at the Tafresh Branch of Amir-Kabir University have staged a sit-in and 17 of them have been on hunger strike since March 1. They are protesting the intended separation of this branch from Amir-Kabir University. Three of the striking students were transferred to a hospital in the city of Tafresh due to severe physical and psychological frailty.

March 4

Threats against Kurdish human rights defenders in Iran. (Amnesty International)

It was reported that human rights defenders in Sanandaj, Iranian Kordestan, working on children and women's rights are facing threats in connection with their human rights work. The organisation appeals to the Intelligence Section of the Law Enforcement Forces (LEF, or *Hefazat-e Ettela'at-e Nirou-ye Entezami*) in Kordestan to stop its apparently unjustified interference with these activists and to work towards protecting human rights. In recent days members of the legally recognised non-governmental organisation (NGO), Association for the Defence of Children's Rights (ADCR, or *Kanoun-e Defa' az Hoqouq-e Koudekan*) and the unrecognised Association of Kurdish Women Defending Peace and Human Rights (AKWDP&HR or *Kanoun-e Zanan-e Kord-e Modafa' Solh va Hoqouq-e Bashar*) have endured summons, interrogation, telephone threats and harassment, apparently in connection with their human rights work. Azad Zamani (m), a member of the ADCR, has stated that the activities of the group, which received legal recognition as an NGO from the Ministry of the Interior around two years ago, have been carried out in the open and have concerned all Iranians without regard to race or religion. The organisation has raised concerns about the administration of criminal cases of minors and expressed opposition to the use of cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment on children. Referring to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), to which Iran is a state party, it has called for the prohibition of the use of the death penalty on juveniles and, latterly, the total abolition of the death penalty.

The Association of Kurdish Women Defending Peace and Human Rights has had its application for NGO status rejected (*rad-e salahiyat*) by the Intelligence Section of the Sanandaj LEF, although the grounds are not clear. Amnesty International has repeatedly campaigned against the use of vague *gozinesh*, or selection and approval criteria which are frequently used to limit citizens' freedom of association. Activist Doctor Roya Tolou'ie, a founding member of the organisation has also faced summons in connection with her activities.

March 6

Court in Izeh imprisons 200 protestors. (RFE/RL Iran Report)

The revolutionary court in the southern town of Izeh jailed some 200 local people who protested violently against the results of Iran's controversial parliamentary polls in February 2004. The court sentenced defendants to 10 to 15 years in jail, and exiled an unknown number for 30 years to other parts of Iran, after they were convicted of rioting and damaging public property. Mohammad Hussein Ahmadpur, a defendant

from Izeh. Ahmadpur has appealed his sentence, and claimed he was not in Izeh when the riots happened.

March 7

Ex-Mujahedeen returned to Iran. (Islamic Republic News Agency / IRNA)

19 former MKO [Mojahedin Khalq Organization, a.k.a. PMOI] members from Sistan-Baluchestan province arrived in Zahedan on Tuesday and were welcomed by their families. Meanwhile, about 276 penitent MKO members who have returned home after escaping from the camp in Iraq, were handed over to their families, the Salvation Society head said.

March 9

Ex-Mujahedeen returned to Iran. (IRNA)

132 former MKO members return to Iran Qasr-e Shirin, Kermanshah province. They arrived in the Iranian territory via Khosravi border point. A 100-member group have also returned home via Khosravi border point recently. Representatives from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the Iraqi Human Rights Ministry, Iran's Foreign Ministry, and Iran's embassy in Iraq accompanied the former MKO members to the country.

Iranian court eases sentence on dissident. (Agence France Presse / AFP)

An Iranian appeals court has ruled that dissident Hashem Aghajari, once condemned to death for blasphemy, does not have to go back to jail and can resume teaching, his lawyer announced. The death penalty imposed on him was commuted to five years in jail, and Aghajari was freed on bail in July 2004 pending the result of a fresh appeal. According to Aghajari's lawyer Saleh Nikbakht, the appeals court only upheld a lesser charge of "insulting religious sanctities", and deemed that the 23 months already served were adequate punishment. The appeals court also removed a ban on teaching and writing and an order that he be "deprived of social rights" for five years.

Iran lifts ban on reformist paper. (BBC)

The *Neshat* newspaper was banned after criticising Iran's penal system. Many of its staff were arrested in a crackdown on the liberal press, including publisher Latif Safari who was jailed for two-and-a-half years.

Student activists stage sit-in in Tehran. (Iranian news site Iran Daily News and Iranian newspaper *Eqbal*)

Members of the Republican Coalition at Tehran's University of Science and Technology staged a sit-in at the University Chancellor's building, demanding that the alliance organize Islamic Student Association elections. According to a member of this coalition, the main reason behind this sit-in was the mass disqualification of students by the Supreme Leader's representative and the head of Security Department at the university. 42 of 61 candidates running for the Islamic Student Association election were disqualified.

March 10

Student activist summoned to court. (Iranian news site Iran Daily News and Iranian newspaper *Hambastegi*)

A member of the Islamic Student Association of Isfahan University, Ahmad Mirzai, was summoned to the 103rd Circuit of the Isfahan Criminal Court after he was sued by a military organization for publication of an article in *Marefat* campus magazine. Mirzai is the managing director of this publication.

March 12

Farhadian trial held in Arak. (Iranian news site Iran Daily News and Iranian newspaper *Hayat-e Now*)

The trial of former Central province Azad University student activists was held in the city of Arak with judge Ahmadi presiding over the proceedings. The number one defendant in this case is Soroush Farhadian and the plaintiff is the Public Prosecutor.

Davoudi sentenced. (Iranian news site Iran Daily News and Iranian newspaper *Shargh*)

Arjang Davoudi, a political activist and the head of the "Parto Hekmat" educational institute has received a heavy sentence. The verdict issued on Mr. Davoudi includes a 15 year jail sentence and exile in Southern Iran, five-year deprivation and denial of social rights after completion of the prison sentence, 70 lashes and the closure of his business.

March 13

Student protests. (RFE/RL Iran Report)

The Islamic Association of Amir-Kabir University announced that its recent sit-in was only an initial step, "Iran News" reported on 16 March. The association explained that, by its actions, it is protesting "the antistudent establishments at this university." An unspecified number of students participated in the sit-in at Amir-Kabir University on 12 and 13 March. They were protesting against the imposition of a "security climate" on universities and the presence there of "rogue elements," or militiamen affiliated with the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), Radio Farda reported on 13 March, citing student Mehdi Hariri. "We are in the second day...[and] not planning to stop...yet," Hariri told Radio Farda. The Office for Strengthening Unity, an umbrella student group, has issued a statement backing the students, and members recently met with Higher Education Minister Jafar Tofiqi to convey student grievances, including the increasing difficulty of holding gatherings inside universities.

March 14

Iranians hanged publicly for rape and armed robbery. (AFP)

Two Iranians were hanged in public on Monday in Bandar-Abbas in southern Iran after they were found guilty of rape and armed robbery. Said Oj Hormozi and Jalil Moridi had each been sentenced to 74 lashings, 35 and 15 years in prison respectively, and to death by hanging.

Protests by teachers, workers. (RFE/RL Iran Report)

A group of part-time teachers gathered outside parliament on 13 March to protest their work conditions, iribnews.ir reported. In another job action, 200 employees of a refrigerator factory in Luristan Province demonstrated in front of the governorate in Khoramabad on 14 March, Radio Farda reported. The workers complained that since the factory was privatized in 2003 they have not received their wages or benefits on a regular basis and that five months have passed since they were last paid. The workers said that the factory does not get raw materials, so it cannot manufacture refrigerators. One of the workers, Morad Davudi, urged the government to pay attention to their demands.

March 16

Serial killer flogged, stabbed and hanged in public. (AFP)

An Iranian serial killer convicted of kidnapping and murdering 21 people, most of them little boys, was publicly flogged and hanged south of Tehran before thousands of spectators. Mohammad Bijeh, branded "the vampire of the desert" in the Iranian press, was lashed 100 times, stabbed in the back by a furious brother of one victim before a blue nylon rope was placed around his neck by the mother of another murdered child. The 22-year-old killer, who remained calm and kept silent throughout the punishment, was then hauled into the air by a crane to cries from the crowd of "make him twist". Both were initially sentenced to hang, but in January the Supreme Court ruled that Baghi should instead serve 15 years behind bars. Before being hanged, Bijeh was stripped of his shirt and stood against a post. His hands were tied around the post and he was lashed by several different plain-clothes officials. According to the charge sheet read out at the execution, Bijeh was guilty of 21 killings. He had been declared "corrupt on earth" and handed 16 death penalties.

Reports also said the pair picked some of their victims from poor Afghan families who may have been living in Iran illegally, meaning that some disappearances were not reported to police.

University students suspended from academic studies. (Iranian news site Iran Daily News and Iranian newspaper *Tose'eh*)

Tehran University Disciplinary Committee has taken punitive measures and/or suspended six students from academic studies due to stirring unrest at the university on the Student Day December 6, 2004.

March 17

Refomist women launch "Woman's choice" weblog. (Iranian Labour News Agency / ILNA)

A group weblog called "woman's choice" has been launched. This weblog has been launched on the eve of the ninth presidential election to express women's demands from the future president and government. A number of reformist activist women including Fakhrossadat Mohtashampur, Delaram Ghanimi-Fard, Susan Musavi, Ma'sumeh Sotudeh and Azadeh Akbari express their views and perspectives. This weblog is accessible at: www.Rooz-HA.COM.

Blogger Arash Sigarchi released. (Reporters Without Borders)

Arash Sigarchi, the journalist and blogger arrested on 17 January 2005 and sentenced one month later to 14 years in prison, was released from prison. A court in Rashed, in northern Iran, finally decided to release Sigarchi on 17 March, after payment of one billion Rials (95,000 euros) bail. This bail was reportedly paid by his newspaper, *Gylan Emroz*. The blogger, who was able to go home the same day, will still have to await his appeal hearing for confirmation of the ruling. Three webbloggers, Mojtaba Saminejad, Najmeh Oumidparvar and Mohamad Reza Nasab Abdolahi, as well as cyberjournalist, Mojtaba Lotfi, are still in prison.

Mazroui appears before court. (Iranian news site Iran Daily News and Iranian newspaper *Eqbal*)

The court hearing of the outspoken reformist and member of Islamic Iran Participation Front (IIPF), Rajab-Ali Mazroui, was held at the 76th Circuit of Tehran Province Criminal Court. He has been charged with 'spreading lies and slandering Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps Deputy-Commander Zolqadr' during his speech delivered in the city of Qom, in 2004.

Six "vandals" arrested in Shiraz on the occasion of "Chahar Shanbe Souri". (Iranian news site Iran Daily News and Iranian news site Baztab)

Six persons who allegedly went violent at the night of March 15 in Shiraz after consuming "alcoholic drinks, attacking police officers with fire crackers, stones and glass," were arrested and handed over to Judicial officials.

March 18

Charity organization pays blood money to release 23 prisoners in Iran. (IRNA)

Twenty three prisoners convicted to pay blood money were released in cooperation with Esfahan Endowments and Charity Affairs Organization (IECAO) on the threshold of the new Iranian year. Director-general of IECAO said 200 million rials were paid for the release of 23 prisoners. Hojjat ol-Eslam Ali Nezam-Zadeh added releasing the prisoners is one of the missions of IECAO which is implemented with the collaboration of Provincial Blood Money Department. "80 prisoners convicted to pay blood money were released this year with the financial aid of the IECAO," he added. He stated that 1.5 billion rials have been totally allocated for the release of prisoners throughout the country.

Thirty two MKO members return to Iran. (Iranian Fars News Agency)

Thirty two members of the Monafeqin [Mojahedin Khalq Organization] terrorist group based in Iraq have returned to the arms of their families in Iran.

According to Fars News Agency, these individuals who had turned away from the Mo

March 20

Disturbances in Iranian Kordestan during Nowruz festivities. (Iranian Baztab web site)

On the evening of 20 March, many young people in Sanandaj, Qorveh and Baneh joined the new year festivity and set off firecrackers, and a number of them set tyres on fire and caused disturbances for the citizens. However, a semblance of normality returned with the citizens when some of the offenders were arrested. Hours after the

start of new year, many people in Bukan also joined the festivity by setting off firecrackers, but some people who were intent on causing disturbances were arrested. Moreover, over 500 people in Mahabad gathered in Shardari square to celebrate the start of the new year. This number slowly increased to 1,000 and some of them, by taking advantage of the festivity, began to display a picture of Ocalan and the Kurdish flag, distributed bulletins among the people and chanted secessionist slogans. While some these people began filming the gathering, others started a rally towards Mellat park. But then some of the ringleaders were arrested and others were dispersed.

March 25

Football match causes disturbances in several Iranian cities. (RFE/RL Iran Report)

Five people in Tehran were trampled to death and about 40 others were injured after a World Cup qualifying match between Iran and Japan at the Azadi Stadium on 25 March, Radio Farda reported. Almost 100 buses were damaged. The casualties reportedly are the result of celebrating fans getting out of hand. The Student Movement Coordination Committee for Democracy in Iran alleged on 25 March that similar events occurred in Isfahan, Mahabad, Mashhad, and the Tehran suburb of Rey.

March 29

Iranian woman nominates herself as presidential candidate. (Iranian Fars News Agency web site)

Raf'at Bayat, the Majlis deputy from Zanjan, has officially declared that she has nominated herself as an independent candidate for the ninth presidential elections. She is the first woman who is going to run at the presidential elections.

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