

Chronology of Events in Iran, May 2004*

May 1

Three Iranian dissidents given week's leave from prison. (Islamic Republic News Agency / IRNA)

Three members of a dissident Iranian group, who are held for acting against the Islamic Republic, have been granted temporary leave. Taqi Rahmani, Reza Alijani and Hoda Saber, members of the so-called religious-nationalist group, were granted a one-week leave from Evin prison by Tehran general and revolutionary court, the head of the court's public relations office, Mohammad Shadabi said. Rahmani faces 11 years in prison, while Saber has been given nine years and Alijani six years. They were among a group of 14 dissidents who received their punishment from the Revolutionary Court in May 2003 for attempting to topple the Islamic establishment.

May 2

Iranian judiciary allows four dissidents to go on leave. (Agence France-Presse / AFP)

Iranian judiciary authorities allowed seven prominent dissidents jailed for speaking out against the regime and students jailed during unrest in 1999 to go on leave. According to the paper, Akbar Ganji, who was jailed in 2000 after he alleged top regime officials were behind a spate of grisly serial murders of dissidents, was given seven days of leave. Ahmad Batebi, Nasser Zarafshan and Akbar Mohammadi were each given five days out of prison. Batebi had been initially condemned to death for his participation in the demonstration in 1999 where he was featured on a famous photograph holding aloft a blood-soaked T-shirt. His sentence was revised to 13 years imprisonment. In August 2002, Zarafshan, a prominent lawyer was sentenced to five years in prison and 50 lashes for "distributing secret information". Akbar Mohammadi was originally sentenced to death for '*mohareb*' (warring against God) for his role in the 1999 student demonstrations, and is currently serving a reduced term of 15 years.

Iranian official says rally planned by Students' Basij unauthorized. (Iranian newspaper *Iran*)

An official announced that no permit has so far been issued to Students' Basij to hold a rally. Director-General of Tehran Province's Politico-Security Department Ali Ta'al said that the Students' Basij applied for a permit to hold the rally on May 3, but were told they would not be allowed to gather around the main headquarters of the three branches of the government, and could only do so somewhere else.

* *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.*

ICFTU lodges formal complaint at ILO concerning Labour Day arrests in Iran. (International Confederation of Free Trade Unions / ICFTU Online)

Following the arrests of 40 workers during a Labour Day march in Saqez, in Iran's Kurdistan Province, on 1st May 2004, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) has lodged a formal complaint with the UN's International Labour Office. It has also requested that the ILO intervene urgently with Tehran's authorities to obtain the release of those arrested. According to the ICFTU, hundreds of workers and their families had staged a peaceful rally and march in the City of Saqez (Kurdistan province), in order to celebrate Labour Day. The event was organized by "the First of May Council", an organisation of workers' in Saqez, consisting of labour activists acting independently from government-controlled structures. At about 5:00 p.m., the marchers were attacked by the Governments' security forces, including plain clothes' agents of the security service. Over 40 participants were reportedly detained and taken into custody. Among those arrested were Mahmoud Salehi, a well-known labour leader who has previously been arrested and imprisoned for 10 months in 2001, Jalal Hosseini, a local labour leader and Mohsen Hakimi, a well-known activist and a member of the Iranian Writers' Association. The security forces subsequently raided Mahmoud Salehi's home and his computer and documents were confiscated. Families of the arrested workers and other citizens are said to have gathered outside the Security Ministry's offices to demand the release of all those arrested.

ICFTU information on the same incident on May 5: Upon his arrest, Mahmoud Salehi was badly beaten up, and the security forces broke his glasses. They subsequently raided his house where they beat up his wife, Najibeh Salehzadeh, as well as his son, and confiscated his computer and documents. Hakimi's wife reported that at least until 3 May 2004, she had not been given any opportunity to contact her husband by phone, and didn't even have any information concerning his whereabouts. At this moment, the detainees have gone on hunger strike, rightfully claiming that they have the right to celebrate Labour Day and did not commit any violation of any law or regulation whatsoever. Also according to our information, the arrested people were later on transferred to a prison in Sanandaj, whereafter their families were asked for a bail of 200,000,000.00 Tomans (around 250,000 US\$). It seems that they are merely being prosecuted for their labour rights activism. Furthermore, as Salehi and Hakimi had met an ICFTU mission only two days before their arrest, and as this mission has been closely monitored by the Iranian security service, the ICFTU is particularly worried that their prosecution is directly related to their contacts with the ICFTU.

ICFTU information on the same incident on May 17: Seven Iranian workers, arrested during peaceful celebrations in the city of Saqez' to mark May Day, have been released. Subjected to physical harassment during arrest, the 7 detainees were held without charge for 12 days in Sanandaj and Saqez'. Names of the three other workers who had also been arrested were Borhan Divangar, Hadi Tanomand and Esmail Khodgam. The workers' families were also subjected to physical intimidation.

May 3

Iran, UN agency open dispute settlement committee for Afghan refugees. (IRNA)

The United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and the Interior Ministry's Bureau for the Alien and Foreign Immigrants Affairs (BAFIA) opened Tehran's Dispute

Settlement Committee for Afghan refugees. The Committee is one of seven openings throughout Iran this month, the other six are in Mashhad, Zahedan, Kerman, Isfahan, Qom and Shiraz. The goal of the committee is to help Afghan refugees who wish to repatriate resolve legal issues such as problems with landlords and employers before they can leave Iran. Often such issues can delay the return of Afghans to their country considerably. Each committee is comprised of a judge, a BAFIA delegate, an Afghan community representative and a UNHCR legal person, who will meet once a week to review the cases brought to their attention. The Dispute Settlement Committees will offer their services free of charge, and will deal with civil cases only (not criminal cases). The emphasis of the work will be on reaching amicable solutions through mediation to disputes such as rental agreements, or back-payment of salaries. Often, Afghan refugees are worried about approaching the Iranian court system, with which they are not familiar. The committees will aim to solve the disputes in a manner that is sensitive to the values of Afghan culture, and will be especially helpful for vulnerable Afghans, such as women and the elderly, who often have very little money and no access to the court system.

Iran court reissues death sentence on Aghajari. (Reuters)

An Iranian court has re-imposed a death sentence on a history lecturer for blasphemy - a verdict that sparked mass student protests when first announced in 2002. Zekrollah Ahmadi, judiciary chief in the western Hamadan province, said the judge had confirmed his original ruling against Hashem Aghajari after a review of the case ordered by the Supreme Court. Ahmadi said Aghajari's case had been sent back to the Supreme Court for a final verdict. Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei ordered a review of the case in early 2003 after students staged almost daily rallies calling for Aghajari to be freed.

Leader of Iranian reformist party re-elected for another two-year term. (IRNA)

Mohammad Salamati was re-elected secretary-general of the Islamic Revolution's Mojahedin Organization (IRMO). Members of the central council of the organization voted Salamati to another two-year term. He has been serving in this capacity since 1991.

May 4

Iranian parliament passes new law banning torture, guaranteeing rights. (AFP)

Iran's outgoing pro-reform parliament passed a law banning torture and guaranteeing the rights of citizens. The parliament agreed in an emergency debate to write into the law-books a range of directives that had been sent last week to branches of the justice department, to police and security forces. Iran's constitution already bans the use of torture. But many detainees complain of mistreatment, bullying or secret detentions, which are regularly denounced by human rights organisations.

Reuters report on the same development on May 5: A bill to ban torture in Iran passed into law after getting the green light from the Guardian Council that has previously vetoed reformist attempts to end torture. "The bill on respecting citizens' rights was compared with Islamic law and constitution and it was not deemed contradictory," Guardian Council spokesman Ebrahim Azizi said.

Iranian Majlis accepts resignation of another reformist MP. (IRNA)

The Islamic Consultative Assembly (Majlis) accepted the resignation of Kerman MP and a member of Budget and Planning Commission Hoseyn Mar'ashi. Mar'ashi

presented his resignation to the Sixth Majlis following a request by President Mohammad Khatami to appoint him as head of the newly-established Organization of Cultural Heritage and Tourism. Majlis has already accepted resignations of Tehran MPs Fatemeh Haqiqatju, Mohsen Armin and Behzad Nabavi as well as Urumiye MP Mir Mahmud Yeganli who handed down their resignation to Majlis Speaker Mehdi Karroubi on February 1 in protest at the mass disqualification of nominees wishing to stand in the 7th Majlis election. Isfahan MP and member of Majlis Presiding Board Naser Khaleqi had also presented his resignation to the Sixth Majlis to undertake the position of Minister of Labour and Social Affairs.

May 5

Iran ayatollah calls for ban on film mocking clergy. (Reuters)

One of Iran's most powerful ayatollahs wants a ban slapped on a box-office hit film that satirises the Islamic state's ruling clergy. The film "The Lizard", which follows the fortunes of a thief who escapes prison by donning the turban and robes of a Muslim cleric, has been playing to packed houses in Iran. Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati - head of the Guardian Council, an unelected constitutional watchdog with sweeping powers - said the film was a "bad influence and should be banned". The film's release was delayed by more than a month as censors debated whether it should be banned. Eventually it was given the green light after four scenes totalling one minute were cut. Cinemas have sold out performances days in advance and been forced to schedule extra late-night screenings to cope with the huge demand. Many moderate clerics have praised the film, pointing to the protagonist's gradual moral transformation as he leaves behind his life of crime and finds God.

Azeri newspaper suspended. (Reporters Without Borders)

Azeri-language daily *Nedai Azarabadegan* was suspended for two months by a Tabriz court and ordered to pay a three million-rials fine (about 3,000 euros). Its editor Abolfazle Vésali, said that several bodies had made complaints against the newspaper but that he believed "it had only done its job in providing news".

May 6

Weekly banned. (Reporters Without Borders)

The weekly *Gorgan é Emrouz* was banned. Its editor Mostafa Sabti, has been imprisoned since 19 March on the orders of the first branch of Gorgan Court in northern Iran. Sentenced on 1 September 2003 to three months in prison and four months suspended, Sabti had been on temporary release since then. He had published an open letter from residents of a neighbourhood in Gorgan protesting at the taking over of a park by the local authorities. The courts, implicated in the case, laid a complaint for defamation.

May 7

"Supreme Leader"s website inaugurated. (Iranian Mehr news agency)

The website of the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamene'i, was inaugurated. The website, which is affiliated to the Office for the Preservation and Publication of the Works of Grand Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamene'i, was inaugurated on the occasion of the birth anniversaries of the Prophet Muhammad

and Imam Ja'far Sadiq, which are commemorated with Islamic Unity Week. The site, which currently has Persian, English, and Arabic language sections, covers a broad range of subjects including news, lectures, visits, meetings, messages, letters, religious questions and rulings, works, books, memoirs, and anecdotes and also contains audio-visual materials. It can be accessed at www.khamenei.ir.

Iran: Extremist group in Mashhad says it will operate despite ban. (Iranian Labour News Agency / ILNA)

Hamid Ostad, an active member of the Hezbollah tendency in Mashhad, has reacted to the news that his activities and those of his group have been banned and the group's publication, *Nabard-e Mellat* [Nation's Battle], has been closed by the Office of the Governor-General of Khorasan Province. He said they were going to continue with their activities despite reformist efforts. The governor-general of Khorasan banned the activities of this group and prevented the publication of *Nabard-e Mellat*.

May 8

Publication of reformist Iranian daily *Nasim-e Saba* temporarily halted. (Iranian Students News Agency / ISNA)

Rasul Montajabnia, licence holder of *Nasim-e Saba* newspaper, has issued a statement, explaining why the paper has stopped appearing for a number of days. He stated that *Nasim-e Saba* newspaper was closed down on May 5, in order to bring about some managerial and structural changes

Speech by Iranian Speaker called off because of unrest. (Iranian newspaper *Mardom Salari*)

A speech by Hojjat ol Eslam Mehdi Karrubi has been cancelled due to clashes and unrest at the venue. This ceremony was supposed to take place in the Hejab Sports Hall of Tehran in the presence of families of martyrs. It was reported that the mixing up of the men and women sections and the resultant creation of a mixed sex atmosphere for the participants, and finally the failure by some of the ladies to observe fully the rule of Hejab were the factors responsible for the ensuing violence and physical clashes in the sports hall. The ceremony was sponsored and organized by the Islamic Association of Women, whose chair is currently held by Karrubi. Fatemeh Karrubi said that the clashes were planned by "the same bullies who act under the banner and guise of defending Islam and the Islamic Revolution."

May 9

Screening of controversial film halted in Iranian cities. (IRNA)

The screening of the controversial movie, the *Lizard*, produced by Manuchehr Mohammadi and directed by Kamal Tabrizi, has been banned in the capital cities of West Azarbayjan and Gilan Provinces, Orumiyeh and Rasht. The reels of the film were confiscated in accordance with a ruling issued by Bench 1 of Orumiyeh Islamic Revolution Court. A judicial official in West Azarbayjan Province Justice Department said that the plaintiffs opposing the screening of *Lizard* included Ansar Hezbollah, representative of Vali-ye Faqih [Supreme Jurisconsult, Khamene'i] in the province, Orumiyeh Friday prayer leader and his substitute. In accordance to the ruling, the film was banned from going on screen in the cinemas of Orumiyeh as well as the towns and townships around it until further notice.

The deputy head of Gilan Province Culture and Islamic Guidance Department, Mohammad Hasan Hasanpur, confirmed that Lizard was banned by a group known as "Protectors of Islamic Realm and Clergies" who gathered in front of provincial Culture Department. Members of the group prevented the screening of the film in all the cinemas in the city of Rasht. However, reportedly no ruling has been issued by any judicial authority in Gilan Province to the effect. Despite the ban of Lizard's screening in Rasht, the public has access to it on CDs across the province.

May 10

Majlis grants equal inheritance rights to women. (AFP)

Iran's outgoing reformist parliament passed a bill handing women in the Islamic Republic the same inheritance rights as men [subject to approval by the conservative Guardian Council]. Under the new legislation, the woman would inherit the whole of her dead husband's estate in the absence of other entitled inheritors. Currently, such a widow receives only half of the estate with the rest going to the state. If the couple have children, she receives one eighth, whereas a widowed husband with children is entitled to a quarter of her estate. In the event that the wife dies, her husband has the right to the whole of her estate. If there are other entitled inheritors, the calculation for the woman would not only be based on immovable assets such as buildings, as is the case at present, but land holdings as well.

Iran, Ukraine sign agreement on extradition of "criminals". (IRNA)

Iran and Ukraine signed three agreements on extradition of criminals, exchange and transfer of convicts as well as judicial cooperation in other areas.

May 11

Tehran students protest against lecturer's death sentence. (ISNA)

A protest gathering against the death sentence on Dr Hashem Aghajari was held at the Chamran Hall by the Islamic Students Union of the University of Tehran and the Medical Sciences University of Tehran.

Ensafali's prison sentence confirmed. (Reporters Without Borders)

The Tabriz appeal court confirmed an 18-month prison sentence against journalist Ensafali Hedayat. Imprisoned since 16 January 2004, Hedayat has been physically weakened by health problems. He has recently started a hunger strike.

May 12

Demonstration in Khorramabad in favour of losing candidate. (Iranian Fars News Agency)

About 500 of the inhabitants of the town of Khorramabad congregated outside the Guardian Council building in protest against the way the second round of the elections was held in the town. Farhad Nazari, who was the Tehran police chief at the time of the raid on a Tehran University dormitory in July 1999, lost the second round of the election.

Dozens of Internet 'companies' closed by prosecutor general. (Iranian newspaper *Etemaad*)

In addition to the 50 companies that have been closed down, 225 more companies whose names are on the prosecutor general's list await being closed down. These companies include sales agents of foreign companies, Internet cafes, and providers of satellite services to Internet service companies. Secretary of the Trade Association of Internet Network Employers [ISPs Trade Association] said: "Many companies that had no violations were closed down during the past two days. These companies have suffered great losses from these actions."

May 13

Iranian police foil attacks in Tehran, 55 arrested on "political" charges. (Iranian newspaper *Iran* and Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty *Iran Report*)

The Tehran public prosecutor's office stated that it arrested 55 people in the month preceding 19 April for alleged "political and security actions against the system. A man was arrested because the contents of a magazine he published allegedly rejected Islamic teachings, discussed contacts with ghosts, and insulted the Koran, according to "Iran." Two other people were arrested for "embezzlement and deceit" pertaining to their alleged use of forged papers identifying them as agents of the Intelligence Ministry and of the office of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Judicial authorities also arrested six individuals in Tehran and the northwestern cities of Khoy and Orumieh over the month on charges of fomenting ethnic discord and promoting separatism, as well as members of a group allegedly planning to bomb parts of Tehran.

May 14

Tehran cinemas yield to pressures on controversial film. (Reuters)

Several cinemas in Tehran have stopped screening a hit movie allegedly mocking Iran's clerics. Seven out of 28 cinemas in the capital stopped screening "The Lizard", which follows the fortunes of a thief who escapes prison by donning the turban and robes of a Muslim cleric. The film has been playing to packed houses but has fallen foul of Friday prayer leaders. Worshippers in the cities of Hamedan and Shiraz on Friday heard sermons condemning the film. Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati - head of the Guardian Council, recently said the film was a "bad influence and should be banned". The film has already been banned in major Iranian cities such as Mashhad, Rasht and the seminary centre of Qom.

May 16

Ten university students released on bail. (ISNA)

Ten members of the Islamic Association of Sistan have been released on a two million toman bail. On the basis of a summons which they had received they went to branch six of the Revolution Court in the morning. They were briefed on the accusations against us and a detention order was issued. They were released after the intervention of the university vice chancellor for student affairs and the payment of the required bail. He said they had been accused of insulting officials, causing riot at university, acting against internal security and agitating public opinion.

May 18

Iranian parliament passes maximum punishment for human trafficking. (IRNA)

The parliament passed legislation to fight human trafficking with maximum punishment for those found guilty. The legislation clarified human trafficking as importing or exporting human being for financial purposes or marriage, slavery, selling organs of the victims or forcing them to prostitution. Any organized group involved in trafficking human being, sheltering them, hiding them for prostitution or any other purposes even with consent of the victims will be held responsible for human trafficking and those involved are subject to maximum punishment. Note one of the legislation said that those found guilty of human trafficking of people aged below 18 and any abuse would bring capital punishment, otherwise, they would be subject to the second degree maximum punishment. Any complicity in human trafficking will bring two years to five years prison term. Any attempt (proved) to get involved in human trafficking will bring at least six months to two year prison term even though the subject fails to perform the wrongdoing for any reasons. Iranian nationals abroad are accountable to the legislation if they are involved in such crime.

May 19

Two journalists freed on bail in Zanjan. (Reporters Without Borders)

The court in Zanjan decided to release the two journalists with the weekly *Seday e Zanjan*, Massiolah Soltani (the editor) and Massoud Almassi, who had been arrested on 13 and 15 May respectively. The court said they could be freed pending "preparation of their cases" and set bail of 35 million tomans for Soltani and 10 million tomans for Almassi.

May 24

Iran's "Supreme Leader" pardons a group of military prisoners. (IRNA)

Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei has granted pardon or commuted the sentences of 296 military prisoners. The Supreme Leader issued the decree on the occasion of the anniversary of the liberation of the southwestern port city of Khorramshahr from Iraqi occupation on May 23, 1982. The pardon was made at the request of Judiciary Chief Ayatollah Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi.

Police detain 20 protesters outside British embassy in Tehran. (IRNA)

Police detained 20 students who had gathered outside the British Embassy for the fifth consecutive day to protest the ongoing violence in Iraq under US leadership. The street across the main gate of the British embassy's compound has been the scene of clashes between police and demonstrators who set effigies of the US and British leaders on fire. The protests are held against a backdrop of clashes and bloodletting in several holy Shi'i cities and further revelations of a prisoner abuse scandal in Iraq.

May 25

Students begin sit-in outside Swiss embassy in Tehran. (ISNA)

The sit-in by members of the Office for the Consolidation of Unity, Shiraz Wing, in protest against and condemnation of the desecration of Shi'a holy sites and sacred places in Iraq began outside the Swiss embassy in Tehran. [The Swiss embassy also acts on behalf of the US in the absence of a US embassy in Tehran.]

May 26

Officials summoned in Iran for elections-related remarks. (IRNA)

It was reported that Morteza Moballegh, deputy interior minister for political affairs and head of the State Elections HQ, and 18 governors have been summoned to the Prosecutor's Office for Offences Committed by Government Employees. The reason for the summoning of the Interior Ministry officials was reportedly their comments and speeches in the course of their legal duties during the seventh Majlis elections.

Convict's hand amputated in Khuzestan. (Turkish Anatolian News Agency)

A person who was convicted of robbery on 90 accounts was amputated publicly on Qudus Boulevard in Andimeshk city of Khuzestan.

May 28

Montazeri spokesman arrested in Iran. (ILNA)

Ahmad Montazeri [son of dissident Ayatollah Hoseyn Ali Montazeri] said that Mojtaba Lotfi, the person in charge of news dissemination at Ayatollah Montazeri's office, has been arrested by the Special Clerical Court. Lotfi was arrested on May 26, in a street in Qom. Montazeri said he was not aware of the charges levelled against Lotfi.

May 31

Iran gets first female mayor. (AFP)

The Iranian city of Saveh has elected the first female mayor in the 25-year history of the Islamic Republic. The new mayor, Mehri Roustaie Gherailou, was a former member of the desert city's municipal council and has been described as being "experienced in public management."

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Revised September 2004*