

## **Chronology of Events in Iran, March 2004\***

### **March 2**

#### **Shi'i-Sunni clashes reported in Khorasan. (Iranian Mehr news agency)**

The spokesman of the Interior Ministry, referring to the incidents and unrest in Khaf on March 1 night and March 2 morning, has stressed that the situation is calm in Khaf. Jahanbakhsh Khanjanisaid that the street clashes in Khaf have currently ended and the situation is calm in the town. He said: "Yesterday evening, an accident between a small van belonging to groups of mourners for Imam Husayn, the third Shi'i Imam, and two motorcyclists who were Sunnis led to clashes between the two sides. Then, a group of Sunnis congregated on the route of the Shi'i mourners and clashed with them. Special law enforcement units in various parts of Khaf now have the situation under control and, in some streets, bits of rocks and burnt tyres have been left behind from the past hours' clashes. In the course of the clashes, several government buildings and vehicles were also attacked by the rioters.

#### **Murderer hanged in public in Iran. (Agence France Presse / AFP)**

An Iranian man found guilty of murder and armed robbery has been hanged publicly in a square in the town of Morand. The executed man, only identified as Kamal Jabarpour, was also given 74 lashes before being hanged.

### **March 3**

#### **Director of reformist daily sentenced to a fine in lieu of jail. (Iranian Students News Agency / ISNA)**

The sentence against the managing director of *Nasim-e Saba* newspaper was conveyed to him. Majid Qasemi-Feyzabadi was accused of insult and slander against the judiciary and the publication of falsehoods with the aim of causing public anxiety by publishing the letter from the Mojahedin of the Islamic Revolution Organization about Seyyed Hashem Aghajari. After his trial, judge Eslami, presiding over Bench 1083 of Tehran's General Court, sentenced him to a fine in lieu of a jail term. The managing director of *Nasim-e Saba* newspaper has to pay a fine of 300,000 tomans [about 350 dollars] in lieu of a jail term. An appeal can be lodged against the sentence within 20 days of it having been conveyed to the defendant.

#### **Former student activists summoned to court. (Iranian Labour News Agency / ILNA)**

Two former members of the Central Council of the Islamic Association of Students at the Khajeh-Nasir University have been summoned to court. Rouzbeh Shafi'i said that

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\* *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*

Hadi Amiri and he had been summoned to Branch 8 of the Revolution Court but the summons did not spell out the allegations.

### **March 5**

#### **Three students of Teacher Training University released. (ILNA)**

Members of the Islamic Society of Tehran's Teacher Training University, who had been detained earlier, have been released. Mehdi Tajik, the official in charge of security at Teacher Training University, referred to the few-hour detention of three members of the Islamic Society of the said university after a ceremony to mark the anniversary of the death of former prime minister Dr Mohammad Mosaddeq, and said that the student detainees had no idea about the body which detained them. During the few hours in which they were in detention, they were reportedly asked why they played music on the martyrdom anniversary of Imam Sajjad.

### **March 8**

#### **Vigilantes stop Iran women's demonstration in Tehran (British Broadcasting Corporation / BBC)**

A gathering to celebrate International Women's Day in Tehran turned ugly as militia groups broke up what had started as a peaceful demonstration. Members of the Basij volunteer group beat people with batons and pushed several men and women to the ground. The authorities had tried to cancel the demonstration, withdrawing permission just hours before it was due to begin. Shouting slogans and singing freedom songs, several hundred women defied the ban and gathered in Laleh Park. Dozens of police stood by, refusing to let the crowd congregate and ordering them to go home. After the organisers left, members of volunteer militia groups, the Basijis, arrived, some on motorbikes, others brandishing batons. They tried to intimidate the crowd of men and women who remained behind. There are reports that several people were arrested.

### **March 9**

#### **Iran says it foiled attack on Shiite shrine. (AP)**

Iran said that it foiled a terrorist attack on a Shiite shrine on March 2. The Information Ministry said in a statement that a mortar launcher was found on a farm just outside the holy city of Qom on March 2. No shells were found nearby. The statement said unidentified persons had planned to attack the shrine of Hazrat-e Masumeh in Qom. It gave no details on how it had stopped the attack, and said the matter was under investigation.

### **March 10**

#### **Iran courts summon at least 10 reformist deputies. (Reuters)**

Iran's judiciary has summoned at least 10 reformist lawmakers in the first week of March. The court summons, to face charges such as propaganda against the state and spreading lies, follow February crushing conservative victory in a parliamentary election reformists said was rigged.

#### **Iran to strip Afghans of refugee status, promises new curbs. (AFP)**

Iran's government has promised to impose tough new restrictions on nearly 1.5 million Afghans living in the Islamic republic, the latest move aimed at accelerating

their repatriation. "Afghans will only be considered as refugees until the end of the next Iranian year (on March 20, 2005), and in the coming months they will face more restrictions," the Interior Ministry's head of immigrant affairs said. Ahmad Hosseini said that since the "voluntary return" of some 706,000 Afghans since the fall of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan in November 2001, 1.46 million were still in Iran. "The employment of Afghans will be banned unless there is specific authorisation, and in case of violations the employer and employee will be punished," he said. In addition, Afghans will need to show a residency permit to enroll their children in Iranian schools and will need to pay for state education here. Afghans will also be barred from enrolling in Iranian universities and will need special permits to rent any property. "Certain regions will also be off limits to Afghans," who will also be banned from opening a bank account in the Islamic Republic, Hosseini said.

**Some striking teachers in Tehran Province return to class. (ILNA)**

All the teachers of Nazarabad, a region in the town of Savojbolagh, and more than half of those in Shahr-e Ray and Qarchak have returned to classes after signing a resolution in which the Education Department is to meet their demands.

**March 11**

**Eight police officers injured during unrest in Kurdish town. (Iranian newspaper *Jomhuri-ye Eslami*)**

Reports from Piranshahr, Kordestan Province, indicate that during disturbances and unrest in this border town on March 9, eight law-enforcement officers were injured. During the riots, doors and windows were smashed at the following buildings: The Law-Enforcement Headquarters, the Traffic Police Department, the National Bank, the Lord of the Era Mosque and the regional Basij Headquarters. The rioters also damaged several vehicles. The police arrested 120 people during the disturbances and handed them over to the judicial authorities. The disturbances in Piranshahr followed the signing of Iraq's interim constitution, in which the Americans grant self-rule to the Iraqi Kurds. Other sporadic disturbances have been reported in Kurdish town of Marivan, where young boys started riots.

**ILNA report of the same news on March 13:** The governor of Piranshahr in Kordestan Province, Mohammad Ali Partovi, said that a group of young Iranians began celebrating in the town of Piranshahr following the approval of the Iraqi constitution and providing self-rule to Kurdish areas of that country. He said that unrest in Piranshahr was not so extensive and only a limited number of people threw stones at the Law Enforcement Force and the police station which resulted in windows of the police station being smashed. He reported that during the unrest around 15 people were arrested, but nine of them were released as they were under 18 years old and six others are still in detention. Partovi said the clashes were more severe in the towns of Mahabad and Bukan-Bala.

**March 13**

**Election results changed in some constituencies. (Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty RFE / RL Iran Report)**

The Guardians Council announced that it has changed the election results in the Babolsar, Darab, Zanjan, and Tarom constituencies. In Babolsar all the ballots in three

boxes were cancelled because the votes were solicited through "threats and coercion," and the ballots in two other boxes were cancelled because the seals on the boxes were tampered with. Ballots in two boxes in Darab were cancelled because the votes were solicited through "threats and coercion." After a recount of votes in Tarom and Zanjan the overall results were altered, leading to a new winner and two people going to the second round. The Guardians Council also overturned election results in the constituencies of Iranshahr and Sarbaz. Guardians Council Secretary Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati said in a letter to Interior Minister Hojatoleslam Abdolvahed Musavi-Lari that the decision is the result of research that discovered "rampant" vote buying and intimidation. Tehran Governor Ali-Awsat Hashemi said on 7 March that Ali Abbaspur-Tehrani has been added to the list of candidates who won in the first round of voting in the capital, according to the Interior Ministry website (<http://www.moi.ir>). Tehran is represented by 30 parliamentarians, and eight candidates will vie for four as-yet-unfilled seats in an upcoming second round of voting.

#### **Thousands of satellite dishes confiscated in Tehran. (AFP)**

Some 40,000 satellite dishes were recently confiscated by Iranian security forces in four factories secretly manufacturing satellite equipment in eastern Tehran. The factory owners were arrested and their cases turned over to the public prosecutor's office. Official estimates show that about three million households have access to satellite television, while security forces have in recent years only managed to seize 70,000 sets.

#### **March 14**

#### **Majlis accepts resignation of pro-reform deputies. (IRNA)**

The Islamic Consultative Assembly (Majlis) accepted the resignation of Tehran MP Mohsen Armin. Armin's resignation was accepted by a vote of 103 in favour and 49 against with 7 abstentions from a total of 194 votes cast. Other resignations accepted by the Majlis are those of Tehran MP Fatemeh Haqiqatju and Orumiye MP Mir Mahmud Yeganli. One hundred eight MPs tendered their resignations to Majlis Speaker Mehdi Karrubi on 1 February in protest at the mass disqualification of candidates wanting to stand in the 7th Majlis election.

#### **March 15**

#### **PMOI families ask UN to assist their children return home. (Islamic Republic News Agency / IRNA)**

Some family members of the sympathisers of the Mujahedin Khalq Organization of Iran (PMOI) asked the UN and the International Red Cross Committee (IRCC) to assist their children to return home. During the meeting organized by Esfahan Province Relief Committee, four of the former PMOI sympathisers, made speeches. Relief Committee is an NGO, comprised of the family members of those whose children have turned their backs to the PMOI. This committee has had two other sessions, the first one in March 2003, and the second one February 2004.

#### **Khamene'i opposes labour strikes, says it "weakens" state. (ILNA)**

Responding to inquiries about workers' right to strike, the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamene'i said that "any action which weakens the sacred Islamic Republican

state is not permissible. They can go through legal channels and report on the matter to senior officials in order to obtain their rights.”

**Dozens injured in Iran election result dispute in Fereydunkenar. (Reuters)**

Three days of unrest sparked by the revision of results in February's parliamentary elections have left dozens of people injured in a town on Iran's Caspian coast. It was reported that 68 people had been hurt, six seriously, during clashes with police. Protests began in the town of Fereydunkenar on March 12 after the hardline Guardian Council, an oversight body with sweeping powers, annulled the votes cast in three ballot boxes, handing victory to the incumbent conservative member of parliament. Protesters set fire to cars and attacked buildings including the home of the town's Friday Prayer leader. Anti-riot police fired plastic bullets to disperse the protesters.

**March 16**

**Iranians hold fire festival freely for first time. (Reuters)**

Iranians danced in the street, threw firecrackers and jumped over bonfires as authorities openly tolerated an ancient fire festival for the first time in 25 years. Halted each year since the 1979 Islamic revolution because hardliners considered it un-Islamic, the Chaharshanbeh Suri, or Red Wednesday, festival was officially recognised in Tehran where the city council set aside dozens of parks for people to enjoy the boisterous celebrations. The festival dates back centuries to pre-Islamic times and is thought to be derived from Zoroastrian traditions which accord special properties to fire. "The superstitious ceremony of Chaharshanbeh Suri is incompatible with the dignity and understanding of the Muslim Iranian nation," Grand Ayatollah Lotfollah Safi Golpaygani said in a statement this week. "Muslims should remain vigilant and...understand the enemy's goal in reviving this dead and obsolete tradition." The evening festivities are also an opportunity for young Iranians to meet and flirt in a country where mixing in public between unrelated members of the opposite sex is outlawed. In one street in western Tehran youngsters danced by blazing bonfires as loud music blared from houses and passing cars.

**March 17**

**Northern town of Fereydunkenar reportedly calm after election unrest. (ILNA)**

Saying that the situation in Fereydunkenar is calm, the governor-general of Mazandaran Province added that no accurate details were yet announced about the people who were injured during the unrest in the town. The governor-general of Mazandaran reported that the protesters had broken the windows of certain buildings and set fire to a car belonging to an interest-free fund organization. He said that buildings belonging to the women's Basij, the Guards Corps and the Law Enforcement Force of the city were damaged during the events of the past few days. Regarding the smashing of the windows of the house of the Friday prayer imam of Fereydunkenar by the protesters, he said: It seems that they believed he had said, in one of his Friday sermons, that he agreed that their rights had been infringed. Five ballot boxes had been announced void by the Guardian Council. He said that the elections in the constituency of Fereydunkenar had gone to the second round, and according to the decision of the Guardian Council, Hojjatollah Rowhi was not the representative of the people of the region.

## March 18

### **District residents hold protest, call for confirmation of election result. (ISNA)**

Some residents of the Badrud district of the Natanz and Qamsar constituency staged a peaceful sit-in outside the office of their local Friday prayers leader and called for the confirmation of the district's election result. The sit-in ended peacefully with the reading of a resolution about the local people's adherence to the Constitution and a call on the Guardian Council to make sure that the people's rights are not undermined.

## March 22

### **Arzhang Davoodi remains in prison despite the paying of bail. (Amnesty International)\***

Arzhang Davoodi remains in prison, although his family have paid bail, and is reportedly suffering from severe health problems as a result of torture and ill-treatment, for which he is being denied necessary medical treatment. Arzhang Davoodi's family recently paid bail of 50 million Tomans (US\$59,380, at the official rate) in the form of property deeds (the normal practice in Iran), as requested by the Iranian authorities, to secure his release. However, the authorities have reportedly refused to release him on the grounds that his file is "not complete". According to an 18 March report on the Iranian internet news site *Peyk-e Iran*, Arzhang Davoodi was severely tortured and kept in solitary confinement for 100 days while he was held in Band 325, a detention facility run by the Revolutionary Guard. The authorities have allegedly provided him with no treatment whatsoever. On 17 March Arzhang Davoodi was transferred from Salon 1 of Evin prison, where he had been detained since his transfer from Band 325 in early March, to Salon 8 of Evin prison. Salon 8 is a section of the prison used for people detained for financial offences, and has no medical facilities. It is allegedly extremely dusty, which has caused Arzhang to suffer from asthma symptoms. According to his family, prison officials will not grant him leave to obtain the medical treatment he requires. Arzhang Davoodi has been allowed to make phone calls to his lawyer, and has been able to meet with him on one occasion. However, his lawyer has not been able to have a copy of the file on his client. Arzhang Davoodi was arrested between August and October 2003. He had assisted in the making of a television documentary about Iran, filmed secretly and illegally, which was widely broadcast in northern Europe in December 2003, and in North America in January 2004. He was interviewed in the documentary, and spoke about political prisoners, and the death in custody of Canadian-Iranian photojournalist Zahra Kazemi.

## March 23

### **Majlis deputy forbidden to leave country. (ISNA)**

Former reformist Majlis deputy Fatimeh Haqiqatju, who resigned from Majlis in February, said that she has been banned from leaving the country when she was planning to visit

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

### **Ensafali Hedayat's temporary detention extended. (Amnesty International)\***

Ensafali Hedayat's temporary detention has been extended until 6 April. The detention order was extended on 18 March, two days before it was due to expire. On 10 March he started to suffer from intestinal bleeding, and for four days he allegedly did not receive medical attention. On 14 March he was taken to a medical facility at Tabriz prison. His lawyer was able to meet with him on or around 15 March, and his condition is said to be improving. It is not known whether he is still in the medical facility. Freelance journalist Ensafali Hedayat was arrested on 17 January, shortly after he returned from a conference in Berlin held between 8 and 10 January, organised by the Ettihad-e Jomhuri Khahan-e Iran (known in English as 'Unity for Democracy and Secular Republic in Iran'). The organisation supports the principles of a pluralistic republic, parliamentary democracy, the separation of religion and state. He reportedly faces charges relating to national security in connection with his participation in this conference and with a visit to Turkey in 2003, and defamation charges relating to an article he wrote which appeared on a website.

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