

Chronology of Events in Iran, January 2002*

January 1

Political prisoners' families congregate outside Justice Department. (Islamic Republic News Agency/ IRNA)

A number of the families of the prisoners known as the National-Religious Alliance (Farsi: Melli-Mezhebi) dispersed after congregating for several hours outside the building of Tehran Province's Justice Department. The demonstrators were protesting against what they described as the "judiciary's illegal conduct". The protesters, most of whom were women, wanted to see the head of Tehran Province's Justice Department, demanding the prisoners' situation to be clarified. The Bastenegar, Qahhari, Alijani and Rahmani families took part in the gathering. The protesters did not manage to see the head of Tehran Province's Justice Department and dispersed after a few hours.

January 7

Several MPs to stage walk out in protest at colleague's imprisonment. (IRNA)

MP from Nahavand, Mohammad Reza Hoseyni said that about 20 MPs from western provinces are to stage a walk out. He told reporters that the aim is to protest the absence of the jailed MP from Hamedan Hoseyn Loqmanian and 'his inability to vote on various bills in the parliament'. He said that several MPs from Kordestan, Hamedan, Khorramabad, Lorestan and Kermanshah will take part in the walk out. Spokesman for Majlis Presiding Board Ahmad Burqani expressed ignorance when asked about the likelihood of a walk out by MPs, adding: "They have said that they will release Loqmanian in the near future, but have not set a date". Meanwhile, Parliament Speaker Mehdi Karrubi recently took a sharp swipe at the Iranian judiciary for the prosecution of MPs, saying the practice could lead to "very grave" consequences.

January 8

Members of the Nationalist-Religious Alliance on trial. (BBC)

The trial of 15 Iranian dissidents accused of "plotting against the Islamic system" started in a closed session of Tehran Revolutionary Court. Most of the defendants were writers and university professors from the liberal Religious-Nationalist Alliance.

* *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*

They face charges of trying to provoke student unrest, having secret ties with foreigners and conspiring to overthrow the Islamic state. Defence lawyer Mohammad Ali Dadkhah said that he was barred from attending despite representing two of those accused. Defence lawyer Mohammad Ali Jedari-Forughi also resigned from the case.

January 15

Reformist MP pardoned after protests in Parliament against his conviction. (BBC)

The Iranian supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, pardoned a jailed member of parliament, Hossein Loghmanian, after the speaker and most deputies of Majlis staged a walkout. He was forced to make the decision after the speaker of the Iranian parliament, Mehdi Karroubi, walked out of the chamber on 13 January in protest over Mr Loghmanian's jail sentence for allegedly insulting the judiciary. Reformists were insisting that he was only performing his duties as a deputy and that his conviction was against his parliamentary immunity. Over the past two years, about 60 reformist MPs have been summoned to appear before the courts facing mainly political charges. During the confrontation between the Majlis and the judiciary in connection with this case, the head of the Council of Guardians had ruled that parliamentary immunity was not an Islamic concept.

January 18

Teachers protest low incomes. (Iranian TV)

A large group of school teachers rallied in downtown Tehran in protest of their low incomes. The protestors demanded higher pays and annual bonuses and removal of discrimination between the Education Ministry's employees. Congregating in front of Tehran University entrance, the teachers called on the Education Ministry to see to their problems. It was reported that the governor of Tehran said: "There were no clashes and no-one was arrested during the assembly of teachers at Hor Square". He said that the Interior Ministry had officially permitted the holding of the assembly. Those who participated in the assembly dispersed when the Law-Enforcement Force turned up and it was reported that no-one was arrested.

January 19

Publisher of provincial weekly summoned to court. (IRNA)

Publisher of the Persian-language weekly *Payam-e Qom* was summoned to the court to answer several complaints filed by the provincial state institutes. Hojjat Heydari said he had appeared at Branch 5 of Qom Public Court and had been informed of complaints filed by the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) and a provincial college. The IRGC has charged Hojjat with "insulting the values of the Islamic revolution" for printing a cartoon.

January 19

Dissident student leader arrested again. (Iranian daily *Norooz*)

The lawyer defending Heshmatollah Tabarzadi said that his client was arrested again. Mohammad Ali Safari stated that Tabarzadi was summoned to the Revolution Court twice in the previous week. He said: "We went there and he was even present there in the second session and he was interrogated". He said that he did not know why his client had been arrested again on 19 January and pointed out that his client was summoned by the court when he was arrested and detained. Safari pointed out: "Court officials believe that according to Article 128 of the penal procedure, which was approved recently, they have the right to prevent the lawyer from being present alongside his client when the client is political figure. They believe that the judge has the right to do so. It is noteworthy that over the last few years, Tabarzadi was arrested a number of times and he was released after a while. However, there have never been any clear statements about the reasons for his arrest".

January 20

Convicted murderer wins last minute reprieve. (IRNA)

An indicted murderer escaped death just before execution in the city of Lahijan, Gilan Province, after being pardoned by the victim's family. The local elderly convinced the victim's family to grant pardon to Farhad Chameh, 21, who was to be publicly hanged for murdering Jalil Mobarhan. According to the Islamic Shari'ah law, murder carries death penalty. A convicted murderer, however, can escape death if pardoned by the family of the victim.

Members of the Nationalist-Religious Alliance on trial, the government challenges the charges (BBC).

The trial against Ezatollah Sahabi (Freedom Movement) started in a closed revolutionary court in Tehran. Sahabi is a member of a loose liberal alliance whose 15 members are charged of "plotting to overthrow the Islamic regime". In connection with this prosecution, he has been held without trial for more than a year after a speech in which he told university students that a system based on political repression could not survive. It is reported that five of the accused are held in a secret Revolutionary Guard jail outside the regular prison system. The Intelligence Ministry, on the other hand, has said it has no evidence to support the charge that Sahabi and others were plotting to overthrow the regime.

Sahabi was already going through a lengthy trial process relating to his participation in a controversial conference in Berlin in 2000. He was initially given a four-and-a-half year-sentence for that, but it was eventually reduced to six months. In addition to Sahabi and his 14 colleagues, more than 30 associates of the Freedom Movement are on trial in a similar prosecution.

Khatami pardons teenagers convicted of distributing defamatory leaflets. (IRNA)

President Mohammad Khatami pardoned the distributors of leaflets considered to be defamatory in Bushehr, stressing that he "did not want anybody get into trouble for

insulting him". The teenagers, who are 18 and 19 years old, were arrested and sentenced to three months and one day imprisonment in Bushehr in July 2001. Once the appeals court confirmed the ruling, the governor general of Bushehr Province asked President Khatami to pardon them arguing that they had been incited into committing the offence and that they had expressed remorse for their action.

21 January

Corruption trial in Tehran may cause political confrontation. (BBC)

A young entrepreneur Shahram Jezayeri is accused, among other things, of bribing officials in order to facilitate his business operations. In court he said he had given a large sum of money to a reformist member of parliament who is the brother of Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Hadi Khamenei is a leading reformist deputy and newspaper editor, and he is also the brother - but no political ally - of the country's supreme leader. Before he was interrupted by the judge, Jezayeri named two other deputies, one reformist, one conservative, to whom he said he had given much smaller sums. Three of the other defendants are reported to be the sons of influential conservative clerics.

January 22

School teachers stage new demonstration in Tehran. (Agence France Presse/AFP)

Thousands of school teachers defied a police ban to stage a new demonstration in Tehran for better salaries and working conditions. As classes were cancelled all over the city, the protestors called on Tehran's 400,000 teachers to stage a mass walkout. "Justice for the teachers!" they shouted, warning of a shutdown of all schools and telling members of parliament that they earned more in a day than teachers did in a year. Police were present in force but did not intervene. The demonstration, which had also been advised against by the teachers' union, attracted more than 8,000 people, according to the organisers, and 2,000 according to the police. More protests are scheduled for the coming days.

Demonstrations have been staged both in Tehran and provincial cities since the beginning of December 2001. Teachers said 44 of their colleagues were arrested on December 31, 2001 during a march in Tehran, but police have denied it. Iran's two million teachers have an average monthly salary of between 130 and 190 dollars, but also have state assistance for housing.

BBC's report on the same news: Thousands of teachers participated in a big demonstration outside parliament in Teheran, demanding higher pay and better conditions. The protest passed off peacefully, though reporters trying to cover the event were detained by security men and had their films and tapes confiscated.

January 23

Teachers in Esfahan protest against low salaries. (Iranian newspaper *Siyasat-e Ruz*)

Following a demonstration by a group of teachers in front of the Majlis in Tehran on January 22, union of teachers held a protest march in front of Esfahan Province's Education Department and five districts in the morning. The demonstrators demanded that their salaries be raised to the same level as other employees. A group of students in Esfahan who intended to leave the school in support of their teachers, were confronted by the school officials. They, however, ignored the official's objections and joined the demonstrating teachers. The teachers guided the students into the education centre where they continued their peaceful protest. Similar developments had occurred in five different districts in Esfahan, which ended through action of police. However, a number of junior and senior high schools were only open for half day on January 23. Students headed for Esfahan's Education Department in groups of 20s and 30s.

After about three hours into the protest the head of the Education Department of Esfahan Province arrived among the protesters to declare his sympathy with them. In a short speech he stressed that the gathering was a union meeting and that his colleagues should not allow "certain opportunists to enter their ranks and portray the gathering to be a political meeting". Reportedly at about 12 o'clock some of protesters began to disperse calmly while others gathered around the head of the Education Department and his deputies to discuss their problems. The Hasht Behesht Street, which had been closed, was then opened to traffic.

January 24

Two journalists arrested. (Iranian website *Iranmania.com*)

In a letter addressed to the head of the magistracy, Ayatollah Sharoudi, Reporters Sans Frontières (RSF - Reporters Without Borders) protested against the arrest of Hechmatollah Tabarzadi, director of *Hoviat-e-Khich* and *Peyam-e-Daneshjou*, and Abbas Dalvand, director of the magazine *Lorestan*. "These imprisonment are a new evidence that the authorities will not put an end to arrests in 2002. Besides, we are concerned about the fate of nine journalists whose trial in camera is under course", declared Robert Ménard, General Secretary of the organisation. "We ask you to release Hechmatollah Tabarzadi and Abbas Dalvand as well as eighteen other journalists presently imprisoned in Iran", he added.

According to the information collected by RSF, Hechmatollah Tabarzadi, director of *Hoviat-e-Khich* and *Peyam-e-Daneshjou* (suspended), was arrested on 19 January in Teheran following orders of the court. This leader of the student movement was arrested after appearing on January 19 before the revolutionary court. Tabarzadi has already been arrested several times last three years. His last imprisonment dates back to 17 April 2001. He had been released on bail on 29 October without any trial.

On 6 January, Abbas Dalvand director of the magazine *Lorestan*, was arrested. He had already been detained for two days in February 2001. Charged with "defaming" and "issuing false articles", he was sentenced in 2001 to nine months in jail. The

journalist who appealed remained free. Besides, Reporters sans frontières is concerned about the fate of nine journalists whose trial in camera opened on January 8. Reza Alijani, Ezatollah Sahabi, Hoda Saber, Saide Madani (*Iran-e-Farda*), Taghi Rahmani (*Omid-e-Zangan*), Ali-Reza Redjaï, Mohammad Bastehnaghar (*Asr-e-Azadegan*), Reza Raïs-Toussi and Morteza Kazemian (*Fath*) are indicted for "subversives activities against the State" and "blasphemy", indictments liable to death sentence.

January 26

Police scuffles with women near Tehran UN office. (Iranian website Iranmania.com)*

The police and plainclothesmen dragged and shoved wives of a number of liberal dissidents away from the United Nations office in Tehran to prevent them from delivering a letter to the visiting UN Secretary General Kofi Annan. Eye-witnesses said the police pushed and shoved about 20 women away from the door, throwing a number of the women on the ground. A scuffle broke out between the women and the police as the women resisted arrest. It was not immediately clear how many women were arrested.

The women included Tahereh Taleqani, the wife of Mohammad Basteh-Negar, at whose home tens of religious-nationalists were detained in March 2001. Some of the religious nationalists were later released from prison but some of the most prominent members, Ezzatollah Sahabi and Habibollah Payman, are said to be in solitary confinement. The conservative-dominated courts have accused the religious-nationalists of attempting to overthrow the Islamic regime, a charge that religious-nationalists--who were active in the 1979 Islamic Revolution--have categorically denied. Kofi Annan arrived in Tehran for a two-day visit on January 25th.

Police clashes with demonstrating teachers. (IRNA)

Scattered confrontations broke out between police and a group of teachers who were holding an "illegal" protest gathering. Police asked the participants, mostly teachers who had grievances about their pay and living conditions, to disperse. However, the police used force against those who refused. "Our gatherings are not political, we just want better living and job conditions," participants in a protest gathering in front of the parliament building said.

January 27

Mayor of Tehran summoned to court as newspaper published. (Iranian newspaper Entekhab).

The managing director of *Hamshahri* newspaper has been summoned to Bench 1410 of Tehran's Public Court. Reportedly Morteza Alviri [who is also the mayor of Tehran] will be questioned by judge Sa'id Mortazavi on 2 February.

* Editor's note: This news has not been confirmed by any major information source.

New wave of restriction of the freedom of the press through the judiciary. (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty RFE/RL *Iran Report*)

Norooz daily publisher Mohsen Mirdamadi, who also is a parliamentarian, attended his fifth court hearing on 20 January. Mirdamadi faces charges such as libel, insulting officials, publishing lies, breaching election violations, and trying to incite the public. Iranian militia Bassij, state broadcasting, and the Election Supervisory Board brought the charges against him. On 19 January, MP Rasul Mehrpur was found guilty of publishing false statements tied to an interview that appeared in *Hambastegi* daily.

Judge Said Mortazavi, who is involved with all of the above cases, banned *Cinema-yi Jahan* weekly on 24 January. In a letter to Minister of Islamic Culture and Guidance Ahmad Masjid-Jamei, Mortazavi accused the weekly of publishing "lies aimed at instigating public opinion, pictures and material violating moral decency," and also "defamation and commercial use of female portraits intended to make the country's press environment insecure."

Guzarish-i Film monthly, whose managing editor is Karim Zargar, was shut down on 27 January.

On 8 January, the managing editor of *Neda-yi Maku*, a biweekly from northwestern Iran, was summoned to court. At that time, Editor Reza Monsaref said that he did not have exact information about the charges against him, but when he was freed from jail on 14 January after posting 5 million rials in bail, he knew that the provincial police department had accused him of lying.

In another case, *Hayat-i No* journalist Ahmad Qabel was arrested on 31 December 2001 on the orders of the Special Court for the Clergy. Qabel had just given an interview to RFE/RL's Persian Service in which he blamed Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei for the Judiciary's activities.

The Ministry of Intelligence and Security denies torture allegation. (RFE/RL *Iran Report*)

A 25-year-old seminarian from Qom named Seyyed Mohammad Nazemzadeh claimed that he was kidnapped and then subjected to physical and mental torture from 17-24 December. Nazemzadeh said that during this time he was forced to read out a statement in which he admitted being Ayatollah Hussein Ali Montazeri-Najafabadi's liaison with *Radio Kol Israel* and the BBC, and he also had to admit to receiving money from foreigners. Eventually, Nazemzadeh was released in Tehran.

The Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS) rejected this account on 27 January, saying that Nazemzadeh was in Mashhad from 18-23 December and that he stayed at the Khorasan Hotel on Adarzgu Street. He headed for Tehran on 23 December. Seyyed Asqar Nazemzadeh, the cleric's father, claimed on 27 January that his son was forced to confess that he was in Mashhad after he was detained from 24-25 January.

January 29

Police attack unpaid teachers and workers. (Iranian opposition website Iranian Press Service)*

Hundreds of people, most of them teachers, have been wounded, some of them seriously, and as many arrested, following violent clashes on January 29 that opposed heavily armed police and security forces in several Iranian cities with demonstrators protesting against poor pay and miserable working conditions, including imposed religious courses and segregation of schoolgirls from schoolboys in crammed village schools.

January 30

Missing student said to have been detained; to be put on trial. (Iranian daily *Norooz*)

Javad Rahimpur, a former member of the Islamic Association of Students of Allameh Tabataba'i University, had been detained by the Revolutionary Court. A member of the Association stated: "After Rahimpur went missing, we spoke about it to a few Majlis deputies. When they followed it up, they learnt that he has been detained by Bench 4 of the Revolutionary Court and he is to be put on trial for acting against national security".

Iran's Judiciary head orders lifting of ban on three movie journals. (IRNA)

The Iranian Ministry of Culture's deputy for movie affairs announced that the Chief of Judiciary, Mahmud Hashemi-Shahrudi, has issued orders for lifting of the ban on three cinematographic journals. The three film journals – "Cinema World," "Film Report" and "Cinema-Theatre" - were banned from publication on the eve of the inauguration of the 20th International Fajr Film Festival [see under January 27].

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* Editor's note: This news has not been confirmed by any major information source.