

Chronology of Events in Iran, February 2003*

February 1

Appeal court sentences local political leader to imprisonment. (Islamic Republic News Agency / IRNA).

An appeal court in Hamedan held a six-month sentence on the head of the Islamic Iran Participation Front (IIPF) in Hamedan Province, Hoseyn Mojahed, who had been initially sentenced to a 30-month imprisonment and 74 lashes on defamation and libel charges. The same court also rejected libel charges brought against the head of the Organization of the Mojahedin of the Islamic Revolution in Hamedan, Mojtaba Heydari, but slapped him with a five-million-rial cash fine for instigating public opinion. Mojahed was summoned to court and indicted 10 months ago after supporting outspoken university professor Hashem-Aghajari who is held in prison on blasphemy charges with a death sentence on his head.

February 2

Court sentenced pollsters Abdi, Qazian. (IRNA).

The court investigating a controversial opinion poll on Iran-US relations sentenced two pollsters held in connection with the case Abbas Abdi and Hoseyn Ali Qazian to jail terms. Abdi has been sentenced to seven years and Qazian to eight years behind the bars. Qazian and Abdi, both working at the Ayandeh Polling and Research Institute, were apprehended last year following an opinion poll they had directed which claimed that two-thirds of citizens in Tehran favoured resumption of talks with the US. The court added that to study the third clause of the indictment on charges of collecting and keeping confidential documents, the court is still waiting for concerned institutions to forward their reports and responses in that connection. The institutions include the Ministry of Information, the Presidential Office, the State Security Department, the Institute for Strategic Studies, and the Secretariat of the Supreme National Security Council. The court has accused the defendants of carrying out the research on the order of the Washington-based Gallup Organization. Other defendants in the case are a deputy from Tehran Ahmad Burqani, Ali Reza Alavitabar and Mehdi Abbasi-Rad, an editor who has been charged with illegal publication of the survey by IRNA.

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February 7

Journalist Baqi released after 33 months in prison. (IRNA).

Emadoddin Baqi, a university professor and prominent journalist, in jail since May 2000 on multiple charges including harming national security, was released from Evin Prison. He had been in jail for five and a half years for questioning Iran's use of capital punishment and inciting public opinion through propagating false news, but an appeal court later commuted his jail term to three years. Baqi said that the court had freed him after posting surety.

Ceremonial arches destroyed in Tehran. (Student Movement Coordination Committee for Democracy in Iran / SMCCDI).*

Several arches built by the authorities for the commemoration of the 24th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution have been destroyed by youth groups in resistance. Most of these attacks have been carried during the night time in the poorer suburbs of Tehran.

February 8

Government forces allegedly open fire and kill 17 prisoners in Dasjerd Prison in Esfahan Province. (Organisation of Iranian People's Fedaii Guerrillas web site Kar).*

Violence broke out between armed prison guards and prisoners in Dasjerd prison in Esfahan. The violence started when some of the prisoners who were returning from the prison's movie theater were searched repeatedly and humiliated by the guards. Treatment of prisoners caused anger and protest among some of the prisoners. The prison guards started attacking and beating up the prisoners. When the government's anti-riot police (i.e., Passdaran forces) started shooting at the prisoners, some prisoners moved towards the prison gates and finally managed to open the gates. 17 people were killed and about 300 hundred people managed to escape. Many were seriously wounded and later were transferred to the nearby hospitals.

February 10

Iranian Supreme Leader grants amnesty to a number of prisoners. (IRNA).

Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamene'i granted amnesty to a group of those convicted by the public, revolutionary and military courts. Iranian leader's order to grant amnesty to the convicted followed a request by the Head of the Judiciary Ayatollah Mahmud Hashemi-Shahrudi on the lofty occasion of the advent of the 24th anniversary of the victory of the Islamic Revolution. In response to a letter addressed to him by Shahrudi the supreme leader agreed with the commuting of the sentences of or giving amnesty to those who have not been involved in serious offences such as kidnapping, armed drug trafficking, rape, running the prostitution houses, corruption, arms smuggling and embezzlement. First of February marks the anniversary of the homecoming of the late Imam Khomeyni after

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15 years of exile. The day serves as the start of the annual "10-Day Dawn" (1-11 February) events marking the triumph of the Islamic Revolution on 22 Bahman (11 February) 1979.

February 11

Authorities in Iran arrest two abortion practitioners. (WMRC Daily Analysis).

Two abortion practitioners were arrested in Iran. The arrests follow revelations by Iran's deputy Health Minister, Hossein Malek Afzali, that some 80,000 abortions take place in Iran every year, most of them illegal. This figure represents around 9% of the number of births expected annually in the Islamic Republic, raising considerable alarm in a highly conservative society where abortion is illegal except in rare cases. It is women in their early twenties who are resorting to illegal abortions and that there has been a considerable rise in pre-marital sex.

Iranian crackdown on Valentine's Day celebrations. (AP).

Iranian police have launched a massive crackdown on Valentine's Day celebrations, ordering shops to remove heart-themed decorations from their windows and confiscating Valentine's cards. The crackdown was launched by plainclothes police after Valentines inundated shopping malls in wealthy north Tehran and young people began to show great interest in marking the day. Shopkeepers were told to go to the Vice and Virtue police headquarters in Tehran, apparently to pledge that they will not sell products promoting Western values.

February 14

Iran lifts death sentence on Aghajari. (AP).

Supreme Court has lifted the death sentence ordered in the case of a university professor, Hashem Aghajari. He had been condemned to death for insulting Islam and questioning clerical rule during a speech in June. "The death sentence against Aghajari has been revoked by a majority of votes by the review judges. Three out of four of the judges voted to revoke the sentence," said Ayatollah Mohammad Sajjadi, one of the judges who heard the appeal in the Supreme Court in Qom.

February 15

Aghajari's sister receives threatening letters. (Iranian newspaper *Etemaad*).

Zohreh Aghajari announced that, after receiving two threatening letters, she has complained to the Intelligence Ministry. She said: "On Wednesday 16.11.81 [5 February], a motorcyclist delivered a letter to us that had no name or address and, after an hour, we were told by telephone that we should take the threat seriously. Then, on Saturday, 19.11.81 [8 February], the same letter was sent to our house again." Regarding the content of the letters, Aghajari said that, in the letters, she had been asked to withdraw, at the first opportunity, her candidacy in the council elections.

February 16

Majlis approves law on conscription of Sunni clerics. (Iranian TV Vision of the Islamic Republic of Iran Network 1).

The Majlis ratified the Bill on the Clerical-Soldier, which is in connection with Sunni clerics. According to this new legislation, all the ministries, organizations, institutions and non-governmental associations can ask the Headquarters of the Joint Chiefs of Staff for the services of Sunni theology students as cleric-soldiers.

February 22

Mohsen Sazgara released. (Iranian newspaper *Aftab-e Yazd*).

Mohsen Sazgara was released from Evin prison on the night and was transferred to Mehr hospital complaining about pain in his chest. Sazgara had been arrested in the morning of 18 February while on the way to attend a meeting. The plainclothesmen who arrested him had a warrant which read "Arrest this person (Sazgara) wherever you see him and transfer him to block 209 of Evin prison as an accused", without specifying the charges. He said that much of the interrogation revolved around his latest article entitled: "The last word, the first step". However, Sazgara said that the charges were not revealed to him during his time in Evin either.

Kurdish man executed in Sanandaj. (Iraqi Kurdish newspaper *Hawlati*).^{*}

According to a statement issued by the Kurdistan Revolutionary Union Party in Sulaymaniyah the Islamic Republic of Iran executed the citizen Sasan Ali Kan'an in prison in the city of Sinah [Sanandaj]. Furthermore, the statement points out that since October last year, another seven citizens have been executed. They are: Hamzeh Qaderi; Saleh Godarzi; Khalid Showqi; Jalil Zevayee; Habibollah Tanha'iyani; Hama Salay Moradian; and Mostafa Khorand. Another five citizens have been sentenced to death but they have not been executed yet. Hasan Mahmudi, Khezr Vaysi and Mehdi Zalyah are being held in Orumiyyeh prison; and Khaled Fereyduni and Mohammad Sharveran are being held in Mahabad prison.

Five Iranian women burn themselves to death. (Iranian newspaper *Aftab-e Yazd*).

Five Iranian girls from different villages around the city of Shiraz burned themselves to death in the second week of February because their families refused to let them work. All the girls, aged between 14 and 23, died in hospital after setting themselves alight.

February 24

Two opponents of the regime executed publicly in Ahwaz. (SMCCDI).^{*}

Two regime opponents, who had been arrested in the aftermath of the clashes in the city of Ahwaz last month, were executed in public. The two were named "Behrooz Hamid" and "Ali Shoomali".

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Sunni group claims it attacked aircraft. (Iranian newspaper *Iran Daily*).

A self-declared "Abu-Bakr Brigade" has claimed responsibility for a recent Iranian air crash, saying its members blew the military plane up. The aircraft, belonging to the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), crashed near the central city of Kerman on [19 February], killing all 302 people aboard, including 18 crew. The Ilyushin-76 airliner was on a domestic flight to Kerman from the southeastern city of Zahedan in Sistan va Baluchestan Province near Pakistan border. It went down as it prepared to land at the Kerman airport.

Qasem Sholeh-Saadi arrested at airport. (Reuters).

Plainclothes Iranian officials arrested a prominent dissident academic, Qasem Sholeh-Saadi, at Tehran airport shortly after he arrived on a flight from France. A law and political science professor and former legislator, Sholeh-Saadi wrote a series of public letters to Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in 2002 in which he directly criticised the country's clerical establishment. It was not clear which of Iran's security organisations had arrested Sholeh-Saadi or on what charges. "They allowed him to call his family and we spoke for one minute," his wife said.

Student demonstration for the release of political prisoners. (Reuters).

Around 200 students, politicians and dissidents gathered at Tehran's Amir Kabir University on Monday to call for the release of all political prisoners. "I have been unjustly accused of some allegations, but I have never bowed to oppression and never accepted the charges brought against me," Abbas Amir-Entezam, who has spent much of the last 24 years in prison, told the crowd. Amir-Entezam, who was convicted of spying for the United States while serving as government spokesman in the first cabinet after the 1979 Islamic revolution, was on temporary release from prison to undergo medical treatment. "I wish success for you. Iran's future depends on you," Amir-Entezam told the students at the end of his speech as he burst into tears.

February 25**Iran police disperse demo at hotel of UN rights experts. (Agence France-Presse / AFP).**

Police dispersed a crowd of around 200 demonstrators gathered in front of the Tehran hotel of a visiting UN human rights delegation to protest at the detention of political prisoners in Iran. At least 30 of the demonstrators, who included relatives of political prisoners, tried to block traffic in front of the downtown Laleh hotel but were prevented by police without the use of force. About a dozen people were arrested, including four young women, by security forces deployed near the hotel. For several days, Farsi satellite stations based in the United States and run by Iranian opposition groups in exile have been calling for demonstrations outside the hotel. [Previously, on February 23], police used tear-gas to disperse 70 protestors outside the hotel and arrested eight of them.

February 26

Iran frees last five Jews jailed as spies for Israel. (AFP).

Five Iranian Jews jailed for spying for Israel, who were freed on bail last week, have been definitively released but not yet officially told so, the head of a UN human rights experts visiting Iran said. "We were able to meet with the five Jews in Shiraz," said Louis Joinet, chief of the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, which is winding up a fact-finding mission that began on February 15. "They have been definitively freed, a senior judicial official told us." Joinet said, however, that the decision had not been officially communicated to the five, but that he had received assurances it would be in the coming days. Thirteen Iranian Jews and eight Muslims were arrested in the southern city of Shiraz in 1999, accused of working as a spy-ring for Iran's arch enemy Israel. In July 2000, a closed-door hardline revolutionary court sentenced 10 of the Jews and two of the Muslims to jail terms of between four and 13 years. In September 2000, an appeals court reduced their sentences, and two of the 12 were freed as they had served out their terms. Three more were released last October under a pardon from supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

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