

# USADI Dispatch

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## USADI Commentary

### In Iran, Year Ends with a Big Bang

The arrival of the spring on Sunday marked the start of the Iranian New Year, *Norouz*, and last week, on the eve of the New Year, Iranians made another brave stand against the tyrants ruling their country, reaffirming the view that the seeming calm in Iran's political space is very superficial.

The occasion was *Chahar-shanbesouri* (Festival of fire), that is celebrated on the last Tuesday of the year in the Iranian calendar. The celebrations quickly turned into an opportunity for the people to display their deep seethed disdain of the ruling mullahs. Tehran and other cities became the scene of major anti-regime protests, the largest, perhaps, since the July 1999 student uprising, according to reports from Iran.

Despite a general ban on *Chahar-Shanbehsouri*, the restive population defied the regime and took to the streets. Eyewitnesses reported the burning of full-sized effigies of the mullahs' Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and Mohammad Khatami.

The authorities brought in the State Security Forces, which the protester defied and clashed with in several districts in the Iranian capital. Repeating a line from the time of anti-Shah revolution some 26 years ago, Tehranis were chanting, "Guns, tanks, Bassijs are no longer effective."

The Guardian reported from Tehran, "At first the ear-splitting explosions, blazing bonfires and choking stench of teargas could have been mistaken for the prelude to a new Iranian revolution." Highlighting the anti-regime overtone of the festivities, the daily added that "subversion... hung heavy in the air... No one present seemed in any doubt about the political undercurrents."

"This is a way for people to use their national traditions to show their opposition to the regime," said a man called Reza. Another young Iranian told the newspaper that "We hate their brand of Islam because it spills blood, [we want a political system which is] democratic, with a separation between religion and politics ... We will sacrifice our lives for democracy and freedom."

The state news agency in Iran, IRNA, reported that the police used tear gas in more than four locations in Tehran. "Special police forces on motorbikes attacked the crowd. While fleeing women and children fell and some were injured," IRNA reported.

In central city of Isfahan, a witness told Reuters, "men in black leather jackets seized a group of nine boys and young men... rammed them against a wall and smash their faces and shoulders with batons." A woman screamed hysterically as one of the religious vigilantes in a motorcycle-helmet dragged a battered teenager into an unmarked car, Reuters reported.

The year-end nationwide acts of protest against the clerical regime reaffirm the assertion that the apparent calm in Iran's political landscape is only skin-deep. The restive population, exploiting national occasions, has time after time displayed its desire for the overthrow of the ruling theocracy.

These acts of popular defiance confirm that far from being apathetic, Iran's younger generation, the main engine of political and social change and the vanguard of Iran's democracy movement, is actively seeking different ways of challenging the regime.

No doubt, with active diplomatic and political support, we could empower this movement to expand and intensify its anti-regime campaign. This support, however, would be meaningful and effectual only if implemented in the framework of a comprehensive Iran policy, which revolves around a pivotal role for the Iranian people and the democratic opposition as a realistic actor of change.

Early March, President George W. Bush declared at the National Defense University, "The advance of hope in the Middle East...requires new thinking in the capitals of great democracies - including Washington, D.C. By now it should be clear that decades of excusing and accommodating tyranny, in the pursuit of stability, have only led to injustice and instability and tragedy... And our duty is now clear: For the sake of our long-term security, all free nations must stand with the forces of democracy and justice."

As Iran's nuclear clock continues to tick, we must work to ensure that the clock for the regime change by Iranians ticks even faster. Ultimately, a democratic and secular government in Iran would remove the regional and global security threats posed by the current terror-sponsoring, theocratic regime.

The US Alliance for Democratic Iran (USADI), is an independent, non-profit organization, which aims to advance a US policy on Iran that will benefit America's interests, through supporting Iranian people's aspirations for a democratic, secular, and peaceful government, free of tyranny, fundamentalism, weapons of mass destruction, and terrorism. The USADI is not affiliated with any government agencies, political groups or parties.

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**Denver Post**

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**In Iran, a time for courage***Excerpts from an article by Faezeh Sami*

This is a time to celebrate the acts of courage. This is a time to reflect on progress we've made. This is a time to call for change. This is a time to salute the women around the world who have strived for freedom and equality.

Iranian women have faced the darkest period of their history in the last three decades and wish to prevent the same thing happening to the women of Iraq.

A quarter century ago, Islamic vigilantes empowered by Ayatollah Khomeini's misogynistic decrees targeted Iranian women. Those who did not adhere to Islamic "veiling" were subject to the harshest treatments, including burning their faces with acid.

In Iraq, a pamphlet recently found on a campus declared: "Any girl student who does not wear a veil and who wears Western clothing will have her face burned with chemicals." Last October, Rana Faud, a student from Mustansiriyah University, was abducted as she was leaving the campus. Within an hour, the young woman, still dressed in blue jeans, was found unconscious but unharmed. Even non-Muslim students feel obligated to wear the veil...

Iranian women have paid a heavy price for their struggle against fundamentalism. Tens of thousands of women have been executed in Iran since 1979. Women played a very active role in voicing their rights. Women who have been involved in demonstrations have been arrested and imprisoned merely for participating. At least 14 women have been stoned to death since President Mohammad Khatami took office in 1997. The suicide rate in Iran is one of the highest in the world. According to the Research Committee of the Women's Forum Against Fundamentalism in Iran ([www.wfafi.org](http://www.wfafi.org)), 75 percent of suicides are women. Of those, 81 percent are between 15 and 31 years old.

It is time for a change. A global fight is needed against the threat of Islamic fundamentalism. The answer to end all oppression is democracy. The continuous violations of human rights in Iran, particularly against women, must be opposed.

Courageous efforts must be made in order to side with Iranian people. The U.S. and Europe must speak in one voice when it comes to defending women's rights and human rights in general. The Western world must respect Iranians for their struggle for democracy. We have one simple request: Freedom and equality.

**The Sunday Telegraph**

March 20, 2005

**Iran plans secret 'nuclear university' to train scientists**

The Iranian government has given approval for the establishment of a secret nuclear research centre to train its scientists in all aspects of atomic technology, The Telegraph can reveal.

Recent reports received by Western intelligence show that Teheran has recently approved the establishment of a faculty of applied nuclear engineering that will be attached to the Atomic Energy Organisation of Iran (AEOI).

The faculty will provide post-graduate courses for Iranian scientists in nuclear engineering and the production of nuclear materials. Intelligence officials believe that the creation of the facility is yet further evidence that Iran is involved in a clandestine programme to build nuclear weapons...

The establishment of Iran's first post-graduate nuclear research faculty is seen as evidence that the Iranians are pressing ahead with their secret programme to become self-sufficient in the production of nuclear weapons.

"If the Iranians were really serious about only developing nuclear technology for peaceful means, there would be no need for a facility like this," said a senior Western security official. "It suggests that they do not want to share their nuclear expertise with the outside world."

The disclosure that Iran is setting up the nuclear research facility follows last week's revelation that Ukraine exported 12 cruise missiles to Teheran in 2001. The X-55 cruise missiles are designed to carry nuclear warheads and have a range of 1,800 miles, enabling Iran to attack Israel and Nato targets in southern Europe...

All students participating in the new Iranian nuclear research courses will first be required to undergo a thorough security vetting process conducted by security officials from Iran's Revolutionary Guards, who will have overall control of the facility.

The main purpose of the complex, which will operate as a branch of Teheran University, is to make Iran's nuclear industry completely self-sufficient. At present most Iranian students are required to travel abroad for advanced studies in nuclear technology, where they are kept under strict supervision. By making the new facility part of Teheran University, Iranian officials hope that it will not be liable to inspection by IAEA officials.