



conditions limit their professional activities.

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... The government's position deteriorated further in August 1978, when more than 400 people died in a fire at the Rex Cinema in Abadan. The fire was started by religiously inclined students, but the opposition carefully cultivated a widespread conviction that it was the work of SAVAK agents. Following the Rex Cinema fire, the shah removed Amuzegar and named Jafar Sharif Emami prime minister. Sharif Emami, a former prime minister and a trusted royalist, had for many years served as president of the Senate. He eased press controls and permitted more open debate in the Majlis. He released a number of imprisoned clerics, revoked the imperial calendar, closed gambling casinos, and obtained from the shah the dismissal from court and public office of members of the Bahá'í faith, a religion to which the clerics strongly objected (see Non-Muslim Minorities, ch. 2). These measures, however, did not quell public protests. On September 4, more than 100,000 took part in the public prayers to mark the end of Ramazan (Ramadan), the Muslim fasting month. Growing anti-government demonstrations continued for the next two days, taking on an increasingly radical tone. After the government declared martial law in Tehran and 11 other cities, troops fired into a crowd of demonstrators in Tehran's Jaleh Square. A large number of protesters, certainly many more than the official figure of 87, were killed. The day of the Jaleh Square shooting came to be known as "Black Friday." The shootings further radicalized the opposition movement and made compromise with the regime, even by the moderates, less likely.

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... The Persians are the largest ethnic group in Iran. They predominate in the major urban areas of central and eastern Iran — in the cities of Tehran, Esfahan, Mashhad, Shiraz, Arak, Kashan, Kerman, Qom, and Yazd; in the villages of the Central Plateau; and along the Caspian coast. Persians generally take great pride in their art and music, both of which have uninterrupted historical roots almost as old as Persian literature. The vast majority of Persians are Shia Muslims (see Shia Islam in Iran, this chapter). Since at least the beginning of the nineteenth century, Persians have dominated the higher ranks of the Shia clergy and have provided important clerical revolutionary leaders such as Ayatollah Sayyid Ruhollah Musavi Khomeini and former presidents Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and Mohammad Khatami. Fewer than 3 percent of Persians adhere to other faiths. These include a community of Sunni (see Glossary) Muslim Persians in the Lar region of Fars Province, Bahá'ís, Jews, and members of the pre-Islamic Zoroastrian faith.

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... Azerbaijanis: The Azerbaijanis account for 90 percent of all Turkic speakers in Iran. Most Azerbaijanis are concentrated in the north-western corner of the country, where they form the majority population in an area between the Caspian Sea and Lake Urmia and the segment of the northern border

formed by the Aras River south to the latitude of Tehran. Their language, Azerbaijani (also called Azeri or Turkish), is structurally similar to the Turkish spoken in Turkey. More than 65 percent of all Azerbaijanis live in urban areas. Major Azerbaijani cities include Tabriz, Ardabil, Khoi, Maragheh, and Zanjan. In addition, about 40 percent of the population of the region of Urmia in West Azarbaijan Province is Azerbaijani, as is one-third of Tehran's population. There are sizable Azerbaijani minorities in the major cities of northwestern Iran. The lifestyles of urban Azerbaijanis do not differ from those of Persians, and there is considerable intermarriage within the upper and middle classes in cities with mixed populations. Similarly, customs among Azerbaijani villagers do not appear to differ markedly from those of Persian villagers. The majority of Azerbaijanis, like the majority of Persians, are Shia Muslims, although some Azerbaijanis are Ahl-e Haqq Muslims or non-Muslim Bahá'ís.

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### Bahá'ís

Although the Bahá'ís are Iran's second-largest non-Muslim minority, they do not enjoy constitutional protection as an official religious minority. There were an estimated 250,000 Bahá'ís in Iran in 2005 according to Iranian figures, but other estimates are as high as 350,000. The Bahá'ís are scattered in small communities throughout Iran, with heavy concentrations in larger cities. Most Bahá'ís are urban, but there are some Bahá'í villages. The majority of Bahá'ís are Persians, but there is a significant minority of Azerbaijani Bahá'ís, and Bahá'ís also are represented in other ethnic groups in Iran.

The Bahá'í faith originated in Iran in the mid-1800s, based on the teachings of Mirza Ali Muhammad and his disciple, Mirza Hussein Ali Nur, or Bahá'u'lláh, the faith's prophet-founder. It initially attracted a wide following among dissident Shia clergy and others dissatisfied with society, but since its inception it has met with intense hostility from mainstream Shia clergy. Upholding many teachings of Islam and other world religions, the faith stresses the brotherhood of all peoples, the eradication of all forms of prejudice, and the establishment of world peace. By the early twentieth century, the faith had spread to North America, Europe, and Africa.

Because the Shia clergy, like many other Iranians, continued to regard their faith as heretical, Bahá'ís in Iran have encountered much prejudice and sometimes even persecution. Their situation generally improved under the Pahlavi shahs, as the government sought to secularize public life. Bahá'ís were permitted to hold government posts and allowed to open their own schools, and many were successful in business and the professions. The faith expanded significantly in the 1960s. However, major instances of discrimination occurred in 1955 and 1978, and the faith's status changed drastically in 1979. The Islamic Republic did not recognize the Bahá'ís as a religious minority, and adherents to the faith were officially persecuted. More than 1,000 Bahá'ís

were imprisoned and several hundred killed. Most privileges of citizenship were revoked. Several thousand Bahá'ís fled the country during the 1980s. Their situation improved marginally during the 1990s. However, in the early 2000s the United Nations Commission on Human Rights reported that Bahá'ís faced restrictions in employment, education, and the practice of their religion. Media condemnation of the faith became more frequent in 2005, and Bahá'ís continue to be subject to arbitrary arrest and imprisonment.

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Despite these constitutional guarantees, in many instances civil liberties were not protected during the early years of the Islamic Republic. More than 500 high officials, military officers, and secret police agents from the shah's regime were executed after summary trials in 1979. In the summer of 1980, the discovery of alleged plots within the military to overthrow the government led to wide-scale arrests and the execution of more than 100 officers condemned by hastily convened tribunals at which no defense was allowed. According to Amnesty International, in the year following the abortive uprising of the Mojahedin in June 1981, nearly 3,000 persons were executed following their summary trials as Mojahedin members. During the 1980s, almost all opposition organizations were suppressed; civil and political freedoms were sharply curtailed, the independent press was shut down, intellectual and artistic expression was heavily restricted, and members of the Bahá'í faith were persecuted. Harsh punishments such as flogging, justified as "Islamic," were applied for violations of social mores and relatively minor crimes such as non-observance of public dress codes, consumption of alcoholic beverages, petty theft, and premarital sex. Robbers could have their fingers amputated, and adulterers could be executed by stoning.

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the United States reduced or ended funding. In 2003 the overthrow of the government of Saddam Hussein in Iraq, which had hosted some opposition broadcasts, further reduced the range of available broadcasting. Several evangelical Christian stations and a Bahá'í station also broadcast into Iran. The Iranian government jams some but not all of these foreign transmissions.

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