

Doc Number: EU000067

Welcome to TimesPeople
Get Started

TimesPeople Lets You Share and Discover the Best of NYTimes.com

Recommend

- [Get Home Delivery](#)
- [Log In](#)
- [Register Now](#)
- [Home Page](#)
- [Today's Paper](#)
- [Video](#)
- [Most Popular](#)
- [Times Topics](#)



Search All NYTimes.com

The New York Times

Wednesday, August 5, 2009

News

- [World](#)
- [U.S.](#)
- [N.Y. / Region](#)
- [Business](#)
- [Technology](#)
- [Science](#)
- [Health](#)
- [Sports](#)
- [Opinion](#)
- [Arts](#)
- [Style](#)
- [Travel](#)
- [Jobs](#)
- [Real Estate](#)
- [Autos](#)



The Lede

The New York Times News Blog

August 3, 2009, 11:35 am

Four Years Ago in Tehran, a More United Regime

By [Robert Mackey](#)

Last Updated (below) | 5:20 p.m. *This post has been updated throughout the day as more information has*

become available on new protests today in Iran. Scroll to the bottom of this post for the latest updates.

As my colleagues [Robert Worth and Nazila Fathi report](#), leading reformists boycotted a ceremony in Tehran on Monday in which the country's ruling cleric, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, officially approved a second term for President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

The Associated Press [reports](#)

that "Iran's main state TV channels did not offer live coverage of the ceremony in an apparent effort by the country's Islamic rulers to avoid emphasizing the boycotts to domestic audiences," but this video of the country's supreme leader handing a decree to Mr. Ahmadinejad was apparently included in a news report on a state channel:



Several reports have taken note of the awkward body language seen in the video between Ayatollah Khamenei and Mr. Ahmadinejad, when there seemed to be some confusion about what sort of kiss would be exchanged. (Readers who cannot access YouTube might be able to view [this video of the ceremony](#) on the BBC's Web site.)

The A.P. notes that four years ago, during the same ceremony, Mr. Ahmadinejad kissed Ayatollah Khamenei's hand "to show absolute loyalty," but this time, after some hesitation, Mr. Ahmadinejad kissed the supreme leader's shoulder instead. As The A.P. reports, this is "not a common gesture in Iran, where men often exchange kisses on the cheeks."

Some supporters of Iran's opposition suggested online that Mr. Ahmadinejad was trying to signal that he is not subservient to the country's ruling cleric, but Hooman Majd, an Iranian-American journalist and the author of "[The Ayatollah Begg to Differ](#)," told The Lede that Mr. Ahmadinejad was criticized four years ago for kissing the leader's hand, which no previous president had done. Also, Mr. Majd says, "Kissing the shoulder is a sign of respect, certainly to a cleric." Still, it is true that, as [Matt Weaver points out](#) on The Guardian's Web site, "the supreme leader did not embrace the president as he did four years ago."

According to [the BBC](#), Iran's official IRNA news agency "later reported that Mr Ahmadinejad had not kissed Ayatollah Khamenei's hand or cheek because he had a cold."

This report from Britain's ITN includes video of the same point in the same ceremony from four years ago and shows that two of Iran's former presidents, Mohammad Khatami and Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, who were absent today, were prominent figures last time, near center stage when Ayatollah Khamenei embraced Mr. Ahmadinejad:



Iran’s state-supported English-language broadcaster, Press TV, said that the ceremony was affected by the absence of former President Khatami, since “the endorsement decrees are normally read by the previous president — even for the second term of the new president in office.” Press TV added that both of the opposition candidates who continue to contest the results of the June 12 election, Mir Hussein Moussavi and Mehdi Karroubi, also missed the ceremony. In 2005, the defeated candidate, former President Rafsanjani, was of course present.

This photograph, [posted on Monday](#) by the Iranian blogger Mehdi Saharkhiz, shows more clearly the lineup of dignitaries from the government in 2005, with Mr. Khatami (directly under the portrait of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini), who was then the departing president, standing beside the supreme leader, and Mr. Rafsanjani just one place farther away (third from left):



In this photograph of the same ceremony today, also from Mr. Saharkhiz’s blog, the absence of the two previous presidents is hard to miss:



This [credit information for this photograph](#) on the English-language version of the semiofficial Fars news agency Web site says that it was provided by the supreme leader’s own Web site, Khamenei.ir.

The BBC has posted another comparison of [photographs from the two ceremonies](#) on their Web site. According to Hooman Majd, “Rafsanjani’s absence, more so than that of Khatami (who in this case did not

precede Ahmadinejad and is now a private citizen),” was significant. As Mr. Majd notes, Mr. Rafsanjani, a hero of the Islamic Revolution who still leads two powerful clerical bodies, is “very much a part of the government apparatus.”

In another exercise in Kremlinology, Mr. Saharkiz also posted this photograph of the ceremony on his blog, noting the presence, off to the side (circled in red), of [Mojtaba Khamenei](#), the supreme leader’s son, who has reportedly played a large role in the crackdown on dissent in the aftermath of the disputed June 12 election, which his father says Mr. Ahmadinejad won. Opposition supporters have claimed that Ayatollah Khamenei may try to have his son appointed as his successor — which led to [chants on Tehran’s streets](#) in recent weeks wishing that Mojtaba might die before his father.



Update | 12:09 p.m. Mojtaba Samienezad, an Iranian blogger still working from inside the country, reports on [his Twitter feed](#) that there have been protests in response to today’s ceremony in Tehran — and clashes between opposition supporters and the security forces. Mr. Samienezad wrote 5 minutes ago:

Confrontation for the past hour in Vali Asr. Sq and Knowledge Park , Basij and security forces using tear gas.

Two Iranian bloggers working from outside Iran, [Mehdi Saharkhiz](#) and [Omid Habibinia](#), have also reported hearing of clashes in Tehran on Monday. We will bring you more information on the reaction to today’s ceremony as we gather it.

Update | 1:55 p.m.

Several short video clips, apparently shot surreptitiously on mobile phones, have been uploaded to YouTube on Monday showing what Iranian bloggers say are opposition supporters protesting the ceremony in which Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was declared the winner of the June 12 presidential election today in Tehran.

According to a reader of The Lede, the anonymous videographer who shot [this video](#), apparently while pretending to speak on his mobile phone, says that it was shot in [Vanak Square](#) and shows opposition supporters “gathering, using the excuse of catching a ride,” despite the presence of “lots of plain-clothes policemen.” Three Iranian bloggers also say that this video was shot today in Vanak Square.

At the very start and then again after about 40 seconds of this video, also apparently shot by someone not wanting their phone camera to be obvious, the chant “Marg bar Diktator!” (“Death to the Dictator!”) can be heard:



In [this video](#), which appears to have been shot from a bus stopped in traffic, the chant "Allahu Akbar!" ("God is Great!") can be heard. Although it is not clear exactly where the chant is coming from, the person who uploaded this video to a channel which has collected video of opposition protests says that it was filmed near Vanak Square on Monday.

The Iranian blogger Mehdi Saharkhiz, the son of a leading reformist who was detained during the protests, writes that the people honking their car horns in [this video](#) were doing so earlier today in protest, and that this video shows an opposition supporter being arrested in Tehran today:



Update | 3:46 p.m. The [BBC reports](#):

After the ceremony, witnesses said hundreds of people had attempted to hold a demonstration in Vanak Square in the north of Tehran, but that they were dispersed the Revolutionary Guards, the Basij militia and police.

One protester called Maryam told BBC Persian the protest had been peaceful and that they were attacked indiscriminately. "Plain-clothed officers started attacking people from the middle of the crowd," she said. "People were chased away and many were beaten up. Electric batons and tear gas were being used to displace the crowd."

There were also reports of a demonstration being prevented by riot police in Vali Asr Square. Mr. Karroubi is also said to have appeared at one rally.

Update | 3:48 p.m. Lara Setrakian of ABC News [writes on Twitter](#):

A supporter says Karroubi was at today's #iranelection protest, at Beheshti & Valiasr. Fars News wrote he participated in "illegal protest."

As Ms. Setrakian says, the semiofficial [Fars news agency reported](#) on Monday that Mr. Karroubi, an opposition leader, had taken part in a protest in Tehran. Oddly, the Fars report was illustrated with a photograph that was not shot today but taken earlier this month, when the cleric was jostled on his way to the Friday Prayer sermon given by Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani.

Ms. Setrakian also writes that a source in Tehran told her that on Monday "the buildup of forces around Vanak, Valiasr, Fatemi & Enghelab Square was unprecedented... fearsome." She adds that her source told her that "columns of smoke were visible from here and there in N. Tehran. Random gunshots fired, cell networks in busy areas shut down."

Update | 4:20 p.m.

The Iranian blogger Omid Habibinia, working from Switzerland, says that this video, uploaded to YouTube today, shows opposition supporters protesting in central Tehran on Monday:



If any readers familiar with Tehran's geography can help us say where this video was shot, we would appreciate hearing from you. (Also, if anyone has seen this video posted online before today, please let us know.)

The anonymous video blogger who uploaded the video above also posted the video below, and says that it shows protesters marching along Vali Asr Boulevard in Tehran on Monday:



The Iranian expatriate Web site [Gooya News](#) has posted [several photographs](#) of what it says are protests today in Tehran, which seem to depict similar scenes to those shown in the videos immediately above. In fact, the photograph below, featuring a man with a green ribbon tied around his wrists, seems to have been taken within seconds of the video directly above, which also seems to show this same man in the same location:



photos: farhad rajabali Farhad Rajabali/Gooya News

Update | 4:49 p.m.

The Iranian blogger Mehdi Saharkhiz, working from outside Iran, says that this video was also shot today in Tehran, showing protesters marching and chanting "Marg bar Diktator!" ("Death to the Dictator!"):



Update | 5:09 p.m. Among the photographs published [on the Gooya News Web site](#) are these images, apparently showing members of the security forces or pro-government militias on the streets of Tehran on Monday:



photos: farhad rajabali

© news.gooya.com

Farhad Rajabali/Gooya News



Update | 5:20 p.m. The blogger Mehdi Saharkhiz says that [this video](#) shows women protesting on Monday night in Tehran, taking the nightly ritual of shouting “Allahu Akbar!” (“God is Great!”) to the streets. The opposition uses this rallying cry to remind the regime’s leaders of the protests against the Shah’s regime in the 1970s, which used the same slogan.

Mr. Saharkhiz also says that this video shows the heavy security presence at different times of the day on Monday on Vali Asr Boulevard in central Tehran:



- [E-mail This](#)
- [Print](#)
- [Share](#)

[Yahoo! Buzz](#)