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In Tehran, Students Defy Ban on Protests

By [FARNAZ FASSIHI](#)

Thousands of students defied threats by security officials and demonstrated against Iran's government at Tehran University on Monday, the first day of the academic year, signaling the opening of a new front in the opposition's battle against the government.

With pressure increasing both at home and abroad, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's government, concerned about the university's influence and reach, has been systematically cracking down on students.

Security officials have called in hundreds of students across Iran for interrogation in the past month and warned them they would be banned from higher education if they brought the opposition movement of Mir Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karroubi to school.

The annual ceremony at Tehran University for the start of the academic year is typically attended by the president, the higher-education minister and lawmakers. But President Ahmadinejad canceled his appearance Monday, and the higher-education minister, Kamran Daneshjoo, was hustled quietly into the auditorium from a back door to avoid encountering the angry crowd.

When Hadad Adel, a conservative lawmaker and professor, entered the campus, students booed him and shouted, "You are against the people, traitor."

Students carrying green balloons -- the color of the opposition -- and wearing green T-shirts, chanted "Death to the dictator" and "You killed our youth -- death to you," as they marched across the campus. The commotion caught the attention of passersby outside the gated campus located on Revolution Street. By noon, hundreds of people had gathered outside the gates, chanting with the students as others in cars honked their horns.

Riot police and security forces swarmed the area. They locked the gates of the university and prevented students from leaving and the public from entering. Though the police didn't enter the university, clashes were reported as they tried to disperse the crowd outside. Police smashed the cellphones of anyone who tried to take pictures or film the demonstrations, a witness said.

Iranian Web sites reported that some students were arrested on leaving the campus in the afternoon.

Students supporting the government staged counterdemonstrations, but their numbers were smaller, witnesses said. They got into a verbal shouting match, screaming at opposition students, "Mousavi and Israel are one." Students supporting the opposition screamed back, "Ahmadinejad is president -- it will be like this every day."

"The campus unrest today proved that difficult days are ahead for Mr. Ahmadinejad. The government has been extremely worried about this development," said Roozbeh Mir Ebrahimi, an Iranian journalist and dissident.

With 60% of its 75 million people under age 30, Iran has a young population. Yet hundreds of students have been arrested and banned from completing their studies or receiving their diplomas in recent years. As a result, the student movement has grown more radical. University campuses have historically been a pillar of force in political upheavals

in Iran. The 1979 revolution was rooted in Tehran University's campus.

In another development, Mr. Karroubi, the outspoken reformist cleric and presidential candidate, wrote a bold letter to former President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani on Monday demanding he review the actions of Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Mr. Rafsanjani heads the Expediency Council, a committee of clerics, who have the power to name and remove the supreme leader.

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