

Pro-government militiamen attack protesting students at two Tehran universities

Contributed by Borzou Daragahi, The Los Angeles Times
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Iran's chief prosecutor warns that harsher measures will be taken against protesters. Tear gas was reported at today's demonstrations, after more than 200 were arrested in Monday's protests.

Reporting from Beirut - Pro-government Basiji militiamen stormed the campuses of two Tehran universities Tuesday and attacked hundreds of protesting students, and Iran's chief prosecutor vowed to come down harder than ever on peaceful demonstrators he described as a threat to the nation's security.

Tehran University remained under lockdown a day after thousands of students across Iran defied tough security measures to stage anti-government demonstrations. Smaller protests continued Tuesday at that campus and at Shahid Beheshti University.

At least 169 men and 39 women were arrested in Monday's mass protests of the June reelection of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, police chief Azizollah Rajabzadeh told the Iranian Labor News Agency. He said the Basiji were not involved in any operations Monday.

On Tuesday, plainclothes security personnel on motorcycles surrounded the downtown office of opposition leader Mir-Hossein Mousavi, who dared them to act.

"You are officers," he told them, according to his website, Kalamehnews.com. "If your mission is to kill, beat or threaten me, go ahead."

The security personnel eventually dispersed.

Mousavi, who lost to Ahmadinejad in the disputed presidential election, had encouraged students to take part in Monday's rallies on National Students Day.

Activists around the country have begun printing posters promoting the next round of rallies, planned to coincide with annual Muharram religious ceremonies this month commemorating the martyrdom of Imam Hussein, a grandson of the prophet Muhammad who is among the most revered figures in the Shiite Muslim faith.

Iran's prosecutor-general, Gholamhossein Mohseni Ejei, warned Tuesday of harsh consequences for those who took to the streets this week. Tehran officially regards the protest movement as a tool of its foreign enemies, including the United States.

"We have asked security, law enforcement and judicial organizations not to give a second chance to lawbreakers and those who disrupt the order and security of society," he said at a news conference, according to the official Islamic Republic News Agency.

"We have shown a degree of tolerance so far in order to identify the boundaries and affiliations and to expose the enemy's hidden intentions," he said. "As of today, no leniency will be shown."

Security forces fired tear gas Tuesday at demonstrators near and on the two Tehran campuses. A witness described seeing one young woman stumbling and coughing hard after being exposed to tear gas as she left Tehran University.

Video posted on the Internet showed shoving and shouting matches between students chanting "God is great!" and pro-government militiamen waving Iranian flags.

Students chanted, "Savages! Savages!" as the Basiji militiamen pushed the protesters out of a courtyard.

At Shahid Beheshti University, a student news website reported the beating of students who were chanting slogans.

Also Tuesday, Iranian authorities shut down a prominent reformist newspaper run by Hadi Khamenei, the brother of Iran's supreme leader, "for working outside the regulations."

Western leaders and human rights groups have criticized Iranian authorities for what they describe as Tehran's heavy-handed response to the peaceful protests.

"The violence employed against ordinary demonstrators and the arbitrary arrests are unacceptable," said French Foreign Ministry spokesman Bernard Valero, Agence France-Presse reported.

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast countered that the West should stay out of Iran's affairs.

"We think that they are insistently taking the wrong path, and these activities, which are aimed at diverting us from our constitutional law, will not be effective," he said, according to state television.

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