Pro-Iran Government Activists Assault Student Protesters in Tehran

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By [Michael Lipin](https://www.voanews.com/author/4422.html)

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Iranian pro-government activists have assaulted Tehran University students staging a peaceful protest against heightened enforcement of religious restrictions during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

Videos verified by VOA Persian and received from social media users in Iran showed the pro-government activists marching on the university grounds and scuffling with student protesters in Monday's incident.

Social media users said the protest began with students chanting slogans and holding signs outside the university's Fine Arts faculty, denouncing Iran's mandatory hijab rules for women and highlighting other concerns such as unemployment and arrests of journalists.

One clip showed dozens of the protesters chanting, "Students may die, but we will not tolerate indignity."

Another clip showed pro-government activists marching outside and chanting, "God is great." A female observer is heard saying, "It's none of your business."

The student protest continued inside a university auditorium, where a third clip showed a pro-government activist running toward and punching another man, triggering a scuffle.

Student protesters in the audience reacted by denouncing the pro-government activists with the chant: "You have no honor."

Social media users identified some of the activists as members of Iran's volunteer paramilitary Basij force, affiliated with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.

In a fourth video, the student protesters inside the auditorium chanted for the paramilitary members, known as Basijis, to "come down" from the stage.

The state-run Iranian Student News Agency (ISNA) published an interview with Tehran University vice-chancellor Majid Sarsangi in which he responded to the incident by saying there had been "no changes" to the institution's policies on enforcing mandatory veiling or respect for the Islamic custom of fasting during Ramadan, which began May 6. But, he said the university's security personnel have warned students to be more observant of Islamic customs while Ramadan is under way.

Iranian morality police and Basijis typically step up public patrols during Ramadan, to ensure that women do not violate hijab rules and Muslims do not violate prohibitions on eating in daylights hours.