

The Jews in Iran. Part II....

Today, the Jewish Community is officially recognized as a religious minority group by the government. They are allocated one seat in the Iranian Parliament. There are 11 functioning synagogues, two kosher restaurants, an old-age home, a newspaper and a cemetery in Tehran. At present there are 25 synagogues in Iran.

The Jews are best known for certain occupations like making gold jewellery and antique dealing, textiles and carpets.

The Government appears concerned about the emigration of Jewish citizens and permission generally is not granted for all members of a Jewish family to travel outside the country at the same time.

Worries over Iranian Jews if Israel attacks....Ynet, March 16, 2012

- Iranian Jews who have emigrated to Israel concerned that Israeli attack could expose family and friends still in Iran to retaliation
Associated Press

....Iran's government is "unstable and unpredictable. If there is a war, you can't tell what the response to the community will be," said Kamal Penhasi, who runs Israel's only Persian newspaper, Shahyad, and its companion website.

The level of worry among Jews in Iran themselves is harder to measure. At a tomb in southern Iran said to be the grave of the biblical prophet Daniel a popular pilgrimage site for Iranian Jews those visiting on a recent day were reluctant to talk about politics or the rising tensions between Iran and Israel, preferring to talk about their visit.

The rising crisis illustrates the uneasy situation of Iran's Jews, the largest community in the Middle East outside of Israel and Turkey. They are believed to number around 25,000, after two major waves of emigration following Israel's founding in 1948 and the Islamic Revolution in 1979. Before the revolution they numbered around 100,000.

Many in the community, centered in Tehran and the southern city of Shiraz, are affluent merchants. Publicly, they are supportive of a system that offers them protected minority status though not equal access to certain government and military jobs and assures them a seat in the Iranian parliament.

"No matter who dares to attack our country, we will stand against the threats like other Iranian people," the current Jewish lawmaker in the Iranian parliament, Siamak Merehsedq, told The Associated Press in Tehran. "The Iranian Jewish community will stand by their compatriots under any circumstance, forever."

In general, the community tries to lie low. Tensions between Iran and Israel have been high for years, and the leadership of hard-line Muslim clerics has not tried to retaliate against Iranian Jews, in part because it likes to tout their presence as proof of the government's tolerance. The biggest exception to that was the trial in 2000 of 13 Iranian Jews on charges of spying for Israel, which raised heavy international criticism.

The ornate tomb of Daniel in Susa, 450 miles (750 kilometers) southwest of the capital Tehran, is cited by Iranians as an example of the historic bonds of Jews and Muslims in the country. The site is popular among both Muslims and Jews, and some of the pious credit their prayers at the site for healing sick relatives or bringing rain for crops. Hundreds visit every day, including high school students on field trips from around the country.

Jews and Muslims visit tomb (AP)

Israeli officials say the presence of Jews in Iran won't influence Israel's decision on whether to strike.

Related Jewish communities

Persian speaking Jews settled in a number of countries neighbouring Iran. Some communities, like Bukharan Jews, were formed when Jews left present-day Iran hundreds of years ago, while other communities were formed by more recent migrants from Iran.

Uzbekistan and Tajikistan

Bukharan Jews traditionally speak a dialect of Judeo-Persian and lived mainly in the former emirate of Bukhara (present day Uzbekistan and Tajikistan). Most Bukharan Jews have immigrated to Israel or the United States since the collapse of the Soviet Union.[89]

Azerbaijan

The Mountain Jews of Azerbaijan split off from Persian Jews in ancient times. However, they maintained a Judeo-Persian language that shares a great deal of vocabulary and structure with modern Persian. Most Azerbaijani Jews have immigrated to Israel since Azerbaijan gained independence.[90]

Afghanistan

In Afghanistan, most Persian-speaking Jews fled the country after the Soviet invasion in 1979.[91] Only one Jew, Zablou Simintov, remains in the capital of Kabul.[92]

Pakistan

The community in Pakistan, due to departure to Israel, has dwindled to less than 200. Most of the Pakistani Jewish community resides in Karachi.[93]

Kazakhstan

There are estimated to be approximately four dozen Persian Jewish families living in Kazakhstan which call themselves Lakhlokh and speak Aramaic. They still hold identity papers from Iran, the country their ancestors left almost 80 years ago.[94]