

Ayatollah Khomeini dies at 86

Local Muslims expect little to change in Iran

From staff and wire reports

The religious leader of Iran, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, died Sunday only 12 days after he underwent surgery for bleeding in his digestive system, according to Iran's official news agency. He was 86.

"The leader of the Islamic revolution and founder of the Islamic Republic, Imam Khomeini, passed away at a Tehran Hospital," the Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA) reported Sunday.

IRNA said Khomeini's death "took place after a surgical operation to stop bleeding in his digestive system on Tuesday, 23 May."

Saturday Iranian officials had said Khomeini's health was deteriorating, and they urged the nation to pray for the country's spiritual leader.

Iran's state-run radio and television, monitored in Nicosia, Cyprus, also had said Khomeini's condition was declining, but gave no details.

Both Iranian news sources carried a brief statement from Tehran that said, "At 3 p.m. on Saturday a complication arose in the imam's condition, which the doctors are trying to control. We urge the nation to pray for the imam's health, and hope that their prayers will be answered."

According to University international studies adjunct Professor Massoud Kheirabadi, a native of Iran, the ayatollah's death has been "expected" by most Iranians.

"He was expected to die, as he has been very sick for about six months now," Kheirabadi said.

Kheirabadi said he believes Iranian President Ali Khamenei will be the next "strong man" in Iran.

"There are some people who think the Mujahideen (leftist underground fighters) based in Iraq will take over," he said. "But I really do not see much chance for that."

The new government may have more moderate elements, Kheirabadi said, but another revolution is very unlikely.

"If there is any change, it will come from



Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini 1904 - 1989

within the present system," he said.

Muslim Student Union Director Khaled Alazzouni, a native of Saudi Arabia, said the ayatollah has been a controversial leader who only represented "10 percent of the world's Muslim population."

"As a member of the other 90 percent, I would hope it (Khomeini's death) would bring for Iranians more freedom, freedom of speech and more democracy," Alazzouni said.

Khomeini had been the absolute "guide" of Iran's theocratic government since he overthrew Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi and 2,500 years of Iranian monarchy in February, 1979.



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