Lecture of the Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei, in the Gathering of Thousands of People from East Azerbaijan Province, Iran - 18 /Feb/ 2024

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In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Ever Merciful

And praise be to Allah, Lord of the worlds, and Allah's blessings be bestowed upon the Prophet Mohammad—Abil-Ghasem, Al-Mostafa—and his exalted family, especially Imam Mahdi—the remaining apostle of Allah in the universe.

I welcome you, dear brothers and dear sisters, one by one, who honoured us by tolerating the burden of coming to this long distance and lightened up this Hosseiniyeh [i.e., the location of the lecture, Hosseiniyeh Imam Khomeini, Tehran] with your presence. As a result, I give my best regards to all the people of Tabriz, all the people of Azerbaijan, those dear people, those devoted people; as you hymned in the beautiful song you performed, Azerbaijan truly means enthusiasm and devotion. Azerbaijan symbolises devotion, confidence, faith, religious and Islamic energy, and thrill. This is what we have read in the history of Azerbaijan and Tabriz and witnessed during the long years of struggle till now.

I should congratulate the Eids of the month of Sha'ban [a month in the Islamic calendar], the births [of the Imams and their family], especially the blessed day of the 15th of Sha'ban, which is genuinely one of the great good news and profound excitements for the hearts of Shi'ite. I should thank the nation of Iran for their energetic demonstration on the 11th of February. People did their best and portrayed their vitality and liveliness throughout the country, in all the provinces, cities, villages, and distant centres. Some wished for the low-spiritedness of Iranians; they were astonished. Some wish Iranians would gradually forget the 11th of February [i.e., the anniversary of the Islamic Revolution of Iran]; they were amazed. This year, people showed the world—and everyone—their revolutionary delight because of the 11th of February in its true sense. I am heartedly grateful. Besides thanking our dear people, I also heartedly thank those who maintained the security of this widespread demonstration—through divine aid. The security that exists [in our country] is gained through 24-hour attempts, effort, and dedication from several striving and devoted individuals; we should acknowledge and respect their deeds. People's presence also motivates those in authority; it increases their spirits; this should be admitted. Thanks to Allah, those in authority [in our country] are high-spirited; they are aware of their responsibilities, are full of motivation, and are working to their full abilities. However, people's presence motivates them more, increases their spirits, and strengthens them in continuing their efforts, and just as the respected cleric of Friday prayers pointed out, people's presence injects blood into the veins of society, nation, authority, and [Islamic] revolution [i.e., everyone is motivated].

And now, on 18 February. Over and over, much has been said about 18 February 1978 from various aspects and dimensions. Today, I also want to say a few words about this [important] day, and then I will present some inferences from what I have said. For sure, the event on 18 February in Tabriz was a history-making event. 'History-making event' means that the event does not start and then reach an end and disappear. No. Such an event begins, continues, spreads, and achieves excellent aims, bringing about changes in the events of history. The event of Tabriz was such an event: history-making. Yes. For instance, Martyr Tajallaie was the reason people entered the streets

[and participated in the demonstrations]. Proclamations of great scholars, [such as] late Mr Amirza-Hasan Angji, late Mr Ghazi (Martyr Ghazi), late Mr Asheikh Abdul-Hussain Gharvi and others who signed and gave proclamations [themselves as well], all were influential and attracted people into the streets. However, the event that took place was even more significant than what was being put into words. What did this event do? The event of Tabriz gave a tenfold ratio to the event of 9 January in Qom, which was finished—and the government was occulting it. The event of Qom was spread all over the country. This was the [result of the] event of Tabriz. When a struggling spirit and revolutionary excitement and uprising spread all over the country, as a result, almost after one year, the event of 11 February took place, and Iran changed drastically. This is what 'history-making' means.

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(3) [which means, 'take action for Allah's sake, in groups of two and alone'], such uprising is blessed, and the Almighty Allah blesses the uprising; and Allah blessed [the uprising of Tabriz] and it went on until it reached the [revolution on] 11 February.

Well, this is all about the past. Most of you in this meeting have not witnessed that day [18 February] nor have any memories. You are the ones of today and tomorrow. One day, the people of Tabriz made an essential move, and the world saw its effect. When the event took place, the world did not realise it; however, later, the movement reached a stage that moved the world and changed history. This event took place in the past, and it is now gone. 18 February 1978 was one of Allah's days; today is another day of Allah's, and tomorrow is another day of Allah. We should learn [from these events]. We must learn from the past for today and tomorrow.

Well, 18 February 1979 was the birth of the Revolution: an exceptional and lively birth. Since 18 February, the existence born on 18 February has grown bigger and stronger; its structure has consolidated, its power has increased, and its impact has become more influential. That existence is now forty-five years old. Experiences, events, war, confrontation with an infidel and hypocrite, confrontation with a political enemy, and various intrigues and conspiracies have happened in these forty-five years, and the Revolution has faced these instances. What does Revolution mean? Revolution is what exists in your heart. You are the Revolution. People are the Revolution. Revolution means that the ruling government has faced and confronted these events and has passed these problematic hardships.

You mention Mr Mehdi Baaqeri. What did Baaqeri do? We just mention the names of people like Baaqeri—who was a young guy in the twenties—and other great people who were in this path. Meanwhile, the details of their deeds, that effort, that struggle [i.e., 'mojaahedat'], that self-devotion [putting aside whatever they one has and likes], that planning, that thought, that strength should be placed in our minds and we should [fully] comprehend it. There are duties we should realise and fulfill. This is what I intend to convey. I will put forth two general duties, from each of which numerous duties are brought up. Two general duties for the Iranian nation, for you and I, especially for you, the youth. What are these two duties? One is the duty of 'looking at oneself', the other is the duty of 'looking at the enemy': two duties. I will now explain the meaning of the duty of 'looking at oneself'.

‘Looking at oneself’ means self-evaluation and assessing oneself. We should consider who we are; what is our condition; we should not forget ourselves. In the Quran, the Almighty Allah says:

نَسُوا اللَهَ فَاَنساهُم اَنفُسَهُم

(4). “They forgot Allah, [so] made them forget themselves!” Allah punished them. What was their punishment? It was forgetting themselves [i.e., self-negligence]. Not knowing and not being able to evaluate and assess ourselves properly is a great disaster: it is like an ill person who has a shocking illness which will lead to death and does not know it and is not aware of it. The result is clear. If they want to survive, they should know their illness to cure themselves. This is one aspect. The second aspect is not only to realise the defects but also to know the strengths. I will present a short list for you, dear brothers, and sisters. If we look at ourselves precisely— ‘ourselves’ means our Revolution, government, behaviour, and identity—there are some strengths and achievements. The Revolution had goals; it entered the scene with essential goals, which it has reached—they have been attained and are crucial—and some we have not gained. We have strengths in some issues and defects in others. We should reinforce the strengths, maintain them, appreciate them, and amend the defects. Why do we say ‘the strengths should be appreciated’? It is because there is a policy that wants you to forget your strengths, not to know you have such abilities. This hostile policy exists; therefore, one should recognise [and admit] the strengths.

We—I mean the Revolution—have had successes. ‘We’ does not mean individuals; it is the Revolution: the Iranian nation, the Islamic Republic government, various authorities, all the people, and all who are involved in the successes. We have had some successes; what are these successes? On top of all these successes is the destruction of a dependent infidel, unfair, cruel autocrat structure, [that is] a royal system. This is not an insignificant issue; it is the most important achievement. The royal system, which had a long history in our country, was a system which did not value the people, did not respect them, did not give people any roles in governing the country, and ignored the people. The governor of Baluchistan province—where I was in exile—had not even visited the province centre, an almost big city (5)! Nowadays, the President goes to distant locations, villages and small towns and is among the people. The difference is significant. They ignored people; people had no roles. Whom did they take into consideration? The British embassy and the American embassy. As I said—a few days ago (6), in a session here—the American agent, the American officer, used to take warplanes belonging to Iran from the airport, go to Vietnam and bombard there: the Iranian King did not even know. The point here is not that he got no permission but that he did not even inform [Iranians]! This is how people spend their lives. Around forty or fifty thousand Americans lived, ruled and decided in this country; people had no roles. [Americans decided] to whom the oil was to be sold with what price, to whom not to sell the oil and through what methods; the governor of a province was summoned; they chose the person who was to become parliament member or the person not to be chosen. Embassies interfered in many issues: they made decisions and announced them, and [their choices] had to be carried out. This was how the [royal] system was. The Islamic Revolution destroyed this system from its foundation and changed it into a republic. In this system [i.e., the Islamic Republic], people are the owners: they choose, distinguish [the truth], and vote. During the end of the Qajar rule and the period of the Pahlavi, [the feature of] dependence upon foreigners was added to the thousands of years of oppressive ruling, besides sexual, financial, and moral corruption, which existed in all aspects. The Revolution changed the system into a republic, in complete contrast [with the royal system]. People choose the legislators, the executors, the leader—through the intermediary of the Elite Assembly—the city council, and other decision-making, thinking and executing agents in the country. This is the most important achievement. This is one success.

The following achievement is creating national self-esteem in the Iranian nation for various national activities: science, technology, politics, art, and other activities. The Iranian nation has achieved self-esteem [and believes in themselves]. They can act, do [what they want], and not depend on foreigners. As I have said several times, in the past, in the tyrannical regime, our wheat was imported from America, and the former Soviet Union built our silo. Our physicians came from India: there were thousands of Indian and Bangladeshi physicians all over Iran. The Iranian nation's youth did not think they could think of being able to do something that was suppressed in them. This

condition was changed into a sense of capability. Nowadays, the youth have done great things, which you have heard and know. [Their deeds] in some fields have been announced and seen—such as the military section, of which all are aware—and in many fields, most people are unaware of the great deeds performed. Who has done [the great deeds] in industry, nuclear industry, medicine, pharmacy, and various fields? These youth. This is self-esteem and self-belief in national affairs.

Meanwhile, [we have the issue of] self-confidence in international confrontations. The Iranian nation and its representatives do not feel weak in their confrontations with [world] powers, and they do not have a sense of humiliation. It was not much in the past. In those days, the chosen political candidates of foreign affairs ministry in specific countries had no innovation in political issues—not to mention their private affairs, which were truly awful—they were subject to the government which controlled them, [such as] England, America, France, and the like. Thus, it creates self-esteem and self-confidence in international confrontation and spreads the thoughts and values of the Revolution, the evidence of which can be seen in the region [are one of the achievements of the Revolution]. The values of the Revolution have spread: we have not done anything for this achievement; this is the feature of the Revolution itself.

Relative prevention of the spread of Western culture as the superior culture: Before the Revolution Western culture was the superior culture: such was the situation. Unfortunately, that perspective has not changed completely, but it has been amended to some extent. Stopping national services from being exclusive to the centre: Before the Revolution, many services, basic issues, and public services were specified for Tehran and a number of big cities. Nowadays, the Revolution has provided the conditions for the services to be spread deep in the country and all over the country. God willing, this will be continued and expanded.

Cultivating global scientists: Scientists who are famous in the world, good surgeons, sound engineers, and eminent nuclear scientists are well-known in the world and respected. As you know, one of the proper concerns nowadays is the immigration of our specialists—physicians and the like—which has raised significant concern for some, and it is true. What is the other side of the coin? The world needs our physicians. Once, we needed Bangladeshi physicians, but today, the world needs our physician engineers, jurists, and pilots. They are trained; the Revolution has created them and brought them up.

Creation of spontaneous common people groups: This is one of the successes of the Revolution. We have spontaneous groups in various aspects of people's lives. Spontaneous popular groups in art, industry, military affairs, and multiple activities exist. Some young people are no burden to the government and have no expectations. However, they do great deeds among themselves. We witness their deeds. These are our strengths, and we have a lot of them. If we look at ourselves, there are many such strengths in the Iranian nation, which is the outcome of the Revolution. Well…These are the strengths.

Do we have no defects or shortcomings? Yes, we do. Are they rare? No. We have weak points. We have fallen behind in building up a robust national economy. We are lagging in establishing social justice, judicial justice, and economic justice— 'justice' is one of the best slogans of the Revolution and one of its most significant goals. We have fallen back. A lot has been done—good work—but there is a great distance to reach what should be done. We are lagging [a great deal] in the eradication of social harms, the issue of divorce, the issue of addiction, and moral issues. We have not succeeded as much as we should have. We are lagging. Look at cyberspace: one observes moral problems. This reveals our lagging. We are lagging. We are lagging in the compatibility of our lives with Islamic values: Islam forbids dissipation, [but] we dissipate; Islam demands putting aside luxurious lives, [but] in various social classes, a group of those who can lead luxurious lives and a group imitate them—they cannot, they do not have the money, but they borrow money to hold a sumptuous wedding for their child. Why? This is our problem. This is why we lag behind.

I pointed out looking at oneself, self-evaluation, and self-assessment. This is our duty. If we look at ourselves, we

will realise our successes and great achievements, insist on them, be proud of them, and increase them; we will also realize our defects and try to fix them. We all have our duties: the government has duties, the Parliament has duties, and the people have duties.

What is the duty of the government, the Parliament, and other official centres? The authority's duty is firm determination, constant work, healthy performance, honesty with people, and preference for national benefits over personal advantages. Thanks to Allah, those in high authority in our country have these features. However, these positive attributes should prevail over the governmental and judicial authorities at all levels and be widespread. I do not intend to blame the one who is responsible for the problems; that is another issue I do not intend to mention now. We want to know today what our duty is and what the government's duty is.

The elite must recognise the lack and shortages, find the dangerous outlets, search for solutions to emend the shortages and close the dangerous outlets, investigate [the situation], and help the government, the Parliament, and the authorities intellectually. This is the duty of the elite. In a lively and alive society, the elite of the nation sense their responsibilities. And these are their duties.

The youth have duties. The duty of the youth—numerous ones—is, first, to provide the capabilities inside themselves for the roles they are to play in the future. The youth can play roles [in the future of Iran]. As you can observe, many capable youths have entered the government and are busy working. Well, they should provide their capabilities; the youth should be ready to be present in various fields and carry heavy burdens [of responsibility]. The youth are forerunners, forerunners of the society. They should be prepared to play the forerunner role in various capabilities—moral, scientific, etc.—in order to play the forerunning role.

The public has duties. There are different duties: a tradesman has his particular duties, a clerk his own, and a clergyman his own. Each of these different people has duties, but the general duty is to support the authorities, to support those who serve the people, and to support good performances.

One of the primary and essential duties, which is the duty of the public, the government, the elite, the youth, the student, the clergyman, etc., is to remember that all the deeds we have demanded them to do are 'jihad'. What does 'jihad' mean? 'Jihad' is the effort one undergoes in confrontation with the enemy. This is what 'jihad' means. The deeds we mentioned are 'jihad'. When we demanded the elite to perform some specific deeds, we meant that the activity should be done because an enemy does not want it to be done. It is in confrontation with the enemy; thus, it is 'jihad'. The youth should do [their duties] and know the enemy does not want that to be done. People should support the authorities; they should be united; they must be aware that the enemy does not want this. If they do so, it is 'jihad'. 'Jihad' means this. The enemy is against whatever good deed that is done in the Islamic Republic. This is not a pure claim, and there is logic behind it. The reason is this: the Islamic Republic system is a system which believes in,

لا تَظلِمونَ وَ لا تُظلَمون

(7) [which means, 'they do not allow others to oppress them nor are they cruel towards others']. The Quran has demanded us,

لا تَظلِمونَ وَ لا تُظلَمون

not to be cruel, nor allow others to oppress us—not to ever, under any condition, accept oppression. This is the Islamic Republic system. Systems which have been founded upon cruelty are against such a system and that is natural. Therefore, whatever development is achieved in the Islamic Republic makes them nervous [and angry]. Hence, perform these deeds since the enemy is confronting you.

And now, let's elaborate on the second duty in a few words. The first duty was to have a glance at oneself, and the second duty was to have a look upon the enemy. I elaborated on a glance at oneself. 'A look upon the enemy' [means] to realise there is an enemy, not to forget there is an enemy, to know the enemy has tricks, deceit, ruse, and the means for it. The enemy should not be considered as weak and incapable. "An enemy cannot be considered as weak and hapless" (8). We should not be afraid of the enemy. The essential condition for success is to know the enemy and be aware of its capabilities but not to be afraid of it. If one is afraid, he will lose. One should not be intimidated by the threats of the enemy, by the tumult [and pother], by the pressure. One should not be frightened by these. One should pay attention to what angers the enemy and put pressure [on Iran]. That is your strength; that is our strength. If we were weak and did not have that strength, the enemy would not have been so angry, would not have put forth such pressure, would not have taken whatever action it could, and would not have played such tricks and deceit. This is what 'a look upon the enemy' means. We should consider the developments of the Islamic Republic and realise these are what make the enemy angry. Occasionally, some are humiliated and become inactive as soon as the enemy humiliates them. Beware! It is the enemy's policy to make them disbelieve and distrust their belongings [and capabilities]. One should not become inactive in front of the enemy. This is what I wanted to say about [duty].

There is another issue as well, and that is the elections (9). We are approaching the elections. Undoubtedly, international arrogance [i.e., Imperialism] is against our elections. Why are they against it? Because our system is an ‘Islamic Republic’, it has two sections. They are against both its ‘Republic’ and its ‘Islamic’. The symbol of ‘Republic’ is this election. This election is the symbol of ‘Republic’. Hence, when America is against the Islamic Republic system, it means it is, in fact, against the elections, it is against the presence of the people, it is against people’s participation in the elections, it is against the liveliness and enthusiasm of the elections and the increased participation rate of people. Even once, near the elections, a president of America—of course, they do not say it now—addressed the people of Iran and said, “Do not participate in the elections!” I do not remember clearly whether it was the presidential elections or the parliament. This reveals how much the president of America at that time—a few years ago— [was against the elections] to address the Iranian nation and tell them not to participate in the elections. Of course, that election was held with the most enthusiasm than ever. In fact, the president of America unknowingly helped the nation of Iran: he wanted people not to participate, he told them not to participate, but people participated more in aversion to him. This was a help to us. After that occasion, they no longer say so—they do not frankly say it—but try to dissuade people from the elections in various ways; they want to frustrate people and disappoint them, and they have numerous methods for it.

Everyone must participate in the elections. Election is the primary basis of the Islamic Republic system. The election is the means for reforming the country. Those who intend to resolve the problems and amend [the country] should go towards elections. The correct path is to choose. This is one issue [I wanted to clarify].

The second issue is that people must try to choose the best. Of course, the first [important] aspect is people’s presence, and then choosing the best. ‘Choosing the best’ means that since the candidates have passed the surveillance of the Guarding Assembly, they are all good [people]. However, the best must be chosen. This is what reasoning demands [This is the verdict of reasoning]. How can we distinguish the best? The nation of Iran should do their best to distinguish the best; they should investigate. If they cannot [distinguish the best and investigate themselves], they can trust those whom they know. Those whom they trust can introduce [the best], and people can make use of their introduction and recognise the best.

Those who can talk to people whose words are accepted by people and whose people respect them should encourage people to participate in the elections. The candidates who enter the realm of elections should avoid insulting, offending and disrespecting others. Pay attention to the fact that these are necessary things we should do for the elections. The one who can encourage [others] should encourage [them]; the one who is a candidate should not be immoral. To offend each other, use obscenities, insult each other, and slander in cyberspace will degrade the elections and make them unblessed. Avoid exaggerating the problems and hardships. To attract the attention of

people, some [candidates] exaggerate the hardships and problems. This is wrong, in contrast to reality and a lie and will not attract the blessing of Allah.

The accuracy of the elections, its perfection, and its propriety have been our perpetual demand from the authorities. I have to tell you that, during these long years, in these recent decades that elections have been held, I, as an individual who was once a president and later a leader [—till now—], never have I observed an election violation in the sense that the enemy claims. They are claiming nonsense. In some instances, a few claimed that there were problems in the elections—in various elections. We investigated, inspected, and dispatched [specific] persons to investigate: the result was that it had not been the case, and the situation was not such to change the result [of the elections]. Some might commit violations on insignificant scales, but that will not affect the result of the elections at all. Thanks to Allah, elections have always been proper, accurate and regular in our country, and this time, it will be as usual, God willing.

My last word is the unity of the Iranian nation. My dears [My dear nation]! We struggled [against enemies] with unity, and as one, we succeeded as one; we have continued till now as one, and we must continue as one. Differences of taste, political differences and the like should not influence the national unity of the Iranian nation in front of the enemies. Peace be upon you all, and may Allah bestow upon you His Mercy and Blessings.

References:

1- At the beginning of the meeting, Seyed Mohammad-Ali Aal-Hashem (Leader's representative in East Azerbaijan and the Friday clergy of Tabriz) had a short speech.

2- Lecture for people of East Azerbaijan (18 February, 2020).

3- Quran, Saba':46.

4- Quran, Hashr:19.

5- Iranshahr.

6- Lecture in the meeting with a number of the generals and clerks of the Air Force of the Islamic Republic of Iran (5 February, 2024).

7- Quran, Baghareh:279.

8- Sa'di. Golestan, Chapter One (with a slight change). "Do you know what Zaal said to the mighty Rustam? / An enemy cannot be considered as weak and hapless".

9- Twelfth elections of the Islamic Consultative Parliament and sixth elections of the Leadership Assembly to be held on 1 March, 2024.