

**Tara Sepehrifar** at Tufts University in Boston, where she's studying law and diplomacy



**Upfront:** How was your experience in an Iranian prison?

**TS:** The experience of being kept in solitary confinement [for a month] is difficult. And the most frustrating point is the fact that you never know what will happen. But at the same time, it's an experience that will help you know more about yourself and how committed you could be.

**Upfront:** Why did you decide to leave Iran?

**TS:** Because I did not want to spend that time in prison, although I respect all my friends who did that and stood up and decided to stay there. I thought, "I'm in my 20s and there is a lot more to learn. And I want to be able to be influential and make a change, and I could use my time to learn more about the world."

**Upfront:** What was your reaction when you found out that you'd been sentenced to prison and a lashing?

**TS:** As I found out I was, "That's impossible." That was a sad moment, figuring out, OK, maybe

there's no way back. But I tried to stay optimistic. If you only think about the negative aspects of it, it's obviously very painful.

**Upfront:** What do you think of President Hassan Rouhani?

**TS:** I think what happened in the elections was definitely a positive change for the country. But I also think we have to be realistic about what he can achieve in this four-year period. I think he will face a lot of resistance from the conservative part of the regime.

**Upfront:** What do young people in Iran hope for?

**TS:** For younger generations, more important than anything is what they would call their basic freedoms. They don't want interference by the government in multiple aspects of their lives—for example, having the morals police telling them what to wear or not, or interfering with their personal relationships.

**Upfront:** What are your hopes for the future of Iran?

**TS:** I don't think the situation is sustainable in Iran because I think people at this moment are very different from the ones in power. If we can break the isolation, it will ultimately help democracy in the country. That's what I'm hoping for. I'm hoping for a more reformist government in power that could bring more change gradually. •

# Escape From Tehran

A young Iranian talks about why she fled to the United States and the 74 lashes that await her back home

BY ALESSANDRA POTENZA

**T**ara Sepehrifar, 26, fled to the U.S. from Iran in 2010 after taking part in student protests over the disputed 2009 election that kept then-President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in power. She was arrested and spent more than a month in a Tehran prison, fleeing Iran after her family bailed her out. Now a graduate student in Boston, she's been sentenced in absentia to seven years in prison and 74 lashes. *Upfront* spoke with Sepehrifar about her life in Iran and her take on the new president, Hassan Rouhani, who has portrayed himself as a moderate ready to improve relations with the West.

**Upfront:** Why did you decide to join Iran's student movement?

**Tara Sepehrifar:** When I was in high school, we had a reformist government in power [President Mohamed Khatami, 1997-2005]. But things changed after Mr. Ahmadinejad became the president. We [in the student movement] were clearly after reform. But gradually, more than trying to make a change, we were trying to stop things from getting worse.

**'If you only think about the negative aspects of it, it's ... very painful.'**

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