**"Fearless" Iranian women defy stadium ban with fake beards and wigs**

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By Reuters

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Female football fans who donned fake beards and wigs to attend a major match in Iran in defiance of a ban on women spectators were hailed as fearless by activists on Monday.

Photos and video of the fans sitting in Tehran's Azadi Stadium disguised as men as they watched their team Persepolis crowned champions on Friday have gone viral on social media.

The Islamic Republic has long barred women from attending male soccer matches and other sports fixtures, based at least partly on the theory that women should not hear fans swear.

"I am very proud of them and impressed that they can be so fearless, because it is a huge risk that they do that," Melody Safavi, Iranian women's rights activist and singer told the Thomson Reuters Foundation by phone from New York.

Safavi is in the Iranian reggae band Abjeez, whose song "Stadium" calls on Iranian men to support women in their fight to be allowed into sports fixtures. She lives in self-imposed exile in the United States.

"They are trying to break a lot of lines and taboos," said Shadi Amin, an Iranian women's and LGBT rights activist.

"For other people it is a small step, but for us it is a big step, because the cost of this action is not small. They risk being arrested," she told the Thomson Reuters Foundation by phone from London.

The Iranian group OpenStadiums, which is campaigning for the right of women to attend sports fixtures in the Islamic Republic, said that some women were arrested near Azadi stadium in March during the Esteghlal-Persepolis match.