

International

# Iran protest crackdown 'kills over 70' in a week

## Iran launches new strikes on Kurdish groups in Iraq

PARIS: Iranian security forces have killed 72 people, including 56 in Kurdish-populated areas, in the past week alone in their crackdown on the protests sparked by Mahsa Amini's death, a rights group said. The protests, sparked in mid-September by the death of Amini, 22, in morality police custody, have cut across ethnicities, social classes and provincial boundaries and turned into the biggest challenge to Iran's clerical leadership since the 1979 Islamic revolution.

Authorities have responded with an intensifying crackdown that has sparked an international outcry. Iran has also launched repeated cross-border missile and drone strikes, most recently on Tuesday, against exiled Kurdish opposition groups it accuses of stoking the protests from their bases in neighboring Iraq.

Norway-based group Iran Human Rights (IHR) said that 416 people had been killed by security forces nationwide in Iran itself, including 51 children and 21 women. It said 72 people had lost their lives in the past week alone, including 56 in western Kurdish-populated areas where there has been an upsurge in protest activity in recent days. Several towns in Kurdish-populated western Iran, including Mahabad, Javanroud and Piranshahr, have seen large protests, often starting at the funerals of those previously slain in demonstrations.

Ahead of a special session of the UN Human Rights Council Thursday in Geneva devoted to Iran, UN Human Rights Chief Volker Turk described the situation as "critical" amid a "hardening of the response by security forces", spokesman Jeremy Laurence said. Laurence voiced particular concern at the authorities' "apparent refusal to release the bodies of those killed to their families," and deplored them for making such releases "conditional on the families not speaking to the media or agreeing to give a false narrative on the cause of death".

### Internet blackout

The Norway-based Hengaw rights group, which focuses on Iran's Kurdish areas, has accused Iranian security forces of directly firing on protesters with machine guns and shelling residential areas. Hengaw said that five people were killed in Javanroud on Monday alone after thousands gathered for funerals for victims of the crackdown who were killed at the weekend. The group said it had confirmed the killing of 42 Kurdish citizens of Iran in nine cities over the last week, almost all killed by direct fire. Monitors also accused Iran of imposing a nationwide mobile internet blackout on Monday at the height of protest activity.

Monitor Netblocks said Tuesday that the mobile internet had been restored after a "3.5 hour cellular data blackout" on Monday that also coincided with Iran's football team refusing to sing the national anthem at their opening World Cup game. Freedom of expression group Article 19 expressed alarm that "reports of extreme state brutality continue out of Kurdistan alongside nationwide internet disruptions and shutdown". Hengaw meanwhile posted a video of protesters trying to remove birdshot pellets from the body of a protester with a knife, saying people were afraid to go to hospital for fear of being arrested.

### 'Systematic killing'

The New York-based Center for Human Rights in Iran on Monday urged the international community to act to prevent a massacre in Kurdish populated areas. "Unless Islamic republic authorities decide the costs of massacring civilians to crush the ongoing protests in Iran are too high, they will continue to slaughter children, women and men with impunity in a desperate attempt to reassert control," said CHRI

director Hadi Ghaemi.

According to figures collated by IHR, over half of those killed by the Iranian security forces in the crackdown have died in provinces populated by ethnic minorities. It said 126 people had been killed in the southeastern province of Sistan-Baluchistan, largely populated by the Sunni Baluch minority, where the protests had a separate spark but fed into the nationwide anger.

Meanwhile 48 people have been killed in Kurdistan, 45 in West Azerbaijan and 23 in Kermanshah, it said. "Systematic killing of civilian protesters belonging to the Kurdish and Baluch minorities amounts to crimes against humanity," said IHR director Mahmood Amiry Moghaddam. The mainly Sunni Kurds, often described as one of the world's largest stateless peoples, make up one of Iran's most important non-Persian ethnic minority groups and also have significant minorities in neighboring Iraq and Turkey as well as Syria.

### New strikes

Meanwhile, Iran launched new cross-border missile and drone strikes against Iranian-Kurdish opposition groups based in northern Iraq whom it accuses of stoking a wave of protests in the Islamic republic. Iran has been shaken by more than two months of civil unrest which authorities in the country describe as "riots" - sparked by the death of Kurdish-Iranian woman Mahsa Amini, 22, after her arrest for allegedly breaching the strict dress code for women.

Iran's Tasnim news agency said the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) had "launched a new round of attacks against terrorist groups based in the Iraqi Kurdistan region", the second such strikes in two days. The report said the headquarters of the



LONDON: People hold a placard during a protest following the death of Mahsa Amini who died in custody of Iran's morality police, in central London. — AFP

Kurdistan Freedom Party "was targeted by missiles and suicide drones" near Kirkuk. An Iraqi Kurdish military official, a local police officer and a party spokesman confirmed the renewed strikes on the region.

"We had taken our precautions and emptied the premises, there were no casualties," Kurdistan Freedom Party spokesman Khalil Nadri said. IRGC General Mohammad Pakpour also confirmed the strikes, saying the Kurdish group had "given support to the recent riots" in northwest Iran. Attacks against "anti-Iranian separatist-terrorist groups in northern Iraq will continue until the threat is eliminated and they are disarmed", the Guards' website quoted Pakpour as saying.— AFP

## Climate change will fuel diseases, Global Fund warns

GENEVA: Climate change will end up killing people by fuelling infectious diseases, the head of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria said Tuesday. Executive director Peter Sands said that in 2022, the fund had witnessed the "escalating impact" of

climate change on health. While upsurges in malaria had hitherto been seen due to the increasing frequency and devastation of tropical storms, "with the flooding in Pakistan it was taken to a completely different scale", he said.

"What we are seeing is that the mechanism by which climate change will end up killing people is through its impact on infectious disease," Sands said that parts of Africa which previously were unaffected by malaria are now becoming at risk as temperatures rise and allow mosquitos to thrive, notably at higher altitudes. However, the population in such areas will not have immunity, with the resulting risk of a higher mor-

ality rate. "It's quite alarming," Sands told a briefing with the UN correspondents' association. Other threats include tuberculosis spreading among the increasing number of displaced people around the world. "TB is a disease that thrives on having concentrations of highly-stressed people in close confines with inadequate food and shelter," he said.

"The more that we see climate change-driven displacement of people, the more I think that will translate into the conditions that will at least make it more likely," Sands also said food insecurity would make people more vulnerable to disease. As for whether the world was better prepared for the next pandemic than it was

for COVID-19, Sands said it was, but added: "That doesn't mean we are well prepared: we're just not as badly prepared as we were before."

By the end of 2022, Sands said the Global Fund will have invested around \$5.4 billion, which is significantly more than it has ever done before. The Geneva-based organization's largest donors are G7 governments, led by the United States and France. "For the people we serve in the poorest, most marginalized, most vulnerable communities in the world, 2022 was a brutal year," said Sands. "In the poorest communities in the world, HIV, TB and malaria are killing many more people than COVID-19." — AFP

CIANJUR: Survivors of an Indonesian earthquake that killed at least 271 people, many of them children, appealed for food and water Wednesday as heavy rain and aftershocks hampered rescue efforts among the rubble of devastated villages. The calls for help came as authorities warned that debris from landslides caused by the strong quake near the town of Cianjur in West Java needed to be cleared as rains forecast for the coming weeks threatened a second disaster.

Two days after the quake flattened their homes, residents were still trying to retrieve priceless belongings including family photos, religious books and marriage certificates. "Although some supplies have arrived, it is not enough. We got rice, instant noodles, mineral water but it's not enough," Mustafa, a 23-year-old resident of Gasol village, told AFP.

Mustafa had just dug through the rubble of an elderly neighbor's house at her request, appearing from the destroyed facade carrying a pile of clothes before returning to collect rice, a gas stove, canisters and frying pans. In Talaga village, some residents put signs on the windows of damaged houses and the front of tents that read "We need help!" In the streets, at least three people held up cardboard boxes, asking for donations. Evacuees crammed under flimsy tents, unable to move inside from the rain in case buildings collapse from an aftershock. A shallow 3.9-magnitude aftershock sent panicked evacuees running from shelters on Wednesday, according to an AFP reporter at the scene. Authorities had recorded 171 aftershocks as of Wednesday evening. More than

61,000 people have been displaced by the quake, around 2,000 are injured and 40 missing, the national disaster mitigation agency (BNPB) said Wednesday.

Around a third of those found dead so far are believed to be children, BNPB chief Suharyanto, who like many Indonesians goes by one name, told a press conference, without providing an exact figure. The government has dispatched tents and other supplies to Cianjur for the displaced, and the military deployed 12,000 personnel on Wednesday, officials said. Heavy rain was hampering those efforts in about a dozen villages where more than 22,000 houses had been destroyed. "For the refugees... their basic life necessities must be guaranteed - water, food, that's non-negotiable," Suharyanto said.

Two villages remain isolated, said Henri Alfandi, head of Indonesia's search and rescue authority Basamas, in a video posted to social media. He said he had received reports of villagers trapped without food and water, and some forced to sleep alongside dead bodies. "The people there can't even ask for help," he said, adding that three helicopters were being sent to drop aid. — AFP

Another hamlet in Cugenang district, the worst-hit by the quake, was buried by a landslide, Muhammad Wachyudin, an official from the Cianjur disaster mitigation agency, told AFP. Rescuers believed some bodies were buried in Kampung Pos but they have not been able to reach them. Indonesia is vulnerable to landslides and flash floods in the rainy season, which has already begun and peaks in December in West Java.

The country's meteorology agency warned that



BEIJING: People wearing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) walk along a street in Beijing on November 23, 2022, amid a lockdown due to COVID-19 coronavirus restrictions. — AFP

## 'Sick of everything': Beijingers fed up with restrictions

BEIJING: Schools and businesses closed, restaurants empty, and the fear of being locked down at any moment - the Chinese capital is a cauldron of dread and fatigue as COVID curbs tighten nearly three years into the pandemic. As infections in Beijing surge, residents are increasingly fed up with navigating vague, shifting restrictions and exhausted by the uncertainty of how long they might last. "I'm sick of everything now, there is no one on the street," Elaine, an office worker in her twenties, said.

"I want to eat out and socialize with friends, but it's impossible," she told AFP. One French expat living in Beijing was unexpectedly locked down in her boyfriend's apartment Monday morning after staying the night - one of his neighbors got infected, causing the entire building to be sealed for five days. "Every time we go to sleep, we're not sure whether the next morning we'll be trapped in our own apartment," the woman, who asked to remain anonymous, said.

"The only thing we have left is the freedom to walk down the street and breathe fresh air." Testing queues now routinely stretch around blocks, while businesses struggle to manage often unclear red lines. The fact that information often comes by word of mouth - oral instructions to close restaurants and businesses that are filtered through the sub-district or neighborhood committee level - has only compounded the misery.

Beijing's tightening restrictions come as the city is reporting its highest-ever number of daily infections, but at around 1,500 cases, the figures remain low by international standards. And almost three years into the pandem-

ic, the reaction by health officials appears out of proportion as the rest of the world has learned to live with the virus.

Residents fear a similar shutdown to the one that was imposed on China's biggest city, Shanghai, in the spring, which led to food shortages, protests and scenes of chaos as people fled snap lockdowns. Beijing's downtown shopping hub of Sanlitun, with its now-closed malls and Western boutiques, and the densely populated central business district of Chaoyang are deserted. Hairdressers, spas and other services deemed not essential for daily living have also been closed. One former staffer at a Chaoyang gym left Beijing after her workplace closed down during an outbreak in May, the last time restrictions were this strict. "The latest COVID wave has had a big impact on people's lives, especially those working in the service sector and fitness enthusiasts," the woman surnamed Xu told AFP. — AFP

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