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Briefing Notes Summary

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

Iran – July to December 2023

31 December 2023

03 July 2023

Access for women to football matches

On 30.06.23, the chairman of the Iranian Football Federation commented on women's access to football matches in the men's league. This issue has been highly controversial in Iran for many years. In Iran, football is a very popular sport also among women and has often been the subject of protests. In principle, access is to be granted in future, he said, but details still needed to be clarified, especially regarding the separate procedure for women's access to the stadiums.

Security situation

On 27.06.23, a skirmish occurred in the Balochistan-Sistan border region in which a border guard was killed. According to Iranian sources, this happened while repelling the incursion of an armed group. The region has problems with Sunni jihadist groups as well as separatist ethnic groups and drug smugglers. Clashes resulting in fatalities occur regularly.

On 27.06.23, various arrests for alleged public disorder were made in the circles close to the Sunni cleric Molavi Abdolhamid, the most important representative figure of the Sunni minority in Iran. According to various sources, those arrested had spread rumours about a possible conspiracy to assassinate Abdolhamid via social networks. The precise background is unclear.

Also on 27.06.23, it was announced that two Kurdish people had been arrested the previous day in the city of Saqqez and taken to an unknown location without contacting their relatives. Since the beginning of the protests over the death of Mahsa Amini, several dozen Kurdish citizens of Iran have been similarly arrested without official charges and taken to unknown locations.

10 July 2023

Attacks on police stations in Sistan and Baluchistan province

Six people were killed in an armed attack on a police post in the provincial capital of Zahedan, as reported by various media. Among the victims were four attackers and two police officers. The exact circumstances of the attack were unclear at first. Foreign media reported that the Sunni guerrilla group Jaish ol-Adl (Army of Justice), which is considered a separatist organisation in the province, claimed responsibility for the attack. According to the reports, the group said in a statement that the police station had been the main cause of violent attacks by law enforcement officers on protesters on 30.09.22 (so-called Bloody Friday). Since then, protests against the Islamic State have been taking place in Zahedan every Friday (cf. BN 10.10.22 and 19.06.23).

The region, which borders Pakistan, is also a hotspot for clashes between security forces and gangs of smugglers (cf. BN 08.03.21 and 22.05.23). Besides economic disadvantages due to a lack of infrastructure and the resulting

high unemployment, the region also suffers from severe environmental impacts such as drought and water shortage.

Ban on leaving the country and fine for trans woman active in civil society

According to a media report on 07.07.23, a transsexual activist in Tehran was sentenced to a six-month ban on leaving the country and a fine. She was charged with propaganda against the system, incitement to disturb national security and insulting sacred principles. Among other things, she had published videos of herself criticising the Islamic dress code and the government. Initially, in addition to the ban on leaving the country, a prison sentence of two years and six months had been imposed. However, the prison sentence was reduced to a fine of an unknown amount. It remains unclear whether the activist was prosecuted because of her sexual orientation. The brother of the convicted woman had stated that the activist had already been briefly detained during protests on 04.11.22 and was arrested at her place of residence on 26.12.22. At the end of January 2023, she was released on bail of two billion Toman (approx. EUR 36,311, as of 06.07.23).

Death penalty: Execution and commutation of death sentences

According to state news agency IRNA, on 08.07.23 the death sentences against two men accused of participating in the organisation and execution of an attack on the Shiite pilgrimage site of Shah Cheragh in Shiraz (Fars province) in October 2022 were executed. Reports say that the terrorist militia Islamic State (IS) claimed responsibility for the attack (cf. BN 31.10.22). The actual assassin had died in hospital from injuries sustained during the attack that left at least 13 people dead.

According to media reports, a Tehran shop owner has been sentenced to ten years' exile in Kerman (province of the same name) and six years' imprisonment. According to his lawyer, the man had initially been sentenced to death on charges of enmity against God (moharebeh) for setting fire to rubbish bins and tyres during a protest rally. During his trial the defendant had denied the charges, saying that he had intended to prevent disorder in front of his shop. According to Article 687 of the Iranian Penal Code, damage to public property can only be prosecuted as a charge of enmity against God if the acts are committed with the intent to disturb public order and security and to oppose the Islamic leadership. Otherwise, prison sentences of up to ten years are provided for.

Father of deceased protester sentenced to imprisonment and flogging

Foreign media report that the father of a female protester who was allegedly killed during the nationwide protests in November 2022 has been sentenced to six months in prison and 40 lashes. The press release refers to the man's own statements in social networks. According to the report, he was briefly arrested by security forces on 09.06.23 together with several members of other families after visiting the graves of protest victims in the cities of Bukan (West Azerbaijan province) and Saqqez (Kordestan province) and later released on bail (cf. BN 19.06.23). His 15-year-old daughter had died in November 2022 after protests in Sanandaj (Kordestan) because she had allegedly been hit in the head with a baton.

17 July 2023

Announcement of renewed deployment of police patrols to control compliance with the dress code

According to media reports, a spokesperson for the police forces announced on 16.07.23 that from now on police units would resume checks in public spaces to ensure compliance with the Islamic dress code. The announcement allegedly said that at first admonitions and, if necessary, warnings will be issued for any violations in the future. In case of non-compliance with police orders, legal action would be taken and the accused would be brought before the judicial system. According to Iranian criminal law, violations of the headscarf requirement can result in fines and even two-month prison sentences. A new bill now before parliament for a vote, initially provides for warnings and, in the case of repeated violations, fines, community service, occupational bans and even prison sentences. In the past months of 2023, more and more women ignored the mandatory wearing of a headscarf, also as a sign of silent protest.

Under President Ebrahim Raisi, the public presence of the so-called morality police (Pers.: gasht-e ershad) had been stepped up since July 2022 (cf. BN of 11.07.22). In the course of nationwide protests after September 2022, some government representatives announced the end of this police unit and its patrols in December 2022 (cf. BN of 06.12.22).

Reports of the death of two prisoners in the province of West Azerbaijan

According to reports by Kurdish human rights organisations, two inmates of a detention centre in Orumiyeh (West Azerbaijan province) died in quick succession on 09.07. and 10.07.23. As the reports refer to unnamed sources and information from the deceased's family members, they are difficult to verify. One of the men is believed to be a member of a Kurdish opposition group. In contrast, foreign media reported that according to official information from the Mahabad prosecutor, the man had been in custody on fraud charges and had died of a serious illness. The second prisoner had been detained for unknown reasons, the report said. According to family members, both prisoners were hospitalised with injuries before they died.

Freedom of the press: criminal proceedings against newspaper editor

According to media reports of 11.07.23, criminal proceedings have been initiated against the editor-in-chief of the well-known Tehran newspaper Shargh. The journalist is accused of publishing unverified and untrue articles, including reports of violence against women. Several staff members of the medium have been summoned in this context. The newspaper is considered reformist because it also takes up comparatively critical issues related to current developments in the country. Recently, the arrest and indictment of two female reporters of the newspaper caused a stir. In September 2022 they had been the first to report the death of a 22-year-old Kurdish woman in police custody, which triggered a nationwide wave of protests (cf. BN of 19.09.22 and 05.06.23). According to a report by the organisation Reporters Without Borders (RSF) of 12.07.23, 21 journalists are currently in custody in Iran.

Prison sentences

Prominent rapper Tomaj Salehi was sentenced to more than six years in prison, the media reported on 10.07.23. His lawyer reportedly stated that a two-year ban on leaving the country and a two-year ban on working had also been imposed. The dissident musician had been arrested in October 2022 (cf. BN of 31.10.22). He was accused of inciting violence with his songs and via social media during the nationwide wave of protests. He had previously been in solitary confinement in Dastgerd prison in Isfahan (province of the same name) and had been transferred to the general section of the prison after the conviction.

According to a human rights organisation, on 11.07.23 a detained teacher and civil activist was sentenced to another two years and six months in prison in addition to an existing sentence of several years. The organisation referred to information provided by his lawyer saying that he was accused of insulting the revolutionary leader and of propaganda against the system. Allegedly, he had published several letters and audio messages from prison.

According to media reports on 12.07.23, a well-known political scientist was sentenced to one year in prison. He is accused of spreading untrue allegations and content, the report said. The scientist had repeatedly criticised the Iranian leadership in his publications. On the other hand, he himself seems to have been criticised by activists abroad because of his connections to government circles.

Poverty line and minimum wage

After the minimum wage in Iran was last raised by 21 % to the equivalent of about USD 150 per month in March 2023, various institutions including the scientific service of the Iranian parliament have now published various studies on the poverty line and the prevalence of relative poverty within Iran. The consensus is that at least 30 % of the population currently live below the poverty line. Over the last decade, Iran's poverty rate has thus roughly doubled, with an additional eleven million people now classified as poor. In a detailed disaggregated study, local poverty lines were defined, according to which the poverty line in Tehran would be about USD 600 per month, in other cities of Iran about USD 480 per month. Depending on commodity group, inflation was between 60 % and 100 % higher than last year. The WFP also found a nationwide decline in food security and the consumption of meat and higher-quality food. According to the available figures, even households with two incomes in the range of the minimum wage and without children are currently unable to live above the poverty line in urban Iran. Additional economic pressure is created by the fiscal constraints of the state, which is trying to improve its revenues by increasing various taxes.

Iraq / Iran: Killing of KDPI member

On 12.07.23, a member of the Kurdistan Democratic Party-Iran (KDPI) was found dead north of Erbil. The man had a gunshot wound in the head. The incident occurred one day after Iran threatened further use of military means if

Iraq failed to sufficiently secure the border with Iran and disarm the Iranian Kurdish opposition groups based in the Autonomous Region of Kurdistan (KR-I).

The KDPI is an Iranian-Kurdish opposition party accused by the Iranian leadership of being involved in the protests against the Iranian government. It is classified as a terrorist group by Tehran. The KDPI holds Tehran responsible for the man's death. Already on 07.07.23 two members of the KDPI were killed in Sulaymaniyah/KR-I, presumably by a member of the Iranian armed forces (cf. BN of 10.07.23).

24 July 2023

Armed attack on police patrol in Sistan and Baluchistan province

Foreign media, citing a report by the Tasnim news agency, report that four police personnel were killed in an attack in Sistan and Baluchistan province on 23.07.23. According to the report, armed men fired at a police car on the route between the towns of Chash and Taftan. So far, hardly any details about the incident are known. Just two weeks earlier, six people, including two police officers, were killed in an armed attack on a police post in the provincial capital of Zahedan, according to media reports on 08.07.23. The reports said that the separatist Sunni guerrilla group Jaish ol-Adl (Army of Justice) claimed responsibility for the attack (cf. BN of 10.07.23).

Conviction of actresses for headscarf violations

According to media reports, two well-known actresses were sentenced to prison terms of different lengths and additional requirements. The reason given was that they had appeared in public and on social media without headscarves. The media report that on 18.07.23, one of the women had been given a ten-months prison sentence as well as a two-year ban on working, a two-year ban on leaving the country and a five-year ban on using social media. She had posted pictures on a social network showing her wearing a hat. The second woman had been sentenced to two years' suspended imprisonment, a two-year ban on leaving the country and a five-year ban on social media for appearing at a public event without a hijab. She was also ordered to undergo weekly psychological treatment. Human rights organisations criticised the use of such additional punishments. In a letter to the head of the judiciary, Gholamhossein Mohseni Ezhei, Iranian psychology and psychiatry associations also demanded an end to the appropriation of these scientific disciplines by the judiciary. They said that the diagnoses of mental disorders are under the purview of medical specialists, not judges.

These convictions as well as measures such as shop closures intensified the debate about the hijab requirement within the country, human rights organisations said. This is especially true after the announcement of the renewed deployment of patrols of the so-called morality police (cf. BN of 17.07.23). The Iranian leadership continues to regard the obligation to veil as one of the foundations of the regime's Islamic identity and authority, despite obvious divisions within clerical circles about this issue. According to media reports of 20.07.23, Judiciary Chief Ezhei called for the appointment of special judges for hijab cases in the future, presumably with the intention of countering the high incidence of violations. According to consistent reports, many women, especially in the cities, continue to ignore compliance with the headscarf obligation despite the increased pressure.

Protests by retirees and pensioners

According to media reports, pensioners and retirees gathered for protest rallies in several cities on 19.07.23. These rallies take place at irregular intervals in several provinces of the country, often without confrontations with law enforcement officers. The protesters are demanding more social and economic justice, as well as regular adjustments of their pensions in line with continuing price increases caused by the high inflation rate (approx. 46 %, as of 21.07.23). According to social media reports, the largest gatherings took place in the cities of Kermanshah, Yazd, Shiraz, Hamedan, Ardabil, Karaj, Qazvin and Sanandaj and several others.

Religious minorities: Reprisals against Baha'i

Various reports indicate ongoing reprisals against the Baha'i religious minority. On 28.07.23, a well-known piano teacher belonging to the group was arrested in Rasht. The teacher's family has been in the focus of the Iranian authorities for some time, it was said. Two of their adult children and other family members have already been sentenced for various activities, some to several years in prison.

At the same time, members of the religious community were prevented from commemorating a deceased person in a religious ceremony at the Golestan Javid cemetery in Tehran. The cemetery is a traditional Baha'i burial site,

however burials have been prevented there, the last time in April 2023. The denial of burial rituals has been reported repeatedly in the past, sometimes secret burials of Baha'i without notification of their relatives, and similar incidents were reported.

31 July 2023

Changes in the bill on the Islamic dress code

According to media reports on 28.07.23, the parliamentary legal committee amended the law reform on hijab and chastity rules before parliament.

Accordingly, the extended bill provides for a tightening of the earlier options for punishments, ranging from interim arrests to fines and imprisonment. Other penalties may include bans on leaving the country, confiscation of passports and deprivation of civil rights, such as occupational bans. In the case of repeated violations, fines of toman 50 million (about EUR 930, as of 31.07.23) and prison sentences of between five and ten years are possible. In exceptional cases, up to 15 years' imprisonment and a fine of toman 100 million (about EUR 1,860) will be possible. In contrast to the original draft law, not only the police force, which was responsible for investigating and enforcing the dress code originally, but also other security agencies will be tasked with this in future, including intelligence organisations and the Basij volunteer militia.

The reports say that the revised bill also stresses the more extensive implementation of gender segregation, including in universities, offices, parks and hospitals. It also provides for programmes that would require cultural institutions to actively promote and advertise the headscarf requirement. In addition, the creation and strengthening of intelligent systems to identify violations in public spaces, for example with the help of cameras, but also corresponding monitoring of the internet are planned.

The bill will be voted on in parliament in the coming months. It is not yet foreseeable, when the bill will finally enter into force.

Protester with criminal record sentenced to two years in prison

According to media reports, a participant in a protest from Rasht (Gilan province) who had a criminal record was sentenced to two years in prison. The charges against him included setting fire to an ambulance during a protest and leading local protests. The man had been arrested several times before, temporarily detained and released on bail each time, the reports said.

Sentencing of women labour activists to imprisonment

According to media reports on 27.07.23, a well-known trade union activist was sentenced to four years in prison and additional social restrictions in Tehran. Referring to information provided by her legal counsel, the woman was accused of committing offences against the security of the country. In addition to the prison sentence, she was banned from leaving the country for two years and banned from membership in parties, groups and organisations, as well as from engaging in media activities on the internet and in the press. The activist had been arrested on the eve of International Labour Day (01.05.23) at the home of a teacher activist friend and released on bail after a brief detention.

According to media reports, an activist and translator of the Tehran Bus Workers' Union started her five-year sentence in the local Evin prison on 26.07.23. This was announced by the convict's brother on social media. The activist had been arrested in May 2022 along with her husband and was temporarily released in August 2022 after putting up bail. She was sentenced to prison on charges of endangering national security and propaganda against the system.

Arrest of twelve persons for trading inappropriate clothing

Foreign media, citing a Tehran police spokesperson, reported that twelve people had been arrested on charges of selling inappropriate clothing and distributing it online. The reports said that related thereto, four production sites in the Tehran bazaar were sealed and corresponding goods were confiscated. The confiscated clothing contained motifs promoting the consumption of alcohol and other drugs as well as Satanism.

07 August 2023

Death penalty: several executions for alleged drug offences

According to reports by the human rights organisation Iran Human Rights (IHR), at least eleven death sentences were carried out between 30.07 and 01.08.23. The executed persons had been convicted of drug offences. All of them belonged to the Baluch ethnic minority, including two persons with Afghan nationality.

According to the human rights organisation, over 428 death sentences have been carried out so far in 2023, 61 of these in the month of July.

Convictions of medical personnel related to abortions

According to media reports, the head of the Iranian organisation for forensic medicine informed that around 500 charges in connection with abortions led to convictions of medical personnel in the years 2021/22. Punishments ranged from fines and imprisonment to the revocation of work permits and medical licences.

In November 2021, a law was passed that includes restrictions on the right to abortions, prohibits access to free contraceptives in the public health system and favours large families with additional public benefits. Previously, the law had allowed legal terminations of pregnancies in the first four months, provided that three medical professionals agreed. The so-called Act for the Rejuvenation of the Population and Support for the Family was introduced as a measure to boost population growth. Health experts and critics, however, warned of an increase in unwanted pregnancies and illegal abortions that represent health risks (cf. BN of 15.11.21).

Protests over water shortage

According to media reports, several people protested in front of the local water supply office in Divandarreh (Kordestan province) in the evening of 31.07.23. The reports said that the protest was triggered by the interruption of the city's drinking water supply for several days. According to unconfirmed reports, security forces used tear gas against the protesters and made several arrests. The reports of such arrests are based on information in social media and cannot be verified.

It was also reported that in the city of Zabol (Sistan and Baluchistan Province) in the country's southwest, a protest against the authorities' water management was staged on 31.07.23. However, this was an authorised assembly, the report said. In particular, the cities in the region's north have been persistently affected by water shortages, which have for several months been exacerbated by dust storms.

Closure of a well-known detention centre

Foreign media reported that preparations were being made to close Rajaei Shahr prison near Karaj (Alborz province), citing official judicial sources. According to the report, one third of the prisoners held there were transferred to the nearby Qezel Hesar prison on 03.08.23. The remaining prisoners are to be transferred to another prison after corresponding court orders. The swift closure of the prison had been ordered by Judiciary Chief Ezhei. In the past, Rajaei Shahr prison had mainly held violent persons serving prison sentences for serious crimes such as murder, rape or robbery, the report said. At the same time, political prisoners are said to have been held in the prison at times. Several reports by activists and former prisoners drew attention to the increased execution of death sentences and the precarious detention conditions in the prison.

14 August 2023

Attack on Shah Cheragh Shrine in Shiraz

An assailant entered the shrine on 13.08.23 and opened fire with an automatic weapon. He only managed to fire eleven rounds before he was overpowered. He killed one person and wounded three others. The attacker was arrested. The shrine is an important pilgrimage centre in Iran and had already been attacked on 26.10.22. At that time, 13 people were killed.

Deadly incident on the border with Iraq

On 13.08.23, Iranian border guards shot and killed a Kolbar at the border with Iraq. Kolbars are traders who smuggle goods, usually on foot, through the rough Kurdish border regions in order to profit from the price differences for

different product groups between Iran and Iraq. Such killings have occurred repeatedly in recent months. In 2022, 33 deaths were reported.

21 August 2023

New wave of arrests of Baha'i

On 16.08.23, the Baha'i International Community group published a total of 180 cases of crackdowns on Baha'i members by the security authorities that had come to light in the previous two weeks. These include raids on Baha'irun businesses, interrogations and arrests. Several prominent members of the community, especially such who had been active in unofficial leadership bodies and had already served long prison sentences, were re-arrested. Specifically, allegations of corruption by withholding medication were made against several owners of pharmacies. So far, at least 60 members of the faith community are reported to have been arrested during the current wave of arrests.

Action against activists

Arrests of people associated with women's rights movements are on the rise throughout the country. They seem to be linked to the anniversary of Mahsa Amini's death in September 2022, to suppress large protests in advance. On 19.08.23, HRW reported twelve arrests in Gilan province.

On the same day, Hengaw, a Kurdish human rights organisation based in Norway, reported the arrest of two Kurdish activists and the redeployment of military units to Kurdish-majority regions of Iran.

28 August 2023

Prison sentence against prominent university activist confirmed

According to media reports, the multi-year prison sentence against a prominent former initiator of student protests at Tehran's Amir Kabir University has been upheld by an appeals court. The convicted activist announced this on social media.

He said that the sentence amounts to a total of six years in prison. In addition, he was sentenced to two years' banishment from Tehran and a ban on leaving the country. A two-year ban on online activities was also imposed on him.

The convicted protest leader had been first arrested in 2007 and was imprisoned from 2009 to 2013. He was temporarily detained again at the start of the nationwide protests in September 2022.

Prison sentences upheld against eight people on security guard murder charges

According to media reports on 23.08.23, eight people, including a woman, were sentenced to prison terms ranging from five to 15 years in connection with the death of a member of the Basij volunteer militia during the 2022 nationwide protests in Karaj (Alborz province). The sentence has been upheld by the Supreme Court after an appeal and the convicts were charged with accessory to murder and other offences, the media said. As the main perpetrators in the case two men had been sentenced to death and executed in January 2023 (cf. BN of 12.12.22 and 09.01.23).

Kurdish human rights activist sentenced

On 24.08.23, a Kurdish human rights network reported that an activist and teacher from Sanandaj (Kordestan province) was sentenced to one year in prison, banishment to Dizel Abad prison in Kermanshah (province of the same name) and 40 lashes on 22.08.23.

The man is accused of disturbing public order and of propaganda against the system. He had already been briefly arrested in Sanandaj on 06.01.23 and 18.01.23 and released on bail in February 2023.

11 September 2023

State measures in the run-up to possible protest events

According to media reports, the Iranian leadership is stepping up measures to prevent protests commemorating the death of Mahsa Amini, which is considered to have triggered nationwide protests in 2022 (cf. BN of 19.09.22).

Several people have already been arrested in recent weeks, including an Amini uncle and family members of protesters who died during the protests. Checkpoints were set up in various cities and additional security forces were deployed in the provinces of Kordestan and West Azerbaijan, where protest participation was particularly strong. In addition, several university teachers critical of the regime, including at least ten professors, were suspended. Universities are sometimes considered the starting points for the largely decentralised organisation of protests. Sources in university circles said that local security agencies summoned students to make them sign pledges not to participate in protests. In some cases, students were threatened with arrest for not following the summons, they said.

Six miners remain in detention after protests

Foreign media report that six miners from the Agh-Dareh gold and stone mines (West Azerbaijan province) remain in detention in the provincial capital of Orumiyeh following their arrest during local protests in August 2023.

32 mineworkers were arrested after a rally over unpaid wages that had resulted in clashes with police forces. 26 people have been released on bail in recent weeks. According to press reports, the charges against the men who are still in custody include disturbing public order, acts against national security and kidnapping.

Freedom of the press: press medium banned

According to media reports, a news portal was banned by the press regulator on 04.09.23. The news website Entekhab, which is considered reform-oriented, violated the press law by publishing a video report in August 2023, the media reported. Among other things, Entekhab's report criticised the foreign policy of the government under President Raisi, which is oriented towards China and Russia. The justification for imposing the ban was that the report was illegal and contrary to the country's national interests.

Conviction of two female journalists

According to media reports on 03.09.23, two female journalists were sentenced to three years in prison each. According to their lawyer, the prison sentences for the charges of "conspiracy and collusion" were suspended on a pro-rata basis. Thus, the women will have to spend only about one month in prison. The rest of the sentence will be suspended for five years on the condition that the journalists attend a course on professional ethics and do not leave the country.

18 September 2023

More arrests in the context of anniversary protests

According to media reports, several activists more were arrested in various cities between 15.09. and 17.09.23. The security authorities justified their actions including by violations of public security, inciting protests or possession of arms.

The arrests, which started at the beginning of September 2023 and are often brief, are seen as an attempt by the Iranian leadership to prevent commemoration and protests on the anniversary of the events that triggered the protests in 2022 (cf. of BN 11.09.23). Human rights organisations say that the majority of arrests were made in provinces where a large share of ethnic minorities are living: including East Azerbaijan and Kordestan in the northwest as well as in Khuzestan in the south-west.

Especially in the city of Saqqez (Kordestan province), the presence of security forces, traffic controls and surveillance measures were stepped up. This is the city where the grave of Mahsa Amini, who died on 16.09.22 shortly after her arrest, is located. Foreign media report that local security forces have been using roadblocks and checkpoints to prevent non-residents from accessing Amini's grave site. Amini's father was also temporarily detained and interrogated on 16.09.23, as is reported by Kurdish human rights groups. A man was injured by gunfire in Saqqez for approaching military barriers.

In addition, units of the Revolutionary Guards (IRGC) and security forces were sent to other cities in the province, including Bukan, Mahabad and Sanandaj, the groups reported. Reportedly there were no calls for protests in the region but there were some shops closures and strikes in solidarity. Isolated protests in Tehran, Isfahan and Shiraz, and other places were reported.

Alleged arrest of protest organisers abroad

According to media reports on 13.09.23, the news portal of the Iranian judiciary Mizan announced that the Ministry of Information (intelligence services) had arrested several suspected protest leaders abroad. A video was published showing the confessions of several men who were alleged to have led demonstrations in the US, Germany and the UK. The report does not say when and where the men were arrested. The authenticity and veracity of the information cannot be independently verified.

Attack on members of the paramilitary volunteer militia Basij

According to media reports, an armed attack targeted a group of paramilitary forces of the Basij volunteer militia, which is subordinate to the Revolutionary Guards (IRGC), in Nourabad (Fars province) on 16.09.23. According to official reports, one Basij member was killed and three others injured in the attack. No further information is available on the perpetrators or the motives for the attack.

25 September 2023

Parliament votes to implement stricter Islamic dress code

According to media reports on 20.09.23, a new bill on hijab and chastity rules was passed by a majority of 152 out of 290 MPs in parliament. However, the law still needs to be ratified by the Guardian Council to finally come into force.

The draft law provides for a wider range of penalties for violations of Islamic rules, which can range from interim arrests to fines and deprivation of civil rights to imprisonment (cf. BN of 31.07.23). Accordingly, the dissemination and promotion of nudity, immorality, hijab violations or inappropriate clothing in public, in social media or in foreign media are considered violations. In future, punishments are to be extended to business operators who, for example, offer services to women although these entail violating the headscarf obligation. In addition, the law is to be used to enforce a more extensive separation of the genders. An extension of the responsibilities of security authorities for monitoring and enforcing the dress code is also envisaged. Human rights organisations consider the bill a massive attack on women's rights in Iran.

Death sentence imposed on Tajik national after attack on pilgrimage site

According to media reports on 21.09.23, a Tajik national was sentenced to death as the alleged main perpetrator of the attack on the Shah Cheragh pilgrimage site in Shiraz (cf. BN of 14.08.23).

Two people were killed and seven others were injured in the attack on 13.08.23. The local head of the judiciary in Fars province stated that the convicted man had links to IS and was considered to bear most of the responsibility for the attack. He was charged with enmity against God (Persian: moharebeh), corruption on earth (efsad-e fi'l-'arz) and conspiracy against national security. He was sentenced to death on two counts.

Detention conditions: Prisoner dies in custody due to delayed medical treatment

According to media reports on 25.09.23, a 63-year-old detainee died in Tehran's Evin Prison due to inadequate medical care. The prisoner had been returned to the prison after being transferred to hospital despite health problems. The prison authorities had refused to admit the man to hospital despite judicial authorisation. The prisoner had been imprisoned for financial offences and held both Iranian and US citizenship.

09 October 2023

16 year-old girl in hospital after suspected dispute with morality police

According to reports in the media, a 16 year-old girl was admitted to hospital on 01.10.23 following an as yet unexplained incident in Tehran's subway. Nothing is known about her state of health at present. Officially published video recordings show a number of people pulling an inert person out of a subway car. A Norway-based Kurdish human rights organisation has reported in this connection that an Iranian Kurdish woman was injured in a confrontation with members of the morality police at Tehran's Shohada subway station, probably as a result of blows to the head, and is now in a coma. The young woman is allegedly now being treated in hospital under strict security conditions. It has also been reported that the girl's mother has been arrested. The information on these incidents cannot be independently verified. International human rights organisations' accounts of events are denied

in Iranian state media. According to information from the authorities, the girl injured her head when she lost her balance as a result of circulatory problems. However, eye witnesses have allegedly reported that the girl was beaten in connection with Islamic clothing regulations.

Reports of attacks on demonstrators in Sistan and Baluchestan province

It has been reported in the media that demonstrations occurred once again in a number of towns and cities in Sistan and Baluchestan province following Friday prayers on 29.09.23. Pictures on social networks showed demonstrators setting fires alight on the streets in the city of Zahedan. According to one news medium which reports on events in the province, security forces opened fire and deployed tear gas against demonstrators. A number of people were reportedly arrested. The incidents cannot be confirmed by any further reports. The local public prosecutor has apparently stated that a normal atmosphere prevailed and no shots were fired.

Demonstrations after Friday prayers have been a regular occurrence in Zahedan and other towns and cities in the province since October 2022, following brutality against demonstrators by the law enforcement forces on 30.09.22 which left large numbers of demonstrators dead or injured (so-called Bloody Friday) (cf. BN of 10.10.22).

16 October 2023

Religious minorities: Prison sentences for four Baha'i

Foreign media have reported that four members of the Bahá'í religious community received prison terms of several years on 10.10.23.

The individuals concerned are reportedly a woman and three men from Tehran province, who received prison terms of five, three and two years after their cases were referred to a court of appeal. The sentences were allegedly passed by the court of first instance on charges of membership of illegal groups with the aim of disrupting national security.

Protest against segregation of the sexes at universities

It was reported in the media on 10.10.23 that students at the Technical University (Sharif) had protested against measures to segregate the sexes in individual faculties and university facilities, including study halls and libraries. Pictures in social media showed a number of students of a faculty staging a sit-down strike in protest. In connection with increased controls on compliance with Islamic clothing regulations, measures to segregate the sexes have reportedly also been stepped up in the academic environment at the beginning of the current academic years.

In this connection, it has been reported that some 32,000 associate university teaching staff have been removed from their positions at branches of the Islamic Azad University as part of a nationwide restructuring of the higher education system. The university based in Tehran is a private university system whose president is appointed directly by the revolutionary leader. It comprises an extensive network of educational establishments covering 367 campus sites throughout the country. The suspended teaching staff are to be replaced by doctoral students who have undergone brief training. According to reports in the media, the wave of dismissals may be regarded as knockon effect of the nationwide protests in September 2022, in the aftermath of which academic staff were dismissed and students were suspended (cf. BN 27.02.23).

23 October 2023

Human rights lawyer and female journalists sentenced to prison terms

It has been reported in the media that a well-known lawyer has been handed down a one-year prison sentence in Tehran. He has also reportedly been banned from any activities in social media for one year. Among the clients represented by the 73 year-old lawyer were the family of Jina Amini, who died following her arrest in September 2022. It was on the basis of this mandate that he was charged. According to his lawyer, the sentence was imposed on charges of propaganda against the system, and is appealable.

The convicted man has supported political prisoners on various occasions and voiced criticism of the government in interviews with Persian-language media abroad. In his capacity as a lawyer he most recently petitioned for an independent medical investigation into the cause of Amini's death. Iranian authorities attributed her death to a heart attack and an underlying disease. This is fully disputed by human rights organisations, who assert that there are indications that the woman was mistreated in police custody.

According to reports in the media on 22.10.23, two female journalists who were the first to report on Amini's death have received prison sentences of seven and six years. The two women were held in custody without trial for several months. They were found guilty on charges including collaboration with enemy states, conspiracy and collaboration to commit crimes against national security and propaganda against the system of the Islamic Republic.

Death sentence: several convicts executed

Citing a Kurdish human rights organisation, it has been reported in the media that the death sentences passed on three male prisoners in Lorestan province were executed on 19.10.23. Two of the men were imprisoned at the central prison of the provincial capital, Khorramabad, while the third man was held in the prison of the city of Aligudarz. It has also been reported that ten people were executed at Ghezel Hesar prison in Karaj (Alborz province) on 19.10.23. In all these cases, the death sentences had been handed down on charges of drug trafficking.

According to reports by human rights organisations, approx. 90 % of all death sentences passed in Iran are linked to drug trafficking. At least 305 people have reportedly been executed for drug-related offences between January and October 2023. According to AI, at least 576 death sentences were executed in Iran in 2022.

Confrontations at protests in Zahedan (Sistan and Baluchestan province)

It has been reported in the media that confrontations occurred between Sunni Muslims and security forces in the provincial capital, Zahedan, on 20.10.23. Posts in social networks claim that security forces took action against demonstrators after Friday prayers. It is not possible to verify by reference to independent sources whether force was used. In recent weeks, photographs have been published in social networks which indicate a bolstering of security personnel in various towns and cities in the province. There are isolated reports of brutality against demonstrators. Demonstrations after Friday prayers have been a regular occurrence since law enforcement forces took violent action against protests in October 2022 (cf. BN of 10.10.22 and 09.10.23).

30 October 2023

Contentious bill on female dress regulations blocked for the time being

It has been reported in the media that the Council of Guardians has rejected the so-called law to protect chastity and the hijab as it stands. The council's spokesman has stated that following an examination of the bill in ten sessions it had been found imprecise and ambiguous. The wording of the bill comprising some 70 articles is allegedly unclear in many instances. Parliament has been invoked to amend the bill accordingly.

The reform to the law stipulates more severe punishment for failure to observe Islamic rules on clothing. Repeated violations of the law are punishable with fines, and in extreme cases prison sentences of up to 15 years plus fines to the equivalent of more than EUR 5,000 (cf. BN of 31.07.23 and 25.09.23) can be imposed. A parliamentary commission had employed a constitutional trick to approve the penal reform at the end of September without a vote in the plenary session of parliament. The Council of Guardians, which examines all parliamentary decisions to verify their constitutionality and compatibility with Islam, reportedly also criticised this practice.

On 24.10.23 the Tehran newspaper Shargh published the result of a poll on the legislative reform. 84 % of the approximately 12,300 respondents believed that the new law would have no effect on compliance with clothing regulations. The newspaper's editor-in-chief was subsequently issued a court summons.

Several arrests at funeral following death of 16 year-old schoolgirl

It was reported in the media on 28.10.23 that 16 year-old schoolgirl Armita Garavand from Tehran had died after being in a coma for a number of weeks. She had been in hospital since the beginning of October 2023, after suffering injuries from blows to the head in what is believed to have been a confrontation with members of the morality police in Tehran's underground railway network (cf. BN of 09.10.23).

The schoolgirl was buried under heightened security measures on 29.10.23. Several arrests were reportedly made at Behesht-e Zahra cemetery, in the course of which law enforcement agents also used physical violence, according to eye-witness reports. Those arrested included two of Garavand's relatives and well-known human rights activist Nasrin Sotoudeh. A number of individuals were released after being briefly detained.

Religious minorities: Arrests and convictions of Baha'i

It was reported in the media on 24.10. and 26.10.23 that ten people who are believed to belong to the Bahá'í religious community had been arrested in Isfahan, in the province of the same name. No grounds for the arrests or the current whereabouts of the individuals concerned are known. Some of those arrested have reportedly already been arrested and convicted in the past. In addition to the arrests, it appears that prison sentences have also been handed down to Bahá'í members, including two women from Mashhad (Razavi-Khorasan province) and at least six other people. They were reportedly charged, among other things, with membership of groups opposed to the government and propaganda against the system.

As such reports cite information provided to a human rights organisation by anonymous sources, they cannot be independently verified.

06 November 2023

Death sentences for adultery and depravity on earth

A human rights organisation has reported that the death sentence imposed on a man of Kurdish origin has been executed after he had spent more than 13 years in a prison in the city of Karaj, to the west of Tehran. He was reportedly sentenced to death together with six other individuals in June 2019 on the charge of depravity on earth - a broadly defined criminal offence pursuant to Art. 286 of the Iranian criminal code.

According to reports in state media, a woman has been sentenced to death for adultery. The convicted woman's husband reportedly discovered from surveillance cameras that she had had relations with other men and reported her in 2022. Under Iranian criminal law, the woman is apparently able to appeal against the sentence.

A report published by the UN Secretary-General on 01.11.23 states that the country is executing death sentences on a large scale. According to the report, at least 419 people were executed in the first seven months of the Iranian year of 1402 (March to October 2023), representing a 30 % rise compared to the corresponding period in the previous year.

13 November 2023

Religious minorities: Baha'i arrested

It was reported in the media on 08.11.23 that several members of the Bahá'í religious community had been arrested in the cities of Hamadan (in the province of the same name) and Karaj (Alborz province).

According to the spokesman for the global community of Bahá'í, armed security forces searched the homes of around 20 Bahá'í families in Hamadan and arrested ten people. Nine Bahá'í were reportedly arrested in Karaj. Eye witnesses have reported that the security forces behaved violently and personal property was seized. Meanwhile, a human rights organisation has cited reports that two of ten members of the religious community who were arrested in Isfahan in October 2023 (cf. BN of 30.10.23) have been released.

It is estimated that the Bahá'í religious community has some 300,000 members in Iran, whose constitution does not recognise it as a religious minority. Its members are continually subjected to repressive measures by the state, such as arrests, convictions, and discrimination, including exclusion from higher education and from access to the labour market. After the nationwide protests began in 2022, a further marked increase in measures by the state against Bahá'í ensued.

Armed clash in border region with Pakistan

According to reports from 13.11.23 citing a news agency associated with the Revolutionary Guards, the governor of the city of Saravan (Sistan and Baluchestan province) has reported an armed clash between Iranian border guards and members of an unspecified hostile group. One member of the border guard was reportedly killed and two members of the military injured.

Protests against shortage of teachers in Khuzestan province

According to reports in the media, a protest rally took place in the village of Qala Seyed Moghim in Khuzestan province on 08.11.23. Pupils' parents who were demonstrating against the shortage of teachers for the third and fifth grades were reportedly attacked by security officers. Four people are said to have been arrested. Eye witnesses have reported that members of the security forces threatened people who took part in the demonstration.

The government announced at the end of October 2023 that a shortage in teaching staff to the tune of at least 250,000 to 300,000 teachers was impending, with the extent of the shortages varying according to province. The shortage in Tehran province was estimated at around 4,000 teachers, while the corresponding figure for Sistan and Balochistan province was put at around 15,000.

Students face disciplinary measures for attending mixed-sex party

It has been reported in the media that Qom University of Medical Sciences (in Qom province) has imposed disciplinary punishments on a group of students for attending a student party at which there was no segregation of the sexes. An unknown number of students involved have reportedly been banned from studies for between one and four terms. According to the secretary of the university's disciplinary committee, the measures were taken on account of concerns relating to the promotion of immorality and unlawfulness in the social media and due to protests against the party by other students.

20 November 2023

Supreme court affirms death sentence

It was reported in the media on 14.11.23 that the death sentence passed on a man had been affirmed by the supreme court. The 20 year-old was reportedly sentenced to death for participating in the killing of a member of the Revolutionary Guard Corps (short form in Persian 'Sepah' or 'Pasdaran') in the city of Malayer (Hamadan province). A human rights organisation alleges that the convicted man was brought to trial under false pretences and had no access to a lawyer.

Political activist receives additional prison term

It has been reported in the media that the Revolutionary Court in Tehran has sentenced a political activist who is already serving a long prison term to an additional four years and three months' imprisonment. The journalist has reportedly already been handed down a 45-year sentence on charges of collaborating with an enemy government and enmity towards god, and has been in prison for around 400 days. The latest sentence has apparently been imposed for propaganda against the system and conspiracy against national security.

Arrests at mixed-gender wedding party

It was reported on 14.11.23 that 300 people had been arrested in the city of Shahrood (Semnan province) for attending a mixed-gender wedding party. According to the province's deputy chief of policy, the venue has been closed and cordoned off.

In the course of ongoing efforts by the Iranian government to enforce Muslim clothing regulations and moral directives more strictly, various companies and leisure facilities have been closed throughout the country in 2023 for breaching Muslim dress regulations.

27 November 2023

Execution of two death sentences

It was reported in the media on 24.11.23 that the death sentence on a man convicted of participating in the killing of a member of the security forces had been executed. The execution reportedly took place at the central prison in Hamadan (in the province of the same name). Reports citing information from a human rights organisation state that the man's family was not informed of his execution in advance. The death sentence was confirmed by the supreme court on 14.11.23 (cf. BN of 20.11.23).

Human rights organisations have further reported that a 17 year-old male juvenile charged with murder was executed in Sabzevar (Razavi-Khorasan province) on 24.11.23. The executed juvenile was accused of having killed a man in a dispute with another man when he was aged 16. Human rights organisations assert that the executed death sentence on a person under the age of 18 is a breach of the UN Convention on Childrens' Rights. According to official information from the government, the accused was already 18 at the time of his execution. Under Iranian law, male persons are fully punishable from the age of 15.

Three members of teachers' union arrested

According to reports in the media on 21.11.23, one female and two male teachers from Shiraz (Fars province) were arrested at their respective places of residence to begin their prison terms for engaging in union activities. The teachers were reportedly prosecuted in June 2023 together with five other persons for participating in union rallies and were subsequently sentenced to prison terms. No details have been reported with regard to the length of the sentences and the precise charges.

Prison sentence for mother of a killed protester

It was reported in the media on 20.11.23 that the mother of a man who died in the protests of 2022 had been sentenced to a long prison term. The woman was reportedly convicted of propaganda against the system and insulting the revolutionary leader, after allegedly disseminating posts in social media on the killing of her son by members of the security forces. Of the total sentence of 13 years, five years are reportedly enforceable.

In the aftermath of the nationwide protests in 2022, human rights organisations have reported in many instances about the authorities pressurizing relatives of killed protesters to prevent them, among other things, from commemorating their family members' deaths at memorial ceremonies.

04 December 2023

Demonstrator receives prison sentence

According to reports in the media on 01.12.23, a man from the city of Piranshahr (West Azerbaijan province) who took part in the nationwide protests of 2022 has been sentenced to five years and six months in prison. Citing a Kurdish human rights network, the man is reported to have been charged with actions counter to national security and propaganda against the system. The man was reportedly shot and wounded by security forces at the protests in 2022, temporarily taken into custody and provisionally released on bail.

Vehicle seized following breaches of compulsory requirement to wear hijab

According to reports in foreign media, a number of cars have been impounded in the Iranian capital, Tehran, as punishment for breaching Muslim clothing regulations. Women who had breached the compulsory requirement to wear the hijab were reportedly informed by text message about the imminent confiscation of their vehicles. This course of action and similar measures were announced in the aftermath of the 2022 protests and are being enforced to varying degrees. Many women, especially in cities, are continuing to ignore the requirement to wear the head covering, whatever steps may be undertaken against them (cf. BN of 17.04., 26.06. and 24.07.23) A contentious draft bill of the so-called law to protect chastity and the hijab which stipulated more severe punishment for breaches of the Islamic rules on clothing was rejected as it stands by the Council of Guardians at the end of October 2022 (cf. BN of 30.10.23).

11 December 2023

Report on sexual violence against detained protesters

A report published by the human rights organisation Amnesty International (AI) on 06.12.23 claims that members of the Iranian security forces subjected demonstrators who were being detained in prison or held in police custody to sexualised violence during the nationwide protests in 2022. According to AI, the offences were committed against women, men and also minors, with the aim of intimidating protesters. AI states that the report is based on information from victims of the violence, members of their families, medical staff and fellow inmates. In all, 45 cases of sexualised violence following arrests of protesters have reportedly been documented in various parts of the country. 16 cases of rape allegedly took place.

Online activist sentenced to three months in prison

According to reports in the media, a media activist was arrested by the security services in the city of Ahar (East Azerbaijan province) on 04.12.23 in order to enforce a three-month prison term to which he had previously been sentenced. Citing information from his family, it has been reported that the man was sentenced to 91 days in prison during the nationwide protests in 2022, on charges including spreading lies in the virtual domain. He had reportedly

been arrested a number of times prior to this. The information provided by his family cannot be verified by reference to further sources.

Prominent women's rights activist receives four-month prison sentence

According to reports in the media on 05.12.23, a well-known activist for women's rights has received a four-month prison sentence. The woman's lawyer has reportedly stated that the sentence was handed down for publishing obscene images in the virtual domain after an appeal hearing. The activist is said to have received three-year sentences in other court proceedings. No further details have been reported as to the status of these sentences. The woman became well-known in the media after she was temporarily detained in 2022 following a public dispute with a female supporter of the obligation to wear the hijab head covering on a bus in Tehran and subsequently received a suspended prison sentence (cf. BN of 01.08. and 05.09.22).

Members of Mahsa Amini's family prevented from leaving the country

According to reports in the media, relatives of Mahsa Amini, who died in 2022, were prevented from leaving the country on 10.12.23. The parents and brother of Amini, who died shortly after being arrested, were reportedly preventing from undertaking a planned flight to France in order to accept the European Sakharov Prize for human rights on behalf of their late daughter and sister, who was awarded the prize posthumously in October 2023. According to the family's lawyer, security agents confiscated the family members' passports despite them having valid visas and prevented them from boarding the flight at Tehran's Imam Khomeini airport.

It has been reported that the Iranian leadership took measures in September 2023 to prevent events commemorating Mahsa Amini (cf. BN of 11.09. and 18.09.23). Her death sparked nationwide protests in 2022.

18 December 2023

Decline in imports and food production

Information on various types of food, rice, meat, sugar and other staples shows a steep decline in production and imports in the past eight months. Food inflation has risen year-on-year to over 50 %. The exchange rate for the national currency against the US dollar has dropped by a half within the past twelve months.

Attack on police station in Balochistan

Eleven security personnel and an unknown number of attackers were killed in an armed attack on a police station in Sistan and Balochistan province on 15.12.23. The Sunni separatist group Jaish al-Adl has claimed responsibility for the attack.

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