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Briefing Notes Summary

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

Iran – January to June 2024

30 June 2024

08 January 2024

Terrorist attack in Kerman at a memorial service held for Qassem Soleimani

On 03.01.24, at least 84 people were killed and several hundred were injured in two explosions during a memorial service held at Qassem Soleimani's grave in Kerman to mark the fourth anniversary of his killing by a US military strike during a state visit to Baghdad. The act was unanimously condemned by the international community. It is the deadliest attack to be carried out in the history of the Islamic Republic of Iran. ISIS has claimed responsibility for the attack. As a result, a large number of arrests were made and investigations into the course of events are ongoing. In recent months, Iranian security authorities have ramped up their operations against ISIS and its supporters, seizing weapons and bomb-making materials in the process.¹

15 January 2024

Reports on several prison sentences

According to media reports issued on 09.01.24, a former professional bodybuilder who had been previously convicted was sentenced to a further five years and eight months in prison. According to information circulating on social media, the man was charged with gathering and collusion as well as propaganda against the system. Having been previously sentenced to seven years in prison in 2019, the former athlete was released early from prison in February 2023 as part of an amnesty due to his deteriorating health. He was arrested again in September 2023 as he tried to leave the country for Turkey.

According to other media reports, the father of a student being held in detention has been sentenced to five years in prison. They say the father had been held in temporary detention since December 2022, inter alia on charges of having a financial connection with an anti-government group abroad. The imprisoned son of the convicted man is a winner of international science Olympiads who, together with a fellow student, was sentenced to 16 years in prison in 2020 on charges that include propaganda against the system and endangering national security.

It was also reported that the father of a protester killed during rallies held in 2019 has been sentenced to 18 years in prison. The man gained notoriety after the death of his son because he repeatedly and publicly criticized the government's violent crackdown on protesters in 2019. He was arrested for the first time in April 2021 and sentenced to three years and six months in prison on several charges, two and a half years' exile from his home province and a two-year ban on leaving the country.²

Attack on military base in Sistan and Baluchestan province

According to media reports, an armed attack was carried out on a military base near Rask I (Sistan and Baluchestan province) on 10.01.24, killing at least one police officer. Jaish al-Adl (Army of Justice in Arabic), a Sunni Baluch

separatist militant group has claimed responsibility for the attack. Members of the group had attacked a police station in the province back in December 2023 (cf. BN of 18.12.23). A large section of the population of the province of Sistan and Baluchistan, which borders Afghanistan and Pakistan, belongs to the country's Muslim Sunni minority.³

Freedom of the press: two journalists released on bail

According to media reports issued on 14.01.24, two female journalists were released from Tehran's Evin prison on bail of 10 billion toman (around EUR 180,000; as of 15.01.24), having been detained for around 17 months. They have also been banned from leaving the country. The journalists attracted widespread media attention as both women had been sentenced to seven and six years in prison, respectively in October 2023 for their coverage of the death of Mahsa Amini (cf. BN of 23.10.23). The Iranian Journalists' Association has criticized the bail amounts.⁴

22 January 2024

Narges Mohammadi handed additional sentence

According to media reports issued on 15.01.24, the well-known human rights activist and winner of the 2023 Nobel Peace Prize who is currently being detained in prison has been sentenced to an additional 15 months in prison. The defendant is accused of spreading propaganda against the system. The activist is currently imprisoned in Tehran's Evin Prison and has already served around 12 years of several prison sentences imposed on her. She has been arrested and sentenced several times for her work as a human rights defender. The 51-year-old has so far been sentenced to a total of 31 years in prison and has received additional sentences, including bans on leaving the country and lashes.⁵

New criminal proceedings against released journalists

According to media reports issued on 16.01.24, further criminal proceedings were instituted against two female journalists shortly after they were released from prison (cf. BN of 15.01.24). According to the Iranian judiciary, the women are accused of appearing in public and in the media without wearing the compulsory veil (hijab) after their release from Tehran's Evin prison.⁶

Officer killed in the province of Sistan and Baluchestan

According to reports issued by an Iranian news agency, a high-ranking member of the Army of Guardians of the Islamic Revolution (known as: Sepah e Pasdaran, IRGC, for short) was killed in an attack carried out in the province of Sistan and Baluchestan on 17.01.24. The officer was reportedly shot and killed on a country road. The Sunni separatist group Jaish al-Adl (Army of Justice) has claimed responsibility for the assassination and for killing two of the man's bodyguards.⁷

29 January 2024

Several executions carried out

According to media reports issued on 23.01.24, a 23-year-old man was executed following an announcement made by the judiciary. He had been sentenced to death in November 2022 for allegedly running over and killing a police officer with his car during a protest rally near the capital Tehran in September 2022, injuring several other people. Human rights organisations claim the trial against the man was unfair, among other things, because he was suffering from a mental illness and was allegedly physically abused in custody. There were also reports of inconsistencies in the outcome of appeal proceedings in the case. According to the man's lawyer, the Supreme Court had overturned the death sentence in July 2023. According to judicial sources, appeals had in turn been rejected twice by the Supreme Court.

According to media reports, a further four death sentences were carried out on 29.01.24. Four imprisoned men of Kurdish descent were executed in Qezel Hesar prison (near Karaj, Alborz province). The men had been accused of espionage, among other things, for allegedly being involved in the sabotage of a factory producing military equipment in the province of Isfahan (central Iran). Family members deny the allegations and say the defendants were forced to make a confession.

It has also been reported that a man of Kurdish origin who had been imprisoned for 14 years was executed for murder on 23.01.24.⁸

Activist sentenced to three years in prison: presumably to put pressure on journalist uncle living abroad

According to media reports issued on 24.01.24, a 47-year-old activist who campaigns for women's and children's rights was sentenced to three years in prison in the city of Khorramabad (Lorestan province). The charges include propaganda against the regime and endangering national security. The woman was reportedly arrested on 30.07.23 and had already been temporarily detained before this.

According to the organisation Reporters Without Borders (RSF), the Iranian government is trying to exert pressure on her uncle, who lives in Germany, by arresting and sentencing the activist. The woman's uncle is an Iranian actor and journalist who works as the editor-in-chief of Iran Journal (IJ) in Berlin, a German-language website that covers developments in Iran. He also worked for the Persian edition of the news portal Deutsche Welle (DW) for several years.

In connection with his niece's conviction (see above), RSF reported, citing information provided by the journalist himself, that he had received threats from Iranian authorities via WhatsApp, urging him to cease working as a journalist. He therefore suspects that his niece's arrest can be attributed to his work as a journalist. The journalist also told DW that he had received similar threats in a telephone call. His statements cannot be independently verified.⁹

05 February 2024

Report on death of a student in custody

A news portal that reports on the province of Sistan and Baluchestan has announced that a 19-year-old student died in Zahedan (provincial capital) three days after being arrested by security forces. The student was reportedly arrested on 30.01.24 for his online activities and support for the protests in Zahedan. It is not possible to independently verify reports by a human rights organisation that he had been tortured in prison.

Anti-government rallies take place time and again in Zahedan and other cities in the region on Fridays, triggered by the crackdown on protestors by law enforcement officers in October 2022 (cf. BN of 10.10.22 and 09.10.23).¹⁰

Shops strike in Kurdish cities in response to execution of prisoners

According to media reports, shops in several cities in Kordestan province, inter alia in Sanandaj and Saqqez, shut down on 31.01.24. Several shops, businesses and human rights groups had called for the strike in response to the execution of four Kurdish prisoners on 29.01.24 (cf. BN of 29.01.24).

Citing human rights organisations, it was reported on 01.02.24 that around 71 death sentences had already been carried out in Iranian prisons since the beginning of 2024, 28 of them between 21.01.24 and 31.01.24 alone. At least six people have allegedly been imprisoned for politically motivated reasons and 22 people have been executed for drug-related offences and homicide during this period.

According to estimates undertaken by several different sources, the number of executions carried out in 2023 is between 791 and 834, with at least 25 of the persons executed being women and two being minors. This represents an increase of more than 33 percent year-on-year.¹¹

Father kills his own son for feminine behaviour

According to media reports issued on 31.01.24, a man was arrested for killing his 17-year-old son in Tabriz (East Azerbaijan). The father handed himself in to the police and admitted to killing his son because of his feminine behaviour, citing his family's disgrace as the motive. These type of crimes are often not prosecuted or are only punished as minor offences. A similar case of violence by family members was reported in 2021, when a man from Ahvaz (Khuzestan province) was killed by family members because of his sexual orientation.¹²

12 February 2024

Press freedom: raid on the editorial office of media company

According to media reports, security forces carried out a raid on the editorial office of a media outlet for economic news in Tehran on 05.02.24. Journalists working there were detained on the premises for several hours and their mobile phones were confiscated. According to family members of the journalists affected, the authorities have given no official explanation for the measures so far.¹³

Filmmaker in custody handed additional prison sentence

According to media reports, a dissident filmmaker has been handed an additional prison sentence of around five years. The man who is incarcerated in Tehran's Evin prison announced via a phone call that he had been sentenced for his protest actions and allegations of vandalism within the detention centre. The prisoner was formerly a journalist with a daily newspaper considered to be conservative. He has been serving a multi-year prison sentence since 2019 because he and other people had publicly called for the resignation of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in 2018.¹⁴

Official measures against teaching staff and students

According to media reports, Iranian authorities are continuing to exert pressure on teaching staff and students to punish them for their support of the nationwide protests in 2022 and to prevent further protest movements. According to the report, teachers have been suspended or called in for questioning in particular due to accusations they supported students and pupils in anti-government protests held in 2022. According to a report published by the Iranian Teachers' Union in June 2023, more than 250 teachers and union activists were affected by reprisals, such as temporary arrests and charges, in 2022. It was also reported that at least five students from Tehran had been barred from attending courses without due process. In addition to admission controls and the denial of access to university residential facilities, measures such as summonses by security authorities, temporary suspensions and even the expulsion of students and faculty members from the university have reportedly also taken place. Students began reporting a growing atmosphere of repression at universities in the aftermath of the protest events in 2022 (cf. BN of 27.02.23 and 11.09.23).¹⁵

19 February 2024

One-year prison sentence confirmed for student activist

According to media reports, the one-year prison sentence for a student and former chairperson of a child protection organisation has been confirmed by the Tehran Provincial Court of Appeal. This was announced by her husband on social media. The woman was initially arrested during protests in October 2022 and was held in prison in Qarchak (near Tehran) until April 2023. She was temporarily detained again in September 2023 and released on bail in October 2023 pending the outcome of her trial.¹⁶

Religious minorities: prison sentences imposed on Baha'i

According to media reports issued on 14.02.24, a member of the Baha'i faith was arrested by security forces in Shiraz (Fars province) on 13.02.24 and taken to the local Adel-Abad prison. The reports stated that the woman had to serve a five-year prison sentence because she had been found guilty of deviant educational and propaganda activities. She was reportedly also given a ten-year deprivation of social rights and a two-year travel ban. The woman had already been temporarily detained in 2021.

It was also reported that a member of the Baha'i faith who was arrested in July 2023 has been sentenced to a total of nine years in prison. The man was accused of spreading propaganda against the system, unauthorised assembly and collusion. Of the total sentence imposed, five years are enforceable.¹⁷

Well-known women's rights activist summoned to begin prison sentence

According to media reports issued on 16.02.24, women's rights activist Sepideh Rashno has been summoned to begin serving her prison sentence of three years and eleven months. The 28-year-old is due to start serving her sentence in Tehran's Evin prison shortly.

The vocal critic of the country's compulsory head scarf law, who hit the headlines in 2022, had already been sentenced to four months' imprisonment in December 2023 (cf. BN of 11.12.23). The total sentence she now faces includes this and other penalties imposed for a public altercation between the activist and a supporter of the headscarf obligation on a Tehran bus in 2022.¹⁸

26 February 2024

Multi-year prison sentences for two imprisoned activists

According to media reports issued on 19.02.24, two women detained in Tehran's Evin prison have been sentenced to 15 years in prison. The sentences were handed down by the Tehran Revolutionary Court on charges including membership of anti-government groups and armed rebellion. Referring to information provided by a human rights organisation, it was reported that the individual charges were unclear. The two women were arrested in Tehran in August 2023. Both women have a history of previous detentions and imprisonments for their activism.¹⁹

Religious minorities: report on the situation of Christians in Iran

According to a press release issued on 19.02.24, the Christian-based human rights organisation Article 18 published a report on the situation of Christians in Iran in cooperation with three other Christian-based human rights organisations. According to the report, the number of Christians who have been detained rose in the second half of 2023. Whereas 134 Christians were arrested in 2022, 166 Christians were arrested in 2023. The report showed that in 2023 at least 17 Christians who were arrested in 2023 had been sentenced to prison terms of three to five years or to non-custodial sentences such as fines, whipping, and community service.

It was not reported whether the victims were Christians by birth or converts to Christianity. According to Article 18, only a few of those affected were willing to make their cases public. However, the results of the report cannot be independently verified.²⁰

Hacktivist group publishes presumably leaked content of judicial files

According to media reports, an Iranian hacktivist group has published confidential content of judicial files. According to the group, they infiltrated the court's case management system in order to access documents and files. Some of the documents allegedly provide evidence, inter alia, of targeted action taken by the Iranian judiciary against journalists living abroad, in particular against journalists from Persian-language foreign media. The hacktivist group released more than three million court files. The information and authenticity of the published content cannot be independently verified. The official news portal of the judiciary stated that the content was fake.²¹

11 March 2024

Two women arrested for dancing in public

According to Iranian media, two young women have been arrested in Tehran following the circulation of a video in which they can be seen dancing in public to celebrate the arrival of the Iranian New Year. The video clip of the two women, which was recorded near Tajrish Square in northern Tehran, went viral on social media. The two women are seen dancing in the square disguised as Hajji Firouz, a fictional character in Iranian folklore dressed in red who every year crosses the streets of Iranian cities, singing and dancing to announce the arrival of the Iranian New Year Nowruz which begins on 20 March. The Tehran public prosecutor ordered the arrest of the two women on the grounds that they had violated social norms.

Iranian law prohibits women from dancing in mixed-gender public places. Numerous videos of women dancing in public places or in the subway have gone viral in recent months after a mass protest movement shook the country at the end of 2022 following the death of Jina Mahsa Amini in police custody (cf. BN of 19.09.22).²²

18 March 2024

Religious scholar and political activist arrestedTwo women arrested for dancing in public

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25 March 2024

Death penalty: number of executions remains high

Citing information provided by human rights organisations, it was reported in foreign media on 18.03.24 that a total of 95 executions took place in the period between January and mid-March 2024. However, they said the Iranian authorities only announce one third of the total number of executions actually carried out. In 2023, as in the previous year, the majority of death sentences were carried out for drug-related offences (N.B.: drug trafficking) and murder. The proportion of executions based on politically motivated charges, involving offences that leave correspondingly broad scope for interpretation under Iranian criminal law, was relatively low at 5 percent.

The human rights organisation Iran Human Rights (IHR) views the number of death sentences carried out as a means of deterrence used by the Iranian government, in particular to prevent further protests.²⁴

Security forces prevent New Year celebrations near Saqqez (Kordestan province)

According to media reports issued on 22.03.24, security forces prevented the celebration of the Persian New Year (Nowruz) from going ahead in the village of Aichi, near the city of Saqqez (Kordestan province).

The village is home to the graves of Mahsa Amini and some of the victims of the nationwide protests that took place in 2022. According to a report released by a Kurdish news agency, security authorities in the city of Saqqez threatened and summoned the organisers of the local Nowruz ceremony. The information cannot be independently verified. According to the report, 30,000 residents were prevented from holding the celebrations in their hometown and had to move to other towns as a result. A similar situation was reported for the predominantly Kurdish city of Gilan e Gharb (Kermanshah province).²⁵

UNHCR report on human rights violations during protests held in 2022

At the beginning of March 2024, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) published a report as part of a fact-finding mission on the extent of measures implemented by the state during the nationwide protests held in 2022. According to the report, crimes against humanity were committed, inter alia, based on the large number of people killed during the protests and the verification of reports of torture and sexual violence in detention, among other things.²⁶

08 April 2024

Sistan and Balochistan province: clashes and attacks on Revolutionary Guards bases

According to media reports, armed attacks were carried out in the night to 04.04.24 on several Revolutionary Guards (IRGC) posts in the cities of Rask and Sarbaz and on a coastguard station in Chahbahar. Iranian news agencies reported exchanges of fire in the street in which several attackers and security forces were killed. At times, armed individuals apparently also took civilians hostage. Security forces brought the situation under control. Media reports of 06.04.24 say that another attack took place in the Korin district of the provincial capital Zahedan, where two police officers were killed and another individual was injured in an armed clash near a checkpoint.

The Sunni group Jaish al Adl (Army of Justice) was named as responsible for the attacks. It is considered to be a separatist organization fighting for the independence of the south-eastern province. The group had already claimed responsibility for armed attacks on police stations in the province in December 2023 and January 2024 (cf. BN of 18.12.23 and 15.01.24).

Citing information from Iranian authorities, foreign media reported on 26.03.24 that two people were killed in an exchange of fire in the province. In the city of Khash, police forces clashed with armed individuals, presumably Baloch separatists. Apparently, one police officer and one child were killed in the incident. The information cannot be independently verified.²⁷

Report on death sentence against 64-year-old prisoner

Foreign media reported on 31.03.24 that a 64-year-old man was sentenced to death by public execution on charges of insulting the Prophet. Among other things, the man's posts on social media were cited as the reasons for the judgement. The accused had been arrested in October 2022 during protests and initially been charged with propaganda against the system, insulting the revolutionary leader and conspiracy against national security, among other offences. In March 2023, he was sentenced to a total prison term of 18 years, which was reduced to eight years and six months during court proceedings. It is not clear from the reports whether this sentence was commuted again or whether an additional death sentence was imposed. All information available is based on the report of a human rights organisation, which cannot be independently verified.

According to Amnesty International, the number of death sentences carried out in 2023 reached its highest level in eight years with 853 executions. Over half of these were due to convictions in connection with drug offences.²⁸

Announcement of pardons for the Islamic Eid celebrations

Media report that a total of four imprisoned environmental activists are to be pardoned on the occasion of the celebrations marking the end of the fasting month of Ramadan on 10.04.24. This was announced on 07.04.24 by the lawyer of those affected. The defendants have been in custody for almost six years. In 2018, they had been accused of committing espionage and treason under the pretext of environmental protection. However, the allegations were never proven.

On the occasion of the Eid celebrations, more than 2,000 other prisoners are to be pardoned and 29 death sentences are to be commuted to prison terms. Human rights organisations regard such pardons as a gesture of appeasement by the Iranian government towards the population.²⁹

15 April 2024

Sistan and Balochistan province: Policemen killed in attack on police convoy

Following attacks launched on 04.04.24 on several posts of the Revolutionary Guards (IRGC) in Sistan and Balochistan province (cf. BN of 08.04.24), a new attack was reported on Iranian security forces in this province on 09.04.24, for which the Sunni separatist group Jaish al Adl (Army of Justice) has claimed responsibility. Iranian state media have held this group also responsible for the attacks of 04.04.24.

On 09.04.24, Jaish al Adl attacked a convoy of two police cars on a road between the towns of Sib and Suran. Six police officers were reportedly killed and two others injured in the incident.

The Jaish al Adl group, which is fighting for the independence of the province bordering Pakistan, has been classified as a terrorist organization by both Iran and the US.³⁰

Tougher action against headscarf offences

The police forces of Tehran and Bushehr have warned women and girls that as of 13.04.24, controls and measures will be tightened to enforce the compulsory hijab laws.

According to the announcement, the wearing of headscarves would be more strictly enforced on all streets and public places, both as part of public demands and based on legal obligations. Women and girls were ordered to wear the compulsory hijab to obey the law and uphold the moral values and national and religious norms of society. Police threatened to take legal action for violations of the hijab requirement as part of their duties. Subsequently, police presence was increased alongside the morality police on 13.04.24 in Tehran's main squares, and women and girls were checked for compliance with the dress code. During these checks, arrests have been made, and in some

instances violence has been used against the women and girls arrested. Media report that one teenage girl was beaten by a police officer during her arrest. In Tehran, a mother and her daughter were temporarily detained and then released.

The measures were preceded by a prayer sermon by Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei on the feast of breaking the fast of this year's Ramadan. The Supreme Leader announced an instruction to enforce measures against the violation of religious norms, emphasizing that the headscarf requirement was a clear religious decree, and underlining the obligation of everyone to comply with this and other legal decrees. Gholamhossein Mohseni-Esche'i, the country's Chief Justice, said that in view of Khamenei's statements, the existing legal framework should be used to enforce better application of the norms.³¹

22 April 2024

Suspected attack by Israel

Following the major attack on Israel by Iran on 14.04.24 (cf. BN of 15.04.24), media report that Israel launched an airstrike against Iran 19.04.24, targeting an airbase and the air defence system of a nuclear facility near the central Iranian city of Isfahan.

US media have quoted unnamed US officials who said Israel carried out the attack. The New York Times cited anonymous Israeli officials who confirmed that Israel had carried out the attack. The Iranian state television agency IRNA said that air defence measures were taken in several Iranian provinces on 19.04.24 after drones were spotted in Iranian airspace, and that the nuclear facility near Isfahan was safe and undamaged. According to an Iranian army commander, the explosions heard in the Isfahan area on 19.04.24 were caused by the air defence system that attacked and hit the three drones. Iranian foreign minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian told NBC News that the drones were launched inside Iran and flew a few hundred metres before being shot down.

Two US officials told CBS News that Israel hit Iran with a missile, but they did not say where or how the missile hit. In addition, according to anonymous US officials, missiles were fired into Iran and hit their target from Israeli warplanes over Iraqi airspace. Analysis of satellite images by experts revealed that an S-300 air defence system was hit at the 8th Shekari airbase, around 20 km north-east of Isfahan. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said that the USA was not involved in any offensive operation in Iran. According to Italian foreign minister Antonio Tajani, the USA told the G7 members that it had only been informed by Israel shortly before the attack.

On 19.04.24, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) stated that no damage was done to Iranian nuclear facilities. Israel has not officially claimed responsibility for the attack.³²

Security forces target women

Media report that several women and girls who since 13.04.24 have been arrested by the vice squad during headscarf checks (cf. BN of 15.04.24) have complained about violence during arrest, including physical assault and sexual harassment.

A 17-year-old girl told the online magazine Iran International that when she was arrested in Daneshjoo Park in Tehran, the vice squad pulled her by the hair, hit her right arm and thigh with a baton and hurled sexual insults at her. In custody, the young woman encountered more than fifty women and girls, most of whom were in their early 20s or teenage years.

Other detainees reported that male officers beat them in the vice squad van taking them to a detention centre. According to media reports, a 19-year-old woman who refused to unlock her phone for the officers at the detention centre was abused by the officers with a stun gun to her stomach and genitals. She was also insulted with sexually harassing swear words. A few hours after their arrests, the two women were released from prison after providing their personal details, home addresses, telephone numbers, fingerprints, and signatures. Iranian journalist Dina Ghalibaf was arrested in her flat in Tehran on 16.04.24 after she had described her recent encounter with the police in an article on X. On 15.04.24 she was abused by the police with a stun gun and sexually assaulted because she was not wearing the obligatory hijab. Aida Shakarami, whose sister Nika had died in the nationwide protests in 2022 after the death of Jina Mahsa Amini, was arrested on 17.04.24 because she was not wearing a headscarf. Another woman told BBC News Farsi that during her arrest, police officers beat her so badly that medical doctors said she suffered a kidney rupture. Numerous women and girls reported on social media about the violent assaults by the police and vice squad.

Media report that in the week starting 13.04.24, hundreds of women across the country, in particular in Tehran, were arrested because they did not comply with the hijab requirements. On 21.04.24, the commander of Tehran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) troops, Hassan Hassanzadeh, announced the establishment of a new authority to enforce the strict dress code for women and stated that the members of the force have been trained to enforce the hijab requirements in public places in a stricter manner.³³

29 April 2024

Rapper Toomaj Salehi sentenced to death

Media report that on 23.04.24, dissident rapper Toomaj Salehi was sentenced to death on charges related to the protests that had started in September 2022 following the death of Jina Mahsa Amini. The judgement was handed down by the Revolutionary Court in Isfahan, which overturned the Supreme Court's decision that the rapper was eligible for amnesty. The Iranian judiciary has not yet confirmed the judgement. Salehi's lawyer has already stated that he will appeal the verdict.

Salehi's dissident writings and criticism of systemic corruption and oppression supported the months-long protests that began in September 2022. In October 2022, he was arrested after making public statements in support of the protests and taking part in protest rallies. Foreign media report that he spent around eight months in solitary confinement during his detention, had limited contact with his lawyer and was physically and psychologically tortured. On 10.07.23 he was sentenced to more than six years in prison (cf. BN of 17.07.23), but was released on bail on 18.11.23 after the Supreme Court found flaws in the original July 2023 verdict. Salehi had previously been sentenced to six years and three months in prison for "corruption on earth". This offence can carry the death penalty. The case was referred back to the lower court for reconsideration. Salehi was finally arrested again on 30.11.23 on charges of making false allegations without evidence and spreading propaganda against the system, and sentenced to one year's imprisonment, two years' suspension of his passport and attendance at a behaviour management course. According to media reports, the charges relate to a video he made while on bail in which he described being tortured in prison.³⁴

Female Kurdish language teacher sentenced to eleven years in prison

A Kurdish language teacher and civil rights activist was reportedly sentenced to a total of eleven years in prison on 20.04.24.

Soma Pourmohammadi was sentenced by a branch of the Revolutionary Court in Sanandaj, in western Iran, to ten years' imprisonment, to be served in a prison in Kermashah, for the so-called formation of groups against national security. She was also given a suspended one-year prison sentence by a criminal court in Sanandaj for disturbing national security.

Pourmohammadi is a Kurdish teacher and member of the cultural association Nojin, an organisation that offers courses in Kurdish language and literature. The association also supports other civil society and educational initiatives, particularly in remote regions without schools.

Pourmohammadi had been arrested on 18.01.23 when she went to a court in Sanandaj to enquire about her imprisoned husband, who was also active in the Nojin association. She was provisionally released on bail of IRR 10 billion on 13.02.23, pending the outcome of the trial. The current sentence can still be appealed.³⁵

06 May 2024

Press freedom: Charges against journalists

Media report that on 01.05.24, the Iranian judiciary brought charges against several media professionals. Further background information, such as the number of people affected and the charges, has not yet been reported. Persian foreign media say the charges are related to the publication of a report by the British news channel BBC News on 30.04.24 which revealed details of sexual assaults and the killing of a 16-year-old girl by three security forces in the course of the nationwide protests in 2022. According to the BBC, the girl apparently killed was activist Nika Shakarami who had been arrested at the beginning of the protests in 2022 and was found dead a few days later. According to the Iranian authorities, she had committed suicide. However, according to the BBC report, there are

now indications that the woman was mistreated and killed by Iranian security forces. The report refers to an internal, apparently leaked, document from Iranian security forces that allegedly names those responsible for the girl's death as well as the commander-in-chief involved in a subsequent cover-up. The official news portal of the Iranian judiciary has stated that the BBC report was a forgery. In a press statement, interior minister Ahmad Vahidi labelled the report a conspiracy by Iran's enemies.

According to the 2024 press freedom ranking published by Reporters Without Borders (RSF) on 03.05.24, Iran is ranked 176 out of 180 countries.³⁶

Reports of armed clashes in Sistan and Balochistan province

Media report of clashes between security forces and several unidentified persons in Zahedan (Sistan and Balochistan province) on the night of 05.05.24. The confrontation was apparently linked to the arrest of several members of the separatist group Jaish al Adl (Army of Justice). However, there were also reports of a private confrontation in which one individual was killed and three others were injured.

Jaish al Adl is labelled as terrorist by the Iranian government. On 04.05.24, state news agencies reported the arrest of several members of the group at a religious school in Pashamag village near the city of Rask. Those arrested were reportedly involved in armed attacks on Iranian security force bases in the province in December 2023 and April 2024 (cf. BN of 18.12.23 and 08.04.24). The reports cannot be independently confirmed.³⁷

Death penalty: More than 60 death sentences carried out in April 2024

Human rights organisations report that at least 63 people were executed in Iranian prisons within 14 days in April 2024. This brings the total number of death sentences carried out since January 2024 to at least 171 people, among them six women. The majority of executions during this period were reportedly carried out on convictions for drug offences and murder charges. One death sentence was carried out for rape.

In its annual report, the human rights organisation Iran Human Rights (IHRNGO) states that in 2023, at least 471 death sentences were carried out for drug-related offences. This represents an 84 percent increase on the previous year. In April 2024, human rights groups published a joint statement on ending executions for drug-related offences, highlighting the lack of due process before the revolutionary courts.³⁸

13 May 2024

Second round of parliamentary elections

The second round of the parliamentary elections took place on 10.05.24. According to the electoral commission, conservative candidates won most of the seats that had not yet been allocated. After the election, 233 of the 290 parliamentary seats are now held by candidates from the conservative camp. The second round had become necessary as not all candidates received the required minimum number of votes in the first round. A number of reformist candidates had been disqualified by the Guardian Council in advance.

The first round of parliamentary elections, held on 01.04.24, had recorded a low voter turnout. According to official figures from the interior ministry, 41 percent of eligible voters participated nationwide. Interior minister Ahmad Vahidi said that turnout in the second round was lower than in the first. Eyewitnesses reported that many polling stations were quieter in this round than before. According to former information and communication technology minister Azari Jahromi, the turnout in Tehran in the second round was around 8 percent. Media report that, according to the second-round vote count, over 90 percent of eligible voters in Tehran and most major cities did not vote.³⁹

Filmmaker Mohammad Rasoulof sentenced to eight years in prison

According to media reports, filmmaker Mohammad Rasoulof was sentenced to eight years in prison on 08.05.24. In a post on social network X, the filmmaker's lawyer wrote that a revolutionary court sentenced Rasoulof to eight years in prison, flogging, a fine and confiscation of property. He added that the sentence was upheld by an appeals court and that the case was sent for execution. Apparently, the main reasons for the conviction were public statements critical of the regime and the production of films and documentaries, which the court considered to be examples of collusion with the intention of committing a crime against the country's security.

Rasoulof and other artists had been arrested in July 2022 for taking part in the "Lay Down Your Guns" campaign, which had called on the military not to use lethal force against protesters. Rasoulof was released in February 2023. His passport had previously been confiscated in September 2017 after he returned to Iran after winning an award at the Cannes Film Festival for his feature film "A Man of Integrity", which focuses on corruption in Iran. Rasoulof is banned from leaving the country.

Rasoulof's latest film "The Seed of the Sacred Fig" is due to be screened in competition at the Cannes International Film Festival. According to Rasoulof's lawyer, Iranian authorities summoned some members of the film crew for questioning on 30.04.24. The authorities pressured them to withdraw the film from the Cannes festival. In addition, the actors and actresses involved have also been banned from leaving Iran, the lawyer said.⁴⁰

27 May 2024

New trial against Narges Mohammadi

Nobel Peace Prize laureate Narges Mohammadi, who has been serving yet another prison sentence since November 2021, reported in a message from Evin Prison that became public on 18.05.24 that she has been charged again and that a new trial is imminent. The charges are reportedly based on statements she made in an audio message accusing the Iranian government of waging a "war on women".⁴¹

Death of President Ebrahim Raisi

On 19.05.24, President Raisi and seven others, among them the foreign minister, died in a helicopter crash near the village of Uzi in West Azerbaijan province. According to the investigations, the crash was not the fault of a third party. The helicopter was a Bell 212 manufactured in the USA, which Iran had acquired before the Islamic Revolution. Technical failure is therefore believed to be the most likely cause.

While Raisi's death led to official expressions of grief, several days of national mourning and a state funeral, opposition-minded Iranians expressed their joy, especially on social networks. Videos of spontaneous fireworks set off over several Iranian cities and open displays of joy led to heated debates. Raisi is considered one of the main figures responsible for a large number of executions in the 1980s and for the suppression of the 2022 protests following the death of Mahsa Amini.⁴²

03 June 2024

Prison sentences against women's rights activists

Media reported on 25.05.24 that a journalist and women's rights activist was sentenced to several years in prison by the Revolutionary Court in Sanandaj (Kordestan province). The Kurdish human rights portal Kurdpa reported that the woman was sentenced to a total of 21 years in prison on charges including forming an illegal group, collaborating with enemy groups and governments and propaganda against the Islamic Republic. In addition, the woman was sentenced to a further ten years in exile. The activist's lawyer announced to appeal the verdict.

Further media reports say that on 28.05.24, eleven women's rights activists were sentenced to several years in prison after unsuccessful appeals. An appeals court in the city of Rasht (Gilan province) upheld the provisional verdicts against the women. Their legal representatives announced that they would appeal again. The convicted women had apparently been arrested, charged and sentenced in August 2023 on various security-related charges.⁴³

Religious minorities: Reprisals against Baha'i

According to media reports, two members of the Baha'i faith were arrested in the city of Rasht (Gilan province) on 28.05.24. A woman and her son were arrested and taken to an unknown location following raids on their home and workplace by ministry of intelligence security forces. Referring to information provided by family members of the detainees it was reported that security forces confiscated personal belongings such as mobile phones.⁴⁴

Prison conditions: Reports of prison staff assaulting a detainee

On 31.05.24, the human rights organisation Human Rights Activist News Agency (HRANA) reported that a prisoner in Qezel Hesar prison in Karaj (Alborz province) was physically assaulted by prison guards and transferred to solitary confinement. The incident took place shortly after a video recorded by a group of prisoners was circulated

highlighting the precarious prison conditions. The prisoner who was attacked is currently serving a multi-year sentence for drug offences and was the target of retaliation after the video was circulated. The report cannot be independently confirmed.

A recent report by Iran Open Data says that Iran's prison administration is seeking to build 70 new prisons across the country. The new detention centres are expected to be operational by 2026. According to the report, the appropriation bill for 2023 envisages at least twelve items for the construction of prisons with a budget equivalent to around USD 19.1 million (EUR 17.57 million, as of 31.05.2024), as well as the construction of additional detention facilities and temporary detention centres.⁴⁵

10 June 2024

Prominent online activist arrested

Media reported on 04.06.24 that prominent media activist and blogger Hossein Shanbehzadeh was arrested in Ardebil (province of the same name), according to his family. The activist, who works as a publishing editor and translator, had gained media fame for his repeated criticism of the government and authorities. His recent comment on a post by revolutionary leader Ali Khamenei on the social network site X (formerly Twitter) attracted widespread interest. In his comment, he simply added a full stop to a sentence posted by the revolutionary leader's account and received more likes than Khamenei's post itself. According to Iranian media, the activist is accused of insulting Shiite imams and being in contact with high-ranking officers of the Israeli secret service Mossad. Shanbehzadeh had already been sentenced to prison in 2018/19 for comments critical of the government.⁴⁶

Press freedom: Reporting requirements announced ahead of presidential election

Media reports on 06.06.24 say that in the run-up to the early presidential elections, the press regulator has issued guidelines for reporting and publishing media content on the elections. It was announced that all content aimed at negatively influencing voter turnout and any form of organising protest rallies would be considered a criminal offence. The guidelines apparently also apply to social media in particular. Violators may reportedly face sentences of up to 74 lashes.

Following the death of President Ebrahim Raisi in a helicopter crash on 19.05.24, the constitution stipulates that new presidential elections must be held within 50 days. Around 80 people had applied to stand as candidates in the run-up to the elections. According to media reports on 09.06.24, only six candidates were admitted to the election on 28.06.24. In particular, candidates considered moderate or reform-oriented were excluded.⁴⁷

Supreme court upholds death sentence and long prison term

Persian-language foreign media report that the death sentence against a Sunni cleric from Bukan (West Azerbaijan province) who is critical of the government was confirmed on 06.04.24. Citing a Kurdish human rights network, it was reported that the 45-year-old cleric had been arrested in the course of the nationwide protests in November 2022 for his participation and speech at the funeral of a protester killed in Bukan. The defendant was indicted and convicted in 2023 on charges including spreading corruption on earth and propaganda against the system. In addition to the death penalty, a sentence of 16 years was reportedly imposed against him. Reports citing the convict's relatives say that he had allegedly confessed after physical and psychological torture. This information cannot be independently confirmed.⁴⁸

Several-months' imprisonment for a rapper and an activist

On 06.06.24, media reported that a rapper and an activist began serving their prison sentences of eight and ten months in Tabriz (East Azerbaijan province). Both men had previously been temporarily arrested and were then released on bail. They were apparently arrested in connection with the publication of a song in support of prisoners of Iranian-Azerbaijani origin (Azeri). Among other things, the defendants were accused of propaganda activities against the government.⁴⁹

17 June 2024

Female cartoonist sentenced to six years in prison

According to media reports on 13.06.24, a female cartoonist has been sentenced to six years in prison. Her lawyer said that the sentence was for insulting sacred principles of belief and propaganda against the Islamic Republic. The convict, an internationally award-winning artist, had already been sentenced to 18 months in prison on several charges relating to activities critical of the government. She was last arrested in April 2024 and was allegedly beaten in detention by security forces.⁵⁰

Protests of retired teachers dispersed

Media reported on 12.06.24 that a gathering of retired teachers in Tehran was broken up by police security forces. Unconfirmed sources reported that demonstrators were beaten. The number of demonstrators was not specified. For several years, retired pensioners have been protesting at irregular intervals in several provinces of the country, demanding an adjustment of their salaries (cf. BN of 24.07.23). For the most part, these gatherings take place without violent clashes.⁵¹

Prominent convicted activist sentenced to further prison terms

According to reports in Persian-language foreign media, prominent activist Fatemeh Sepehri, who had previously been arrested and convicted, was sentenced to further prison terms (cf. BN of 09.08.21). She had become known for her involvement in a campaign demanding revolutionary leader Ali Khamenei to resign, among other things, and has now been sentenced to more than 18 years in prison, as her brother reported. She is reportedly accused of supporting Israel because she voiced criticism of the Hamas attack on Israel on 07.10.23. Together with the prison sentences already pending, her total sentence amounts to more than 37 years in prison.⁵²

24 June 2024

Lawyer sentenced to six years in prison

Media reported on 20.06.24 that the Revolutionary Court of Karaj (Alborz province) has sentenced a lawyer to six years in prison. According to a human rights organisation, the charges include propaganda against the government. The convicted is the defence lawyer for the family of a man sentenced to death and executed during the nationwide protests in 2022 (cf. BN of 09.01.23). A Kurdish human rights organisation stated that the prison sentence against the lawyer had already been handed down in May 2024. Apparently, the lawyer was arrested in Karaj on 28.08.23 following a summons and was temporarily released on bail after around four months, pending the conclusion of the court proceedings.⁵³

Death sentences and imprisonment for alcohol offences

According to media reports on 19.06.24, a first instance court sentenced four people were sentenced to death, presumably for the production and sale of adulterated alcohol. The convictions are linked to the deaths of at least 17 people who died after consuming illegally produced alcohol mixtures; others suffered poisoning. Citing a state news agency, seven defendants were reportedly also sentenced to several years in prison.

Under Iranian criminal law, the production, sale and consumption of alcohol is punishable by fines, imprisonment and lashes. Home-made products, which may be mixed with methanol and other substances, have caused poisoning and even death in the past.⁵⁴

Religious minorities: Prison sentences for two Baha'i

On 21.06.24, media reported that two members of the Baha'i religious community were each sentenced to five years in prison in Isfahan (province of the same name). They were also banned from using social media and prohibited from leaving the country. They were convicted on charges of propaganda against the Islamic Republic and membership of groups with the intention of endangering the country's security. The defendants' business premises had reportedly previously been sealed and various items confiscated.⁵⁵

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