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An everyday occurrence in Iran: three more women journalists jailed in Tehran, marking 55 arrests since the start of protests

The Islamic Republic of Iran has arrested three more women journalists, bringing the number of detained women journalists to 16, Reporters Without Borders (RSF) alerts. In total, 55 journalists have been arrested for media-related activities since the start of the Mahsa Amini protests in September. Twenty-seven of these journalists remain behind bars, while the others have been released on bail awaiting sentencing. RSF calls on the Iranian authorities to release the detained journalists immediately and drop all charges against them.

Melika Hashemi, from the online daily *Shahr News Agency*, was called in for questioning at the notorious Evin prison on 21 January, but after the journalist went in, all contact with her was lost. The next morning, on 22 January, **Mehrnoush Zarei** and **Saeede Shafiei** joined her in prison. With these three new arrests in less than 48 hours, the Iranian government continues its [crackdown on women journalists](#). In total, 25 of the 55 journalists arrested since the start of the protests on 16 September, following Mahsa Amini's death, have been women.

"The Islamic Republic must immediately release journalists Melika Hashemi, Saeede Shafiei and Mehrnoush Zarei, as well as all reporters, photographers, and bloggers detained in connection with the Mahsa Amini protests," says the head of RSF's Middle East desk Jonathan Dagher. "The frequency of arrests, the numbers, the brutality... All paint an image of a government determined to cut off the flow of information. But the journalists are just as stubborn: despite the endless arrests, they courageously continue to do their work."

Mehrnoush Zarei, a freelance journalist who had contributed to publications such as *ILNA*, *ISKA*, and *Chelcheragh* was arrested in front of her home in Tehran, Iran's capital. According to the [HRANA](#) news agency, the security forces that arrived at her home did not present their institutional affiliation. After searching the premises and confiscating her digital devices, they arrested the journalist and drove her to Evin prison. The reasons for her arrest are also unknown.

A few kilometers away the same morning, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) were arresting Saeede Shafiei, the freelance journalist who had collaborated with *Donyaye Eghtesad*, *Shargh*, and *Insaf News*. A [tweet](#) by Saeede's husband Hassan Homayon, revealed that she was arrested by security forces on Sunday morning. "Saeede Shafiei, my dear wife, called from the detention center at noon today, the 23rd, and said that she is in Evin prison. She was arrested on the morning of the 22nd," he wrote. Reports have suggested that Saeede was being charged with "propaganda against the system and action against national security".

Eight journalists arrested since the beginning of 2023

Since the beginning of 2023, authorities have so far arrested eight journalists and photographers due to their journalistic activities. Four of them were later released on bail, awaiting sentencing. These releases are no cause for celebration, however. In recent days, Iranian courts have ruled on many of these cases, issuing long sentences to journalists who had been awaiting the verdicts outside of prison.

Photographer **Ahmad Halabisaz**, who spent 27 days in prison in the early days of protest, announced on 16 January, that he had been sentenced to two years in Evin prison. On 17 January, journalist **Alireza Khoshbat** who was previously arrested on 22 September and released on bail after 94 days, also received a five-year prison sentence by the 29th Branch of the Revolutionary

Court of Tehran, in addition to one more year for engaging in “propaganda activities against the regime”.