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# **IRAN : News Digest about Baha'is and religious issues in Iran**

**News Digest about Baha'is and religious issues in Iran in September**

**General**

**Iranians are ready for a different approach to religion and government**

FiveThirtyEight (30.09.2022) – Protests in Iran have been raging on for nearly two weeks because 22-year-old Mahsa Amini died in the custody of the “morality police” after she allegedly failed to comply with the nation’s veiling laws. The protests that began on the streets of Saqqez, her hometown, have now spread to roughly 80 cities across the nation, as Iranian women lead demonstrations in defiance of a law that mandates they cover their hair and wear loose-fitting clothes while in public. At least 76 people have died, although the toll is likely higher as internet restrictions have made information harder to confirm.

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### **What to know about the Iranian protests over Mahsa Amini’s death**

Time.com (24.09.2022) – Protests have intensified this week in Iran over the death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini in police custody after she was arrested for allegedly wearing her headscarf too loosely. Amini died on Sept. 16 three days after her arrest in Tehran, and many Iranians are alleging that she was killed by law enforcement. Protestors have faced a brutal crackdown from the government who have deployed riot police, resulting in arrests, injuries and at least 17 deaths, according to the state media.

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### **UN experts strongly condemn death of Mahsa Amini**

Moderndiplomacy (24.09.2022) – UN independent human rights experts on Thursday strongly condemned the death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini, who died in police custody following her arrest for allegedly failing to comply with Iran’s strict

rules on women's dress, by wearing what authorities said was "an improper hijab".

"We are shocked and deeply saddened by the death of Ms Amini," they said in a statement.

"She is another victim of Iran's sustained repression and systematic discrimination against women and the imposition of discriminatory dress codes that deprive women of bodily autonomy and the freedoms of opinion, expression and belief", the experts added

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### **Dissident: 'Iranian women are furious' over headscarf death**

Apnews (24.09.2022) The tears come quickly to Masih Alinejad when she talks about the messages she's received in recent days from women in Iran protesting against their government after a young woman died in police custody over a violation of the country's strict religious dress code.

They talk about the risks, possibly fatal ones, in facing off against government forces that have a long history of cracking down on dissent. They share stories of saying goodbye to their parents, possibly for the last time. They send videos of confrontations with police, of women removing their state-mandated head coverings and cutting their hair.

According to a tally by The Associated Press, at least 11 people have been killed since protests began earlier this month after the funeral of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini, who died in custody after being detained by Iran's morality police. State media has said the toll could be as high as 35.

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## **Baha'is**

### **Payam Vali and Sepehr Ziaei, Baha'i Citizens, arrested**

Iran Press Watch (26.09.2022) – Two Baha'i citizens were arrested by the security forces on Saturday, September 24, 2022, and taken to an unknown location. **Sepehr Ziaei** was arrested at his home in Tehran. **Payam Vali** was arrested in Karaj at his business. Both Mr. Vali and his son, Adib Vali, were beaten by the officers.

A well-known source told Harana: “Yesterday, eight forces of the Ministry of Intelligence went to Payam Vali’s workplace in Karaj and tried to detain this Baha'i citizen by beating him. Then the security forces searched his house, and in the meantime Adib, Mr. Vali’s son, was also beaten by the security forces. The officers confiscated a number of Adib Vali’s personal devices, including his mobile phone and laptop and took them with them.

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### **Baha'i 'Open cases'**

Iran Press Watch (20.09.2022) – What you will read is the result of several hours of conversation with three people – Morteza, Pejman and Maryam. All three, who are not Bahá'ís, have Bahá'í friends and associates. Due to their fields of activity, these three have extensive research on the cases, the current situation and living conditions of the Bahá'ís. We talked with them about the pending status of a number of Baha'i citizens who are known as “open case” owners. The names of these three individuals in this article have been pseudonymized at their own request, and the names of the Baha'is, the dates and case numbers, and any identifiers – which were mentioned in detail during the interview – have been removed in an effort to maintain the safety of the

individuals.

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### **'The World is watching': Australian daughter of Iranian Baha'i in prison pleads for her release**

Iran Press Watch (16.09.2022) – When Negar Sabet awakes after a restless night in Sydney, she agonises about her elderly mother, Mahvash Sabet, who has been locked up in Iran's notorious Evin prison since the end of July.

"She's in solitary confinement, again, with just a piece of cloth," Negar tells ABC News.

It's not the first time her mother, who is a teacher, writer and poet, has been arrested – that was in 2005, on the day of Negar's wedding.

That time, Ms Sabet was released after questioning but in 2008, she spent 10 years in prison.

This time, Negar is conscious of the stories her mother has told about prison, but she doesn't want to imagine how her mother is being treated.

"This is 2022 and the world is watching," she says.

"They cannot simply torture a woman. Do they have no respect for such a thing as a woman, elderly, [who] already spent [time] in jail, and [is] sick?"

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### **Baha'is citizen Jila Shahriari imprisoned**

Iran Press Watch (14.09.22) – According to HRANA, the news

agency of Human Rights Activists, Baha'i citizen Jila Shahriari started her sentencing at Evin Prison.

An informed source told HRANA that Evin Prison officials called Shahriari to appear at Prosecutor's Office to answer questions, but she was taken in.

In September 2016, intelligence agents arrested Shahriari at her house in Tehran. She was released on bail after 31 days of interrogation.

The Tehran Revolutionary Court later sentenced her to five years imprisonment. This sentence was reduced to two years and six months on appeal.

### **Hollywood actors condemn Iran's persecution of Baha'is**

Iran Press Watch (12.09.2022) – Three Hollywood actors and celebrities, Mark Ruffalo, Rainn Wilson and Justin Baldoni, have denounced the Iranian government's ongoing persecution of the Baha'i community in a series of tweets published last week. The interventions came after security agents arrested 13 young Baha'is in the city of Ghaemshahr in Iran's Mazandaran province.

No charges against the young Baha'is have been announced.

"This is very disturbing news and the international community should be aware of this," Ruffalo tweeted to his 8.2 million followers, sharing the latest news release published by the Baha'i International Community (BIC) last week. His tweet was shared nearly 300 times as of Monday and liked more than a thousand times.

Rainn Wilson called the situation "shameful", in a post to his 4.4 million followers, and using the #freeBahaiyouth hashtag that had emerged online, and said that the Iranian authorities were "criminalising" Baha'i citizens. And Justin Baldoni asked

his followers to retweet the news and said it was “unbelievable that this is still happening”.

Thousands of other tweets by Iranian activists and citizens, as well as many supporters around the world, also shared the latest news and expressed support for the human rights of the Iranian Baha’i community.

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### **Baha’i individual Fariba Ashtari arrested in Yazd**

Iran Press Watch (10.09.2022) – An informed source told HRANA that Ashtari has been arrested to start her five-year sentence. She had a heart disease for which she had undergone surgery two times last year.

On December 2, 2019, the intelligence agents arrested Ashtari at her house and on February 2019, she was released on bail.

On June 20, 2020, the Revolutionary Court of Yazd sentenced Ashtari to five years on the charge of “membership in an anti-regime group” and one year in prison on the charge of “propaganda against the regime”. Based on Article 134 of the Islamic Penal Code, five years imprisonment for the first charge is enforceable to her.

Previously, Ashtari and her husband and son had also faced arrests and convictions. Between 2014 to 2016, she had been imprisoned in Yazd Prison. Her husband, Naser Bagheri was imprisoned for nine months. Her Son, Faez Bagheri was arrested in March of 2015, when he was 17 years old. He was released on bail after five months. Later, he was sentenced to three years in prison but the verdict was commuted to a one-million-toman fine on appeal.

## **Iran's Government cracks down on Baha'is; 200 incidents reported**

Iran Press Watch (05.09.22) – The Iranian government cracked down on the Baha'i religious minority over a three-week period starting on July 31. There were 200 reported incidents, according to the Bahá'í International Community (BIC), the official voice of the Bahá'í community, responsible for the defense of the Bahá'ís in Iran. BIC also reports its findings to the United Nations.

According to BIC, actions by Iranian officials included: arbitrary arrests; imprisonment; destruction and confiscation of property; and denying Bahá'í youth access to higher education and universities. More than 100 Bahá'ís were arrested during the crackdown.

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## **25 Baha'is sentenced to prison in Shiraz**

Sens Daily (03.09.2022) – The Provincial Review Court for Shiraz has sentenced 25 Baha'is there to prison terms. It handed down 5-year sentences to **Yekta Fahandezh-Sa`adi, Laala Saalehi, Bahaareh Nowruzi, Rezvan Yazdani and Mozhgaan Gholampour**. Their passports are revoked for two years – presumably after the completion of their sentences – during which time they are required to report daily to the Provincial office of the Ministry of Intelligence.

Five-year sentences and a two-year passport confiscation were also given to **Nabil Tahdhib, Sahba Maslah, Behnaam Azizpour, Esmá'il Rusta, Ramin Shirvaani and Sa`id Hassani**. These five were also sentenced to internal exile in other provinces: Mr. Tahdhib to Izeh, in Khuzestan Province, Sahba Maslahi to

Ferdows in South Khuzestan, Behnaam Azizpour to Dehdasht, Esma`il Rusta to Baft in Yazd Province, Ramin Shirvaani to Bagh-e Malek in Khuzestan, and Sa`id Hassani in Lordegan, in Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari Province, where they would be required to report daily to the Ministry of Intelligence.

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### **Fourteen young Baha'is arrested in Qaemshahr**

Sens Daily (02.09.2022) – During the afternoon of 31 August, agents of the Ministry of Intelligence in Mazandaran province raided the home of a Bahai, Mojir Samimi, in Qaemshahr, and arrested eleven young Bahais from Qaemshahr, Sari and Babolsar during a religious study meeting. The Baha'is were reading prayers and religious books.

Officers also arrested Afnaneh Nematian, Mojir's mother, and transferred all twelve people to the Sari Intelligence Department.

“Officers went to the house of one of the detainees, named Bita Haqiqi, and searched this house without showing the warrant,” an informed source told IranWire. “And another group of security agents stormed the home of two other Bahais in Qaemshahr, Golban Fallah and Sanaz Hekmat Shaar, and searched their homes, without showing a warrant, and confiscated books and works related to the Bahai faith. Both of them were also arrested.”

The informed person further said that, after following up, families of the detainees found out that all fourteen were transferred to the detention center of the Sari Intelligence Department. Two of the families managed to meet with one of the people responsible for their children's detention. The officer told them that if their children cooperated, they would be released, but that if they did not then they would

continue to be detained.

The names of the fourteen arrested Bahais are **Afnaneh Nematian, Mojir Samimi, Samia Qolinejad, Basir Samimi, Mehssa Fathi, Negar Darabi, Hengeme Alipour, Mani Qolinejad, Nazanin Goli, Sam Samimi, Sanaz Hikmat Shaar, Bita Haghighi and Anis Sanai.**

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