



INTERNATIONAL PROTESTS ROCK IRAN

– THE DEATH OF MAHSA AMINI SPARKS OUTRAGE AROUND THE WORLD



Just imagine how excited Iranian Mahsa Amini must have felt as she wandered through Tehran. All those bright lights! All those **pungent** restaurant aromas! The 22-year-old woman was visiting her country’s capital. She was from Saqez. That’s a city of about 165,000 in Iran’s Kurdistan Province. Now, she was mingling among Tehran’s eight million residents.

That changed quickly. On September 13, Iran’s morality police scooped her up. They shoved her into a van. Three days later she was dead.

What had she done to have her life cut off so cruelly? It was simply a matter of how she was dressed. Something about the way she wore her **hijab** had displeased the police. Perhaps a lock of hair had become visible.

That’s against Iran’s harsh laws affecting all women. These rules define and demand **modest** female attire. They rigidly regulate women’s behaviour in other ways, too. The Iranian **regime** carries out the laws. It takes orders from its highest Muslim cleric, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

‘IMMODEST’ CLOTHING

So Ms. Amini was likely killed for the ‘crime’ of immodesty. Police claim she died from a pre-existing health condition. But all indications are that they killed her. A photo surfaced of her beaten and bandaged body. She was wearing an oxygen mask.

“It was absolutely shocking to see this young, beautiful woman like that,” said Iranian American human rights attorney Gissou Nia. “The photo went viral.”

ABOUT IRAN

Iran is a Middle Eastern nation on the Persian Gulf. Called Persia until 1935, it was once a great empire, known for poets and artists.

At 1.65 million square kilometres, Iran is slightly larger than Quebec. It has a population of 87 million. The main language is Persian. Tehran is the capital. Oil is its key export.

WOMEN! FREEDOM! LIFE!

As the heartbreaking image circulated the nation, it triggered massive protests. For weeks, rage over this injustice mounted. People gathered by the tens of thousands. They amassed in 105 cities. They rallied in all of Iran’s 31 provinces. Many carried Ms. Amini’s photo and banners that said *Women! Freedom! Life!*

DEFINITIONS

HIJAB: clothing that covers the head, worn in public by Muslim women

MODESTY: the action of behaving or dressing so that you do not show your body or attract admiring attention

PUNGENT: having a strong taste or smell

REGIME: a system of government, especially one that has not been elected in a fair way



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Authorities reacted harshly. Human rights groups say security forces have killed over 200 protestors. That included two 16-year-old girls.

Yet women still defiantly removed their hijabs. Many set them on fire. High school girls rebelled and discarded them too. Often, these protestors had full male support.

That took outstanding bravery, wrote Iranian journalist Laya Jalilian. At present in Iran, women need men's permission just to travel and go to university.

Throughout October, protestors stood up to the regime. Activists even briefly took over a state-TV newscast. They flashed a placard that said “The Blood of Our Youths Is on Your Hands.”

A WIDESPREAD PROTEST

This isn't the first time that the Iranian public has raised its fists in anger. In 2009, hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets. The issue? A rigged election. They protested again in 2017 and 2019 over the country's failing economy. But observers say this time is very different. How? The current protests are drawing people from all sectors. Many of them formerly backed the government.

“[Ms. Amini's] murder was so unjust, and so disturbing, that it united groups of people that are rarely seen in alignment,” Ms. Jalilian wrote.

For example, the protests have attracted workers in Iran's oil industry. Previously, they resisted getting involved in politics. But in October, more than 1000 of them went on strike. This concerns the government. It shows how broad the opposition is to its policies. And if oil production halts, Iran loses a major income source.

YOUTH LEAD THE FIGHT

About 80 percent of Iran's population is under 40. Younger people use social media. They see the freedoms their peers enjoy elsewhere in the world. So they have become major players in the protests. They reject the government's strict rules. They aren't necessarily against wearing hijabs. But they don't like the vague standards for what a ‘proper’ hijab should look like. Their parents are often behind them.

“Religious folks who support the Islamic Republic are saying: ‘Why are we doing this to our children? This doesn't make sense anymore,’” said one expert.

IRAN'S FORCES

After a revolution **deposed** the Shah of Iran in 1979, Iran became an **Islamic Republic**.

The most powerful figure in the country is 83-year-old Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. As head of state, he is chief of the armed forces, the national police, and the morality police. He also controls the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps (IRGC), responsible for internal security, and its volunteer wing, the Basij Resistance Force.

Elected President Ebrahim Raisi is Iran's second-most powerful man. He runs government affairs, oversees domestic policy, and manages foreign relations. When it comes to security issues, however, he has little power.

READY FOR DIALOGUE?

The protests appear to have shaken up the regime. In mid-October an official admitted for the first time that the government had made “mistakes.” Another said “we are ready for dialogue.”

Some Iranians hoped the unrest would bring real change.

“This is not a protest, this is a revolution,” students declared.

But will hopes for a revolution be realized? Only time will tell. ★

DEFINITIONS

DEPOSE: to remove somebody from power

ISLAMIC REPUBLIC: a form of government based on Islamic laws and religious beliefs



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COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Explain what an **Islamic Republic** is.

2. Who holds the most power in Iran's government?

3. List at least four other important facts about Iran.

4. Explain what a **hijab** is.

5. Describe the rules that apply to women's clothing in Iran.

6. Who was Mahsa Amini? Where was she from and where did she travel to in mid-September?

7. Who arrested her and why? What happened after she was detained?

8. What happened after pictures of Ms. Amini were widely circulated?

9. How did Iranian authorities respond to these mass demonstrations?



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PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

A. Write the letter that corresponds to the best answer on the line beside each question:

_____ 1. Which type of government does Iran have?

- a) Islamic Republic
- b) Islamic Democracy
- c) Socialist Republic
- d) Islamic Monarchy

_____ 2. Mahsa Amini was arrested by Iranian authorities for:

- a) stealing
- b) drug smuggling
- c) dressing immodestly
- d) excessive speeding

_____ 3. She lost her life because:

- a) she fell off a moving subway train
- b) she was assassinated by political opponents
- c) she was in a car accident
- d) she was beaten in police custody

B. Mark the statements T (True) or F (False). If a statement is True, write one important fact to support it on the line below. If a statement is False, write the words that make it true on the line below.

_____ 4. **True or False?** The population of Iran is 87 million.

_____ 5. **True or False?** The most powerful person in Iran is President Ebrahim Raisi.

_____ 6. **True or False?** Iranian authorities reacted violently to protests against Mahsa Amini's death.

C. Fill in the blanks to complete each sentence.

7. The capital of Iran is _____ .

8. The headscarf worn by many Muslim women is called a _____ .

9. Iranian women are not allowed to _____ abroad without permission.

D. Respond to the following question in paragraph form. *(Use a separate sheet of paper if necessary.)*

10. Make a prediction. What do you think will happen next in Iran? Give reasons to support your response.
