

47 children among 378 killed in Iran crackdown

AFP, Paris

Iranian security forces have killed at least 378 people -- including 47 children -- in a crackdown on protests sparked by Mahsa Amini's death, a rights group said in an updated toll yesterday.

The Islamic republic has been gripped by protests that erupted over Amini's death on September 16, three days after her arrest for an alleged breach of the country's strict dress code for women.

The protests were fanned by fury over the dress rules for women, but have grown into a broad movement against the theocracy that has ruled Iran since the 1979 revolution.

"At least 378 protesters, including 47 children, have been killed by the oppressive forces since September 16," Iran Human Rights director Mahmood Amiry-Moghaddam told AFP.



The figure represents an increase of 36 since the Norway-based group issued its previous toll on Wednesday.

Iran Human Rights warned that the regime had been mounting a "campaign of spreading lies" ahead of a meeting of the UN Human Rights Council next week.

"They have two goals by attributing the killing of the protesters to terrorist groups like Daesh," Amiry-Moghaddam said, referring to the Islamic State group.

"They want to use it as an excuse for more widespread use of live ammunition," he told AFP.

His comments came as Iran yesterday criticised the "silence" of the international community in the face of acts of violence in the country during protests.

"It is the duty of the international community to condemn the recent terrorist acts in Iran and not to provide a safe haven for extremists," Iran's foreign ministry said in a statement.

On Wednesday, 10 people including a woman, two children and a security officer were killed in two separate attacks.

Two members of Iran's pro-government Basij paramilitary force were stabbed to death in the northeastern city of Mashhad while trying to intervene against "rioters", according to state news agency IRNA.



An Israeli soldier aims his weapon as Palestinian gestures during a scuffle with Israeli settlers in Hebron in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Apec pledges to boost trade

Xi, Harris call for open channels amid growing geopolitical rifts

AGENCIES

Leaders of the 21-member Apec bloc yesterday pledged to boost trade and do more to tackle other economic challenges, wrapping up the last of three summits in the region in a week that have been overshadowed by intense geopolitical rivalry.

The summits have been attended by global leaders, and the talks have often been disrupted by friction spilling over from the war in Ukraine as well as flashpoints such as the Taiwan strait and the Korean peninsula.

A Southeast Asian summit that included China, Japan and the United States was held in Cambodia, while the Group of 20 (G20) major economies met on the Indonesian island of Bali.

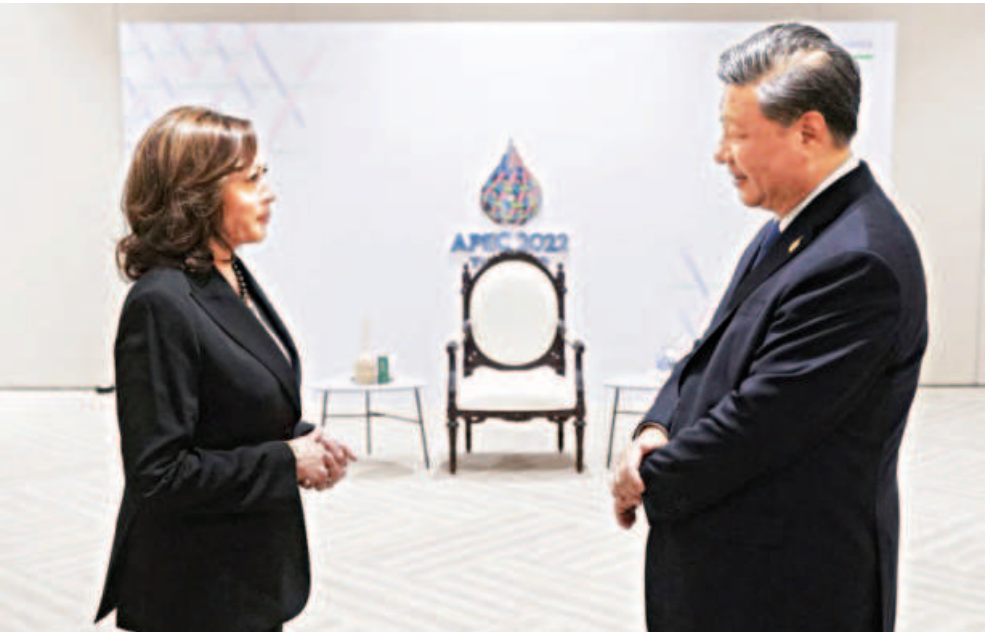
The APEC meeting was interrupted on Friday when Vice President Kamala Harris, who is heading the US delegation, called an emergency gathering of allies on the sidelines to condemn North Korea after it test-fired an intercontinental ballistic missile capable of reaching the United States.

Yesterday, Thai Prime Minister and Apec chair Prayuth Chan-ocha sought to bring the focus back to economic issues and said Apec made "significant progress" by agreeing a multi-year work plan for a Free Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific (FTAAP).

An Apec leaders' declaration said the group would uphold and further strengthen a rules-based multilateral trading system, but also recognised more intensive efforts were needed to address challenges like rising inflation, food security, climate change and natural disasters.

"This year, we have also witnessed the war in Ukraine further adversely impact the global economy," said the declaration, which said most members strongly condemned the war.

At the G20 meeting in Indonesia, members unanimously adopted a declaration that said most members condemned the Ukraine war but also acknowledged some countries saw the conflict differently.



The Apec leaders echoed the G20 declaration as they referred to UN resolutions that deplore Russia's aggression and demand its complete and unconditional withdrawal from Ukraine, but also noted a variety of opinions.

"There were other views and different assessments of the situation and sanctions. Recognising that Apec is not the forum to resolve security issues, we acknowledge that security issues can have significant consequences for the global economy," the bloc said.

Russia is a member of both G20 and APEC but President Vladimir Putin has stayed away from the summits. First Deputy Prime Minister Andrei Belousov is representing him at Apec.

The US city of San Francisco will host the next APEC summit and Prime Minister Prayuth handed over the chair to Vice President Kamala Harris at a ceremony.

Kamala Harris yesterday briefly met with Chinese President Xi Jinping.

On Monday, Biden and Xi met for three hours at a Group of 20 summit in Bali, the first in-person talks between the leaders of the world's two largest economies since they each became president.

Speaking to Xi on the sidelines of the Apec forum, Harris reinforced Biden's message that "we must maintain open lines of communication to responsibly manage the competition between our countries", a White House official said.

Xi and Biden agreed that Secretary of State Antony Blinken will visit China early next year, the first visit by a top US diplomat since 2018.

Xi last visited the United States in 2017, meeting then president Donald Trump at his Florida estate, but relations between the two countries later sharply deteriorated over trade, Taiwan, human rights and Covid-19.

MALAYSIA GENERAL ELECTION

Polls predict no clear winner

REUTERS, Kuala Lumpur

Malaysians yesterday voted in a general election that may fail to end the recent phase of political instability in the Southeast Asian nation as polls have predicted no clear winner.

The alliance led by veteran opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim is forecast to take the most seats in parliament but fail to reach the majority needed to form a government.

Prime Minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob's ruling Barisan coalition and another bloc led by former premier Muhyiddin Yassin are other leading contenders. Muhyiddin's alliance was a junior partner in Ismail's coalition government, and the two could come together again to block Anwar.

Without a clear winner, political uncertainty could persist as Malaysia faces slowing economic growth and rising inflation.

It has had three prime ministers in as many years, including 97-year-old Mahathir Mohamed, who ruled Malaysia for more than two decades during two stints in power, and has roused himself for one last fight, though he is not considered a leading contender.

If Anwar clinches the top job, it would cap a remarkable journey for a politician who in 25 years has gone from heir apparent to the premiership to a political prisoner convicted of sodomy to the country's leading opposition figure.

Malaysia's 21.1 million eligible voters, including 6 million new ones, will choose 222 lawmakers for the lower house of parliament. The race was fluid, with opinion polls showing significant numbers of undecided voters in the days before the vote.

Cops in J&K raid journalists' houses over online threats

REUTERS, Srinagar

Indian Police raided the houses of several journalists yesterday in an investigation of anonymous online threats to around a dozen journalists in Indian Kashmir, a top police official said.

Police have blamed Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Toiba and its offshoot the Resistance Front for the threats. New Delhi has been fighting an Islamist separatist insurgency in the disputed Himalayan region since the late 1980s.

Local journalist Sajad Ahmad Kralyari was detained for questioning during the raid, and his laptop, camera and cellphone were seized, the official told Reuters on condition of anonymity because he was not authorised to speak to media.

The raids were at the houses of half a dozen journalists, including writer and author Gouhar Geelani, the official said.

Geelani, Kralyari and the other journalists could not be reached for comment and their phones were switched off.

"The searches were conducted at 10 locations in Srinagar, Anantnag and Kulgam in connection with the investigation of the case related to recent threats to journalists," the official said.

Also raided was the house of a lawyer who has been representing defendants in anti-militancy cases.

Indian Police last week registered a case under an anti-terrorism law after anonymous online threats were posted against a dozen journalists in Kashmir.

Online posts, accusing journalists of being "collaborators" with Indian security agencies, threatened employees of three Kashmir-based, "Delhi-backed, Indian army-sponsored" media houses for "spreading fake narratives".

Five journalists affiliated with these media organisations resigned after threats leading to panic among others, local journalists said.



US Justice Dept names special counsel for Trump probes

REUTERS, Washington

US Attorney General Merrick Garland on Friday named Jack Smith, a war crimes prosecutor, to serve as special counsel to oversee Justice Department investigations related to Donald Trump including the former president's handling of sensitive documents and efforts to overturn the 2020 election.

Garland's announcement came three days after Trump, a Republican, announced he would run for president again in 2024. Garland said Trump's candidacy, as well as Democratic President Biden's stated intention to run for re-election, made the appointment of a special counsel necessary.

Special counsels are sometimes appointed to investigate politically sensitive cases and they do their jobs with a degree of independence from the Justice Department leadership.

Smith will oversee the investigation into Trump's handling of government documents after leaving the White House last year and the probe into attempts to interfere with the peaceful transfer of power following the 2020 election, Garland said.

"Appointing a special counsel at this time is the right thing to do," Garland, who was appointed by Biden, told a news

conference.

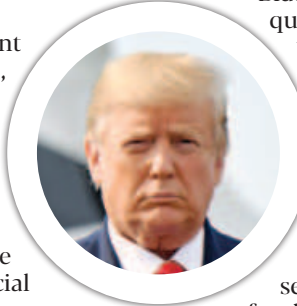
Trump called the special counsel appointment a "rigged deal."

"This horrendous abuse of power is the latest in a long series of witch hunts that started a long time ago," he told a crowd of supporters at a black tie event at his Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida.

Biden did not respond to shouted questions from reporters about the special counsel during his only public appearance of the day. The White House was not involved in the decision to appoint Smith, an official said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Smith, a political independent, until recently served as the chief prosecutor for the special court in The Hague, tasked with prosecuting war crimes in Kosovo. He previously oversaw the Justice Department's public integrity section and worked as a federal and state prosecutor in New York.

This marks the second time in five years that the Justice Department has appointed a special counsel to probe Trump's conduct. Former FBI director Robert Mueller, named as a special counsel in 2017, documented contacts between Trump's 2016 presidential campaign and Russia, but found insufficient evidence to bring a charge of criminal conspiracy.



A vehicle drives with snow on the roof during a snowstorm as extreme winter weather hits Buffalo, New York, US, on Friday. An early winter "lake effect" storm dumped heavy snows on parts of western New York state on Friday, with at least two deaths reported, travel disrupted and icy powder expected to pile higher through the weekend.

PHOTO: STAR