

MAHSA AMINI'S DEATH ANNIVERSARY

Security forces briefly detain Amini's father

US, UK, Canada issue new Iran sanctions

REUTERS

Iranian security forces briefly detained the father of Mahsa Amini yesterday and spread across mainly Kurdish areas of the country, a year after her death in police custody set off some of the biggest protests since the fall of the Shah in 1979.

State-affiliated media reported arrests of several "counter revolutionaries" and "terrorists" in different Iranian cities and said security forces had foiled plots to create disturbances around illegal demonstrations.

The death in custody of Mahsa Amini, a 22-year-old Kurdish woman arrested by the morality police last year for allegedly flouting mandatory dress codes, triggered months of some of the biggest protests against the Islamic Republic's Shi'ite clerical rule ever seen and drew international condemnation.

Yesterday, the first anniversary of her death, a massive security force presence was deployed in Iran's mostly Kurdish areas in anticipation of unrest, according to human rights groups.

Mahsa's father, Amjad Amini, was warned against marking the anniversary of his daughter's death before being

released, the Kurdistan Human Rights Network said. Iran's official IRNA news agency denied that Amjad Amini was arrested, but it did not say if he was briefly detained or warned.

Earlier, social media and reports by rights groups spoke of security forces taking up positions around Amini's home in Saqez, in western Iran.

In a statement on Friday, US President Joe Biden said: "Mahsa's story did not end with her brutal death. She inspired a historic movement — Woman, Life, Freedom — that has impacted Iran and influenced people across the globe."

Britain on Friday imposed sanctions on four Iranian officials and the United States said it was sanctioning more than two dozen individuals and entities connected to Iran's "violent suppression" of protests. Canada also announced multiple rounds of sanctions against Iran.

According to social media posts, Amini's parents had said in a statement earlier this week that, despite government warnings, they would hold a "traditional and religious anniversary ceremony" at their 22-year-old daughter's grave in Saqez.

Widespread strikes were reported in multiple cities in Iran's Kurdistan region.



Activists take part in an anti-fossil fuel protest at Patan Durbar Square in Lalitpur, Nepal yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Kim inspects key Russian weapons

AFP, Moscow

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un met yesterday with the Russian defence minister in Vladivostok, where he inspected state-of-the-art weapons including a hypersonic missile system on the latest leg of a rare visit outside his country.

Upon arriving in Vladivostok, a Pacific port city near the Chinese and North Korean borders, Kim was greeted by Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu and an honour guard.

The pair were seen smiling as they inspected some of Russia's nuclear bombers at an airfield before boarding a warship, a video released by the Russian defence ministry showed.

At the Knevichi airfield in Vladivostok yesterday, Kim was shown strategic Tu-160, Tu-95MS and Tu-22M3 bombers.

"These aircraft form the air component of Russia's strategic nuclear forces," the defence ministry said in a statement.

According to footage released by Moscow, Kim was shown carefully listening to senior representatives of the Russian military and inspecting the aircraft.

Russian officials also showed the reclusive leader a range of fighter jets as well as a hypersonic, air-launched Kinzhal missile system.

Kim and Shoigu then boarded the Marshal Shaposhnikov, an anti-submarine destroyer, where the head of the Russian navy, Admiral Nikolai Yevmenov, explained the characteristics of the warship and the weapons it carries including Kalibr cruise missiles. Russia uses Kinzhal and Kalibr missiles to assault Ukraine.

'Bring them back'

Ukrainian orphans demand return of children held in Russia

REUTERS, The Hague

Ukrainian orphans Ivan and Maksym, 17 and 16, escaped shelling and hunger in besieged Mariupol only to be captured and taken to the Russian-occupied city of Donetsk where they were held incommunicado for months with dozens of other children.

They are now among about 400 Ukrainian children to have returned from Russia or Russian-held territory since Moscow's full-scale invasion began in February, 2022 - a tiny fraction of the 20,000 children that Kyiv has identified as taken without the consent of family or guardians.

The boys and four other Ukrainian children told their stories in The Hague, where the campaign "Bring Kids Back UA" was launched this week by Netherlands-based NGO Orphans Feeding Foundation with the backing of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy.

The boys, students at the Mariupol Technical School of Building, were living in a dormitory when the area came under fierce bombardment by Russian forces. Food and water ran out, and they fled on foot in March to a nearby village.

"When we arrived, we went to the hospital, because there was nowhere else



to go. We said we were orphans, and they informed the Donetsk hospital. Then child protection services came and asked where our parents were. So, we were taken away," Maksym told Reuters.

Ivan said: "We didn't want to go there, but we didn't have a choice. We were fed four times a week. We spent time in our rooms and played on our phones. They let us go outside for one hour a day, and not every day. There was nothing for us to do."

He said 31 Ukrainian children ended up at Donetsk Hospital Nr. 5, and that most had taken up offers to go to Russia, where they were promised comfortable housing and other incentives.

Moscow has repeatedly denied forcibly taking Ukrainian children, saying it found only a small number of children in orphanages or without parental care, and tried to accommodate as many as possible with relatives in Russia.

The International Criminal Court (ICC) issued an arrest warrant in March against Russian President Vladimir Putin, accusing him of the war crime of illegally deporting hundreds of children from Ukraine.

But Moscow's envoy to the United Nations in New York said shortly afterwards that Russia did not prevent

children contacting relatives and friends, wherever they lived, and that parents could apply for help with reunification.

A source has said talks are under way, mediated by Saudi Arabia and Turkey, on repatriating thousands of children.

Ivan, Maksym and others are sharing their experiences with senior officials from the Netherlands and Ukraine to spur international action.

"It's important to tell the world that the Russians are really stealing our children. We need to bring them back as quickly as possible," said Maksym after meeting Dutch Foreign Minister Hanke Bruins Slot, who vowed to raise the issue internationally.

"It is heartbreaking to hear their stories," Bruins Slot said, promising to provide Ukraine with rapid DNA kits to help match children and parents more quickly.

Just as the two boys were losing hope of making it back home, they were given SIM cards for their phones by the mayor of Donetsk, enabling them to contact their headmaster, Anton Bilai, who had been trying to locate them for weeks.

Bilai, their legal guardian under Ukrainian law, travelled for three days and more than 4,000 km (2,500 miles) from Kyiv to Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia and then back down through Russia to Donetsk.

"These were the first children returned from the occupied territory," he said. "Before the war ... they were orphans. All I can say is that now they are my children."

Ivan hardly remembers the moment Bilai arrived.

"I was barely awake so I didn't know what was going on ... He's my superhero. If it wasn't for him, I'd probably still be in occupied territory with other children."

Prosecutor seeks gag order on Trump

REUTERS

US Special Counsel Jack Smith is asking a judge to impose limits on statements from former President Donald Trump regarding a Washington, DC, court case over his attempt to overturn his 2020 election defeat, according to a court filing on Friday. "The defendant has an established practice of issuing inflammatory public statements targeted at individuals or institutions that present an obstacle or challenge to him," Smith said in a filing in US District Court asking Judge Tanya Chutkan to impose some "narrow" limits on Trump's statements outside of court.

US women among NGO staff detained in Afghanistan

AFP, Kabul

Afghanistan's Taliban authorities have arrested at least 18 staff of an international NGO, including an American woman, accusing them of carrying out Christian missionary work, the country's leaders said yesterday. The International Assistance Mission (IAM) confirmed its staffers were picked up from its office in Ghor province, central Afghanistan, and taken to the capital Kabul. Security and intelligence forces had been observing the group for some time, Abdul Wahid Hamas Ghor, a government spokesman for the province, told AFP.

HERITAGE IN DANGER

UNESCO adds Ukraine's Kyiv, Lviv in list

AFP, Paris

The UN's cultural organisation on Friday placed World Heritage Sites in the Ukrainian cities of Kyiv and Lviv on its "in danger" list, saying they are at risk from the war sparked by Russia's invasion. The decision, taken at UNESCO's annual world heritage committee meeting in Riyadh, is a step towards better protection of the historic sites, the UN's cultural organisation said. UNESCO said it had added Kyiv's Saint Sophia Cathedral and the medieval buildings of the city's Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra monastery site to the list "due to the threat of destruction the Russian offensive poses".

Migration pressure on Italy 'unsustainable'

Says PM Meloni

AFP, Rome

Italy's Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni said Friday that the pressure of migrants arriving in the country was "unsustainable" and called on the European Union to intervene. "The migratory pressure that Italy has been experiencing since the beginning of the year is unsustainable," she said in a video message broadcast by her office, adding that it sprang from the "difficult international situation" in Africa.



People watch drones creating a 3-D display outside the United Nations Headquarters calling attention to the Amazon rainforest and climate change in New York US, on Friday.

PHOTO: REUTERS