

FEATURES

Crackdown on Diaspora Dissenters: Surge in Passport Seizures at Iranian Airports

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Recent developments suggest that security institutions have shifted their focus to individuals who participated in an anti-Islamic Republic rally in Berlin on October 22, 2022

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The Islamic Republic's authorities have been cracking down on members of the Iranian diaspora who participate in protest rallies outside Iran, IranWire reveals.

Since Mahsa Amini's death numerous incidents have emerged, including arrests on espionage charges, interrogations at airports, confiscation and examination of mobile phones and laptops, passport seizures, and reports of Iranians living abroad being approached for espionage.

However, recent developments suggest that security institutions have shifted their focus to individuals who participated in an anti-Islamic Republic rally in Berlin on October 22, 2022.

IranWire has conducted interviews with 17 individuals whose passports and electronic devices were confiscated at various Iranian airports over the past fortnight.

Despite the rhetoric of various Iranian officials welcoming the return of Iranians residing abroad, Iranians who participated in the Berlin rally have had their passports, mobile phones, laptops, and other electronic devices confiscated at Tehran airports.

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"Upon passing passport control, I was escorted to a dimly lit room by several individuals," one individual subjected to multiple interrogations in recent weeks recounted to IranWire.

"They rudely confiscated my passport, mobile phone and laptop, issuing a receipt instructing me to visit the General Passport Office in 10 days," the individual said.

Another person who went through a similar experience at Shiraz's Dastgheib airport stated: "They seized my passport, mobile phone and iPad without inquiry, giving me a form to visit the passport office. The appointment was set two months later, despite my three-week trip to Iran."

The number of Iranian diaspora members facing passport confiscation at various airports is immeasurable.

However, it's evident that in recent weeks, security institutions have intensified pressure on this group, with IranWire receiving reports of dozens of Iranians effectively being detained in the country every week.

One individual recounted being subjected to prolonged interrogation, spending hours with eyes blindfolded, after visiting the General Passport Office in Tehran.

During an interview with IranWire, he disclosed that the majority of the interrogation focused on the Berlin rally.

Interrogators pressed him to confess that the People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran had funded his trip to Berlin.

Another person revealed that he underwent three interrogation sessions at his local passport office.

Apart from questioning his involvement in the Berlin rally, interrogators pressured him to admit ties with Israeli spy agencies.

An indictment has been submitted to the prosecutor's office against Iranian diaspora members, charging them with "gathering and collusion against national security," and in some instances, "propaganda against the Islamic Republic."

During interrogations of Iranians residing abroad, security and judicial authorities have claimed to have identified them through published images of protest gatherings of Iranians overseas.

Numerous pictures and videos of these gatherings, particularly during the Woman, Life, Freedom protests, were published in both Persian and non-Persian media outside of Iran.

However, relying only on these images to identify participants in the gatherings poses significant challenges.

Matching these images with the identities of protesters outside Iran is nearly impossible.

IranWire has learned that security institutions utilize specialized groups to monitor the Iranian diaspora.

These "pseudo-security" groups are tasked with investigating, compiling and documenting the activities of active Iranians beyond the country's borders.

Through scrutiny of social media accounts belonging to the Iranian diaspora members, these groups gather evidence of their presence at protest gatherings.

This includes photographs, videos, and even content detailing travel arrangements to the protest site, individuals spotted at the gathering, or slogans chanted.

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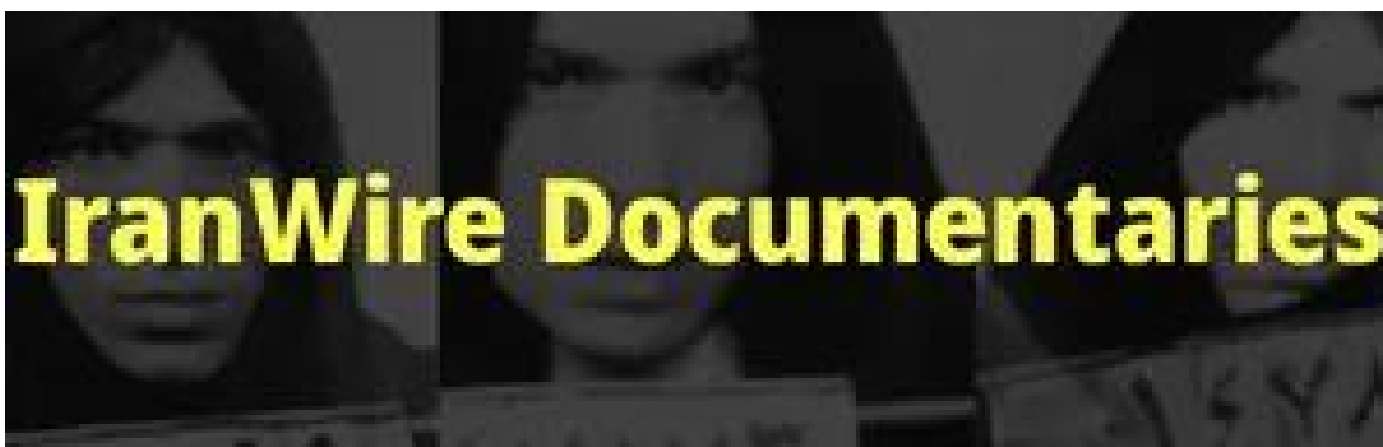
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