



Iraqis yearn for change: 'These people who died will inspire people to go out again'



Lorraine Mallinder
in Baghdad

Three years after an uprising was put down, revolution is brewing again

The revolution is not over. Three years after an uprising in Iraq's Tishreen – or October – uprising, which saw more than 600 protesters assassinated by security forces and Iran-backed militias, many of the movement's young protesters are broken but far from unbowed. Change, they believe, is inevitable.

"There will be a bigger revolution because the system is still the same," says Hatem Tome, a 34-year-old cameraman who documented the protests in Baghdad's Tahrir Square, which lasted several months from October 2019. A veteran activist, his surname is a nickname used by friends in the movement.

"Tishreen opened things up. The new generation are not afraid of anyone. They say what they want now," says Tome. "They are all opening up to the world. They compare their lives to other countries and they don't want to see religion mixed up in politics any more."

Young Iraqis of all creeds had united to express their anger at endemic corruption, dire public services and foreign interference in Iraqi affairs. Ultimately, these grievances converged into one aim, that of overturning the post-2003 political order, in which the country's ethnic and religious groupings – mainly Shia, Sunni and Kurdish – share power and resources.

Sectarian rivalries

Critics believe the system, known as muhasasa, has destroyed national unity, fuelling sectarian rivalries and enabling corruption among venal elites who enrich themselves while leaving the rest of the population to rot. Despite bumper oil revenues – \$115 billion in 2022 (£106.2 billion) – the state has been unable to provide Iraqis with proper access to basics like water and electricity.

Tome believed that protesters might actually succeed in toppling the system. Even as the death toll mounted, with official security forces hitting protesters with tear gas grenades

and live ammunition, and snipers linked to Iran-backed militias taking aim from the rooftops, his resolve remained strong.

But he believes things took an even darker turn after the US assassination of top Iranian general Qasem Soleimani and Iraqi militia commander Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis outside Baghdad airport at the beginning of 2020, which sowed mayhem among the militias. Within days, a nephew of one of the country's militia leaders warned him he would be killed. After two attempted knife attacks, he fled the country for a while.

Now, he is left with conflicting feelings. "First, I feel guilty over what happened because we encouraged people to go out and protest against the government. But in another way, I feel these people who died will inspire people to go out again."

The martyrs' names are still painted on the walls of the Saadoun tunnel beneath Tahrir Square amid fading graffiti echoing the vibrant spirit of Tishreen.

As a concession to the movement, cosmetic changes were made to the political system, with ex-intelligence chief Mustafa al-Kadhimi, viewed as sympathetic to the protesters, charged with leading a caretaker government. But, while compensation was offered to the

families of slain protesters during al-Kadhimi's two years in office, he failed to keep a key promise to hold the killers to account.

False dawn

Shams Talaat, a 24-year-old women's rights advocate, was sceptical from the get-go about al-Kadhimi, who lacked a political base, placing him at the mercy of more powerful forces. "Kadhimi was a false dawn," she says. "He wasn't our choice. We

“The militias will always make sure they have all the money”

didn't want a person who'd already been in the system. Though we had some hopes he could do something, our hopes died day after day."

For her, as for many young people, the experience of Tishreen was life-changing.

She skipped lessons at the University of Technology, heading instead to Tahrir Square, where she ran a stall educating people about the importance of buying local products to support Iraqi businesses and reduce the country's dependence on imports. It was all part of the movement's vision to forge a new, united Iraq. "It was the most important thing in the

world to me," she says.

She was reluctant to leave the protests when Covid-19 hit in 2020. "We told ourselves it was a break," she says. "But inside, we started to feel very hopeless." At home, she fell into a "big and hard depression", telling herself that the protests had accomplished nothing. She blamed herself for the death of her friend, Mohamed al-Mokhtar, who had been killed by riot police, his skull smashed by a tear gas grenade.

Three years on, Talaat believes that Tishreen has opened the way for younger generations to rise again.

Broken spirits
Al-Kadhimi's electoral reforms allowed smaller grassroots parties linked to Tishreen to win seats in early elections held in October 2021. But many protesters had decided to boycott the poll, with turnout slumping to a record low of 41 per cent. Now, after a year of political deadlock, Iran-backed Shia parties have the upper hand in parliament.

Ismael (24) couldn't bring himself to vote. He joined the Tishreen protests after seeing a Facebook post about access to clean water. "As human beings we are 80 per cent water. How can it be that we don't have clean water to drink?" he says.

He never believed that Tishreen would topple the sys-

■ Protesters gather at Tahrir Square in Baghdad during anti-government protests in 2019. PHOTOGRAPH: MURTADHA SUDANI/ANADOLU AGENCY VIA GETTY IMAGES

tem, claiming he went on to Tahrir Square to help protect his friends. "Even if we had won, the militias would never have given us what we want," he says. "They will always make sure they have all the money."

"They broke our spirit," he says. "When they started shooting at us, that's when I knew it was over. It was like we were in an open field."

"It will take lots of blood to change things," says Tome. "Right now, changing society is more important. We need to bring people together again," he says. Sectarian conflict drove different ethnic and religious groups to live separately in their communities, but he believes Tishreen changed this for good.

His fondest memory of the protests was when thousands congregated on Tahrir Square to watch Iraq beat Iran in a World Cup qualifier. The mood was euphoric, he remembers. "You just felt everyone had united as Iraqis."

"Give it one or two years," he says. "The revolution is not over. It will happen again and again and again."

Cause of Nepalese air disaster still unclear

Passenger originally described as Irish was travelling on a UK passport

Plane was trying to land at newly opened airport when it veered off course

A national day of mourning was held in Nepal yesterday after at least 69 people were killed in a plane crash on Sunday.

Rescue workers rappelled down the 984ft Seti Gorge in Pokhara to continue the search, after the plane crashed while attempting to land at a newly-opened airport.

A spokesman for Nepal's Civil Aviation Authority said a flight data recorder and a cockpit voice recorder have been retrieved from the site.

At least 69 of the 72 people aboard the flight from the capital Kathmandu to Pokhara were killed, and officials believe the three missing people are also dead. It remains unclear what caused the crash.

five Indians, four Russians, two South Koreans, and one each from the UK, Australia, Argentina and France.

A passenger who was described as Irish by Nepalese authorities is a UK national, it has been confirmed. He has been named as Ruan Calum Crighton. His was among the names of passengers published by the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal, where his nationality was listed as Irish.

It is understood he was travelling on a UK passport.

A spokesman for Ireland's Department of Foreign Affairs said: "The Department of Foreign Affairs can confirm that an individual indicated in



Spinning violently

A witness who recorded footage of the plane's descent from his balcony said he saw the plane flying low before it suddenly veered to its left. "I saw that and I was shocked," said Diwas Bohora.

After it crashed, red flames erupted and the ground shook violently, like an earthquake, Mr Bohora said. "Seeing that scene, I was scared," he added.

Another witness, Gaurav Gurung, said he saw the aircraft spinning violently in the air after it began descending to land, as he watched from the terrace of his house. Finally, he said, the plane fell nose-first towards its left and crashed into the gorge.

Nepal's Civil Aviation Authority said the aircraft last made contact with the airport from near Seti Gorge at 10.50am (5.05am Irish time) on Sunday before crashing.

The twin-engine ATR 72 aircraft, operated by Nepal's Yeti Airlines, was competing the 27-minute flight from the capital, to Pokhara, 125 miles west.

It was carrying 68 passengers, including 15 foreign nationals, as well as four crew members, Nepal's Civil Aviation Authority said in a statement.

The foreigners included

“After the plane crashed, red flames erupted and the ground shook violently, like an earthquake”

reports as being Irish is a UK national.

"The UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) is providing consular support. Our deepest sympathies go to all those who have been affected by this tragic plane crash."

Nepali prime minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal rushed to the airport after the crash and set up a panel to investigate the accident. "The incident was tragic. The full force of the Nepali army, police has been deployed for rescue," he said.

Sunday's crash is Nepal's deadliest since 1992, when all 167 people aboard a Pakistan International Airlines plane were killed when it ploughed into a hill while trying to land in Kathmandu. – AP and PA

Long-running Indian legal case ends 72 years after it was first filed

RAHUL BEDI
in New Delhi

An Indian high court has finally delivered judgement on the country's oldest case, 72 years after it was filed in 1951.

The court in Kolkata has upheld its own judgement delivered in 1948 approving liquidation of the erstwhile Berhampur Bank, in response to a review petition dating back to 1951 that sought to challenge the verdict delivered three years earlier.

In his January 9th decree, Justice Ravi Krishan Kapur validated the winding up of the debt-ridden bank that had long since disappeared – in a case in which almost all the

to murder, attempted murder, rape, kidnapping and other violent offences, of which more than 420,000 have been ongoing for more than a decade. Another five million are older than three years.

Consequently, tens of thousands of under-trial prisoners have languished for years in overcrowded prisons; lawyers said many such cases were eventually resolved by the accused's demise. Some 372,000 under-trial prisoners are in jails across India at present, an increase of some 26 per cent since 2020, law officials said.

Even the supreme court is not without blame, as it deals with a backlog of more than 60,000 cases, many of which have been pending for multiple years and are nowhere near resolution.

Disillusionment voiced

A cross-section of lawyers, legal analysts and former judges are increasingly voicing their disillusionment and dissatisfaction with the ability of the legal system to administer justice.

Justice Bilal Nikazi, former chief justice of the Orissa high court in eastern India, recently tweeted that he had "lost faith in an institution" to which he owed his existence.

Justice Subhash Reddy, who retired from the Indian supreme court last year, said in a farewell speech that all Indian courts laboured under a "huge backlog" of pending cases, which increased annually.

"The courts are clearly showing that justice delayed is justice denied," said leading lawyer Dushyant Dave.

Iranian power struggle may have led to Akbari execution



Michael Jansen

Killing of dual national for spying may have its roots in internal intrigue

Tehran's execution on Saturday of Iranian-British dual national Alireza Akbari for spying has been condemned by Britain, France, the US and human rights organisations, and could further deepen hostility between Iran and the West.

Relations deteriorated last year after the collapse of negotiations on the 2015 nuclear deal – which limits Iran's nuclear programme in exchange for sanctions relief – and Iran's crackdown on protests against repression and economic hardship.

Iran's intelligence ministry described Akbari, a naturalised British citizen, as "one of the most important infiltrators in the country's sensitive and strategic centres".

A former Iranian deputy defence minister and Revolutionary Guard colonel, Akbari was the second senior official to be condemned to death for espionage. The first, Iranian naval commander Bahram Afzali, was executed in 1984 for spying

for the USSR.

A proponent of the nuclear pact, Akbari was arrested in 2019 after being invited to return from exile to advise on Iran's response to the US withdrawal from the deal.

He was charged with having been recruited by British intelligence and providing information on top Iranian nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, whose 2020 assassination was blamed by Tehran on Israel.

In Akbari's edited recorded confession, he denied involvement in the murder, but said British intelligence had asked for information about the scientist.

Ruling factions

Akbari's family have told British media that his arrest and execution may be a manifestation of a power struggle between ruling factions. He served under Iran's defence minister Ali Shamkhani from 1997-2005. Shamkhani is current head of



“Akbari denied involvement in the 2020 death of top nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, whose killing was blamed on the Israeli state by Tehran”

the national security council (SNSC), and remains a powerful figure in Tehran.

President Ebrahim Raisi, intelligence minister Esmail Khatib and interior minister Ahmad Vahidi reportedly want to replace Shamkhani, as he has failed to order the Revolutionary Guards to crush protests sparked by the September 2022 death in custody of Mahsa Amini, who was detained for not wearing her hijab according to a dress code.

National unity

The SNSC-connected Nour news agency tweeted: "During the last few days, some fake and false news were published by unofficial news channels regarding the imminent transfer of Admiral Shamkhani from the Secretariat of Iran's SNSC, while no decision has been taken to change the management of the Secretariat of this Council."

Nour accused "radical circles" of undermining "national unity". Akbari's execution followed the hanging of four protesters, and is seen as a further warning to dissidents that they will receive no mercy if they continue to demonstrate. The Human Rights Activists News Agency has reported that 520 protesters have been killed and 18,500 arrested.

The hanging also sent a message to the West not to meddle in Iran's affairs. Tehran has repeatedly claimed that the West and Israel have been backing protests which the authorities call "riots".

The Iranian foreign ministry has so far failed to respond to a request for comment on the execution of Akbari.



■ The supreme court building in New Delhi: India's judicial system has a huge backlog

original litigants had died. His disposal order formally recorded the decades-old case as irreversibly concluded.

This was not the last case pending before the Kolkata high court: two others pertaining to local civil matters, filed in 1952, await adjudication.

Overburdened system

Although the three cases were exceptionally delayed, they are also symptomatic of India's notoriously unburdened and overburdened judicial system, in which some 47 million cases are awaiting conclusion.

About 14.5 million of these are criminal cases pertaining

THE IRISH TIMES DEBATE

This House Believes that to achieve a united Ireland Amhrán na bhFiann would have to go



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Time: 5:30pm sharp
Venue: Royal Irish Academy, Dawson Street, Dublin 2

The Irish Times Debate semi-final, in partnership with ARINS is open for all to attend.

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