

Iran lawmaker says 3,700 arrested in days of protest, unrest



An Iranian reformist lawmaker said Tuesday that some 3,700 people were arrested in the days of protests and unrest that roiled Iran over the past two weeks, offering a far higher number than authorities previously released.

The protests, which vented anger at high unemployment and official corruption, were the largest seen in Iran since the disputed 2009 presidential election, and some demonstrators called for the overthrow of the government. At least 21 people have been killed in the unrest surrounding the protests.

The official news website of the Iranian parliament, [icana.ir](#), quoted Mahmoud Sadeghi of Tehran as saying that different security and intelligence forces detained the protesters, making it difficult to know the exact number of detainees. He did not elaborate, nor did he say where he got the figure.

Previously, authorities have said ?hundreds? were arrested in Tehran alone, not offering a total figure for arrests as the demonstrations spread into the Iranian countryside, including small towns.

Interior Minister Abdolreza Rahmani Fazli has said about 42,000 people at most took part in the anti-government protests. Sadeghi's figure of arrested offered Tuesday would mean nearly 10 percent of those who demonstrated were arrested.

On Sunday, Tehran prosecutor, Abbas Jafari Dolatabadi, said that 70 of the detained protesters have been released on bail during the last 48 hours. He added that there would be more releases from detention, except for the main instigators of the riots who will be ?dealt with seriously.?

Also Sunday, Iranian lawmakers held a closed session in which senior security officials briefed them on the protests and the conditions of the detainees, the state-run IRNA news agency reported.

Iranian authorities have said that the protests are waning. That's in part due to the government blocking access to the popular messaging app Telegram, which demonstrators used to share images of the rallies and organize. Authorities also have deployed additional police and members of the Basij, a volunteer organization affiliated with Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard.

It remains difficult for journalists and outsiders to piece together what's happening beyond Tehran, as Iran is a vast country of 80 million and travel there is restricted.

In recent days, government supporters have held several mass rallies across the country to protest the unrest.

The United States and Israel have expressed support for the protests, which began on Dec. 28 in Iran's second largest city, Mashhad,

but deny Iranian government allegations that they fomented them.

U.S. officials and analysts studying Iran say believe conservative opponents of President Hassan Rouhani, a relative moderate within Iran's clerically overseen government, started the demonstrations in Mashhad, but quickly lost control of them.

Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on Tuesday also blamed "Americans and Zionists" for the protests, saying money supporting them came from "one of the filthy-rich governments of the Persian Gulf."

Khamenei, however, also stressed that those with legitimate complaints about Iran's economy should be heard.

"We should differentiate between people's righteous and honest demands on one side and barbaric and disruptive moves by another group," he said. "These should be distinguished from each other."

Source : AP News