A Chilling Crackdown at a Tehran Apartment Complex

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The family of four was watching television at home in central Tehran on Sunday night when a series of big explosions outside rattled their windows. The mother grabbed her two children and ducked under the dining table.

The husband peeked out from a window to see what was going on and several laser dots flashed on his body — a warning from the security forces arrayed outside his apartment block that he had been spotted. He joined a chorus of voices from other apartments chanting “death to the dictator,” the antigovernment cry that has been taken up by thousands of protesters across Iran for more than a month.

The husband and wife, in interviews by telephone from Tehran, described the attack Sunday on the Shahrak Ekbatan apartment complex where they live as tantamount to a military invasion, with security forces shooting into windows and using stun grenades and tear gas. [Videos](https://www.instagram.com/p/CkZXFnKu1Uu/) posted on social media and statements by other residents corroborated their account.

The couple asked not to be identified by name for fear of retribution from the authorities, who have cracked down hard on those engaged in the protests that erupted in late September when a young woman, Mahsa Amini, died in the custody of the morality police. The protesters are demanding an end to the Islamic Republic’s rule.

Shahrak Ekbatan, a sprawling middle-class apartment complex in the west of Tehran with nearly 50,000 residents, had for the past six weeks been the scene of [nightly protests](https://www.instagram.com/p/CkMbMfkp2aB/) in the aftermath of Ms. Amini’s death.

The nighttime protests typically unfold with young men and women gathering in the common outdoor area chanting “Freedom, freedom” and “The end is here, dictator.” Some young women twirl their hijabs in their hands, in defiance of rules requiring them to be worn. Thousands of other residents chant slogans against the authorities from their apartment windows.

The names of those killed in the uprising have been spray-painted on pillars in Shahrak Ekbatan’s outdoor area, [videos](https://www.instagram.com/p/CkT1F04MsV0/) on social media show.

The security forces, including anti-riot officers, and plainclothes operatives from the feared Basij militia raid the area every night, playing a dangerous game of cat-and-mouse with the young residents of Ekbatan and beating and arresting them, according to residents, media reports and videos on social media.

But the crackdown at Shahrak Ekbatan intensified last week after a member of the Basij, Arman Aliverdi, was beaten and killed in the complex.

A [video](https://twitter.com/D_modaresian/status/1586676868589182981) on social media showed the man on the ground, his shirt stripped off and blood running down his face and body. The government blamed the death on “vigilante rioters” and launched a [commando-style raid](https://twitter.com/syedkomaill/status/1586672698138173440) in Shahrak Ekbatan to arrest a group of young men accused of killing Mr. Aliverdi.

Security forces destroyed furniture in lobbies, wrecked doors and damaged elevators so badly that they were out of service, according to residents and [videos](https://www.instagram.com/p/CkXamf-PgPz/) on social media. Shattered glass and debris carpeted the ground and blood was splattered on the floor tiles, residents said.

Dozens of Shahrak Ekbatan’s residents, mostly young men and women who were out protesting, have been beaten, shot with pellet guns, dragged into vans and taken to detention centers, residents said. Several doormen, many of whom are elderly, were also beaten with batons for not cooperating with the security forces, the residents said.

The crackdown at Shahrak Ekbatan underlines just how far the protests have spread in Iran, and the government’s inability to contain them even with the deployment of security forces and their heavy-handed crackdowns.

Many young Iranians say they have lost their fear of the authorities and have nothing to lose. Protests have continued across university campuses, at [funerals](https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/27/world/middleeast/iran-protests-mahsa-amini.html?searchResultPosition=1) and memorials for people killed by security forces, on the streets and at apartment compounds like Shahrak Ekbatan across the country.

In some instances protesters have fought back, charging after security forces with rocks, hurling Molotov cocktails, burning police motorcycles and beating officers, according to videos, media reports and the government. Rights groups say 250 people have been killed, including 32 children and teenagers, but the real number could be much higher. The government says at least 24 security officers have been killed.

While Shahrak Ekbatan had already been the scene of violent clashes, residents said the raid on Sunday represented a new level of violence unleashed on people in their homes who had not participated in protests, including old people, small children and the sick and disabled.

The husband interviewed by The New York Times said he noticed anti-riot officers pointing their guns at windows and shooting into homes. Glass shattered and the antigovernment chants grew louder and more furious, accompanied by explosions from the stun grenades, he said.

Tear gas seeped into the family’s apartment, he said, making it difficult to breathe. The children cried as the gas burned their eyes and throats.

He said the family could hear security forces outside shouting sexualized slurs at the residents through loudspeakers.

Then came an ominous threat, picked up in [a video](https://www.instagram.com/p/CkZsCBsI6Q-/) posted on social media.

“We will give our blood, we swear by God that if we have to we will even behead our own wives and children,” a voice said, in a chilling vow that the security forces would not relent in their crackdown.

Iran’s military and judicial officials had warned in the preceding days that if people remained on the streets, the protests would be crushed with even more force. A video that surfaced on Tuesday night, shocking Iranians, showed security forces cornering a young man on a street in the working-class neighborhood of Naziabad in Tehran and throwing him to the ground as they beat and kick him. Then a bullet is fired and a motorcycle runs over the man.

Some residents in Shahrak Ekbatan, which has its own schools, clinics, shops and restaurants and a new mall and cinema, said it appeared that their complex had been an early target of the authorities’ tougher stance.

In a video on social media, a woman who is capturing the sound of explosions from her window on Sunday can be heard saying, “It’s like a war zone.” Another resident shooting a [video](https://www.instagram.com/p/CkavO_eJ6HZ/) of the tear gas attack shouted at the security forces, “Our turn will come too.”

“These days I don’t leave the apartment unless I have a necessary errand,” said Minoo, a resident who asked that her last name not be used. “But after what these violent thugs did, I don’t feel safe even in my own home.”