IRANIANS GRIEVE, CELEBRATE, WORRY AFTER KHAMENEI'S KILLING

INFOGRAPHIC BY PHILLIP NSAMBA

PARIS

Iranians were experiencing a mix of shock, grief and joy after the death of supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, as Israeli and US strikes extended into a second day yesterday.

The attacks unleashed on Saturday killed Khamenei and top military leaders and prompted Iranian authorities to retaliate with strikes on Israel and across the Gulf.

At the first reports of Khamenei's death, many Iranians erupted into cheers from apartment buildings in the capital Tehran, while others blared car horns and blasted music in the streets.

In a reflection of the continued sense of wariness from Iranians about speaking freely of their rulers, none of the people AFP interviewed were willing to give their full name.

"We are on the road and celebrating the news," said a woman in her 40s who had left the capital and headed west as strikes continued to pound Tehran.

Others were stunned into silence.

"I am in shock. I cannot believe what happened," said a Tehran resident in his 30s.

Khamenei, who had final say on all state matters, had been Iran's supreme leader for nearly four decades.

Around 5:00 am yesterday, Iranian state TV announced Khamenei's death, saying he had "fulfilled his lifelong dream" of martyrdom.

Within hours, Iranian mourners dressed in black took to the streets in Tehran's central Enghelab Square.

Some were angry, while others wept. The grieving crowds chanted "Death to America" and "Death to Israel" and demanded revenge as they carried portraits of their dead leader, religious banners and the Iranian flag.

Similar gatherings took place in the southern city of Shiraz, Yazd and Isfahan in central Iran, Tabriz in the northwest and elsewhere, according to images broadcast on state TV.

WEEKS OF MOURNING

Iran announced a 40-day mourning period and seven days of public holidays.

As dawn broke, large areas of the usually busy capital were deserted and shops remained shuttered.

There were security checkpoints and police patrolled the streets in numbers that appeared larger than during last year's 12-day war.

An AFP journalist at the northern Islam Qala border crossing saw the Iranian flag completely lowered and a black flag raised.

The journalist said the crossing was open and people and trucks were passing through normally.

An Iranian cargo driver said he could not see things turning out well and had been "really worried" since he heard of Khamenei's death.

"The situation right now in our country is not good at all," the driver, who requested anonymity for security reasons, told AFP.

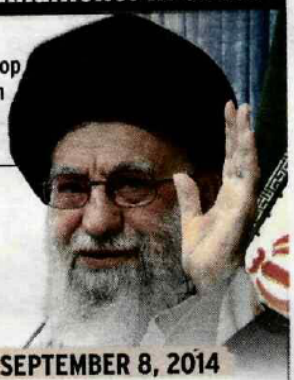
"I don't know what will happen in the future, but it's not a good future for us Iranians," he said.

"The Americans have destroyed everywhere they've gone in the world," he said, accusing them of wanting to take over Iran's energy and mineral resources.

AFP

Iran's supreme leader khamenei in dates

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei had been Iran's hardline spiritual guide and top political authority since 1989, when he succeeded Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini as supreme leader.



JULY 17, 1939
Khamenei is born in the shrine city of Mashhad to parents from Iran's Azeri minority.

1957
Meets Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, who will emerge as a key influence.

1977
After several stays in prison due to his opposition to the shah, he is exiled to Iranshahr, a remote desert city close to the Pakistan border. He returns to Mashhad in 1979 for the Islamic Revolution.

1979
His rapid ascent to power begins when he is named deputy defence minister and subsequently head of the elite Revolutionary Guards by Khomeini.

1981
Becomes the first cleric to be elected president of the Islamic republic. Re-elected in 1985.

JUNE 27, 1981
Survives a bomb attack by the outlawed People's Mujahedeen group in a Tehran mosque, but his right hand is never the same. Learns to write with his left.

JUNE 4, 1989
Upon the death of Khomeini, he is elected supreme leader just a year after the end of the war with Iraq (1980-1988).

JANUARY 2005
Confirms the "death sentence" fatwa handed down on writer Salman Rushdie by Khomeini.

SEPTEMBER 8, 2014
Undergoes prostate surgery after two decades of speculation about his health.

JULY 14, 2015
Supports the Vienna accord with world powers on Iran's nuclear programme.

JANUARY 17, 2020
Leads Friday prayers in Tehran for the first time since 2012. Uses the occasion to condemn anti-government protests.

OCTOBER 3, 2022
Blames the United States and Israel for fomenting the widespread nationwide unrest sparked by the death of Mahsa Amini.

JUNE 13-24, 2025
Going into hiding during the 12-day war with Israel, which the United States briefly joins, but emerges from the conflict unscathed.

JANUARY 17, 2026
Says "Iran must break the back of the seditionists" as the clerical authorities brutally repress the biggest protests against the Islamic republic in more than three years.

FEBRUARY 28, 2026
Killed in the wave of strikes launched by the United States and Israel.