
Millions join Iraq funeral rites for Iran's late leader



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BAGHDAD, July 8— Millions of mourners gathered in Iraq's holy cities of Najaf and Karbala on Wednesday to participate in funeral processions for Iran's late Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Initial reports indicated that more than 2.3 million people joined the Najaf procession within the

first hour after it began early Wednesday morning, according to the official Iraqi News Agency (INA).

Iraqi Prime Minister Ali al-Zaidi declared Wednesday a public holiday across state institutions to facilitate the ceremonies.

The casket of the late Iranian leader is scheduled to move later Wednesday from Najaf to Karbala, where Abdul-Mahdi al-Karbalai, representative of Iraq's Supreme Religious Authority, will lead prayers at the Imam Hussein Shrine.

On Tuesday evening, al-Zaidi and Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian received the casket at Najaf International Airport. During their meeting, al-Zaidi highlighted strong Iraq-Iran ties and reaffirmed commitment to expanding cooperation.

Pezeshkian thanked Iraq for its support and invited al-Zaidi to visit Iran to strengthen coordination on shared challenges.

Funeral ceremonies have been held since Friday in Tehran and Qom. Khamenei will be laid to rest in Mashhad on Thursday, declared a day of national mourning by Iran.