

Iran ex-Guards chief vows to turn Tel Aviv 'to dust'

AFP, Tehran

A former head of Iran's Revolutionary Guards threatened on Sunday to turn the Israeli cities of Haifa and Tel Aviv "to dust" if the US attacks targets in Iran.

"If America takes any measures after our military response, we will turn Tel Aviv and Haifa to dust," Mohsen Rezaei, who currently heads the Expediency Council, a top state body, said in a Tweet.

His warning came after President Donald Trump warned on Saturday that the US would target 52 sites "important to Iran & Iranian culture" and hit them "very fast and very hard" if the Islamic republic attacked American personnel or assets.

In a saber-rattling tweet that defended Friday's US drone strike assassination of top Iranian military commander Qasem Soleimani in Iraq, Trump said 52 represents the number of Americans held hostage at the US embassy in Tehran for more than a year starting in late 1979.

LPG prices up

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said Jakaria Jalal, general manager at Bashundhara LP Gas.

In Panchhari upazila of Khagrachhari, retailers charged Tk 1,100 for an 12kg cylinder yesterday, said Sugata Chakma, a household user. Prices also rose in Bandarban.

Restaurant owners in the capital said the price hike had affected them. The price of larger cylinders rose by Tk 300 to Tk 350.

LPG marketers can increase or decrease the price in line with the international market, but it should be logical, said Shamsur Rahman, chairman of the Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation.

Local importers spend \$120 for shipping of each tonne of LPG. There is 5 percent value-added tax at retail levels.

As a result, the prices should increase by no more than Tk 130 excluding VAT, Shamsur added.

In June last year, the LP Gas Limited increased the 12kg cylinder price by Tk 30 and sold it for Tk 700. But the state-run company accounts for only 2 percent of the total annual sales of 1 million tonnes.

A lot more LPG can be sold in the country, he said.

At present, 15 companies import LPG and 20 companies, including the importers, retail the refillable LPG cylinders.

LPG supply from the Middle East would be limited by lower crude oil output and gas in 2020, following the decision by the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, Russia and its allies.

In December last year, they decided to steepen production cuts to 1.7 million barrel per day from 1.2 million, with Saudi Arabia offering an extra 400,000 barrel per day in voluntary cuts starting January.

With no sign of an end to the US sanctions, especially in light of the current tensions following the killing of Iranian General Qassem Soleimani, Iranian supplies are also expected to remain scarce, it said.

Oil companies in India have raised the price of non-subsidised LPG to Rs 714 per 14.2kg cylinder from Rs 695 previously. This is the fifth straight monthly increase in cooking gas prices since September 2019, the India Today reported on January 1.

LPG price is revised on the first day of every month based on the average international rate for benchmark fuel and foreign exchange rate in the preceding month, said an official of a multinational company operating in Bangladesh.

Court orders

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extortion, land grabbing and tender manipulation.

He deposited all the money in different bank accounts. If these accounts were not frozen, it would be impossible to recover the money in the future, said Senior Assistant Superintendent of Police Abu Sayeed of CID.

Sayeed, also the investigation officer of a money laundering case filed against Shamim, filed the petition with the court.

Rab arrested Shamim and his seven bodyguards on September 20 last year on charges of extortion and tender manipulation.

The law enforcers, during a raid in his house and office in the capital's Niketan, seized eight firearms, a huge amount of ammunition, Fixed Deposit Receipt (FDR) worth Tk 165 crore, a stash of Tk 1.8 crore, a large amount of US and Singaporean dollars, and some foreign liquor.

He was remanded the following day in an arms and a drug case.

A money laundering case was also filed against Shamim and his bodyguards with Gulshan Police Station on the day, in which they were shown arrested on September 26.

Anti-Corruption Commission filed another case against him and his mother for allegedly amassing a huge amount of money beyond their known sources of income.



Members of National Students' Union of India (NSUI), the student wing of India's main opposition Congress party, shout slogans during a protest against the attacks on the students of Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) in New Delhi yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Protests rage across India

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Mumbai. Other demonstrations were held in Bangalore, Kolkata and other major cities.

Nobel economy prize winner Abhijeet Banerjee, a former JNU student, said the attacks had "echoes of the years when Germany was moving towards Nazi rule".

Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party denied claims by the opposition Congress that it was responsible, and in turn blamed left-leaning student groups which dominate the university's politics.

The government has promised an investigation, while home minister

Amit Shah -- a close Modi aide -- told university administrators and police to maintain order at the campus, which has been tense since protests in November over fee increases.

The unrest comes as nationwide protests continue against a citizenship law passed in December that bars Muslims from a measure granting nationality to minorities from three neighbouring Islamic-majority countries.

Hundreds of thousands of people have taken to the streets across the country, and more than 25 people have been killed.

Critics say the legislation goes

against India's secular constitution, but Modi says the new law is intended to help "persecuted" minorities.

The street protests have further divided a country that gave Modi a landslide return to power in May last year.

Modi's opponents blame his policies for the country's sluggish economy and social unease.

India's leading trade unions yesterday called for a general strike on January 8 to protest against the government's "anti-people" policies. More than 60 student unions have supported the one-day strike.

Scientists plan to plant

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said in a fundraising video announcing the project.

"We started Flash Forest with the goal of healing the planet's lungs and taking that job seriously. Until that job is done well, no other job matters."

The drones don't just carry seeds themselves, but pods of nutrient rich soil packed around three pre-germinated seeds like a casing, according to New Atlas.

The nutrient-rich padding can keep the germinated seeds alive for up to nine months, giving them plenty of time to take root in the

local environment.

Each drone will be capable of shooting around one pod per second into the ground and the system will allow one human pilot to operate as many as ten drones simultaneously.

The group says their drone system can plant trees ten times faster than what a human worker could do by hand, and for one-fifth the cost.

Subsequent test flights since August have planted over 3,100 trees with their drones, including White Spruce, White Pine, Blue Spruce, Red Maple, White Birch, Sugar Maple, Douglas Fir, and Balsam Fir.

Flash said it won't focus exclusively

on trees but other kinds of plants that compliment certain kinds of trees for "full ecosystem recovery."

This summer, a Brazilian couple showed the power of reforestation when they showed the results of their own 20-year project to bring trees back to a 1,750-acre piece of land that had previously been used for cattle grazing.

The shocking results caused previously dry rivers to flow with water while more than 170 species of birds and 30 species of mammals returned to the forest cover after having previously departed due to lack of shelter and food sources.

Beekeepers deal bitter blow

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the last week of January; guji til (oil seed), coriander and cumin fields from the last week of January to the first week of March; litchi gardens during March; from keora, kholisa, goran and bain in the Sundarbans during March-April; and sada til (oil seed) fields from the second week of April to the second week of June.

According to the Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) in Tangail, mustard was cultivated on 41,000 hectares of land at 12 upazilas in the district this year.

Honey cultivators from different districts come to Tangail every year to set up their bee colonies in boxes beside the mustard fields.

Over 7,000 bee colonies were set up in the district during mustard season last year. The figure is below 5,000 this year, the cultivators said, based on their estimates.

Honey bees help pollination of crops and increase yields. Previously, mustard cultivators were reluctant to allow setting up bee colonies near their crop fields, fearing declining crop yields.

Mustard cultivators changed their decision after agriculture officials assured them that they would see around 20 percent increase in yields if bee colonies were set up near their fields, said the local DAE officer.

Usually, cultivation of honey from

mustard starts in mid-November every year. This year, it started a little late due to unfavourable weather, including cyclone Bulbul, said Afsar Ali, a honey producer in Sagardighi of Sakhipur upazila.

Later, bitter cold and dense fog hampered production when mustard flowers started to bloom. The bees do not leave the colonies in such weather conditions, Afsar said.

"I set up my 100 bee colonies in Parkhi area of Kalihati upazila this year and got only three maunds of honey in the last two weeks. During the same period last year, I got about 15 maunds," he said.

"I had produced about 100 maunds of honey from the five seasons last year, including from mustard and litchi. Around 50 maunds are still unsold," he added.

Aminur Rahman of Santosh in Tangail Sadar upazila, who set up his bee colonies at Katulee village, said 30 maunds of honey he produced last year are yet to be sold.

There are around 2,500 honey cultivators, including 500 to 600 commercial ones, in the country, said Dulal Hossain, a honey cultivator of Panch Terilla village in Bhuapur upazila as well as president of the honey producers' association of greater Mymensingh.

Honey cultivators in the country produce around 3,000 tonnes of

quality honey, with the highest amount -- 1,000 tonnes -- coming from mustard and litchi each, with the rest coming from other crops, Dulal said.

There is a huge demand for honey in the country, especially in the food processing and pharmaceutical industries, said honey cultivators.

Despite this, the number of honey cultivators in the country, including in six districts in greater Mymensingh, is declining due to various problems - including a lack of fair prices for honey, he said.

In Tangail district, there are around 100 cultivators, including 50 commercial ones, he said. This is down from 150 cultivators in 2018.

"The pollination of crops will be seriously hampered if the number of beekeepers is reduced," he added.

Deputy director of the district DAE, Abdur Razzak said he was aware of declining honey production in the district due to the cold and foggy weather. "It is also true that a number of beekeepers have left the profession because they are not getting a fair price for the honey they produce," he said.

The authorities concerned, including those who export honey, should think about the difficulties of the honey producers and arrange modern marketing facilities for this promising sector, he added.

New commander

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proxy forces in the region through which it could act.

The size of the crowds in Tehran, which state media said numbered in the millions, mirrored the masses that gathered in 1989 for the funeral of the Islamic Republic's founder, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.

Soleimani was a national hero to many Iranians, even those who did not consider themselves supporters of Iran's clerical rulers.

Aerial footage showed people packing thoroughfares and sidestreets, a welcome show of national unity for the government after deadly protests in November.

INFLUENCE
Iran's long-standing demand that US forces quit the region gained traction on Sunday when Iraq's parliament backed a recommendation by the prime minister for all foreign troops to be ordered out.

Iraq's rival Shia leaders, including ones opposed to Iranian influence, have united since Friday's attack in calling for the expulsion of US troops. About 5,000 US military personnel are in Iraq, mostly acting as advisers.

Soleimani, seen as Iran's second most powerful figure behind Khamenei, built up Iran's network of proxy forces to create a crescent of influence stretching from Lebanon through Syria and Iraq to Iran. Allies also include Palestinian and Yemeni groups.

He mobilised Shia Muslim militia forces that helped crush Islamic State, the Sunni militant group that had seized control of swathes of Iraq and Syria. Washington also blames Soleimani for attacks targeting US forces and their allies.

Prayers at his funeral in Tehran, which will later move to his southern home city of Kerman, were led by Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali

Khamenei, who wept as he spoke.

His daughter Zeinab Soleimani told mourners the United States would face a "dark day" for her father's death.

NUCLEAR TENSIONS

Adding to tensions, Iran said it was taking another step back from commitments under a 2015 nuclear deal with six powers which Washington withdrew from in 2018.

Germany said Iran's move to abandon limitations on enriching uranium could end the pact, which European governments have been struggling to prevent from collapsing.

Since quitting the deal, the United States has imposed new sanctions on Iran, saying it wanted to drive down Iranian oil exports - the main source of government revenues - to zero. Iran's economy has been in freefall as the currency has plunged.

Trump stood by his remarks that cultural sites were potential targets despite criticism from US politicians that this amounted to threats to commit war crimes, reports Reuters.

"They're allowed to kill our people. They're allowed to torture and maim our people. They're allowed to use roadside bombs and blow up our people. And we're not allowed to touch their cultural sites? It doesn't work that way," Trump said.

Democratic critics of the Republican president have said Trump was reckless in authorising the strike. Republicans in the US Congress have generally backed his move.

Trump also threatened sanctions against Iraq and said Baghdad would have to pay Washington for the cost of an air base in Iraq if US troops were required to leave the country.

"We will charge them sanctions like they've never seen before ever. It'll make Iranian sanctions look somewhat tame," Trump said.

Road crashes

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Hospital. Police seized the bus but the driver managed to flee the scene, SP Saifujaman said.

Rafiqul Islam, brother of Shariful, said the family was going to Cox's Bazar on a vacation.

Faridpur's Deputy Commissioner Atul Sarker said a four-member committee was formed to investigate the accident and it was asked to submit its report within a week.

Meanwhile in Chapainawabganj, a father and his nine-year-old daughter were killed in a road crash.

The accident occurred as a Rajshahi-bound lorry hit a motorcycle from behind on Chapainawabganj-Rajshahi highway in Chapainawabganj municipality area, said police.

The dead are Golam Rabbani, 42, and his daughter Sadekina Roshni.

Amir Sohel, sub-inspector of Faridpur Sadar Police Station, said the

duo was killed on the spot.

Police recovered the bodies and sent those to Chapainawabganj Sadar Hospital morgue for autopsies.

In Jhenaidah, Shahin Mia, 18, a rickshaw puller by profession, was killed as a human hauler hit his rickshaw at Baidanga bazar in the district's Sadar upazila.

In Gopalganj, a deaf woman Sahinur Begum, 35, was killed as a train hit her in Baspur area of the district's Kashiani upazila yesterday morning.

In Dinajpur, 25-year-old Moniruzzaman Munna was killed as a truck ran over him after he fell from an engine-run three-wheeler in the district's Nawabganj upazila on Sunday night.

On the same night, a school teacher Shanaz Parvin, 45, was killed and her husband Nurul Amin was injured in a road accident that took place in Pathar Par area of Mawna-Phulbaria road in Gazipur.

Police want postings

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condition of anonymity.

Presently, a DIG-ranked official has been working at the DNC on deputation as its director (operation). But a few years ago, the department had an official of the rank of additional inspector general as its chief, said another police officer.

Talking about BRIA, the official said it is a regulatory body and police are doing the job of enforcing traffic rules. Like the BRIA, the ACC and the BIWTA also have enforcement duties.

Sources said no policemen are currently working at the BIWTA and the BRIA. But the ACC has a wing of 24 policemen which only deals with operational duties. Besides, the graft watchdog also has an SP and two additional SP-ranked officers who along with other ACC officials investigate various allegations.

At the meeting, DIG Harun further demanded posting cops to Bangladesh missions abroad for ensuring security and legal support to the Bangladeshi expatriates.

The PM said police have less work to do at the missions abroad, as the countries concerned only attaches importance to the officials from foreign service. "I don't think police has the chance to work in Bangladesh missions abroad."

Amena Begum, additional commissioner of Chattogram Metropolitan Police, demanded increasing the number of women in the force from 15,000 to 30,000 and building at least two training centres for female cops.

The premier said every training centre should have residential facilities for female cops and female trainers.

"I agree with their demand. How will they take basic training after being recruited if they do not have a dormitory or training facilities?"

She said the government would arrange the facilities.

Presently, female constables receive training only at Khulna and Rangpur training centres.

Amena sought approval of

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Specialised Police Training Centre in Ruppaganj, Narayanganj.

The Khulna Metropolitan Police Commissioner, Lutful Kabir, demanded the government set up residential houses for the chiefs of police units like those of Dhaka Range, Dhaka Metropolitan Police and Rapid Action Battalion.

He further asked for providing interest-free car loan to officials at the ranks of SP and above like the senior admin cadre officials, said meeting sources.

DMP Commissioner Shafiqul Islam demanded creating new posts in the police force. He wanted the government increase the number of posts of SPs by 133, addl DIGs by 184, DIGs by 71, addl ICPs (grade-2) by 17 and addl ICPs (grade-1) by eight to strike a balance between the number of subordinate and command-level officers.

Currently, there are 367 posts of SPs, 105 addl DIGs, 67 DIGs, 15 addl ICP (grade 2), and four addl ICPs (grade 1), including two supernumerary posts.

About interest-free loan for personal vehicles, the PM said officers who are not entitled to use government vehicles get such loans. She assured the cops of arranging such loans for that section of officials.

Talking about residential facilities for the unit chiefs, Hasina said an apartment building was being built on a large plot in the capital's Gulshan at a cost of about Tk 119 crore and the unit chiefs could be accommodated there.

The PM said the government has already directed the authorities concerned to construct flats in every upazila for the government officials.

On restructuring the police organogram, she said it has already been significantly restructured.

"When more manpower will be recruited, the number of posts for the leaders will also have to be increased," the premier said, adding that 215 new posts have already been created.

Gain trust of people

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confidence in the police force.

"In case of any offence, law enforcers now reach the crime spot and take immediate action responding 999 calls. Now, there is no unwillingness among the people to avail themselves of the police services. So, you will have to work accordingly."

Talking about the Anti-Corruption Commission, she said the ACC has no jurisdiction to arrest anyone, but it can order an arrest.

"If they want to arrest anyone, they will have to tell the law enforcement agencies. They can issue an order," she said, adding that it was not the ACC's job to keep anyone in custody.

Earlier on Sunday, the PM

inaugurated the five-day Police Week 2020 with the theme "Mujib Borsher Angkar Police Hobe Janatar" at the Rajarbagh Police Lines.

Hasina yesterday stressed the need for formation of a separate medical corps in the police as physicians often do not want to go to the Police Headquarters on deputation.

"If a police medical unit of its own can be formed, it will be good for them [the police]," she said, adding that talented people like physicians, barristers and engineers may join the police.

Mentioning that the government was setting up 100 economic zones across the country, the premier said the industrial police unit would have to be strengthened further to ensure security at the economic zones.

The PM put emphasis on advanced training programmes for the police personnel as the pattern of crimes was changing constantly with the advancement of the digital era.

Hasina thanked the police for being able to keep law and order under control. "If you couldn't have done this, it might not have been possible to carry out massive economic development."

About her government's activities for the development of law enforcement agencies, she said the government increased the manpower of the police and the number of posts of officials to a large extent.

Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan and Public Security Division Senior Secretary Mostafa Kamal Uddin also spoke on the occasion.