

## Iran executes 4 over Israel 'collaboration'

AFP, Tehran

Iran yesterday hanged four people convicted of spying for arch foe Israel, the judiciary said, less than two weeks after authorities had executed a man on similar grounds.

"Four members of a sabotage group related to the Zionist regime (Israel)... were hanged this morning" in Iran's northwestern province of West Azerbaijan, the judiciary's Mizan Online website reported.

It identified them as three men - Vafa Hanareh, Aram Omari and Rahman Parhazo - and one woman, Nasim Namazi, who had all been sentenced to death on charges of "moharebeh", or waging war against God, and "corruption on Earth" through their "collaboration with the Zionist regime".

The group "committed extensive actions against the country's security under the guidance of the Mossad", Israel's spy agency, Mizan said.



Palestinians search for casualties at the site of an Israeli strike on a house in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip yesterday. Residents said Israeli forces have fought their way deep into Bureij in the battle in central Gaza in the past two days, with intense fighting still taking place on the eastern outskirts. PHOTO: REUTERS

## Indonesia navy drives away boat carrying Rohingyas

REUTERS, Jakarta

An Indonesian navy vessel in Aceh drove away a boat carrying Rohingyas from Myanmar, a military spokesperson said, as growing numbers of would-be refugees from the strife-torn country face hostility from locals.

The wooden boat was encountered in waters near Weh Island, off Sumatra, military spokesperson Nugraha Gumilar said.

The Indonesian military vessel "shadowed" the vessel, which it believed to be carrying Rohingyas, a persecuted Myanmar Muslim minority, until it was outside Indonesian waters and "would not return".

There are no estimates of how many Rohingyas were on the boat, Nugraha said. Indonesia's foreign ministry referred inquiries to the coordinating ministry for political, legal, and security affairs, which did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

## US shoots down drone, missile fired by Huthis

CENTCOM says there was no damage to any of 18 ships in the area or reported injuries

AFP, Washington

An American warship shot down a drone and an anti-ship ballistic missile fired Thursday by Yemen's Iran-backed Huthi rebels, the US military said.

The Huthis have repeatedly targeted vessels in the vital Red Sea shipping lane with strikes they say are in support of Palestinians in Gaza, where Israel is battling Hamas.

"The USS Mason (DDG 87) shot down one drone and one anti-ship ballistic missile in the Southern Red Sea that were fired by the Huthis," US Central Command (CENTCOM) said in a statement, referring to a guided missile destroyer.

"There was no damage to any of the 18 ships in the area or reported injuries," CENTCOM said, adding that it was 22nd attempted attack on international shipping by Huthis since mid-October.

The attacks are endangering a transit route that carries up to 12 percent of global trade, prompting the United States to set up a multinational naval task force earlier this month

to protect Red Sea shipping.

In addition to US military action, the Treasury Department unveiled sanctions Thursday against a network involved in financing Huthi attacks.

The Treasury said it had sanctioned the head of the Currency Exchangers Association in the Yemeni capital, Sanaa, along with three exchanges in Yemen and Turkey responsible for "facilitating the flow of Iranian financial assistance" to the Huthis.

The Yemeni rebels say they are targeting Israel and Israeli-linked vessels to push for a stop to the offensive in the Gaza Strip.

US forces in Iraq and Syria have also repeatedly come under fire from drone and rocket attacks that Washington says are being carried out by Iran-backed armed groups.

Meanwhile, Galaxy Maritime Ltd, the Isle of Man registered owner of bulk carrier "Galaxy Leader" hijacked by Yemen's Iran-aligned Houthis on November 19, said yesterday that it was encouraged by reports from the Philippines that the release of 17 of their seafarers held by the Houthis was imminent.

## China names new defence minister

AFP, Beijing

China yesterday named former navy commander Dong Jun as its new defence minister, state media said, filling a vacancy created by the surprise removal of Li Shangfu in October.

Dong was appointed at a meeting of standing committee of China's National People's Congress, Xinhua said.

Beijing has not given an official reason for Li's removal. Li's removal was one of a series of high-level demotions in the military establishment.

Three executives at leading Chinese missile defence firms were removed from Beijing's top political advisory committee this week, according to state media.

## 2008 MUMBAI ATTACKS Extradite Hafiz Saeed to face trial

India asks Pakistan

NDTV ONLINE

India has sent a request to Pakistan to extradite 2008 Mumbai terror attack mastermind Hafiz Saeed to India, foreign ministry spokesperson Arindam Bagchi told reporters yesterday. Hafiz Saeed, 71, was sentenced to 33 years in jail by a Pakistan court after being convicted in two cases of terror financing in April 2022. The case was filed by Pakistan's Counter-Terrorism Department. He, however, has continued to evade punishment for involvement in the 26/11 terror strikes. He has been sentenced in multiple cases of terror financing in the past. In 2020 too, he was sentenced to 15 years in jail. He has spent years in and out of detention in varying forms in Pakistan, sometimes under house arrest. But he had roamed freely across the country and addressed incendiary speeches targeting India with impunity. India's extradition request comes at a time when a political front backed by 26/11 Mumbai attacks mastermind will fight the Pakistan election.

## RESEARCH MISSION SpaceX launches secretive US military space drone

AFP, Washington

SpaceX's Falcon Heavy rocket blasted back into space on Thursday night to ferry the US military's secretive X-37B drone to a research mission. After weeks of delays, the rocket launched from NASA's Kennedy Space Center in Florida at 8:07 pm Eastern Time in a liftoff livestreamed on SpaceX's website. It is unclear where exactly the uncrewed and autonomously operating spacecraft is headed on its seventh mission. The Pentagon has released little information about the space drone and its mission, and SpaceX only cited the Pentagon's mission code name - USSF 52 - in its statement on the launch. "Falcon Heavy launched the USSF 52 mission to orbit from Launch Complex 39A," SpaceX said. Earlier, the Pentagon had said the X-37B's seventh mission would entail "multiple cutting-edge experiments". "These tests include operating the reusable spaceplane in new orbital regimes..." the US Department of the Air Force Rapid Capabilities Office said in a statement last month.



## Too new to talk about democracy

FROM PAGE 12 with some good policymakers and getting ideas from them means it will go ahead without many problems.

DS: Why did you choose to start your political career with the Awami League?

SAH: I feel that the way the country's economy and other sectors are developing, this is the right path for me. It's good because there is a lot more options for me to work with. That is why I chose Awami League.

The plan that Awami League has or the master plan that the honourable prime minister has till 2045, if it has to be fulfilled then I feel that the longer Awami League is in power, the further the development curve will go.

Everyone thinks of the country and has good ideas but I feel that not many people have the mentality to undertake the scale or level of work required. Naturally, I have been in touch a lot with the PM and talked to her. I feel that I know her well. I feel that the vision she has will make Bangladesh a role model for this world. If I can help to achieve that from my position, it will have an all-around effect and will go ahead positively.

DS: Since you are still

playing cricket, do you feel you rushed into politics?

SAH: No, I feel that this is the right time.

TDS: Is that because you feel that you are in the last few years of your career?

SAH: No, actually it's not like I am seeing the end of something. I don't see anything coming to an end.

DS: Does your family have any background in politics?

SAH: No. From what I know, there was nothing at any time. I haven't seen any active politics (in the family).

DS: This time you managed nomination papers from three constituencies. Do you feel that competing from Magura-1 sees you start from your strongest position?

SAH: That's what I feel. Since I am a boy from Magura, being able to do it from here is something to be cherished and also a matter of pride. Since the honourable PM has given me the nomination from here, nothing can be better than that. That's the best gift I have received from her. Being able to do something from my own area, my birthplace... nothing can be better than that for me.

DS: Is it a relief for you that Saifuzzaman Shikhor (incumbent Magura-1

lawmaker, who is not contesting the polls) is campaigning for you?

SAH: See, here everyone is helping, starting from Shikhor bhai to the district Awami League, since I am new to this. What we have learned in cricket is that the team is more important than the individual. So here, everyone will be working for the party, working for its requirements and to make it win and that's what's natural.

DS: What will your election manifesto contain?

SAH: Yes, we are working on that and since I am very busy, there is a separate team working on that for a detailed view.

DS: What does democracy mean to you?

SAH: Look, I am too small a figure to talk about this subject. My political career has just begun and I am only seven or eight days old in this field. So, I don't think it will be good to comment on it. I might say something unintentionally and that can create problems for me afterwards.

I feel that I don't have the right to talk about something like that. I will try to get as many votes from my position and win, and am working so that there is a high presence of voters during the polls.

## The racket on prowl at the border

FROM PAGE 1 When they fail to outsmart the BGB, they plant sacks of phensedyl in isolated locations, and then tip-off the BGB post about a narcotics consignment near the border.

A BGB unit's success is dependent on the amounts of recoveries made, and so they fall for the ruse. While the BGB moves to intercept the supposed drug consignments, the carriers clandestinely pass the people through.

Among the significant traffickers in Matila village is Md Wakimail, aged 47. Another perpetrator, Zia, brazenly doubles as a BGB lineman, collecting bribes daily from illegal crossings for the law enforcers.

Another carrier who these correspondents met at the zero line of Matila village said BGB, through their lineman, now demands Tk 1,000 for each person trafficked illegally.

Lt Col Masud Parvez, commander of BGB Maheshpur Battalion, refuted the allegation, and said they are trying their best to stop the illicit trade, and the trend is going down.

"People cross the border illegally for three reasons - treatment, employment, sex trade. It is often difficult to identify the trafficking victims," he told The Daily Star.

However, the price for passage is not fixed and fluctuates based on border situations, ranging from Tk 7,000 to Tk 13,000 and sometimes Tk 16,000, according to at least eight sources on both sides of the border who are directly involved in the trafficking.

At the Matila village, a small canal divides the two countries. During dry season, the water is knee-deep, but when monsoon hits, this canal can be treacherous. Travellers

are forced to cross, often stripped naked, regardless of gender.

The carrier said that if the women or girls being trafficked are deemed beautiful by the carriers, they are often sexually assaulted right on the border. The women are held captive for a night before being sent to the other side.

Adding to the network, local police stations demand their share. Through their linemen, they charge Tk 500 for each person smuggled across the border. The carriers, a cog in this dark machinery, must comply with the demands to evade trouble.

Khandker Shamim Uddin, officer-in-charge of Maheshpur police station, refuted the allegations and said they did not collect any toll from these traffickers.

"We take action whenever any complaint is received," he said.

"We mainly found people crossing the border without passports for treatment purposes. Sometimes, we found trafficking victims and lawful action was taken," he added.

An additional superintendent of police from Khulna Range, however, admitted that the border area police stations know everything.

"But actions are not taken against these traffickers as we receive benefits, tolls. Sometimes grassroots-level carriers are arrested but they get released within a day or two in the absence of strong evidence," said the officer, requesting anonymity.

Earlier, the traffickers were mainly seen using West Bengal as a transit route to traffic the girls to Mumbai from Bangladesh. But recently, they have started using the border points of

Sylhet, and Brhmanbaria via Northeast India to Mumbai, according to law enforcement officials and NGO workers in India.

Along with the law enforcers, some ruling party men, and public representatives were found involved with the network, supporting these traffickers at the border, according to local traffickers, and our findings.

Sultan Ahmed Babu, a former Member of Benapole Ward-1 is named by locals as a prominent ringleader.

Sadipur, a village in Benapole Ward-1, has become a den of traffickers, with locals being known to accommodate refugees in their houses in exchange for money.

Speaking to The Daily Star, Babu acknowledged that he traffics people.

"We helped them out on humanitarian grounds. We send them directly to the Maheshpur border of Jhenaidah by motorbike, which is around 50 kilometres from Benapole," he said.

Asked about the costs involved, Babu said, "I do not know about it clearly, but they charged between Tk 5,000 and Tk 7,000. And the bike driver charged Tk 2,000 to Tk 3,000."

"People are taking girls with them, posing as wives, so we do not understand," Babu admitted, highlighting the deceit that permeates the operations.

Babu agreed that people occasionally take shelter in the homes of poor villagers in the absence of alternative lodging. In such cases, they pay a meagre rent of Tk 500 for a night.

On the other side of the border in India, similar living facilities are available in Haridaspur and Juapur villages, he said.

## My son's nose, ears bled

FROM PAGE 12 and was taken to the upazila health complex," she said.

Baniachong police station is around one and a half kilometres off Rabbani's home.

Fajrchan said she immediately informed her elder son Moin Uddin of the matter and rushed to Baniachong Upazila Health Complex. Police, however, did not allow the family members to see Rabbani.

They were allowed to see his body at the health complex around 2:00am on Wednesday.

"Police tortured my son to death and hanged his body from the ceiling fan. We want justice. We will file a case with the Habiganj judge court on Sunday," said Fajrchan.

She said Rabbani was sent to jail in a theft case three months ago. He came home around 15 days back after securing bail.

Police had arrested him on charges of stealing a battery-run auto-rickshaw, locally called "tomtom", but he was behind bars when the theft took place, she added.

According to Fajrchan, her son was accused in several theft cases.

Manju Mia, maternal uncle of the deceased, said he saw many scars on the body while washing it before burial.

Speaking to The Daily Star, SI Monirul yesterday

denied the allegation of beating up Rabbani, accused in seven cases filed with the police station.

He said stealing of "tomtoms" increased in the area recently and locals suspected Rabbani. That is why he detained Rabbani to interrogate him over a theft that took place on November 4.

The SI said since the OC was not at the police station at that time, he took Rabbani to the woman and children help desk room. He said he informed the duty officer about Rabbani's detention and left the police station.

All of a sudden, Rabbani locked the room from inside, said Monirul.

"Hearing about this, I rushed back to the police station. I found the door of the room locked from inside. We broke open the door and found Rabbani hanging from the ceiling fan," he said.

The SI claimed that Rabbani tied his vest and belt around his neck and stood on a chair to fasten it with the ceiling fan.

Dr Md Nashrullah Rabbani, who declared Rabbani dead after he was taken to Baniachong health complex, yesterday said he found a black spot around the neck of the deceased.

The cause of his death will be known once the postmortem report is available, he added.

## URGENT SALE

**Construction items, i.e. Ringlock Scaffoldings, Scaffoldings Plank and Rebar Cutting & Bending Machine are available for sale.**

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