

INTERNATIONAL

Iranian man
in plot to
kill Trump
charged

REUTERS, Washington

The United States charged an Iranian man on Friday in connection with an alleged plot ordered by Iran's elite Revolutionary Guards Corps to assassinate President-elect Donald Trump, the Department of Justice said.

Farhad Shakeri informed law enforcement "that he was tasked on October 7, 2024, with providing a plan to kill" Trump, the department said in a statement. It said Shakeri told law enforcement he did not intend to formulate such a plan within the time frame directed by the IRGC.

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Esmail Baghaei said in a statement carried by Iranian media on Saturday that the claim was a "repulsive" plot by Israel and Iranian opposition outside the country to "complicate matters between America and Iran."

The DOJ described Shakeri, 51, as a Revolutionary Guard asset residing in Tehran. It said he immigrated to the US as a child and was deported around 2008 following a robbery conviction. Shakeri is at large and believed to be in Iran.

Two NY residents whom Shakeri had met in prison, Carlisle Rivera and Jonathan Loadholt, were also charged with helping Shakeri plot to kill a US citizen of Iranian origin in New York, described as an outspoken critic of Iran's government.

Prosecutors did not identify the target, but it matched the description of Masih Alinejad, a journalist and activist who has criticized Iran's head-covering laws for women. Four Iranians were charged in 2021 in connection with a plot to kidnap her, and in 2022 a man was arrested with a rifle outside her home.



Smoke rises from the site of an Israeli airstrike that targeted the southern Lebanese village of Khiam yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

They're just kids playing soccer

Gaza mourns children killed in Israeli strike; 44 more killed

REUTERS, Gaza

A Gaza family sat weeping yesterday over children killed by an Israeli strike as they were getting ready to play soccer, amid an intensified bombardment that Palestinian health authorities said has killed 44 people over the past 24 hours.

The strike was in Mawasi, a southern coastal area where hundreds of thousands of people have sought shelter after Israel's military told them to leave other areas it was bombing in its war against Hamas.

"The rocket struck them. There were no wanted or targeted people there and there was nobody else in the street. Just the children who were killed yesterday," said Mohammed Zanoun, a relative of the dead children.

Palestinian health authorities say Israel's military campaign in Gaza has killed more than 43,500 people, with another 10,000 believed to be dead and uncounted under the rubble since Israel launched its offensive on October 7, 2023.

The conflict has expanded, with Israel also fighting the Iran-backed Hezbollah in Lebanon.

An Israeli strike on Tyre in southern

Lebanon killed at least seven people yesterday, Lebanese health authorities said.

The UN Human Rights Office said on Friday that nearly 70 percent of fatalities it had verified in Gaza were women and children. Israel's diplomatic mission in Geneva, where the office is based, said it categorically rejected the report, saying it did not accurately reflect realities on the ground.

Qatar to pull out of Gaza ceasefire mediation
Israeli rejects 'biased' warning of famine in Gaza
Israeli airstrikes on Lebanon's Tyre kill at least 7

Strikes overnight and yesterday morning also killed four Palestinians east of Gaza City including two journalists, four people in a house in Beit Lahiya, and two people in a tent at al-Aqsa hospital in Deir al-Balah, medics said.

Israel's military did not immediately respond yesterday to a request for comment on strikes on areas where displaced people

were sheltering.

It has previously said Hamas fighters hide among the civilian population and it hits them when it sees them. Hamas denies hiding among civilians.

For the past month, Israel's main military focus has been in northern Gaza, the first part of the tiny, crowded territory that its troops overran early in the conflict last year.

A committee of global food security experts warned on Friday that there was a strong likelihood of imminent famine in northern Gaza amid the renewed fighting.

Israel's military said 11 trucks of food, water and medical supplies had been delivered into the north Gaza areas of Jabalia and Beit Hanoun on Saturday and said the famine assessment was based on "partial, biased data".

It said was preparing to open the Kissufim crossing into Gaza to expand aid routes.

On-off peace talks mediated by the United States, Egypt and Qatar have made little progress over months. Qatar yesterday said it will pull out of Gaza ceasefire mediation until Hamas, Israel commit to talks.

On Friday, a US official said Washington had asked Qatar to close the Hamas office in Doha after the group rejected a ceasefire proposal.

BNP mulling more mega events

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People want to exercise their voting rights like they did after November 7, 1975, when multiparty democracy was restored. Yesterday's mammoth rally showed that people want an elected government and move forward."

The BNP leadership is considering whether to arrange similar demonstrations across the country to press home their demands. Some leaders want to organise such events with mammoth crowds on various national days and issues.

BNP leaders believe the government is grappling with various crises facing the economy and a potential food shortage. The situation could make it difficult for the administration to ignore the calls for elections.

"Friday's procession concluded

Voting rights, democracy

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system," Tarique said.

The BNP leader, who joined the event virtually from London, said it will not be possible to control the market or eliminate business syndicates without true representatives accountable to the people.

"Without a democratic system, it will also be impossible to develop any sector of the country, from education to industry, or to contain corruption, or achieve any positive progress."

He urged the nationalist forces to convey the message to the people that citizens' voting rights must be safeguarded at any cost.

The BNP leader said no more sham elections should be allowed in Bangladesh.

"Voting must take place in daylight. There should be the freedom to vote for anyone you choose, and the freedom to vote safely. No one should be allowed to disturb and intimidate others."

He said the election must be held in a fair and neutral manner. "If we can ensure this, we will gradually be able to ease the problems facing the country and its people."

Krishak Dal organised the day-long event at the Institution of Diploma Engineers, Bangladesh.

Tarique described his party's future plans to improve the agriculture sector, enhance facilities for farmers, and take effective steps to increase agricultural production to keep commodity prices within the reach of the ordinary people.

near the parliament to emphasise BNP's and people's focus on elections. The slogans chanted at the procession were about demands for the election," said a senior leader wishing not to be named.

If the election is delayed, public support for the interim government will dwindle because the people want to cast their votes, added the leader.

Senior BNP leaders believe large gatherings put pressure on the interim government to hold an election.

At a BNP standing committee meeting on Monday, it was decided that the party would intensify the demand for election. If the government does not release an election roadmap soon, the BNP will take to the streets in March or April

Separatists kill 26

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Quetta railway station... after completing a course at the Infantry School," the BLA said in a statement.

The Associated Press of Pakistan, the official news agency, cited railway officials as saying the blast happened near the ticket booth when two trains were scheduled to depart.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said the attackers "will pay a heavy price", according to a statement from his office.

The BLA frequently claims deadly attacks against security forces or Pakistanis from other provinces, notably Punjab.

At Quetta station, police said they were working to determine the cause of the blast.

"When we reached here, initially it appeared that some explosive had perhaps been hidden or left in the luggage. But now we think it may be a suicide bomber," Muhammad Baloch, a senior local police official, told journalists.

Firefighters, rescuers and passengers were working through abandoned luggage on the platform, guarded by heavily armed members of the security forces.

At the hospital, Mohammed Irfan had to identify two of his relatives killed in the bombing.

"As we woke up we found out there was an explosion," he said.

"Then we discovered that my uncle and another relative had gone to have tea at the station."

Power master plan will strain the economy

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families rely on traditional livelihoods like tourism, fishing and dry fish, salt production, betel leaf cultivation and agriculture in the Cox's Bazar region in Chattogram. These critical industries, connected to the lifeline and livelihoods of the people in this area, are at threat of highly polluting carbon intensive projects."

Prof Anu Muhammad, a central leader of the National Committee to Protect Oil, Gas, Mineral Resources, Power and Ports, said the previous governments, including those of the Awami League, always served the interests of some global multilateral energy groups.

"Instead of emphasising exploration of local gas, they went for high-cost LNG imports," he said, adding that it is clear now how the import of fossil fuels and LNG poses a financial burden on the country and is associated with the destruction of life and nature.

He demanded cancellation of the master plan, prepared mainly by Japanese experts.

"We must adopt a plan by local experts who will prepare it in favour of

Bangladesh."

Shafiqul Alam, lead analyst for Bangladesh energy at the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis, said the government should focus on exploring local gas and implementing renewable energy projects.

"We are under an economic burden due to the import of LNG and other fossil fuels. It is not possible to stop the imports, but we must reduce the dependency on it and improve energy efficiency," he said.

Khondaker Golam Moazzem, research director at the Centre for Policy Dialogue, said the power demand projection in the master plan is absurd.

"Only 17 years left before we enter 2041, but we estimated our power demand at 65,000MW, which is more than three times the current demand. The previous Awami League government increased the power generation capacity based on such false demand projections and paid capacity charges to power plants," he said.

He said the existing capacity of around 27,086 MW is enough to meet the power demand till 2030 and the

demand will not exceed 27,000MW by 2041. "If we can set up new plants with a total capacity of around 33,000MW, it will be enough."

He demanded conducting energy audits in all government and non government offices, curbing corruption, and ensuring the use of energy-efficient technologies.

The report, presented by Munira Chowdhury, Asia energy analyst at Market Forces, said the capital expenditure required to realise Bangladesh's LNG power plans could instead fund 62 gigawatts (GW) of new clean, renewable power, enough to replace most of the country's existing gas power fleet, or replace its coal power capacity four times over.

According to the study, Bangladesh has enormous renewable energy potential, with the capacity to install up to 240 GW of solar power and 30 GW of onshore wind.

DU teacher Moshahida Sultana, Megu Fukuzawa, Asia energy finance campaigner at Market Forces, and Amanullah Parag, South Asia mobilisation coordinator at 350.org, also spoke at the event.

15 AL-affiliated UP members held

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Ahmad, 40, and Irfanur Rahman, 40, of Paschim Bara Bheola; Kafil Uddin Md Jahangir, 46, of Badarkhali; Belal Uddin, 40, and Shafiqur Rahman, 42, of Bamo Bilchhari; Abul Kalam, 55, of Konakhali; Nazrul Islam, 35, of Kakhara; Shah Alam, 39, of Teknaf Sadar; and Mohammad Miah, 54, of Chowfaldandi.

According to the meeting participants, the gathering titled the "Role of Root-Level Public Representatives in State Reform, Democracy, and Local Development" was organised by the Bangladesh Union Members'

Organisation (Cox's Bazar branch).

Around 70 representatives were attending the meeting when police, along with members of Anti-Discrimination Student Movement, stormed into the hall room around 9:00pm and detained 18 of the participants around 12:00am, they added.

"The operation was based on information that Awami League-backed UP members were conducting a clandestine meeting. We are now checking whether any of the arresting are facing any criminal charges," said Cox's Bazar Sadar Model Police

Station Officer-in-Charge (OC) Faizul Azim.

Zahir Ahmed, member of Teknaf Sadar Union Parishad, who was detained and later released, denied the allegation of holding a clandestine meeting, saying, "If it was supposed to be a secret, we wouldn't organise such a large gathering at a roadside hotel. We're being harassed."

Another attendee, Mohammad Salim from Moheshkhali, who was not picked up, said, "Representatives of all political affiliations were present. I strongly condemn the arrests of our colleagues."

Students to resist
AL event today

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will not allow it to hold any protest. "The Awami League in its current form is a fascist party. There is no way this fascist party will be allowed to hold protests in Bangladesh," he said in a Facebook post.

Alam also warned against any attempts to organise rallies or processions by taking orders from "mass murderer and dictator Sheikh Hasina". If anyone tries to do so, the law enforcers will deal with it strictly, he said, adding that the interim government will not tolerate violence or any attempt to break public order in the country.

Asif Mahmud, youth and sports adviser, in his verified Facebook account, yesterday said if any members of banned organisations or perpetrators of genocide attempt to hold events, law enforcement will take strict action.

Announcing the mass gathering, Hasnat Abdullah, in his Facebook post, urged all to refrain from resorting to violence and not to create any public sufferings.

"Disguised [Awami] League criminals might carry out vandalism and arson and then shift responsibility onto the students and people. So if you find anyone from the [Awami] League, hand them over to the police," he wrote.

In another post, Hasnat urged the students of Dhaka College, Ideal College and City College to join what he called the "Apa Doman" (resist Sheikh Hasina) programme.

AL President Sheikh Hasina recently directed her party leaders and activists to use the US flag and photos of US president-elect Donald Trump while holding "illegal processions", said the statement.

In another development, the Mirpur unit of the student movement in a statement last night said it will hold a sit-in at Mirpur 10 intersection from 9:30am onwards, and will start, around noon, installing plaques carrying the names of the July uprising martyrs on the walls of the traffic police box there.

Late last night, several hundred students and people gathered at Zero Point and their number was growing.

Witnesses said most of those present there were leaders and activists of the faction of Gono Odhikar Parishad led by Reza Kibria.

Tarek Rahman, joint member secretary of the organisation, said, "We are worried that Sheikh Hasina and her party leaders and activists have conspired to kill students... No one can trust them. They don't hesitate to kill people."

Dhaka Metropolitan Police in a statement said it arrested 10 men on charges of trying to ruin Bangladesh's good relations with the US.

AL President Sheikh Hasina recently directed her party leaders and activists to use the US flag and photos of US president-elect Donald Trump while holding "illegal processions", said the statement.

Police recovered a large number of "provocative posters, placards with pictures" and money from the possession of the arrestees.

Fair polls can't be held before certain reforms

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"We're not saying that reform everything and continue reformation for 5 to 6 years. We must go for elections only after reforming institutions related to elections. But, the reformation of the system demands a logical time. Otherwise,

we will remain in the same place.

"For 53 years, the constitution could not ensure a people's government or protect our rights. Constitutional reformation is also very important."

Sarjis said the law enforcement agencies must also be brought to order;

otherwise, vote rigging might occur.

"Besides, the judicial system also needs to be reformed to ensure fair polls. Many collaborators of the fascists are still at the High Court, who secured their place by lobbying with the government. They must be removed."