



PHOTO: STAR

Ctg microbus driver, Pathao rider killed Police probe separate killings

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A microbus driver and a Pathao motorcycle rider were stabbed to death in separate incidents in Chattogram early yesterday, sparking protests and raising concerns over public safety in the district.

The microbus driver, identified as Mahbub Alam, 35, of the Azimpura area under Ward 3 of Hathazari municipality, was attacked around 4:00am at the yard of a building known as Alaol Hall in the Kolabagan area.

Jahidur Rahman, officer-in-charge (OC) of Hathazari Model Police Station, said a group of assailants stabbed Mahbub and fled the scene. Locals rushed him to Chattogram Medical College Hospital (CMCH), but he died on the way.

Initially, the body was taken to the victim's house.

Police later visited the residence, prepared an inquest report and sent the body to the CMCH morgue for autopsy, the OC said.

Following the death, leaders and activists of the Microbus Drivers' Association staged a protest, demanding the immediate arrest and exemplary punishment of those involved in the killing.

They blocked the Chattogram-Rangamati road in the Kolatol area, disrupting vehicular movement for about 20 minutes. Police said traffic returned to normal after they intervened.

Preliminary investigation suggests that an altercation over a gambling-related dispute led to

War fear grows as crackdown intensifies

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long internet blackout hampered verification, but did not break down the figures between protesters and security forces.

Meanwhile, Iran's semi-official Tasnim news agency yesterday reported that 109 security personnel had been killed in the protests across the country.

Staff at several hospitals told the BBC they have been overwhelmed with the injured and dead, with BBC Persian verifying 70 bodies brought to one hospital in Rasht city on Friday night and a health worker reporting around 38 people dying at a Tehran hospital.

Iran's police chief said on state TV that the level of confrontation with protesters had been stepped up, with arrests on Saturday night of what he called "key figures". He blamed a "significant proportion of fatalities" on "trained and directed individuals", not security forces, but did not give specific details.

More than 2,500 people have been arrested, according to a human rights group.

Contrary to media reports, Iran's interior ministry said the "riots" are gradually subsiding while the attorney general has warned that those involved in the unrest could face the death penalty.

Speaking to state broadcaster IRIB, Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian yesterday said that the US and Israel want to "sow chaos and disorder" in Iran by ordering "riots", and called upon Iranians to distance themselves from "rioters and terrorists".

On Saturday, Reza Pahlavi, the US-based son of Iran's ousted shah, urged Iranians to stage more targeted protests with the aim of taking and then holding city centres. He also said he was "preparing to return to my homeland" in a day he believed was "very near".

However, analysts doubt how much support the shah still carries in Iran and say the protests appear to be spontaneous and targeted at "dictator Khamenei", whom they blame for their economic woes.

Khamenei has dismissed demonstrators as a "bunch of vandals" seeking to "please" Trump.

Three Israeli sources, who were present for Israeli security consultations over the weekend, said Israel was on a high-alert footing, but

did not elaborate on what that meant. An Israeli government spokesperson declined to comment. The Israeli military did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Israel and Iran fought a 12 day war in June last year, in which the US joined Israel in launching airstrikes. Iran retaliated for those US strikes by firing missiles at an American air base in Qatar.

The flow of information from Iran has been hampered by an internet blackout imposed by the authorities since Thursday. Internet monitoring watchdog Netblocks reported national connectivity levels remained about 1 percent of the norm.

Video verified by AFP showed large crowds taking to the streets in new protests on Saturday night in several Iranian cities including Tehran and Mashhad in the east, where images showed vehicles set on fire.

A social media video posted on Saturday showed large crowds gathered in Tehran's Punak neighbourhood at night, drumming rhythmically on the railings of a bridge or other metal objects in an apparent sign of protest. Reuters verified the location.

Iranian state TV broadcast funeral processions in western Iranian cities such as Gachsaran and Yasuj for members of the security forces killed in the protests.

The Revolutionary Guards on Saturday accused "terrorists" of attacking security facilities. On the same day, Iranian army said in a statement that it would defend the country's "national interests" as it accused Israel and "hostile terrorist groups" of seeking to "undermine the country's public security".

Iran's rulers have quelled previous bouts of unrest, most recently in 2022 over the death in custody of a woman accused of violating dress codes.

Trump, posting on social media on Saturday, said: "Iran is looking at FREEDOM, perhaps like never before. The USA stands ready to help!!!"

His comments came a day after he said Iran was in "big trouble" and again warned that he could order strikes.

"That doesn't mean boots on the ground, but it means hitting them very, very hard – where it hurts," the US president said.

In a phone call on Saturday, Israeli

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and US Secretary of State Marco Rubio discussed the possibility of US intervention in Iran, according to an Israeli source who was present for the conversation.

A US official confirmed the two men spoke but did not say what topics they discussed.

Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Saar yesterday said that Israel supports the Iranian people in what he described as their "struggle for freedom".

A senior US intelligence official on Saturday described the situation in Iran as an "endurance game". The opposition was trying to keep up pressure until key government figures either flee or switch sides, while the authorities were trying to sow enough fear to clear the streets without giving the United States justification to intervene, the official said.