Iran executes three men linked to anti-govt protests

AFP, *Tehran*

Iranian authorities yesterday executed three men after convicting them of carrying out operations on behalf of Israel and the United States during anti-government protests in January, the judiciary said.

The death sentences against Hassan Divband, Hamid Kazemi and Reza Zanganeh "were carried out this morning after being upheld by the Supreme Court", the judiciary's Mizan Online website reported.

It said they were found guilty of "participating in operational activities on behalf of the Israeli Zionist regime, the United States and hostile groups" during the protests.

Mizan said the men threw Molotov cocktails and grenades, used bladed weapons and firearms and set fire to public facilities in the city of Karaj, west of Tehran.



Protesters from the Surabaya Bergerak and Srikandi Bergerak alliances hold posters and raise three fingers during a demonstration demanding a government review of several issues, including lower prices of basic commodities, military involvement in civilian affairs, the free meal programme, and forest and land fires in Surabaya, Indonesia, yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

COP31 climate summit begins in Turkey today

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climate policies.

A 1.1-million-square-metre venue has been prepared in Antalya for COP31, which will be held under the theme "COP of the Future – COP of Implementation" and built around three pillars: dialogue, consensus and action.

The conference aims to strengthen trust and cooperation among countries, promote shared responsibility, and translate climate commitments into concrete, measurable actions, reports Anadolu Ajansı.

Activities will take place in two designated areas, the Blue Zone and the Green Zone.

Official negotiations under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, high-level meetings, and diplomatic talks will be held in the Blue Zone, where access will be controlled under UN accreditation rules.

The zone will also host side events, including panels on climate adaptation, clean energy, zero waste, sustainable cities, climate finance, technology, health, and green transformation.

The Blue Zone includes plenary halls, delegation offices, pavilions, a press and media centre, and restaurants. A five-petal structure called the "Time Tunnel," covering 10,000 square metres will serve as the Zero Waste Museum.

The Green Zone, designed to encourage public participation, will feature thematic centres where government agencies, businesses, academics, civil society organisations, and young people can share climate solutions, technologies, and best practices through exhibitions, concerts, panels, workshops, and interactive activities.

The area includes the Turkey Pavilion, Science Centre, Green Industrialisation, Resilient Cities, Energy and Transportation, Culture and Civilization, COPArt, and Start-up Zone facilities.

As part of the Zero Waste Movement, which has expanded globally, the COP31 venue will feature a Zero Waste Hub, a Zero Waste Practice and Workshop Centre, the Seven Regions, Seven Homes Zero Waste Kitchen, the Zero Waste Museum, and a Zero Waste Temporary Storage and Composting Centre.

The Green Zone will also include an "Antalya House" reflecting traditional Yoruk culture and a turtle pavilion built using zero-waste materials.

Trapped between salinity and debt

FROM PAGE 1

a slum in Satkhira town.

Local civil society leaders said the influx of people with similar experiences is reshaping Satkhira's urban landscape.

A total of 47 slums have developed in Satkhira town over the years, said Ali Noor Khan Babul, joint secretary of Satkhira Nagarik Committee.

"The first one in Itagachha area had around 500 people in 1994. Now, nearly 4,500 people live here," he said.

"Most of them are from Shyamnagar, Ashashuni and other vulnerable coastal regions."

According to the Population and Housing Census 2022, Shyamnagar upazila, with an area of 1968 square kilometres, has the lowest population density in Satkhira district at 186 people per square kilometre, compared with the national average of 1,119.

BURDENED WITH DEBT

Obaidul Hossain Gain, a resident of Datinakhali village, was sitting idle at home when this correspondent met him last week.

His wife, Afroza Begum, said, "Nothing grows here because of high salinity. We have only one option: buying food from the market."

She said the family now carries loans worth Tk 70,000 from two non-governmental organisations.

"They come to collect instalments almost every day. They came today too, but we couldn't pay. Now we don't have money to buy even vegetables."

Afroza said the family is surviving on rice and boiled keora fruit collected from trees along riverbanks in the Sundarbans.

Their situation is far from unique.

People borrow money to prepare for fishing trips, buy food during lean periods or repay existing debts. One loan often finances another.

A recent survey by Caritas Bangladesh, an NGO, across six unions of Shyamnagar found that nearly 90 percent of surveyed households had taken loans from NGOs or local moneylenders.

"Our findings show that the average family debt is Tk 58,782," said Caritas Research Coordinator Golam Mainuddin who led the study.

The survey, conducted among 270 households in Gabura, Burigoalini, Kaikhali, Munshiganj, Padmapukur and Ramjan Nagar unions in July 2025, found that about 75 percent of borrowing came from NGOs and the rest from local moneylenders.

Mainuddin said many families have remained trapped in debt for years, and debt is often a symptom of a deeper problem: the disappearance of livelihoods.

CHANGING LANDSCAPE

For generations, agriculture sustained communities across Shyamnagar. But this began to change as salinity spread and agricultural land was gradually converted into shrimp and crab farms, said rights activists and researchers.

"Loss of livelihoods has reached an alarming level," said Shahin Islam, regional coordinator of Bangladesh Resource Centre for Indigenous Knowledge (BARCIK).

Several decades ago, agricultural productivity was high and people did not have to leave the area in search of work, he said.

"The livelihood crisis started when shrimp farming was promoted. Agricultural land was gradually converted into shrimp farms. Later, crab farming was also expanded."

The shift dramatically reduced labour demand.

Giving an example, he said that an agricultural plot of three acres requires many workers, but only one person is needed to guard a shrimp farm.

For many who lost their livelihoods in the coastal belt, the Sundarbans became the last refuge for earning a living through fishing and honey collection. But even that refuge is now under threat from forest bandits.

The Forest Department recently reopened the seasonal window for mud crab collection after a three-month closure that began in September. However, many fishermen are staying away from the forest out of fear of bandits.

In Munshiganj and Burigoalini unions, families, already burdened with NGO loans and debts to local moneylenders, said trips into the forest could end in kidnapping and ransom demands they cannot meet.

"My cousin's family had to pay Tk 1.5 lakh to a group of bandits last week to secure his release. He, along with two other fishermen, entered the forest to catch crabs. Bandits abducted and held them for five days until the ransom was paid," said Upolul Press Club President Abdul Halim while accompanying this correspondent in Burigoalini.

Halim said his cousin's family had to borrow the money to secure his release.

Local fishermen said several other groups of bandits are also active in the two areas.

Abiar Rahman, a resident of Datinakhali, who has depended on the Sundarbans for his livelihood for over four decades, chose to sit idle this year rather than risking abduction by bandits in the forest.

"It has now become extremely dangerous to venture into the forest. If bandits kidnap me, my family cannot afford to pay a ransom," said the 64-year-old.

When contacted, Safiul Islam Patwary, officer-in-charge of Shyamnagar Police Station, said that fishermen are sometimes abducted by forest bandits, but their families and relatives do not want to inform law enforcers out of fear.

Even when police contact them after receiving information, they refuse to speak. Usually, moneylenders secure the release of the abducted fishermen through negotiations with the bandits, he said.

"The River Police, Coast Guard and forest guards patrol the rivers winding through the Sundarbans. However, abductions usually occur deep inside the forest. Dismantling the bandit networks will require a coordinated effort by all these forces."

WHAT EXPERTS SAY

M Asaduzzaman, former research director of Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, said the National Adaptation Plan, Bangladesh (2023-2050) was updated a few years ago, but there has been no visible move to implement it.

"The government needs to do more than planting trees to tackle climate change."

The NAP has identified 113 major interventions for implementation in 11 climate-stressed regions across Bangladesh. More than $230 billion will be needed for these interventions, and almost three-quarters of this amount will be required by 2040.

The interventions include integrated management of coastal polders, and the construction of sea dikes and shelters against tropical cyclones, sea-level rise and storm surges.

Our Satkhira Correspondent contributed this report.

Back home dead or scarred

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A burial-cost claims register for 2024 contained 95 entries, including 15 suicides, 12 of them in Saudi Arabia. These are cases when assistance was provided by WEWB, not a complete count of repatriated bodies.

Tasneem Siddiqui, migration expert and founding chair of RMMRU, said some women might die by suicide because they could no longer endure their working conditions, while others might die following abuse.

She questioned the reliance on death certificates issued abroad without independent forensic examinations in Bangladesh. "We proposed introducing a system at the airport to examine bodies for visible signs of injury," she told The Daily Star.

She called for qualified medical personnel and storage facilities to preserve bodies and forensic evidence for proper post-mortem examinations.

If findings contradicted certificates issued abroad, Bangladesh could seek investigations from the countries concerned, she said. "But we have not made the necessary preparations to reach that stage."

Women who return alive often face serious physical and psychological difficulties.

Nanjiba Kabir, case management officer at BRAC's Migration Welfare Centre in Dhaka, estimated that nearly 90 percent of the returning female house helps whose cases she had encountered experienced physical or psychological abuse.

Some also reported sexual abuse, food deprivation, excessive workloads, restrictions on communicating with their families, and confiscation of their phones and passports.

"They were completely isolated and controlled," she said, adding that many returnees showed symptoms of depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). She estimated that around 350 female returnees had received assistance through BRAC programmes this year alone.

She cited the case of Rajia Begum, who returned from Saudi Arabia on February 12 this year after losing contact with her family for years.

Rajia had travelled through the prescribed migration process but informed her family in 2021 that she was being beaten and threatened with death. Her daughters approached police seeking help, but the family did not receive the assistance they sought, Nanjiba said.

When Rajia returned, she was frightened of people, struggled to communicate and initially appeared unable to recognise her children. BRAC staff traced her identity through fingerprint verification and reunited her with her family from Barlekha, Moulvibazar, on February 24.

When there is no investigation, and the perpetrators face no punishment, one woman returns home, and another goes to the same place only to face similar abuse.

Md Shariful Islam Hasan, associate director of BRAC's Migration Programme and Youth Platform

Nanjiba also described another case involving a woman who returned five months pregnant after reportedly being transferred between four households while working abroad.

RMMRU's latest 2025 migration report noted that Bangladesh still lacks comprehensive data on returning workers, despite maintaining records of departing migrants since 1976.

Md Shariful Islam Hasan, associate director of BRAC's Migration Programme and Youth Platform, said Bangladesh began sending women house helps to Saudi Arabia in February 2015 without adequate protection mechanisms.

He alleged that complaints of abuse were often not pursued with Saudi authorities, allowing perpetrators to escape accountability.

"When there is no investigation, and the perpetrators face no punishment, one woman returns home, and another goes to the same place only to face similar abuse," he told The Daily Star.

Such concerns are longstanding.

A study by the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment, submitted to a parliamentary standing committee in August 2019, found that among 110 female house helps who returned from Saudi Arabia, 35 percent reported physical and sexual abuse, while 44 percent said they had not received wages regularly.

There have been instances of legal accountability.

In 2021, a Riyadh court sentenced a member of an employer's household to death over the 2019 murder of Bangladeshi house help Abiron Begum.

State Minister for Expatriates' Welfare Md Nurul Haque told parliament on September 3 that the government had signed agreements with 22 law firms in 13 countries to assist migrants and maintained two safe homes in Saudi Arabia.

Meanwhile, Bangladeshi women's overseas employment fell 40.9 percent, from 1,05,466 in 2022 to 62,317 in 2025, according to the RMMRU report.

Women accounted for only 5.5 percent of migrants in 2025, compared with around 16 percent in 2016. Saudi Arabia remained their largest destination, receiving 44,832 women last year.

The report identified unsafe working conditions and violence inside employers' homes among factors discouraging women from seeking overseas employment.

Tasneem Siddiqui urged more shelter facilities, regular embassy-supervised contact with women workers and comprehensive protection measures. "Piecemeal efforts will not work anymore."

At a parliamentary caucus discussion on November 4, Deputy Speaker Barrister Kayser Kamal called for reviewing Bangladesh's 2015 agreement with Saudi Arabia on female house helps.

He stressed the need to ensure their safety, dignity, adequate rest, proper accommodation, and opportunities to communicate with their families.

KSA downs two Houthi missiles aimed at Riyadh

Aramco Tower building damaged by falling debris

AGENCIES

An administrative building belonging to state oil giant Saudi Aramco in Riyadh was damaged by falling debris following an attempted attack yesterday, with no injuries or fatalities reported, the kingdom's energy ministry said.

A Reuters witness saw blown-out windows across several floors of the Aramco Tower, one of the tallest buildings in the capital's King Abdullah Financial District.

The incident, which the ministry said caused limited damage, came after the Saudi-led coalition said it had intercepted two missiles fired by Yemen's Iran-aligned Houthis towards Riyadh.

Multiple loud booms were heard in Riyadh earlier yesterday, a Reuters witness said, shortly after Saudi Civil Defense issued an early-warning alert of a potential threat in the region. Authorities later announced that the danger had passed.

The Saudi-led coalition that has been fighting the Houthis subsequently said it had intercepted and destroyed two cruise missiles in Riyadh and the kingdom's southern region.

In a separate development, three oil tankers caught fire in the Strait of Hormuz after hitting mines, Iran's Revolutionary Guards said yesterday, according to state news agency IRNA.

Since the outbreak of the Iran war in late February, Tehran has severely restricted traffic through the strategic waterway, insisting vessels use routes authorised by the Islamic republic.

An American military aircraft fired on and disabled a commercial vessel that tried to break the US blockade of Iran later on Saturday, US Central Command has claimed, according to Reuters.

Meanwhile, Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz said: "With regard to Iran, the mission is still not complete. Iran is trying to renew its efforts to obtain nuclear weapons -- alongside other grave efforts that place the State of Israel in real danger."

US Vice President Vance has spent the past two weeks personally involved in indirect talks with Iran aimed at reaching a new ceasefire and resuming nuclear negotiations, Axios reports, citing two "sources with knowledge of the matter".

Vance has been "speaking almost daily" to key figures from mediating countries Pakistan, Qatar and others.

Most Gulf stock markets started yesterday on the back foot as investors awaited indications on whether President Trump will order fresh attacks on Iran.

Family planning

FROM PAGE 1

The move follows a cabinet committee recommendation to bring three categories of field-level healthcare workers under a unified system to avoid duplication and improve coordination and integration, rather than having them work separately under different programmes and departments.

Following the proposal, the government has planned to recruit nearly 1 lakh health workers over the next three years.

It envisages a workforce of around 1.50 lakh combining the new recruits with more than 40,000 existing health assistants, family welfare assistants, family planning inspectors, and community health care providers.

The workforce will operate through proposed health and wellbeing centres at the union level in the rural areas and at the ward level in the city corporation areas. They will be designated as health and wellbeing assistants.

Health ministry officials said the plan aims to ensure that health workers visit every household at regular intervals, at least once every two months, to conduct basic health checkups and provide health advice while continuing to carry out their existing responsibilities, including vaccination and the distribution of contraceptives and medicines.

At the October 6 meeting, SM Ziauddin Hyder, PM's special assistant on health affairs, said DGFP should be restructured to form a new directorate named DPHC, according to the meeting minutes.

Three-and-a-half-storey primary healthcare centres would be established in every union under the new department, he added.

Subsequently, the meeting formed a seven-member committee, led by the additional secretary (administration) of Health Services Division. The body will have representatives from DGHS, DGFP, and Community Clinic Trust.

The body has been asked to submit its report within 20 working days.

Prof Be-Nazir Ahmed, former director of disease control at the DGHS, said the proposal to create DPHC needed further discussion and assessment, warning that restructuring the existing directorates without proper planning could create administrative complications.

He said primary healthcare services were being provided through upazila health complexes and their subordinate facilities under the DGHS, while family planning services were being delivered through union-level health and family welfare centres under the DGFP.

"If primary healthcare is brought under a new directorate, the role of upazila health complexes and their doctors and nurses will also need to be considered, as they are already an important part of primary healthcare," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

He said that integrating health and family planning services under a unified administrative structure had long been a demand, rather than maintaining separate directorates and administrative arrangements.

The health expert expressed doubts about how much could be achieved by creating another directorate without addressing the existing administrative and workforce arrangements.

"I think more work, discussions, workshops, and assessments are needed before taking such a decision. Once a separate structure is set up, it may be difficult to reverse it later, as has been the case with family planning over the past 50 years or more."

Speaking to this correspondent, ANM Bazlur Rashid, secretary of Health Services Division, said the initial thinking is to re-organise the existing DGFP into a new department.

"A committee has been formed to examine the proposal further and may recommend how it should be implemented.

"The idea is to make healthcare services closer to people, particularly in the rural areas .... The idea is to unite everyone under one umbrella so that services can be streamlined."

Addressing concerns about the possible impact of the restructuring on family planning services, he said the committee would examine the issue, adding that the government wanted to prioritise family planning while integrating it into the broader primary healthcare system.

Responding to another question, he said representatives of all relevant stakeholders, including the DGHS and DGFP, were involved in the process.

"The initiative is at a very preliminary stage. Everyone is involved in the discussions, and the objective is to ensure that services are delivered under a unified system and streamlined," the secretary said.