

Iran says some of those involved in killing nuclear scientist arrested

Author:

Reuters

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DUBAI: Some of those involved in the assassination of Iran's top nuclear scientist last month have been arrested, an adviser to the Iranian parliament speaker said on Tuesday, according to the semi-official news agency ISNA. Iran has blamed Israel for the Nov. 27 killing of Mohsen Fakhri-zadeh, who was seen by Western intelligence services as the mastermind of a covert Iranian nuclear weapons program. Tehran has long denied any such ambition. Israel has neither confirmed nor denied responsibility for the killing.

"The perpetrators of this assassination, some of whom have been identified and even arrested by the security services, will not escape justice," ISNA quoted adviser Hossein Amir-Abdollahian as telling Iran's Arabic-language Al Alam TV.

"Were the Zionists (Israel) able to do this alone and without the cooperation of, for example, the American (intelligence) service or another service? They certainly could not do that," Amir-Abdollahian said.

Iran has given contradictory details of Fakhri-zadeh's death in a daytime Nov. 27 ambush on his car on a highway near the capital Tehran.

A senior Revolutionary Guards commander has said the killing was carried out remotely with artificial intelligence and a machine gun equipped with a "satellite-controlled smart system."

Witnesses earlier told state television that a truck had exploded before a group of gunmen opened fire on Fakhri-zadeh's car.

Experts and officials told Reuters last week that Fakhri-zadeh's killing exposed security gaps that suggest Iran's security forces may have been infiltrated and that the Islamic Republic is vulnerable to further attacks.



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Iran says scientist killed in 'complex' operation, opposition rejects involvement as 'lies' Iran to give a 'calculated' response to nuclear scientist killing, says official

[UK writer Neil Gaiman teams up with UNHCR to raise money for Syrian refugees](#)

Tue, 2020-12-08 21:16

LONDON: British writer Neil Gaiman has launched a new video campaign with the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) to help raise funds for Syrian refugees, as part of the commission's Winter Appeal.

Introducing the wonderful new animated film of “What You Need to be Warm” including many of your [#DrawForRefugees](#) illustrations. Thanks for joining me on this journey.

RT this Tweet to hear more from me & UNHCR on how you can help [@refugees](#) this winter <https://t.co/gu2Q7GS0Sh>
pic.twitter.com/w1RClzwexM

– Neil Gaiman (@neilhimsel) [December 8, 2020](#)

Gaiman, a UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador since 2017, released the video, featuring him reading a poem he wrote called “What You Need to Be Warm.” The poem draws attention to the plight of refugees, as animations in the video, created by more than 900 people, from artists to schoolchildren, depict the hardships many face.

The appeal will mainly try to raise funds for Syrians in Lebanon. Gaiman told the Independent that the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) had worsened the situation for many refugees, especially those in the Middle East facing a difficult winter.

“It’s very easy when you are dealing with your own nightmares and your own problems – and all of us are dealing with them through 2020 – to forget that there are people out there who have less than you and who need help and who are now having to cope with things like COVID in camps,” he said.



One of the artworks submitted for the video. (UNHCR/Helena BS)

"I think this is, in a lot of ways, the hardest time of all. That was why I loved the idea of us taking the poem I wrote about warmth ... and going 'okay, well, we did a thing about the cold and winter and refugees and this year, it's worse'," he added.

"It's not like any of that is better than it was in winter of 2019. Everything now is 10 times worse, 50 times worse, 100 times worse. So, let's see what we can do to fix it or at least improve it in some way."

Gaiman first traveled to the region to raise awareness of the issues faced by refugees in 2014. "I've been banging the drum now for refugees for seven years or more," he said.

"I wound up going in 2014 to Jordan and seeing the camps up close and ... talking to refugees and that was life-changing. I came away, there are photos of me coming away from there with this sort of thousand-yard stare. I just realised for myself how incredibly fragile civilisation is.



Neil Gaiman at work on the video for ‘What You Need to Be Warm’ at his home on the Isle of Skye, Scotland. (UNHCR/Jim Petersen)

“These were people from towns, cities and villages who had completely normal lives a year ago, two years ago, four years ago, they had corner shops. They were working selling cars, selling insurance, they were dentists. Everything was normal and then the world fell apart,” he said.

UNHCR spokesperson Lisa Abou Khaled told the Independent that Syrian refugees in Lebanon faced their most difficult winter since fleeing their war-torn homeland, with their temporary shelter undergoing serious social, political and economic issues of its own, not to mention suffering a devastating explosion at the port of Beirut earlier this year.

“On top of the economic crisis, COVID-19 has obviously had a huge impact on the ability of refugees to find work because most of them were working or finding daily labour opportunities and unfortunately, most of them have lost those opportunities during lockdowns and as other confinement measures were taken,” she said.

“Like everyone affected by the explosion, some refugees were living in some of the poorest neighbourhoods affected by the blast and its impacts and will now be exposed to the winter elements.

“The level of depression, attempted suicide and self-harm amongst refugees has increased dramatically in the past few months in Lebanon. We’re aiming to reach 90 percent of Syrian refugees with support with the winter cash program. It’s a lump sum that will help them buy fuel, warm clothes and basically survive this winter,” Abdou Khaled added. “This is considered to be a lifesaving program ... but we still don’t have enough money to reach that 90 percent of refugees.”

Gaiman added that people viewing the video should “remember how lucky you are to be warm and remember that there are people out there who aren’t. Just think of what it’s like in the bleak mid-winter for refugees all over the world. Think of them shivering and then reach into your pocket and send something.”



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Friends or foes? Syrian refugees divided on fate of defectors
Russia-backed conference on Syrian refugees dismissed as ‘dog and pony show’

[**Russia urges release of reporters**](#)

[detained in Turkey](#)

Author:

Tue, 2020-12-08 02:00

MOSCOW: President Vladimir Putin's spokesman said on Monday the Kremlin hopes that two Russian journalists detained in Turkey will be released as soon as possible.

Dmitry Peskov told reporters Russian diplomats were in contact with Turkish representatives to secure the release of two journalists working with Kremlin-friendly NTV channel "in the near future."

"We hope through dialogue we will be able to resolve this incident," Peskov said.

NTV said last week that journalist Alexei Petrushko and cameraman Ivan Malyshev were arrested by police in Istanbul on Thursday morning.

BACKGROUND

A Turkish Foreign Ministry source said they were detained while filming near a facility for manufacturing drones and were working without accreditation.

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Peskov said Russia would "take all possible steps" to help them.

Moscow and Ankara have agreed to jointly monitor a Russian-mediated truce over the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region after a six-week war between Armenia and Azerbaijan that claimed over 5,000 lives.

But tensions between the two rose during the conflict, Russia accusing Turkey of deploying Syrian fighters to combat Armenian forces.



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Arab Spring weakened many states, benefited Iran and Turkey, says Arab League secretary
Hungary jails Syrian Daesh commander over imam beheading

[‘Keep up the fight,’ urges Tunisian street vendor’s sister](#)

Author:

Tue, 2020-12-08 01:56

MONTREAL: Tunisians should keep up the fight for their rights, believes the sister of a street vendor who set himself alight a decade ago, triggering a string of protests around the Arab world.

But Leila Bouazizi admitted the revolt which flared in late 2010 has done little to solve the economic problems that pushed her brother, Mohamed, over the edge.

“Everyone thought the government would do something,” she told AFP in Quebec, where she moved to study in 2013 and has lived ever since.

“Unfortunately, it did nothing,” she added, saying she was “very disappointed” in the outcome of the uprising, even though it brought down the north African country’s long-time ruler Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali, and

installed a fragile system of democracy.

Mohamed Bouazizi and his family lived in modest circumstances in the run-down central rural town of Sidi Bouzid.

Like many young, unemployed Tunisians, Mohamed, then 26, provided for his loved ones with the limited means at hand, selling whatever fruits and vegetables were in season.

On the morning of Dec. 17, 2010, the police seized Mohamed's handcart – which served as a makeshift stall – and his merchandise.

After a series of petty harassments, it was the last straw. Mohamed doused himself in petrol and set himself alight.

"It was an accumulation of things that made him explode," said Leila, now aged 34.

At the time, she was studying in another town, but she recalled hearing that her brother had been slapped by a policewoman during an altercation, although this was never confirmed.

When Mohamed asked local authorities to investigate, "he didn't get a response," she said. "He was really annoyed ... That's why he took petrol and did what he did." The young man succumbed to his wounds in early 2011.

But his act had sparked unprecedented mass demonstrations across Tunisia, super-charged by social media, which then ignited a series of revolts across the Middle East. "When my brother did that act, everyone exploded and protested against the system," Leila said.

"Everyone wanted the situation to change," she added, saying her brother had been in "the same situation" as most young people.

In the wake of his death, the Bouazizi family received "lots of threats" – including death threats – as well as harassment both online and in the streets by people opposed to the revolution. Rumours were rife that they had become rich. "It was dangerous," said Leila. Her mother, surviving brothers and sisters managed to emigrate to Quebec where Leila lives in a residential district and works in the aeronautics industry.

She said they are "well integrated," but continue to follow events in Tunisia. The country has seen some progress in the past decade, she says – it has a new constitution and has organized several democratic elections. "You can speak, you can demonstrate," she said, noting the lack of political freedoms during the 23-year rule of Ben Ali.

But a succession of governments has not fixed the economic situation, particularly tough for young people, Leila added. "Every time there's a vote, they say 'we're going to do this, things will change,'" she said. "But when they take power, nothing changes."

She criticized the lack of solid measures to reform Tunisia's failing health system or fix its decrepit infrastructure, with deadly floods following every major rainstorm.

And despite some political progress, young people in marginalized regions such as Sidi Bouzid still face unemployment three times the national average. With rising prices, stagnant incomes and few opportunities even for the highly educated, "the situation might even be worse now" than before the revolution, said Leila.

Tragically, dozens of young people still set themselves alight every year in Tunisia, which has also seen a spike in numbers of people, particularly jobless youth, attempting dangerous sea crossings to Europe. "It's not just my brother," she said. "Lots of people have lost their lives." But, she said,

“I hope that things will change.” “Many people are still protesting, speaking out, for change,” she said. “It might take more than 10 years, but young people must carry on protesting, speaking out, to get their rights.”



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Tunisian charged over fatal French church stabbings Tunisia extends night-time curfew until end of year

[Hezbollah loyalists blamed for violent assaults on party opponents](#)

Tue, 2020-12-08 01:39

BEIRUT: Lebanese journalist Maryam Seif Eddine, known for being a strong critic of Hezbollah, on Monday claimed she and her family had been violently attacked and issued with death threats.

The 29-year-old writer told Arab News that Hezbollah loyalists had targeted her family home in Burj El-Barajneh, in the southern suburbs of Beirut, two days ago.

During their ordeal, Eddine alleged her brother's nose was broken, her mother was physically assaulted, and she received death threats.

The reporter said it was the second time her family had been the target of an

attack within a month after one of her other brothers received blows to his head from sharp implements during an assault by three people, one of whom she claimed was a member of Hezbollah.

Eddine added that despite promises made weeks ago by a Hezbollah official to investigate the matter nothing had been done and said that an unresolved local family dispute with Hezbollah could have compounded the situation.

"The matter later turned into incitement against us in our area and among our relatives as I was writing more actively against Hezbollah in the newspaper I work for and on social media. I have been receiving threats and insults to oppress me and my family," she added.

Eddine, a journalist since 2016, said: "I oppose the ruling political authority, and Hezbollah is a party to this authority. I criticize the practices of every party. It seems that my family's decision to install surveillance cameras outside our house to protect ourselves from attackers has provoked them, leading to the recent attack under the pretext of destroying the cameras.

"When we found that we might get killed, we decided to speak up, and I was advised to keep a low profile for now and reduce my criticism."

She pointed out that when she called her local police station to ask for protection for her family, her request was turned down due to lack of staffing.

Activist, Ali Al-Amin, who claimed that he had been attacked on more than one occasion by Hezbollah-linked people, told Arab News: "These attacks reflect Hezbollah's dualism and confusion.

FASTFACT

Lebanese journalist Maryam Seif Eddine alleged that her brother's nose was broken, her mother was physically assaulted, and she received death threats.

"One minute, the party resorts to the law like it did last week to sue some opponents on the pretext that they were inciting sedition, and the next moment it is taking the law into its own hands – whether directly or indirectly.

"Hezbollah has always resorted to accusing its opponents of working for Israel, the US, or foreign embassies. It has mobilized its electronic armies to launch (online) campaigns against them over the past 15 years. There is much evidence for this.

"At the same time, the party has been stopping any allegation against any of its members from reaching the Lebanese official courts. It also disparages these allegations, as is the case with the party's stance toward the Special Tribunal for Lebanon," he said.

"Hezbollah insists that its environment be cleansed of its opponents, and we cannot forget how it resorts to using the residents (of Hezbollah-controlled areas) to get its messages through. Hezbollah used this method against UNIFIL (UN Interim Force in Lebanon) forces as well as others.

"Hezbollah prohibits its members from entering state police stations if they are summoned in connection with any incident, and police stations themselves

do not summon any Hezbollah member. The matter requires prior approval from Hezbollah's security committee before going to the police station," Al-Amin added.

Hezbollah last week filed lawsuits against former MP Fares Souaid and the Lebanese Forces party, accusing them of inciting sedition. On Monday, former Lebanese Prime Minister Fouad Siniora blamed Hezbollah for exposing Souaid to increased security risks.

The former premier said: "Hezbollah, which is capable of acting on the security and judiciary levels without being held accountable, aims to silence people and act with absolute freedom in all directions – without anyone criticizing it or asking it any question about its influence and control over the state's departments and apparatus and its control over its line of action and its work."



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