

**MUSTREAD**

**Fire safety crisis plagues Bangladesh's Rohingya refugee camps**

Dhaka: Bangladesh's fire safety management in Rohingya refugee camps exposes a central paradox as humanitarian actors focus on emergency responses while the underlying causes of fire remain unaddressed. Plans for 50,000 semi-permanent, fire-resistant shelters, unveiled with fanfare, have gone unfunded after the early 2025 international aid cuts, a report has cited. What stands out in the humanitarian record is not just this catastrophe but the sheer recurrence: between May 2018 and December 2025, 2,425 documented fires have struck the world's largest refugee settlement in southeast Bangladesh, affecting over 100,000 individuals and destroying more than 20,000 shelters.

**Pakistan: Petrol, diesel prices hiked amid West Asia tensions**

Islamabad: The Government of Pakistan has announced a sharp hike in the prices of petrol and diesel by PKR 55 per litre, in the wake of the escalating security situation in West Asia, as per a report by ARY News. According to ARY News, the federal ministers made the announcement during a press conference in Islamabad. Under the new prices, petrol will now cost a whopping PKR 321.17 per litre, while diesel prices will jump from the existing PKR 275.70 to PKR 335.86 per litre.

**US Mission appoints Mariana Neisuler as Consul General**

Chennai: The US Mission in India on Friday announced the appointment of Mariana L. Neisuler as the US Consul General in Chennai. According to a release, the US Mission said that Neisuler took charge of the United States Consulate General Chennai on Monday. Upon her arrival, Neisuler said she was honoured to represent the United States in southern India at a significant moment in bilateral ties. "I'm honoured to represent the United States in southern India during this pivotal moment in our bilateral relationship."

**China accused of detaining Uyghurs**

Washington: The World Uyghur Congress (WUC) has raised alarm over recent reports that Uyghur Muslims in East Turkistan have been detained for practising Ramadan fasting. The organisation said the incidents illustrate the continued lack of freedom of religion for Uyghurs living under Chinese rule. In a press release shared on X, WUC stated that according to reporting by Radio Free Asia (RFA) published on February 27, police officers detained six Uyghur residents from multiple villages in Hotan Prefecture, including Bulaq Chorgey, Bash Chapal, Dul Tugman and Korgan.

**US, Venezuela decide to re-establish ties**

Washington: The United States and Venezuela have agreed to re-establish diplomatic and consular relations, according to the US State Department. "This step will facilitate our joint efforts to promote stability, support economic recovery, and advance political reconciliation in Venezuela," the statement by the US State Department read. In January this year, the US military forces launched a large-scale surprise raid on Caracas and captured Venezuela's former President Nicolas Maduro and his wife and the duo was taken to the US and faced allegations of weapon and drug offences in Manhattan court.

**US lawmakers question federal role in Pakistan-owned hotel deal**

Washington: A US congressional hearing erupted into sharp questioning after lawmakers this week challenged a federal real estate agreement involving Pakistan's Defence Ministry and the Roosevelt Hotel in New York, asking why Washington is involved in redevelopment discussions around a foreign-owned property. The exchange took place during a hearing of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management, examining federal real estate management.

**Iran vows "never surrender"**

**But halts attacks on neighbours: President Pezeshkian**

Tehran (UNI) Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian apologised to Arab Gulf nations in an address on Saturday morning, saying Tehran would stop striking its neighbors unless attacks on Iran provoked, while asserting that claims Iran would surrender unconditionally are "nothing more than dreams." President Pezeshkian said the interim leadership council has approved a policy to avoid attacking neighboring countries unless provoked. He also apologised for the strikes carried out in recent days. Speaking on state television, Pezeshkian said, "I personally apologize to the neighboring countries that were attacked by Iran. We do not intend to attack neighboring countries. As I have repeatedly said, they are our brothers." In his address, Pezeshkian said:



"They will take their dreams of our unconditional surrender to the grave." His remarks came less than a day after US President Donald Trump declared that his government would not negotiate with Tehran without its

"unconditional surrender." "The three-member leadership council temporarily ruling Iran had told armed forces that from now on there should be no attack on neighboring countries or hit missiles unless they would want to attack us from those countries," he added. Since the killing of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei a week ago, a three-person leadership council has held power until a successor is named. The council includes Pezeshkian, a relatively moderate, along with hardline judiciary head Gholamhossein Mohseni Ejei and senior cleric Alireza Arafati. On diplomacy, he emphasised, "I think we need to solve this with diplomacy rather than fighting and having problems with neighboring countries." He also warned Gulf nations, say-

ing, "Do not become a plaything in the hands of imperialism," urging them not to attack Iranian territory. It is unclear whether Pezeshkian's announcement comes into effect immediately. Following the address, interceptions were reportedly heard over the United Arab Emirates, and sirens sounded in Bahrain. But minutes after his speech, an explosion was reported in the sky over Doha as reported by Al Jazeera. The sound likely came from a missile interception, though it is unclear if there was a lag between the government's announcement and the Iranian military's actions. Meanwhile, Israel declared a "new phase" in its joint campaign with the US, which has involved heavy bombing of Tehran and Lebanon. Trump signaled he would not pursue negotiations with Iran, calling instead for its "unconditional surrender" and stating he aims to influence Iran's next leadership.

**Putin calls for immediate halt to Iran conflict**

Moscow: Russian President Vladimir Putin expressed his condolences to Iran's president over the numerous civilian casualties resulting from "the armed Israeli-American aggression against Iran" and called for an immediate halt to hostilities, the Kremlin said. In a phone call late on Friday with Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian, Putin expressed his deep condolences over the killing of Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, members of Khamenei's family, Iranian political and military leaders and "numerous civilians". "Vladimir Putin reaffirmed Russia's principled stance in favour of an immediate cessation of hostilities, the rejection of force as a method to solve any issues surrounding Iran or arising in the Middle East, and a swift return to the path of diplomatic resolution," the Kremlin said. Putin said he was in constant contact with the leaders of Gulf Cooperation Council member states.

**Pak IRGC operative convicted for plot to kill US officials, including Trump**

New York (UNI) Asif Merchant, a 47-year-old Pakistani with ties to Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps, has been convicted of murder-for-hire and attempting terrorism across national borders. He has been found guilty of plotting to assassinate US officials, including President Donald Trump, by hiring a hitman in New York in 2024. A federal jury in Brooklyn found him guilty after a weeklong trial in Brooklyn amid the US-Israel war with Iran. According to prosecutors, Merchant, a trained operative of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), sought to hire hitmen in New York to carry out political assassinations. The plot was uncovered after an acquaintance, whom Merchant



approached to connect him with potential killers, tipped off authorities. Undercover officers posing as hitmen met Merchant in June 2024, leading to his arrest the following

month. The trial, which lasted a week amid escalating US-Israel tensions with Iran, revealed that Merchant had been sent to the US in 2023 by the IRGC to scout possible recruits. He returned the following year with a mission to recruit individuals to assassinate specific US political figures, steal sensitive documents, and organize protests. According to the Justice Department, Merchant testified that the IRGC sent him to the US in 2023 to scout possible recruits to stay in the country. He returned to the US the following year, he said, with a mission to recruit people to assassinate one of three specific US political figures, to steal documents, and to arrange a protest.

**Israel strikes Iranian military sites**

Tel Aviv (UNI) The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) announced on Saturday that it carried out a series of airstrikes on Iranian military infrastructure, including an underground facility allegedly used to store ballistic missiles. "As part of the strikes, the IDF struck several military sites belonging to the Iranian regime, including... an underground infrastructure used for storing ballistic missiles, where hundreds of regime operatives were operating," the IDF said in a statement on Telegram. The facility reportedly contained military bunkers and command centers, with hundreds of Iranian personnel present at the time of the strike. The IDF also confirmed that the main military university of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), Imam Hossein University,



was targeted. According to the statement, the university is used for training IRGC officers. The wave of strikes involved approximately 80 Israeli Air Force aircraft, marking a significant escalation in Israel's military actions against Iranian infrastructure. The IDF emphasized that the operation was aimed at weakening Iran's military capabilities and disrupting the activities of its regime operatives.

**US grants Air India expanded flight permit; allowed to run cargo, chartered flight**

Washington: The United States has granted Air India an amended foreign air carrier permit, allowing the airline to operate passenger, cargo, and charter flights between India and the United States. The US Department of Transportation issued the final order this week, concluding its review. No objections were filed within the period allowed for public comments. Officials said the Department had earlier invited interested parties to file objections within 21 days if they opposed the proposed decision. None were received. "No objections were received within the time period provided," the order said. As a result, the Department finalised its earlier findings and awarded Air India the amended permit along with the operating conditions attached to the order.

**One week into Iran war, the dangers for the US and Trump multiply**

Agencies, Washington One week into the U.S.-Israeli war against Iran that has plunged the Middle East into turmoil, President Donald Trump faces a growing list of risks and challenges that raise questions about whether he will be able to translate military successes into a clear geopolitical win. Even after the killing of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and devastating blows against Iranian forces on land, at sea and in the air, the crisis has quickly widened into a regional conflict that threatens a more prolonged U.S. military engagement with fallout beyond Trump's control. That is a scenario that Trump had avoided in his two terms in the White House, preferring swift, limited op-



erations like the January 3 lightning raid in Venezuela and June's one-off strike on Iran's nuclear sites. "Iran is a messy and potentially protracted military campaign," said Laura Blumenfeld of the Johns Hop-

**Saudi air defences neutralise 16 drones**

Riyadh: Saudi Arabian air defences successfully neutralised a fresh wave of aerial assaults targeting the strategic Shaybah oil field early Saturday, according to reports from Arab News citing the Ministry of Defence. In a series of updates on X, ministry spokesperson Major General Turki Al-Maliki confirmed that 16 drones, launched in four separate waves, were intercepted and destroyed over the Empty Quarter. These unmanned aircraft were reportedly tracking toward the vital energy facility before being downed. In additional statements, Al-Maliki confirmed the "interception and destruction" of a ballistic missile and a cruise missile aimed at Prince Sultan Air Base in Al-Kharj. Arab News noted that another drone was downed east of Riyadh, marking the third consecutive day of attempted strikes on Al-Kharj, a major industrial hub located 80 kilometres from the capital.

**As war spreads, airline pilots contend with drones, missiles - and stress**

Agencies, London/Copenhagen/Beirut Airline pilots have faced escalating risks in recent years, from drone incursions to flight paths squeezed by conflict. Now U.S.-Israeli attacks on Iran are making the skies even more perilous and ratcheting up the pressure on those flying through them. The outbreak of war in the Middle East has put hundreds of ballistic missiles and attack drones into the skies above some of the world's busiest airports. Tehran's retaliation against the U.S. and its allies has included hitting airports, grounding scores of flights from Dubai to Abu Dhabi. A trickle of rescue flights has made it through for thousands of stranded passengers.



"We are not military pilots. We are not trained to deal with these kinds of threats in the air," Tanja Harter, a pilot with Middle East experience and president of the European Cockpit Association, told Reuters. The current crisis is the latest in a

string of security threats the sector has faced over the years, she said, which could cause "fear and anxiety" for pilots. Airlines now often have peer programs to help, she said, adding as a pilot she would not want to "share airspace with missiles." Airspace safety has worsened in the last two-and-a-half years as conflicts have grown, industry experts said, through a combination of GPS spoofing - maliciously tricking planes about their position - and increased numbers of missiles and drones. An Air France (AIREPA), opens new tab flight to bring stranded French nationals home from the United Arab Emirates turned back due to missile fire on Thursday.

**Israel carries out rare airborne raid in Lebanon; 16 killed in strikes**



Agencies, Beirut Israel's military carried out an airborne operation that dropped troops into a town in eastern Lebanon overnight, residents and Lebanese state media said on Saturday, as heavy Israeli strikes on the area left more than a dozen people dead. Lebanon was plunged deeper into the conflict engulfing the Middle East on Monday when Iran-backed Hezbollah launched rockets and drones into Israel, which has responded with heavy bombardment across Lebanon's south, east and near the capital Beirut. Overnight, Israeli helicopters dropped troops near the town of Nabi Chit in Lebanon's eastern Bekaa Valley, Lebanese state media and residents said. Residents and Hezbollah fighters fired on the troops as they moved on foot, the reports said. The Israeli troops withdrew and left by helicopter as Israeli strikes pounded Nabi Chit and nearby towns, state media and residents said.

**Russia hits Ukraine with drones, missiles, kills at least seven**

Agencies, Kharkiv, Ukraine Russia launched a barrage of drones and missiles at Ukraine overnight on Saturday, damaging infrastructure and killing at least seven people, including two children, in the north-east city of Kharkiv, Ukrainian officials said. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said that Russia launched 480 drones and 29 missiles targeting the energy sector and railway infrastructure across the country. "There should be a response from partners to these savage strikes against life," Zelenskyy said on the Telegram app. "Russia has not abandoned its attempts to destroy Ukraine's residential and critical infrastructure, and therefore support should continue," Zelenskyy said, urging partners to continue air defence and weapons



supplies. Ukrainian air defence units shot down 453 drones and 19 missiles, the air force said. But nine missiles and 26 attack drones hit 22 sites, it said.

Oleh Syniehubov, Kharkiv regional governor, said that the city of Kharkiv was targeted by both Russian drones and missiles, and seven people, including two children, were

killed after a Russian ballistic missile slammed into a five-storey residential building. "When we arrived here 20 minutes after the explosion, I thought I was going to have a stroke. I couldn't string two words together, and my legs were buckling," Hanna, a resident of the destroyed building, told Reuters. "It's good that I wasn't there with my child and that my father was with me. It was ordinary people who lived there. What were they targeting?" White smoke was rising from the ruins and emergency workers carried a body in a black sack, Reuters TV footage from the site showed. In Kharkiv, 15 people were also wounded, and 19 residential buildings were damaged by the Russian attacks, Syniehubov said.

**Tornadoes kill four, injure more than a dozen in rural Michigan**

New York: Tornadoes and strong storms killed at least four people and injured more than a dozen in southern Michigan on Friday, destroying multiple homes and leaving hundreds of residents without power, local authorities said. Soon after the National Weather Service issued tornado warnings for the area on Friday, videos on social media claiming to be from the towns of Three Rivers and Union City showed massive whirlwinds tearing roofs off buildings and lifting debris into the air. Local media footage showed smashed buildings and cars, and poles, trees and road signs that had been blown over. Three fatalities and a dozen injuries were reported in Branch County, where Union City is located, the county's sheriff's office said.