



Anti-clockwise from left: Plumes of smoke rise from the sites of Israeli airstrikes on the southern suburbs of Beirut. Foreign workers watch as a tall plume of black smoke rises following an explosion in the Fujairah industrial zone in the UAE. Israeli security forces and emergency personnel stand next to the wreckage of cars at a site struck by a projectile in Ramat Gan near Tel Aviv. The photos were taken yesterday.



PHOTO: AFP

Paul Kapur in Dhaka to boost bilateral ties

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

US Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asian Affairs, S Paul Kapur, arrived in Dhaka last night on a two-day visit to discuss expanding bilateral trade and investment, enhancing security cooperation, and advancing shared interests in the Indo-Pacific region.



"We warmly welcome Assistant Secretary S Paul Kapur to Bangladesh. Assistant Secretary Kapur will engage with government officials and business leaders to strengthen US-Bangladesh strategic ties," said the US embassy in Dhaka.

This is Paul Kapur's second leg of the visit, following his trip to India from March 1-3.

Today, the US assistant secretary is scheduled to meet US embassy officials and then Foreign Minister Khalilur Rahman, Home Minister Salahuddin Ahmed, Minister of Power, Energy, and Mineral Resources Iqbal Hasan Mahmud Tuku, and Commerce Minister Khandakar Abdul Muktadir.

In the evening, he is scheduled to meet a business delegation. The US assistant secretary will also talk to political leaders tomorrow.

Rivals dig in for 'longer war'

FROM PAGE 1

of Hormuz, through which a fifth of the world's oil consumption passes, is now "closed", and warned that any vessels attempting to pass through the waterway will be attacked.

"Their air defence, air force, navy, and leadership is gone. They want to talk. I said: 'Too late!'" Trump posted on his social media site, two days after he had agreed to talks and four days after US and Israeli strikes wiped out much of Iran's senior leadership.

Iran's ambassador to the UN in Geneva denied that his country had approached the US for talks.

As if to underline Trump's new stance, loud blasts echoed around downtown Tehran. According to Iranian media, US and Israeli strikes had targeted the building housing the committee that is to elect Iran's new supreme leader.

"The military has launched a ninth wave of strikes in Tehran. The Air Force has now begun a large-scale wave of strikes targeting the Iranian terror regime's infrastructure in Tehran," the Israeli military said.

Meanwhile, the US embassy in Riyadh — which was damaged and briefly caught fire overnight in an Iranian drone strike — yesterday warned of an imminent attack in the eastern Saudi city of Dhahran, home to much of the kingdom's oil and gas installations along the Gulf coast.

"There is a threat of imminent missile and UAV (drone) attacks over Dhahran. Do not come to the US Consulate," the embassy posted on social media.

As Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu gave open-ended answers when asked how long the war would last, a source told Reuters that Israel's campaign was to overthrow Iran's clerical rulers, and there was no firm deadline to achieve it.

Netanyahu told Fox News in an interview that Israel's strikes on Iran would continue, but not become an endless war. "It may take some time, but it's not going to take years."

While Israeli officials explicitly say they want to overthrow Iran's government, US officials have said the war aims to destroy Iran's ability to project force beyond its borders.

Trump yesterday denied that Israel had forced his hand into launching the war, a day after his Secretary of State Marco Rubio said the US did so only after learning that ally Israel was going to strike.

"Just about everything's been knocked out," Trump said as he met German Chancellor Friedrich Merz, answering his first questions from reporters since the strikes began.

"Based on the way the negotiation was going, I think they (Iran) were going to attack first. And I didn't want that to happen," Trump said in the Oval Office. "So, if anything, I might have forced Israel's hand."

He also claimed that two waves of US-Israeli attacks on Iran had killed figures he had eyed as potential new leaders.

"Most of the people we had in mind are dead," he said. "Now we have another group. They may also be dead, based on reports."

As Trump dismissed any remaining hope of a negotiated solution, Israel's Foreign Minister Gideon Saar urged foreign capitals to cut all ties with Tehran "following the Iranian regime's attacks on all its neighbours and the massacre of its own people".

China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi, according to the official Xinhua news agency, warned Saar in a call that Beijing opposes the strikes. "Force cannot truly solve problems — instead, it will only bring new problems and severe after-effects," he said.

The United States and Israel triggered the rapidly spreading war on Saturday with a strike on Tehran that killed supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and several more senior Iranian figures.

Iran's armed forces responded with missile and drone attacks on Israel, US embassies and military bases and on its Arab neighbours around the Gulf, targeting oil and gas facilities, ports and airports, foreign missions and landmark hotels.

Qatar has shut down its massive LNG industry, shipping traffic through the strategic Straits of Hormuz has all but halted, and thousands of flights have been cancelled, leaving foreign governments scrambling to rescue trapped travellers.

The war has already sent shockwaves through world markets. Energy prices are soaring, and share prices are falling. India yesterday expressed concerns over the evolving conflict in a region vital for its energy supply, and where more than 10 million citizens work.

"Our trade and energy supply chains also traverse this geography. Any major disruption has serious consequences for the Indian economy," ministry spokesman Randhir Jaiswal said.

Drones, meanwhile, struck a fuel tank in Oman, and in the UAE, an oil storage zone was hit by falling debris from an intercepted drone, as Iran apparently widened its targets beyond US assets.

Qatar's state-run QatarEnergy said it would halt some downstream production of substances including urea, polymers, methanol and aluminium after Iran attacked two gas processing plants.

In Oman, several drones targeted the port of Duqm on its eastern coast yesterday. The attack was the second on the port in three days, with the sultanate hit despite acting as a mediator between Iran and the United States just days prior to the war.

The UAE says it has been targeted with more than 800 drones and nearly 200 missiles since the war erupted.

Reporters in the Saudi capital Riyadh saw smoke damage on the walls and roof of the American embassy after two drones hit it overnight, starting a fire in one building. The Saudi foreign ministry described the attack as "heinous and unjustified".

Iran's foreign ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei yesterday warned European countries against joining its conflict with Israel and the United States, after Germany, Britain and France said they could take "defensive action" to destroy Iran's missile-launching capabilities.

"It would be an act of war. Any such act against Iran would be regarded as complicity with the aggressors," Baqaei said at a press briefing when asked about the statement.

A spokesman for the Revolutionary

Guards warned, "The gates of hell will open more and more" upon the US and Israel.

Iran said its death toll from the attacks had reached 787, citing the Red Crescent. The US said that six American soldiers were killed in an Iranian strike that hit a military facility in Kuwait on Saturday.

United Nations rights chief Volker Turk said he was "deeply shocked" by the war's toll on civilians, and the UN nuclear watchdog said Iran's Natanz enrichment plant appeared in satellite imagery to have suffered "recent damage".

On Monday, the US State Department had urged "Americans to DEPART NOW" from all of the countries and territories of the Middle East "due to serious safety risks".

Israel, meanwhile, said it was seizing new forward positions inside southern Lebanon, after Hezbollah fired missiles in support of its backer Iran, provoking a furious Israeli bombardment.

Defence Minister Israel Katz said Israeli forces had been authorised "to advance and take control of additional strategic positions in Lebanon in order to prevent attacks on Israeli border communities".

Shortly afterwards, the military spokesman said: "In practice, Northern Command has moved forward... and is creating a buffer, as we promised, between our residents and any threat."

A Lebanese army source said Israeli forces had advanced from around Kfar Kila, in an apparent attempt "to establish a broad security belt in south Lebanon".

According to a Lebanese military source, following Israel's "escalation", the Lebanese army redeployed troops posted near the southern border back to their bases. Hezbollah said it had launched strikes targeting three Israeli bases.

A spokesman for the UN refugee agency said 30,000 Lebanese had been driven from their homes and registered at collective shelters, while "many more slept in their cars on the side of roads".

HC questions legality of July charter and referendum

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday issued a rule questioning the legality of the relevant provisions of the July charter, the referendum ordinance, and the letter regarding lawmakers taking oath as members of the Constitution Reform Commission.

The court asked the respondents to explain why the provision in the implementation order of the July National Charter (Constitutional Reform), 2025, for "yes" or "no" vote in referendum and the letter issued by the parliament secretariat on February 16 to lawmakers for taking oath as members of the Constitution Reform Council should not be declared void and unconstitutional.

It also asked them to show causes why Schedule-3 of the Referendum Ordinance, 2025, containing the 30 proposals, on which the political parties reached a consensus, should not be declared unlawful and unconstitutional.

The secretaries of law, cabinet, and Jatiya Sangsad; the prime minister's principal secretary, the Election Commission, and the chief election commissioner have been made respondents to the rule and asked to provide their explanations in four weeks.

The bench of Justice Razik-Al-Jalil and Justice Md Anwarul Islam issued the rule after hearing arguments from lawyers concerned on two writ petitions challenging the legality of the referendum ordinance and the July charter.

Lawyers Ahsanul Karim, Syed Mamun Mahbub, Jyotirmoy Barua, Gazi Kamrul Islam Sajal, and Gazi Touhidul Islam placed arguments in support of the petitions, while lawyers Mohammad Hossain Lipu, Mohammad Shishir Manir, Imran Siddiqi, and Md Saddam Hossen opposed the petitions on behalf of the National Citizen Party and the Jamaat-e-Islami.

Acting Attorney General Md Arshadur Rouf and Additional

Attorney General Aneek R Haque represented the state during the hearing.

After the HC issued the rule, lawyer Shishir told The Daily Star that if there is no implementation order for the July charter and no reform proposals based on the 30 points of consensus, then even the provisions of a referendum become invalid, so in the end, what will remain?

"Will be the election valid? Will a government exist? Everything will face questions of legality. Therefore, the government will have to take responsibility for this."

The 30 proposals include introducing a bicameral parliament with an upper house; expanding women's representation; limiting the prime minister's tenure; rebalancing powers between president and PM; strengthening judicial independence; reforming appointment processes for constitutional bodies; enhancing fundamental rights and civil liberties; recognising all mother tongues; redefining national identity as "Bangladeshi"; decentralising local government; ensuring police and public administration reforms; strengthening anti-corruption mechanisms; reforming election oversight; removing restrictive constitutional clauses; improving transparency and accountability; and establishing independent commissions to safeguard democracy, human rights, and institutional checks and balances, lawyer Shishir Manir added.

Supreme Court lawyers Gazi Md Mahbub Alam and Chowdhury Md Redwan E Khuda recently filed the petitions as public interest litigations, appealing to restrain respondents from implementing any act related to the referendum ordinance.

In the petitions, they said the implementation order of the July charter and the referendum ordinance were issued beyond the mandate of the constitution, the supreme law of the republic.

Strait of Hormuz closure threatens LNG Supply

FROM PAGE 1

through the Strait. Officials said there has been no disruption so far, as most scheduled cargoes are already in transit.

But analysts warn that an extended closure could delay cargoes, make gas harder to get in the region, drive up prices and strain the country's energy security at a time when domestic gas output continues to decline and industrial demand is rising.

Bangladesh now meets nearly 30 percent of its gas demand through imported LNG amid persistent shortages in domestic production.

This year, the government plans to utilise its full regasification capacity of 1,100 million cubic feet per day (mmcf) for the first time since LNG imports began in 2018. It has also planned to import 115 cargoes, including 59 from the spot market.

Amid the conflict, Oxford Economics has projected LNG prices could rise 30 percent to average about \$14 per million British thermal units (MMBtu) between April and June, up from the current \$9-10.

In addition, Wood Mackenzie have warned that a prolonged closure of the Strait could remove around 86 billion cubic metres of LNG

about 15 percent of global supply. Such a shock would intensify global competition and force Asian buyers to outbid European markets for US cargoes.

The spike would push Bangladesh's LNG import bill beyond the projected Tk 57,000 crore for FY26, adding to fiscal pressure and straining the exchequer.

Data from Kpler Insight show that while China and India are the largest importers of Qatari LNG, Bangladesh — alongside Pakistan — ranks among the top Asian buyers dependent on the Middle East.

Roughly one-fifth of global hydrocarbons pass through the Strait of Hormuz, the strategic gateway linking the Gulf to international markets. More than half of Bangladesh's LNG imports in 2025 moved through this chokepoint. In March alone, nine cargoes were scheduled, six of them from Qatar via the Strait.

Mohammad Erfanul Haque, chairman of Petrobangla, told The Daily Star on Monday that four of those six cargoes had already crossed the Strait.

"So there is no risk regarding those cargoes for now," he said,

adding that authorities are in contact with alternative suppliers in case of disruption.

When The Daily Star spoke to the Petrobangla chief, the Strait remained open. Later, Iranian media quoted a senior Revolutionary Guards official as saying it had been closed and that Iran would fire on any vessel attempting to pass.

A senior Petrobangla official said yesterday there is no uncertainty over LNG supply until the third week of this month. Beyond that, any disruption to incoming vessels could tighten supply.

Energy analysts warn that prolonged constraints could hit power generation, fertiliser production and industrial competitiveness, particularly during the summer peak. Think tanks have also cautioned that heavy reliance on LNG imports without boosting domestic exploration or diversifying supply contracts could deepen fiscal vulnerabilities.

The power sector consumes 41 percent of total gas supply, industries 34 percent, households 10 percent and fertiliser 6 percent.

Daily demand stands at around 3,800 mmcf against supply of about

2,650 mmcf, including around 950 mmcf from imported LNG. Ahead of summer, imports were to be raised to 1,050 mmcf.

Failure to increase imports could limit additional gas allocation to power plants, potentially lowering electricity generation, triggering load-shedding and reducing pipeline pressure for households.

A similar shock unfolded in 2022 after the Russia-Ukraine war disrupted global energy markets. Spot LNG prices surged beyond \$60 per MMBtu.

Although Bangladesh bought cargoes at up to \$36, it later suspended spot purchases. From July that year, spot imports were halted for seven consecutive months, resulting in gas shortages, reduced power output and widespread load-shedding.

If spot prices spike again, pressure could mount on foreign exchange reserves and retail energy tariffs.

Until 2022, Russia was the world's largest LNG exporter, but its exports declined sharply following its invasion of Ukraine. The United States is now the largest exporter, followed by Qatar and Australia.

Mother of 2 found dead in Cox's Bazar

Family alleges land dispute behind rape, murder

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

Police recovered the body of a woman from her residence in Cox's Bazar's Ukhiya upazila yesterday morning.

The 30-year-old homemaker Laila Bibi was the wife of Malaysia expatriate Abdur Shukkur and mother of two.

Police suspect she was killed after rape.

According to the victim's family, she lived with her children in a house on a small, remote hill.

Nur Ahmad, officer-in-charge of Ukhiya Police Station, said, "They alleged that miscreants entered the house when she woke up for sehri. They then raped and killed her... Her children were in a separate room during the incident."

The victim's brother-in-law Abdul Alam said she was preparing sehri around 3:00am when two to three masked individuals broke open the door and entered the house. "The miscreants raped her and killed her. Hearing her screams, neighbours

rushed in, and the attackers fled."

He also alleged that the attack was planned following a land-related dispute.

On information, police rushed to the spot and recovered the body. The inquest report found multiple injury marks on her body. It was sent to Cox's Bazar 250 Bed District Sadar Hospital morgue for autopsy.

The OC said primary investigation found signs of rape. "But it will be confirmed after the autopsy."

He added, "We have learned that there was a land-related dispute between the victim's family and neighbours. We are investigating whether the murder was carried out over that dispute."

No case was filed and no arrests were made until filing the report around 8:00pm.

Cox's Bazar Sadar Hospital's Resident Medical Officer Dr Subaktagin Sohel could not be contacted by phone despite repeated attempts.