



Smoke rises after an Israeli strike on Beirut's southern suburbs, as seen from Baabda, Lebanon, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

War spreads beyond Middle East

FROM PAGE 1
Sparked by a massive US-Israeli attack that killed supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the war has seen Iran lash out with missile and drone strikes from Israel across the Gulf and beyond.

Cities like Dubai and Riyadh, which have long taken pride in their safety from the tumult of the region, have been drawn in, with the growing chaos sparing few countries in the region.

Far from the Middle East, a US submarine torpedoed an Iranian warship in the Indian Ocean off the coast of Sri Lanka in an operation dubbed "Quiet Death", US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth announced.

It was the first US sinking of an enemy ship by torpedo since World War II. "Like in that war," Hegseth said, "we are fighting to win."

Sri Lanka's government said it recovered 87 bodies of Iranian sailors and rescued around 30.

Authorities told Al Jazeera the frigate IRIS Dena, located about 40 nautical miles (75km) off Galle in southern Sri Lanka and with around 180 crew members on board, sent out a distress call between 6:00am and 7:00am (00:30 to 01:30 GMT).

The Iranian frigate was returning from having taken part in the 2026 International Fleet Review last month in eastern India's coastal city of Vishakhapatnam.

On another front, a missile launched from Iran was destroyed by Nato's air defence system while heading towards Turkey's airspace, drawing condemnation from Ankara and Nato.

A Turkish official told AFP that Turkey was not the target of the missile, but rather that it had "veered off course" and had been aimed at a base in Cyprus. Turkey said it summoned Iran's ambassador to Ankara to protest the incident.

In the Gulf, Iran's Revolutionary Guards said they had total control of the crucial Strait of Hormuz, after President Donald Trump had said the US Navy was ready to escort oil tankers through the waterway.

Earlier, the Revolutionary Guards warned ships against entering the strait, and major shipping firms have already suspended transit through the waterway,

with maritime agencies reporting several ships attacked.

In Lebanon, which Hezbollah dragged into the war, Israel expanded its air strikes, targeting the area around the presidential palace and the militant group's south Beirut bastion, killing 11 people, according to Lebanese authorities.

The Israeli military also warned people living south of Lebanon's Litani river – an area of hundreds of square kilometres – to evacuate, saying that the army was "compelled to take military action" against Hezbollah in the area.

Since the start of the fighting, at least 72 people have been killed in Lebanon. It also displaced more than 83,000 people, Lebanese officials said.

Meanwhile, the US embassy in Baghdad yesterday told its nationals to leave Iraq as soon as possible, as explosions were heard around Erbil in the Kurdish region and drones were shot down near Baghdad.

The country's electricity ministry said the entire country had also been affected by a total blackout without specifying the cause.

Earlier, Reuters and CNN reported that Iranian Kurdish militias have consulted with the US in recent days about whether, and how, to attack Iran's security forces in the western part of the country, according to three sources with knowledge of the matter.

The Iranian Kurdish coalition of groups based on the Iran-Iraq border in the semi-autonomous region of Iraqi Kurdistan has been training to mount such an attack in hopes of weakening the country's military. The goal would be to create room for Iranians opposed to the Islamic regime to rise up now that Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and other top officials have been killed, two of the sources said.

A final decision has not yet been made on the operation and its possible timing, they said, adding that the forces are in talks with the US about CIA help to provide weapons.

Iran, meanwhile, announced that the state funeral for Khamenei that had been planned for yesterday had been postponed amid waves of strikes.

Two Iranian sources, speaking on

condition of anonymity, told Reuters that Mojtaba Khamenei, son of Iran's slain supreme leader, was not in Tehran when his father was killed in a strike that destroyed the leader's compound. He is the frontrunner in replacing his father as the new supreme leader, sources said, adding that choosing him would send a signal that hardliners were still firmly in charge.

Israel has already vowed to assassinate any successor to Khamenei.

"Any leader appointed by the Iranian terrorist regime will be an unequivocal target for elimination," said Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz.

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia said it intercepted two cruise missiles as well as a drone targeting its huge Ras Tanura refinery, while drones struck near the US consulate in Dubai, starting a fire, and a missile hit the US military base at Al-Udeid in Qatar.

The UAE and Qatar both said they had intercepted drone and missile salvos yesterday, with Abu Dhabi saying it had been targeted by three ballistic missiles and 129 drones, intercepting all but eight drones.

Kuwait has also been struck, with the health ministry announcing the death of an 11-year-old girl killed after she was hit by falling shrapnel.

Thirteen people, seven of them civilians, have been killed in countries around the Gulf since the war began.

The Pentagon has announced the deaths of six US service members since Saturday, four of them in Kuwait. Iran's state media yesterday said at least 1,045 people were killed in five days of war.

Meanwhile, lawmakers in the US Senate were set to begin voting yesterday on a bipartisan war powers resolution aiming to stop the military campaign against Iran. This is the latest effort by Democrats and a few Republicans to rein in Trump's repeated troop deployments, sidelining Congress.

Trump's fellow Republicans hold slim majorities in both the Senate and House of Representatives and have blocked previous efforts for resolutions seeking to curb his war powers.

The House vote on the measure is expected today.

Focus on energy security

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revenue shortfall of Tk 36,000 crore against its target within just a six-month period.

The government's first investment priority should be the energy sector to tackle this crisis, said Azad, who is also the vice-president of the International Chamber of Commerce Bangladesh.

The lack of direct energy infrastructure is forcing businesses into extreme measures.

"I run my boiler by taking gas from CNG – I am paying double the price."

To remedy this, he suggested a radical policy change regarding domestic gas usage.

"Cut off my [residential] gas – make it mandatory for me to use LPG at home so that the limited natural gas supply can be diverted to factories that create employment."

Governance failures are particularly evident in the energy sector, specifically regarding Titas Gas Transmission and Distribution Company.

Titas staff disconnect illegal lines during the day, only for the lines to be reconnected in the evening, he added.

The economic pressure is further compounded by high operating costs. With interest rates at 13 percent and frequent power outages, many businesses are struggling to remain viable.

"I get electricity for six hours and run the other six hours on diesel," Azad said, adding that the high cost of diesel makes production unsustainable.

He said he disagreed with the immediate past governor regarding inflation reduction: it cannot be curbed by raising interest rates alone, as it requires coordinated efforts in revenue collection, employment, VAT, taxation, customs duties and manufacturing.

The fundamental challenge in Bangladesh's power and energy sector stems from its heavy dependence on

imported fuel, said Shaifiquil Alam, lead energy analyst at the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis (IEEFA).

About 62 percent of the country's primary energy now comes from imports, a shift that has gradually taken place from around 2010-12 as Bangladesh moved towards an import-dependent energy system.

As a result, the country has become highly vulnerable to disruptions in global energy markets.

Recent developments in global markets illustrate this risk, he said.

Brent crude prices have recently crossed \$81 per barrel, while LNG spot prices have been around \$15.77 per one million British Thermal Units (MMBtu).

If LNG prices rise further, potentially reaching \$20 per MMBtu, it would become increasingly difficult for the government to purchase sufficient LNG from the spot market.

He warned that Bangladesh may soon face renewed pressure from the International Monetary Fund to adjust energy prices as part of the ongoing reform commitments.

However, significant tariff increases could undermine the competitiveness of the country's industries.

Currently, industrial electricity tariffs in Bangladesh are already close to those in Vietnam.

If subsidies were reduced by around 50 percent, retail electricity prices could rise to levels roughly 40 percent higher than those in Vietnam, potentially making Bangladeshi industries less competitive.

Transmission and distribution losses in Bangladesh's power sector stand at about 10.13 percent, compared with the global average of less than 8 percent and around 6 percent in advanced economies.

Bringing these losses closer to the global average could generate savings, he added.

Even after setting up factories,

entrepreneurs must wait years for utility connections, said Showkat Aziz Russell, president of the Bangladesh Textile Mills Association.

"Even after building a factory, many entrepreneurs have to wait two to four years for electricity or gas connections," he said, adding that such delays deter investment and jobs.

Around 350 garment factories and over 50 textile mills have shut, some despite Tk 1,000 crore investments.

Some factories have closed because they could not secure around Tk 200 crore in financing.

He criticised the loan rescheduling mechanism of banks and urged for refinancing to reopen these factories.

Asaduzzaman, former research director of the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, cautioned that the government's 180-day agenda is unfolding at a time of extraordinary global uncertainty, one that could sharply reshape Bangladesh's energy security and economic priorities.

Within days of the new policy timeline being discussed, international developments, particularly heightened instability in the Middle East, have created fresh risks for global energy supply.

For a country like Bangladesh, which remains heavily dependent on imported fuel, any disruption or price shock in energy markets can quickly spill over into inflation, household budgets and industrial competitiveness.

Against this backdrop, Asaduzzaman suggested that energy policy must be approached through two linked lenses: security of supply and management of demand.

The government has to provide around Tk 60,000 crore as subsidy to the energy sector, said Rashed Al Mahmud Titumir, the prime minister's adviser to the ministries of finance and planning.

"This amount of subsidy is not sustainable, so we are working on it,"

Govt eyes

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Broader rationing measures could follow, said Iqbal Hassan Mahmood Tuku, the power, energy and mineral resources minister who chaired the meeting.

"Until the supply side is fixed, I have to use what I have in my hand in a prudent manner. We must use what we have sparingly. If people cooperate, it will be possible to overcome this crisis," he told reporters after the meeting.

Tuku described the situation as part of a wider global scramble for fuel.

"When there is a crisis globally, it is not only my problem. Everyone is scrambling to secure supplies."

He acknowledged that the supply chain for importing liquefied natural gas (LNG) has slowed significantly and that Bangladesh is receiving limited response in spot market tenders due to the war.

Diesel sales have risen sharply in border areas due to higher prices in neighbouring countries, prompting rationing at fuel pumps in those regions after discussions with security agencies.

While there has been no load-shedding during shri and itar so far, Tuku indicated that power cuts may become unavoidable if the crisis persists.

"If consumption is controlled, we will be able to run March properly. If committed supplies arrive, the pressure will ease. In fact, the crisis may continue until the Eid holidays. If we can manage demand, it will gradually fall," he added.

Officials said the situation would remain "tolerable" but acknowledged that austerity measures are now central to the government's strategy.

Currently, the Bangladesh Power Development Board (PDB) supplies between 12,000 megawatts (MW) and 13,000 MW electricity.

At least 30 out of the total 143 power plants have not been producing electricity due to either gas or liquid fuel shortage.

The government will reduce gas supply to the power plants and fertiliser industries by up to 200 million cubic feet a day, which may reduce electricity production further.

Gas supply has been reduced from yesterday, according to officials. As a result, loadshedding has started in parts of the country, though it was below 50MW at the time of filing the report at 9:00pm.

The ministry said it is trying to secure fuel from multiple sources and has taken "all possible measures" to minimise the adverse impact of global developments.

However, it urged citizens to remain patient and cooperate by curbing unnecessary consumption.

Petrobangla chairman Md Erfanul Haque told reporters at his office that they had called international tenders for spot LNG purchase for the last two days, but nobody bid.

There might be two reasons for not getting any bids: all of the suppliers might be sourcing LNG from Qatar, which has now halted production, or the suppliers are waiting for the price to hike further, he said.

Already, the spot market price has hit \$25 per per one million British Thermal Units (MMBtu) from \$10 MMBtu.

According to Petrobangla, Bangladesh is scheduled to receive six LNG cargoes via the Strait of Hormuz for the month of March. Of those, four have been ensured. Two cargoes, which were supposed to anchor on 15th and 18th March, remain uncertain.

"Suppliers have not formally cancelled them, but confirmation is pending," Haque said.

Earlier in the day, Tuku sought support from the US in a meeting with Paul Kapur, the US assistant secretary of state for South and Central Asian Affairs.

Bangladesh has requested both immediate crisis period support and longer-term cooperation in the energy sector.

"Commitments that were in place are not being honoured. Supplies that were supposed to arrive have stopped."

Kapur said he would discuss the matter with senior officials in Washington DC and inform Dhaka of the outcome, according to Tuku.

Gulf states weigh response

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In targeting the Gulf states, Iran is targeting the Gulf's image as a safe, prosperous hub for travel, tourism and finance, and disrupting the oil and gas industry at its core.

This is a war that the Arab governments didn't want and tried to prevent. The question is whether they'll be drawn into it by what they've called the "treacherous" Iranian attacks.

"All the red lines have already been crossed," said Qatar's foreign ministry spokesman Majed Al Ansari at a press briefing on Tuesday.

"The attacks on our sovereignty are constant," he told journalists.

"There are attacks on infrastructure. There are attacks on our residential areas. And the effects of these attacks are very clear. When it comes to possible retaliation, all options are with our leadership. But we have to make it very clear that attacks like these will not go unanswered and cannot go unanswered."

Mostly, the Iranian missiles are being intercepted across the region, but falling debris has started fires and killed people. Drones that are more easily able to get through air defences often cause minimal damage but still sow chaos that disrupts trade and travel.

That seems to be the Iranian strategy – to raise the stakes for its Arab neighbours in hopes they will increase pressure on the US to end the war.

Analysts say Iran can weaponise the region's vital oil and gas industry –

disrupting that could send shockwaves through the global economy.

That also means Tehran's strategy could backfire. Iran risks pushing Gulf states closer to Washington, even having them join the war effort in some form.

So far, they've refused to let the US use their skies and territory to launch strikes on Iran.

That could change. At some point, they might decide to participate in military operations.

They're not there yet – for now the Arabs are focused on defence. But much depends on how long the war goes on.

Some would be reluctant to appear to be taking Israel's side in the conflict.

What's clear is that Iran's attacks have strengthened unity among the Gulf states.

The six members of the Gulf Cooperation Council – Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates and Oman – met in emergency session on Sunday to express solidarity and pledge to "take all necessary measures to defend their security and stability and to protect their territories, citizens, and residents, including the option of responding to the aggression."

A senior diplomatic advisor to the Emirati president, Anwar Gargash, has urged Iran to come to its senses.

"Your war is not with your neighbours," he wrote in a post on X. "Return to your surroundings, and deal with your neighbours with reason and responsibility before the circle of isolation and escalation widens."

Protection promised

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persistent gap between legislation and enforcement. Almost half of the victims were minors.

Last month alone saw 183 cases of violence against women and children, according to Bangladesh Mahila Parishad.

Over the last week, at least three rape incidents involving minors were reported. One of them was killed after being raped, and a family member of a survivor was murdered while trying to stop the perpetrators. There was also the shocking murder of a seven-year-old girl, who was found with her throat slit at Sitakunda Eco Park on March 1. Police said that attempts were made to rape her.

Experts say the ordinance cannot serve as a true safeguard while deep structural failures continue to plague the justice system.

The 2025 ordinance clearly defines rape as a non-compoundable offence. Yet, a parallel practice of unlawful village arbitration, or shalish, continues to override the law in many cases.

The problem has deepened due to the absence of basic protection mechanisms and a fragmented network of One-Stop Crisis Centres (OCCs), hamstrung by funding and manpower shortages.

A recent incident involving a 15-year-old girl in Narsingdi illustrates the consequences of systemic failure. The girl was abducted and murdered on February 25, two weeks after she had been gang-raped.

When her family members were on their way to the police station after the rape incident, the perpetrators intercepted them and forced them to return home.

Later, a union parishad member "settled" the issue through local arbitration.

As the girl was still being stalked, her father decided to move her to safety. When he was taking her to a relative's house on February 25, they were intercepted on the way. The girl was abducted and then killed.

"This type of settlement directly violates a High Court judgment prohibiting derogatory or demeaning decisions made in the name of fatwa or informal arbitration," said Taposhi Rabeya, deputy director (mediation) at Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST).

"Such settlements are not remedies; they fuel further violence... Had she been able to report to police instead of being forced into a compromise, she would have been alive today," she said.

Fauzia Moslem, president of Bangladesh Mahila Parishad, shared the same view.

"Justice for rape must be pursued only through the legal process," she said.

CRISIS CENTRES IN CRISIS
Designed as "single-window" support hubs, the OCCs were supposed to be integrated into the regular revenue budget after the expiry of the Multi-Sectoral Programme under the women and children affairs ministry in 2024.

However, that did not happen, hampering the operations of the OCCs. Survivors often complain of a lack of support and limited services.

For example, a Jahangirnagar University student, who was rescued after she had been raped, was taken to the OCC at Dhaka Medical College Hospital on February 24 but was turned away after waiting for nearly two hours.

Kamrun Nahar, a member of the Rape Law Reform Coalition, who assisted the victim in accessing OCC services, said, "The victim arrived at the OCC just before iftar. No responsible official was there. Only a constable was present. Despite her condition, she was told that admission was not possible at that hour."

It took 48 hours for the student to get admitted.

"The promise was to provide all services under one roof. But it is difficult to find anyone after 2:00pm... If a rape incident occurs at midnight, who will serve the victim?" she said.

Several rights campaigners who provide support to rape victims said that staffers at OCCs often view the facilities as forensic units rather than spaces for medical and psychosocial care. By prioritising clinical evidence over essential counselling, the state has allowed a vital support system to lapse into bureaucratic neglect.

FROM MANIFESTO TO MEANINGFUL ACTION

Experts say the 776 cases recorded over the 13 months till February this year demonstrate that tougher laws cannot achieve the desired results without strong determination to strictly enforce them.

"Lawmaking in Bangladesh often becomes an act of populism," said Taposhi, adding that the real test is whether people actually benefit from it.

She said the government must translate its pledges into concrete measures to ensure women's safety and dignity. It should also review and implement the recommendations made by the Women's Affairs Reform Commission.

Fauzia urged the new government to adopt a zero-tolerance policy on violence against women and children with a dedicated taskforce under the home ministry.

She said the necessary measures to protect women and children from violence should be outlined in the government's work plan for the next six months, and the upcoming parliamentary sessions must prioritise substantive action over rhetoric.

"We do not want to live in a society scarred by rape and murder," she said, adding that a humane society requires a fundamental shift in sensitivity towards women.

Maleka Banu, general secretary of Bangladesh Mahila Parishad, said that although laws have grown stricter, the state has failed to build an effective justice delivery mechanism.

"Exemplary punishment alone is not the solution," she said.

She called for broader social reform – through education and by challenging misogynistic political and religious narratives – to move towards a culture rooted in respect for women.

Staffer kills teacher

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had a feud with Fazlu, an employee of the same department.

Runa had an altercation with Fazlu a few months ago. Later, Fazlu was transferred to the political science department, said the proctor.

Fazlu, a temporary employee, has been working on a daily payment basis for several years, said Shahinuzzaman, who also failed to say the reason for the feud.

Yesterday, an iftar programme was scheduled to be held at the social welfare department.

"We were preparing for the event and madam [Runa] was waiting in her office to join the event," said Mahmud, a fourth-year student of the department.

"Madam's office room is adjacent to our iftar venue. Around 4:10pm, we went to the madam's room to discuss the expenditure of our programme. When we reached there, we saw madam's room was locked from inside and two Ansar members were knocking at the door. But she was not responding."

Mahmud added that at one stage, they broke open the door and found the madam lying bloodied on the floor. In another corner of the room, they saw that Fazlu was trying to slit his own throat.

"Then, we informed the proctorial team." Proctor Shahinuzzaman said that on information, they rushed to the spot and found them lying on the floor.

The two were sent to the 250-bed Kushtia General Hospital, where doctors declared Runa dead.

"Both of them were brought to the hospital around 5:00pm in critical condition. The teacher died shortly afterwards while undergoing treatment. She was stabbed in the throat," said Hossain Imam, a doctor of the hospital.

"The condition of the employee, who sustains stab wounds to his throat, is critical," he said.

This correspondent talked to around 30 people, including teachers, students, family members, and university staffers, to know the reason for the feud between the teacher and the staffer.

Almost all of them said they heard that Fazlu misbehaved with the teacher over his salary and other benefits.

Contacted, Mahmudul Haque Majumdar, assistant superintendent of Kushtia police, said, "We still don't know the motive behind the murder. We are talking to the university authorities and investigating the incident to get details."