

India arrests 7 for 'training' Myanmar rebels

AFP, New Delhi

Indian investigators have arrested seven foreigners, including six Ukrainians and an American, on suspicion of illegally crossing into neighbouring Myanmar to train armed militia groups, the public radio broadcaster reported yesterday.

Myanmar descended into civil war after a junta seized power in a 2021 coup, with pro-democracy guerrillas and ethnic-minority armed groups fighting for control of large parts of the country.

India has long been suspicious of certain Myanmar factions that have the same ethnicity as populations on the Indian side of the border, fearing a spillover of violence and unrest.

On Monday, a closed court in New Delhi remanded the seven foreign nationals in custody for 11 days of interrogation after they allegedly illegally entered sensitive Mizoram state without an official permit, All India Radio (AIR) reported.

The seven then allegedly passed from Mizoram into neighbouring Myanmar, where they were "training ethnic war groups... associated with insurgent groups in India", according to AIR.



Workers dry freshly made semai (vermicelli) at a factory in Khulna city's Khalishpur area yesterday. From dawn till deep into the night, labourers are busy kneading flour, shaping the strands, and drying them to meet the seasonal demand. For many families, semai remains an essential part of Eid morning, served to relatives and guests after prayers.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

OCCUPIED WEST BANK 'Unprecedented' 36,000 displaced in one year: UN Urges Israel to immediately halt its settlement expansion

AFP, Geneva

The UN yesterday urged Israel to immediately halt its dramatic settlement expansion in the West Bank, raising concerns of "ethnic cleansing" with over 36,000 Palestinians displaced in a single year.

A fresh report from the United Nations rights office, looking at the 12 months up to October 31, 2025, warned that Israel's accelerating expansion of unlawful settlements and annexation of large parts of the West Bank was driving "unprecedented" displacement.

"The displacement of more than 36,000 Palestinians in the occupied West Bank represented the mass expulsion of Palestinians on a scale previously unseen, amounting to unlawful transfer that is prohibited under international humanitarian law," the report said.

Alongside "the extensive displacement of Palestinians in Gaza", it "appears to indicate a concerted Israeli policy of mass forcible transfer throughout the occupied territory, aimed at permanent displacement, raising concerns of ethnic cleansing".

The report pointed to the advancement or approval by Israeli authorities of 36,973 housing units in settlements in occupied East Jerusalem and around 27,200 in the rest of the West Bank.

No talks until US, Israel

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a recorded video interview, carried by Tasnim news agency and other media.

"This will be a regional, indigenous order."

On Monday, Israeli President Isaac Herzog told AFP that the war against Iran marked a key turning point for the entire region.

"We are at a historical juncture, there comes a moment that after well over a generation of endless wars, bloodshed and terror, the root cause of it, which comes from Tehran, will be blocked and stopped, and the whole direction of the region will change," Herzog told AFP in an exclusive interview at his Jerusalem residence.

The US Israeli war on Iran is now in its third week, with at least 2,000 people killed and no end in sight.

Meanwhile, a senior US counterterrorism official resigned yesterday to protest the US Israeli war against Iran and said the Islamic Republic posed no imminent threat to the US.

"I cannot in good conscience support the ongoing war in Iran," Joseph Kent, the director of the National Counterterrorism Center, said in his resignation letter to President Donald Trump.

Kent — a former member of the Green Beret special forces who served multiple combat tours — said, "It is clear that we started this war due to pressure from Israel and its powerful American lobby."

Kent is the first senior US official to resign from the Trump administration to protest the war against Iran.

Trump yesterday lashed out at "foolish" NATO over Iran, saying the US needs no help after allies rebuffed his calls to join efforts to reopen the Strait of Hormuz.

Trump said most US allies had rejected his push to escort ships through the crucial waterway, with French President Emmanuel Macron saying his country would "never" do so until the situation was calmer.

"I think NATO is making a very foolish mistake," Trump told reporters as he hosted Irish Prime Minister Micheal Martin in the Oval Office.

"I've long said that I wonder whether or not NATO would ever be there for us. So, this was a great test."

But Trump insisted that Washington was ready to go it alone

against Iran. "We don't need too much help. We don't need any help."

Asked if he would reconsider the US relationship with NATO as he has suggested in the past, Trump said it was "certainly something that we should think about", but added: "I have nothing currently in mind."

In an interview with Reuters yesterday, European Union foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas said diplomatic ways have to be found in order to keep the Strait open.

"Nobody is ready to put their people in harm's way in the Strait of Hormuz. We have to find diplomatic ways to keep this open so that we don't have a food crisis, fertiliser crisis, energy crisis as well," Kallas said.

There was no let-up in attacks by both sides yesterday, with Iran launching missiles on Israel overnight, underscoring that Tehran retains the capacity to carry out long-range strikes despite more than two weeks of pounding by US and Israeli weapons.

Iran's army released a statement saying it had targeted with drones cybertechnology centres in Israel, as well as weapons manufacturing centres of the Israeli arms manufacturer Rafael.

The Israeli military said it was targeting "Iranian regime infrastructure" with a new wave of strikes across Tehran, as well as Hezbollah sites in Beirut, a day after saying it had drawn up detailed plans for at least three more weeks of war with Iran.

Trump on Monday admitted he was "shocked" at Iran's response to the US-Israel attacks.

"They weren't supposed to go after all these other countries in the Middle East. Those missiles were set to go after them," he said.

"So, they hit Qatar, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain, Kuwait. Nobody expected that. We were shocked."

However, six foreign diplomats in the Middle East have told Reuters it was widely anticipated that Tehran would target Gulf Arab states if the US or Israel attacked Iran, an assessment they said was shared by regional and Western governments.

Gulf Arab states, including the UAE, have faced more than 2,000 missile and drone attacks since the start of the war on Iran on February 28, striking US diplomatic missions and military

bases as well as oil infrastructure, ports, airports, ships and residential and commercial buildings.

Oil loading at the UAE port of Fujairah was at least partly halted yesterday after a third attack in four days caused a fire at the export terminal. Fujairah is important as it lies on the far side of the Strait of Hormuz from the Gulf, making it one of the few ports from which the region's oil can be shipped without passing through the blockaded waterway.

The cascading disruptions threaten to completely sever the OPEC producer's remaining crude export outlet from global markets, potentially deepening a crisis that has sent energy prices surging.

UAE authorities said debris from an intercepted ballistic missile also fell in Abu Dhabi's Bani Yas area, killing one Pakistani national, while a fire caused by a drone attack was being fought at Abu Dhabi's Shah gas field.

In Kuwait, two medical staff were injured when shrapnel fell on an emergency medical centre where they were working, the health ministry said.

Two barrages of missiles were also launched at Qatar yesterday, with the Gulf state's defence ministry saying it had intercepted the projectiles in two separate statements.

Oil prices jumped about 4 percent yesterday and stock futures slipped as investors fretted about a renewed spike in inflation as the conflict drags on.

According to analysis from the World Food Programme released yesterday, at least 45 million more people in the region will face acute hunger if the Iran war continues through to June.

China yesterday said it will provide humanitarian assistance to Middle Eastern countries, including Iran and Lebanon.

Beijing is a close partner of Iran and has urged the US and Israel to cease their attacks on the country, while also criticising Tehran's strikes against Gulf states housing US military bases.

Meanwhile, around 200 US military personnel have been wounded in seven countries across the Middle East since the start of the US-Israel war against Iran, a US military spokesman said Monday.

A return to the old admission rat race?

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Before the lottery system, the pressure on families was immense. Determined to secure seats in reputed schools, many parents pushed their children — some as young as four or five — into coaching centres long before they were ready for formal education. In many cases, schoolteachers themselves ran these coaching businesses.

The pressure surrounding school admissions became so intense that some guardians even manipulated official documents, deliberately changing their children's birth years to secure an extra year or two before entering the ruthless race for admission.

Irregularities were also common. Schools often admitted more students than the number of seats advertised, and many believed these additional places were secured through money.

Parents queued for hours just to collect admission forms. Children sat for dozens of tests at different schools. Childhood became trapped in a cycle of coaching centres, stress, and relentless competition.

The introduction of the lottery system largely ended this ordeal. It removed admission tests and spared young children the psychological strain of early academic competition.

Now, with the system set to be withdrawn, there is a real possibility that the old scenes — long queues, coaching pressures, and anxious examinations —

may return. It's true the lottery was far from perfect. For some families, repeated failed attempts led to disappointment, and some children even began to believe they were simply unlucky. Yet despite its flaws, the system was humane. It spared pre-schoolers from competing before they could even properly read or write.

It also curbed the coaching centre frenzy, where teachers often profited from anxious parents.

Coaching centres are costly, and most families cannot afford them. Without safeguards, education risks becoming a commodity accessible only to those with money — undermining the principle of education as a right that people in this country have struggled for decades to establish.

The government's decision-making process also raises questions. Although the minister said the move followed "extensive discussions" and a month-long review, it remains unclear who exactly was consulted.

Transparency is lacking.

The Awami League governments under the ousted autocrat Sheikh Hasina did not always make the right decisions, and criticising past policies is part of democratic debate. Governments have every right to overturn flawed initiatives. But it becomes troubling when policy shifts appear driven less by public interest and more by the impulse to undo whatever a previous government

introduced.

Bangladesh has long suffered from another troubling pattern: students are treated as guinea pigs by successive governments. Each administration reshapes education policy, exam systems, and admission frameworks. This government now appears to be following the same path.

The solution to the admission crisis does not lie in scrapping lotteries or reviving exams for four-year-olds. What the country needs is a commitment to raising the quality of all schools.

That requires thinking beyond quick fixes and embracing a long-term vision.

It begins with a comprehensive national plan that treats education not as a privilege for the few but as a right for all. Such a plan must ensure an adequate number of qualified teachers — because no such reform can succeed without strong human resources. Schools also need proper infrastructure and sufficient funding to function effectively.

But resources alone are not enough. Misuse of funds has long plagued the sector, and unless corruption and inefficiency are addressed, even generous budgets will fail to produce results. Accountability and transparency are essential at every level.

Above all, the system needs visionary leadership — leaders who can rise above partisan rivalry and treat education as a national priority rather than a policy experiment.

Dhaka-Sylhet highway a major concern

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Officials of the Roads and Highways Department (RHD) said they have taken steps to reduce congestion during the Eid rush through traffic management and alternative arrangements on key routes.

DHAKA-SYLHET HIGHWAY

The Dhaka-Sylhet highway remains one of the biggest concerns.

Highway Police have identified 43 congestion points along the 209-kilometre route, including Kanchpur, Tarabo, Barpa, Chhapra, Madhabdi, Panchdona, Itakhola, Bhairab, Brahmanbaria, Bishwa Road, Madhabpur and Osmaninagar. The highway has been under a six-lane expansion project since 2021.

"Only 20 percent of the Dhaka-Sylhet highway construction has been completed. For the Eid journey, we repaired the old highway and coordinated with Highway Police, local police and magistrates to manage traffic," RHD Additional Chief Engineer Fazlul Haque told The Daily Star.

During visits to the highway over the past two days, this correspondent saw traffic jams stretching up to seven kilometres at Kanchpur and the 300 Feet Road section during rush periods because of heavy trucks, buses and private cars, along with construction work, potholes and slow toll collection.

The western side towards Kuril also comes under pressure.

At Chhanpara in Araihaazar, damaged roads, ongoing expansion work, illegal parking and slow-moving trucks carrying sand and construction materials frequently cause gridlock, particularly between Tarabo Bishwa Road and Barpa.

Despite restrictions, battery-run three-wheelers and CNG-run autorickshaws were seen on the highway. Some drivers carried passengers while driving on the wrong side, while others crossed damaged dividers to change lanes.

Md Rifat, a conductor of a bus operating between Dhaka and Gaucia, said congestion has become routine.

"If the road is clear, it takes half an hour to reach the destination, but now it takes two to two and a half hours," he said.

Aminul Ehsan, the RHD official responsible for the Brahmanbaria-Habiganj zone, said the old two-lane road was being kept operational during the construction period.

Waterlogging on the alternative highway of the route at Sherpurbazar in Moulvibazar is disrupting traffic even after light rainfall, particularly

near Mukhtijoddha Chattar.

Pedestrians are forced to use makeshift crossings, while unplanned parking worsens congestion, said bus stand manager Jahangir Khan.

Kaiser Hamid, executive engineer of the Moulvibazar sewage department, said the responsibility for the affected section now lies with the Dhaka-Sylhet Corridor Road Development Project authorities.

"We will inform the concerned officials to take necessary measures to ensure proper drainage," he said.

RISKS ON DHAKA-CTG ROUTE

The Dhaka-Chattogram highway, another major Eid corridor used by travellers from at least 22 districts, also remains vulnerable to congestion.

According to Highway Police, unauthorised bus stoppages, alleged extortion by stopping vehicles, passengers boarding and alighting on the highway, wrong-way driving and ongoing development work continue to slow traffic.

A truck breakdown near Daudkandi or Meghna Bridge can paralyse traffic for more than 12 hours, while toll plaza problems can trigger tailbacks stretching 13 to 30 kilometres, a Highway Police officer said.

Emergency repairs on Langalbandh Bridge, potholes at Jatramura Bridge, slow toll collection at the Meghna toll plaza, road repairs between Madanpur and Bastul, and bridge work at Rampur in Feni remain key risks.

RHD Additional Executive Engineer in Cumilla Khandaker Mostofa said traffic hotspots were being monitored and repairs coordinated, with police and volunteers stationed at congestion points.

PRESSURE RISING IN THE NORTH

On the northern route, vehicle pressure has already increased on the Jamuna Bridge after the week-long Eid holiday began on Monday night, as homebound passengers started heading to northern districts.

Some 35,658 vehicles crossed the bridge in the last 24 hours, generating Tk 2,84,49,700 in toll revenue. Usually, 20,000 to 22,000 vehicles cross the bridge daily, said Sayed Riaz Uddin, an executive engineer of the Jamuna Bridge.

Despite the surge, traffic was moving steadily on northern highways with no major disruption reported.

Officials, however, fear congestion near Elenga on the Dhaka-Tangail-Rangpur highway due to flyover and overpass constructions under the

SASEC-2 project. The 13.5-kilometre Elenga-Jamuna Bridge section is about 50 percent complete, while the Jamuna Bridge toll plaza remains a key pressure point.

SASEC-2 Project Director Waliur Rahman said congestion could occur on the bridge because of the narrow route.

To manage the Eid rush, around 780 police officers have been deployed on northern highways in Sirajganj, including 144 highway police personnel.

"Additional police have been stationed at every key point to maintain vehicle flow during the Eid journey," said Md Ismail Hossain, officer-in-charge of Hatikumrul Highway Police Station, adding that no congestion had been reported so far despite the high volume of vehicles.

OTHER HIGHWAYS ALSO VULNERABLE

Other major highways may also see delays during the Eid rush.

On the Dhaka-Aricha highway, congestion may build up at the Baipayl intersection due to ongoing road repair and development work. Traffic is also slowed by the nearby bus stand and wholesale fruit and fish markets, where roadside activity often spills onto the highway.

On the Jashore-Khulna highway, renovation work has narrowed traffic movement from Baniyargati to the Ghuni rail crossing, where half of the 10.3-metre-wide road remains closed. The route also becomes riskier at night because of poor lighting in work zones. Officials fear congestion at Akij City, Betarkona, Prembag Union Parishad and Basundia bus stand during busy hours.

Delays may also occur on the Chattogram-Cox's Bazar highway near Dohazari and on the Dhaka-Mawa highway at the Dhaleshwari toll plaza.

Meanwhile, the rush of homebound passengers intensified yesterday on the Dhaka-Mymensingh-Tangail highway after 444 garment factories in Gazipur closed for the Eid holiday.

Vehicles were seen moving slowly throughout the day.

The situation was similar on the Dhaka-Aricha highway, where vehicle pressure increased though no severe gridlock was reported.

At the Paturia ferry terminal in Manikganj, the crowd was larger than usual as holidaymakers gathered to cross the Padma River.

[Our correspondents in Pabna, Narayanganj, Sylhet, Moulvibazar, Gazipur, Savar and Manikganj contributed to this report.]

PM orders drive to curb violence against women

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There are also concerns that any surge in such incidents could trigger political protests, potentially putting additional pressure on the administration during a sensitive period, according to officials.

To address the risks, the government plans to roll out a special monitoring and enforcement drive involving multiple ministries, including home, law, women and children affairs, and local government.

Officials said the directive includes field-level monitoring, rapid response mechanisms and stricter enforcement of existing laws.

Senior officials have also been asked to remain in close contact with district administrations and law enforcement units to ensure that any

incident is addressed promptly.

Officials said the cabinet also discussed measures to further strengthen existing tribunals dedicated to handling cases of violence against women, saying that delays in trials often contribute to a sense of impunity.

The directives come amid broader concerns within the government over law and order, market stability and public safety during the Eid holidays.

Meeting sources said the PM asked ministers to remain actively engaged in monitoring the situation across sectors, particularly in transport management, fuel supply and commodity markets, where price manipulation and shortages often emerge during holidays.

Officials were also instructed to ensure that public transport fares

remain within approved limits and to maintain heightened vigilance to reduce the risk of road accidents, which typically rise during mass Eid travel.

The cabinet meeting also focused on recent natural disasters affecting farmers in several northern and northeastern districts.

Tarique directed the agriculture ministry and the disaster management and relief ministry to provide immediate assistance to those affected by hailstorms and flash floods in Thakurgaon, Joypurhat and Sunamganj.

The deputy commissioners have been instructed to use available funds to provide urgent relief support, while relevant ministries will take longer-term measures to assist affected farmers, Ghani said.