



Clockwise from left: Homebound passengers jostle to board an overcrowded train at Joydebpur Junction station in Gazipur; crowds wait for buses at a counter in Dholaipar; and the Nilsagar Express derailed near Santahar station in Bogura, leaving at least 66 injured and disrupting rail communication with eight districts in the Rangpur region. The photos were taken yesterday.



PHOTO: PALASH KHAN, FIROZ AHMED, COLLECTED

Bring VOA employees back to work US judge orders Trump admin

AFP, Washington

A US federal judge on Tuesday ordered the Trump administration to bring more than 1,000 Voice of America employees back to work and resume broadcasts by the government-funded media outlet.

District Judge Royce Lamberth's order comes 10 days after he ruled that President Donald Trump's pick to oversee mass layoffs at VOA was unlawfully appointed, rendering the job cuts invalid.

Kari Lake, a former TV anchor, slashed jobs and funding after she was appointed by Trump to head the US Agency for Global Media (USAGM), which runs VOA, Radio Free Europe, Radio Free Asia and other stations.

Lamberth, an appointee of Republican president Ronald Reagan, ordered the reinstatement by March 23 of 1,042 VOA employees who have been on paid administrative leave for the past year.

The judge also ordered USAGM to come up with a plan by next week to resume international broadcasts.

VOA was created in the wake of World War II as a key instrument of American soft power worldwide.

Trump frequently attacks media outlets and denounced the editorial firewall at VOA that prevents the government from intervening in its coverage.

War 'will hit us all'

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Gulf, a move that could invite retaliation against other producers and make it harder for global markets to recover from what has already been the biggest ever interruption to energy supplies.

But nearly three weeks into the war, there has been no sign of de-escalation.

Israel yesterday said it had killed Iran's intelligence minister in the second strike on a top leadership figure in two days, and had authorised the military to target any senior Iranian official it can locate.

Israel also hit central Beirut, destroying apartment buildings in some of the most intense airstrikes on the Lebanese capital for decades.

"No one in Iran has immunity, and everyone is in the crosshairs," said Defence Minister Israel Katz, who announced that Israel had killed Iran's Intelligence Minister Esmail Khatib a day after killing security chief Ali Larjani.

"The Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, and I have authorised the Israel Defense Forces to target any senior Iranian official for whom an intelligence and operational opportunity arises, without the need for additional approval."

It appeared to be the first time Israel has publicly stated that it would let the military target enemy officials without seeking special permission from political leaders for missions. Katz did not say when the order had been given.

In Tehran, thousands of people appeared in the streets for a funeral for Larjani and other slain figures. The crowd waved Iranian flags and carried portraits of the dead as a eulogist sang: "Martyrs are leading

the way, they've become more alive, burning with love."

Iran retaliated for the killing of Larjani by firing missiles at Israel, which Israeli authorities said killed two people near Tel Aviv. Tehran said it fired overnight on Tel Aviv, Haifa and Beersheba in Israel, and at US bases in Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said the US and Israel failed to understand that the Islamic Republic was a robust political system that did not depend on any single individual.

"Wave of global repercussions has only begun and will hit all, regardless of wealth, faith, or race," Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi posted on X, urging the international community to abandon the US-Israeli nexus.

He also told Al Jazeera that Iran's stance against the development of nuclear weapons will not significantly change, cautioning that the new supreme leader is yet to publicly express his view on the matter.

Former Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who was killed early in the US-Israeli war against Iran, opposed the development of weapons of mass destruction in a fatwa, or religious edict, issued in the early 2000s.

The unprecedented disruption to global energy supplies has raised the political stakes for US President Donald Trump. Diesel prices in the US rose above \$5 a gallon for the first time since the 2022 inflation surge that eroded support for his predecessor Joe Biden.

Trump yesterday angrily suggested that he could leave US allies to secure the Hormuz strait on their own since

they have refused to fight alongside US forces against Iran in the crucial shipping lane.

Trump has responded to the Hormuz crisis with a series of contradictory statements, saying both that allies must help the US and then, on Tuesday, saying "we don't need any help."

His latest statement on Truth Social suggested the US could abandon the situation altogether, leaving other countries to deal with the aftermath.

On Tuesday, the US military said it had hit Iranian missile sites near the Strait with some of the most powerful bombs in the US arsenal.

"US forces successfully employed multiple 5,000-pound deep penetrator munitions on hardened Iranian missile sites along Iran's coastline near the Strait of Hormuz," Central Command said in a statement on X.

Israel has stepped up strikes on Lebanon and a ground assault in the south in pursuit of the Iran-backed Hezbollah group, which has fired across the border in solidarity with Tehran.

In central Beirut's Bachoura district, Israel warned residents early yesterday to leave a building it said was used by Hezbollah, which it then completely flattened. Eyewitness video, verified by Reuters, showed it crumbling into dust as it was struck at dawn.

Abu Khalil, who lives in the area, said he had helped people flee nearby homes after the Israeli warning. "It's just an operation to hurt, to terrify people, to terrify children," he told Reuters, insisting there were no military targets nearby.

No similar warnings were given for strikes that hit apartment buildings in

two other central districts, killing at least 10 people, according to Lebanese authorities. Smoke poured from the balcony of one building as residents swept debris from the street.

Meanwhile, missiles and drones yesterday continued to target the Gulf states.

Saudi Arabia said it had intercepted the US drones targeting the diplomatic quarter of its capital, Riyadh.

Qatar's defence ministry said it intercepted a missile attack as blasts were heard in Doha.

Meanwhile, a drone attack targeted the US embassy in Baghdad early yesterday, causing explosions. At least four explosions were heard in the city of Erbil in the autonomous Kurdistan region.

Amid the raging war, Saudi Arabia said it will host a consultative meeting of foreign ministers from several Arab and Islamic countries in Riyadh on Wednesday to discuss ways to support regional security and stability, given the Iran war, the kingdom's foreign ministry said.

A Turkish diplomatic source said separately that representatives from Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Pakistan, Qatar, Syria, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates would attend the meeting.

US-based Iran human rights group HRANA said on Monday that an estimated 3,000-plus people had been killed in Iran since the US-Israeli attacks began on February 28. Authorities in Lebanon say 900 people have been killed there and 800,000 forced to flee their homes.

Iranian attacks have killed people in Iraq and across the Gulf states. Fourteen have been killed in Israel.

China blasts 'colonial' Australia, New Zealand over rights concerns

AFP, Sydney

China yesterday condemned Australia and New Zealand for "colonial-style arrogance" and poor treatment of Indigenous people after a joint statement by the two nations raised concerns over Beijing's rights record.

In comments sent to AFP, a spokesperson for Beijing's embassy in New Zealand said the comments by Australia and New Zealand's defence and foreign ministers were "marked by bias, misinformation, and inexplicable colonial-style arrogance".

The spokesperson accused the two countries of overlooking the "root cause" of the current war in the Middle East, triggered by joint US-Israeli strikes on Iran on February 28.

And they accused New Zealand and Australia of staying silent on their "own poor records concerning human rights and ethnic minority issues".

Clarification

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sole statutory jurisdiction of the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB).

Biman further said it has already communicated with CAAB for the necessary verification and that the matter remains under review by the competent authority.

However, it claimed, despite the aforementioned press release, the report published in The Daily Star presents the matter in a manner that may create unnecessary confusion among the public and could potentially harm the reputation of the country's aviation sector.

Eid journey largely smooth

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According to factory authorities and Industrial Police sources, around 2,000 factories in Gazipur closed, with most workers released after completing shifts by noon.

Saiful Alam, secretary general of the Bangladesh Road Transport Owners Association, said bus travel across the country has remained largely smooth so far.

He added that stricter monitoring by volunteers, highway police, and magistrates at key congestion points could further ease traffic.

Waterways, meanwhile, offered a steadier passage despite a tragic accident at Sadarghat Launch Terminal in Dhaka.

One person was killed and another critically injured after a launch rammed into passengers waiting to board at the terminal in the evening, while at least two others went missing. Search efforts were underway to locate the missing individuals, police said.

However, launches from the terminal operated normally since

morning, with vessels continuing to ply 43 destinations without disruption.

Ferry services on the Paturia-Dauladia and Shimulia-Kathalbari routes -- key links between Dhaka and the southern districts -- also ran as usual.

Transport operators said the exodus to village homes is likely to peak today, following the closure of garment factories for Eid.

During a visit to Gabtoli, Transport Minister Sheikh Robiul Alam said fares were being maintained, travel conditions remained smooth, and no major complaints or fuel shortages had been reported.

He added that around 124 additional coaches and five pairs of special trains had been introduced to manage the Eid rush.

Although the seven-day public holiday officially began on March 17, many travellers had started leaving Dhaka a day earlier, on March 16 -- setting in motion the annual tide of homebound journeys.

BNP to revamp central, grassroots bodies after Eid

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party's top policymaking body, on March 19, 2016. These councils decide on the various committees, each of which serves a three-year term.

So the party constitution requires a council every three years, but leaders said it could not be held under the Awami League regime in the past 17 years due to political, legal, and organisational constraints.

The high command has yet to decide on holding the next council.

Talking to reporters at his Gulshan residence yesterday, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir said, "We hope to hold the council this year, but no date has been fixed yet."

The terms of 10 out of 11 committees of BNP and its affiliated and associate bodies having expired, say party insiders.

Committees of Chhatra Dal, Swachhchasebak Dal, Krishak Dal, Mohila Dal, Muktijoddha Dal, Sramik Dal, Tanti Dal and Jatiotabadi Samajik Sangskritik Sangstha (JASAS) have expired; Jubo Dal's partial committee is yet to be expanded into a full one; and Matsyajibi Dal has had no committee since 2024.

Chhatra Dal's committee expired on March 1 this year. Most leaders of the 257-member committee enrolled in undergraduate studies a decade

ago and were expected to graduate years earlier. With the term expired, lobbying for new positions has intensified.

The Jubo Dal central committee remains incomplete one and a half years after a partial committee was announced on July 9, 2024. The committee has yet to be expanded.

The Swachhchasebak Dal committee, formed on September 4, 2022, completed its term last year.

Krishak Dal's committee expired one and a half years ago.

Mohila Dal's committee, formed in 2016 for a two-year term, has functioned for nearly a decade under Alroza Abbas and Sultana Ahmed.

Muktijoddha Dal and Sramik Dal are operating with committees formed more than a decade ago. The last council of Muktijoddha Dal was held in December 2013, while Sramik Dal's committee dates back to April 2014. Neither has held new councils since.

The committee of Tati Dal, formed in 2019, completed its term in 2022. Matsyajibi Dal's committee was dissolved in September 2024, but no new committee has been announced.

JASAS's committee, with a three-year term, has been in place for nearly five years, with limited activity beyond commemorations.

Ukrainian drone attack kills one in Russian region

AFP, Moscow

A Ukrainian drone attack in Russia's southern Krasnodar region killed one person, its governor said yesterday.

"Ukrainian Armed Forces drones struck apartment buildings in the regional capital tonight," Krasnodar's Governor Veniamin Kondratyev posted on Telegram, adding one person had been killed.

"A total of three buildings were damaged. A fire broke out in an apartment in one of them, but it was quickly extinguished," he added.

Kyiv regularly carries out strikes within Russia in response to Russian

attacks -- which have targeted Ukrainian territory daily since Moscow's full-scale offensive began in February 2022.

Kyiv says it primarily targets military and energy infrastructure. Early in March, a Ukrainian missile strike in the Russian border region of Bryansk killed seven and wounded dozens, according to regional authorities.

The United States is pushing Kyiv and Moscow to agree to an elusive peace deal, but a third round of three-party talks has been derailed by the war in the Middle East.

Educated youth return to farms

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At the same time, while agriculture's share of the economy fell by 3.96 percentage points, employment in the sector rose by 4.8 percentage points.

Education levels have increased across all sectors over the past decade. But the labour market has failed to keep pace.

"Rising educational attainment has outpaced job creation within the existing industrial structure, leaving too few high-quality employment opportunities for the expanding pool of highly educated workers, particularly among youth," the report said.

"The contradiction between rising education levels and the reversed pattern of employment structural transformation indicates that building human capital has not translated into movement toward higher-productivity sectors," it added.

The IMF described agriculture as "acting as a buffer for unemployment, absorbing excess labour but at the cost of persistently low productivity".

The disparity in employment outcomes is stark. Those with education below Secondary School Certificate level face an unemployment rate of 3.01 percent, while those with higher degrees face 8.7 percent.

"By 2024, unemployment among highly educated youth stands at a staggering 25 percent -- more than triple the rate of their less educated peers," the report said.

The overall unemployment rate remains relatively low at 3.69 percent, but deeper fault lines emerge among the youth. Youth unemployment stands at 8.49 percent -- more than double the national average -- with 13.27 percent of urban youth unemployed, compared to 6.63 percent in rural areas.

Women face even harsher realities. Highly educated women experience an unemployment rate of 16.66 percent -- more than double that of

their male counterparts.

The IMF noted that unemployment among the highly educated "has persistently stayed high for nearly a decade", calling it an "alarmingly weakening labour market for youth and highly educated workers".

Mustafa K Mujeri, former director general of Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, said the implications stretch far beyond employment figures.

"The higher-educated youth look for jobs in the formal sector, whereas the rest go to the informal sector. And private sector investment is barely existent," he said.

"The education system is disconnected from the industry. The degrees do not serve the needs of the job market. The RMG sector still has a scarcity of skilled labour, yet so many youth are unemployed," he added, noting that the standard of education has declined over the years.

He warned that low-skilled jobs in manufacturing are being replaced by automation, meaning employment in the sector will continue to shrink unless education is aligned with industry needs.

Speaking about agriculture's evolving role, Mustafa said, "Over the years, agriculture has gone through a feminisation, with uneducated women taking the place of educated men exiting the sector."

Mustafizur Rahman, distinguished fellow of the Centre for Policy Dialogue, pointed to another constraint: a lack of diversification.

"The growth in the formal sector is low job-creating growth, and if expansion does not take place at a faster pace, then the absorption [by the agriculture sector] too will not be adequate," he said.

Because industries are not diversifying fast enough, a swelling labour force is competing for a limited pool of jobs, he added.

"This discontent was also a driver of

the July uprising," he said.

Mustafizur cautioned that overseas employment will not expand sufficiently to absorb the growing number of unemployed youth. The focus, he said, must shift inward.

"The focus should be on the domestic market, and so the private sector needs to be incentivised."

The IMF report observed that overeducation and education-occupation mismatches are particularly pronounced in agriculture and manufacturing, with the garment industry and youth workers most affected while gender disparities in unemployment remain significant.

It said advancing structural reforms and labour market policies will be critical to enhancing resilience, fully harnessing Bangladesh's demographic dividend, and unlocking higher growth potential.

"Key priorities include upgrading the industrial structure, channelling investment toward high productivity sectors, and promoting diversification to expand high quality employment," the report said.

At the same time, building stronger linkages between education institutions and industry is essential. Improved skill training, co-designed apprenticeship programmes and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) education can better align workforce abilities with evolving labour market needs.

Finally, the IMF report said, the role of foreign direct investment (FDI) cannot be overstated. Currently Bangladesh's FDI inflows remain very low compared to other peer developing economies, limiting opportunities for technology transfer, industrial diversification and job creation.

"Increasing FDI would bring new high-value markets into the economy and serve as a significant source of employment for youth, particularly in skill-intensive sectors."