

RUSSIAN ATTACKS

Nine killed across Ukraine

Historic monastery ablaze; 30 hurt; power cut in several areas of Kyiv

REUTERS

Four people were killed while the Kyiv Pechersk Lavra monastery, a symbol of Ukrainian spiritual and cultural history, caught fire, in the heaviest Russian air attack on the Ukrainian capital in two weeks, authorities said yesterday.

The fresh strikes came after Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said on Sunday he had spoken to US President Donald Trump and discussed efforts to achieve an end to the more than four-year conflict, ahead of a G7 meeting in France this week.

The central Kyiv Pechersk Lavra monastery, a Unesco World Heritage site founded in 1051, was seriously damaged in a direct attack, Tymur



Tkachenko, the head of the capital's military administration, said in a Telegram post.

"A Russian strike on the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra set the Dormition Cathedral on fire – a church whose history dates back to the 11th century. And this is one of Russia's most serious crimes against Christian culture to date," Zelensky said on X.

As towering flames rose over the monastery, residents took shelter underground in the worst Russian attack on Ukraine since early June when drones and missiles killed more than 20 people and left over 100 wounded.

Drones and missiles struck several high rise apartment buildings and damaged electricity lines, leaving some 140,000 residents without power, according to Kyiv authorities. Authorities later said power had been restored to most residents.

Ukraine's military yesterday morning said Russia had launched 70 missiles and 611 drones on Ukraine overnight and its air defense shot down 50 missiles and 582 drones of various types.



A man holds an Iranian flag in Tehran yesterday, after US and Iranian officials announced a deal to end their war and reopen the Strait of Hormuz. PHOTO: REUTERS

Trump edges toward Iran war exit, risks remain

Unresolved issues in 'memorandum of understanding' threaten broader talks within 60 days

REUTERS, Washington

With a framework agreement for peace with Iran, US President Donald Trump may have found a way to exit an unpopular war while easing global energy prices. Yet the deal falls short of many of his original goals, exposing him to criticism from party hawks and leaving the US strategically weaker than before the conflict.

Three months after launching attacks on Iran, Trump approved a "memorandum of understanding" marking the most significant breakthrough in talks. Iran agreed to reopen the Strait of Hormuz, potentially lowering US gasoline prices. The Pakistani-mediated deal, however, requires US concessions, including deferring talks on Iran's nuclear program – Trump's stated war objective.

Pressure to end the war has mounted as casualties rise, economic costs grow, and Trump's approval ratings drop ahead of midterm elections. The deal faces resistance from Washington hawks who warn of excessive concessions. Trump hailed the accord on social media, while Iran confirmed it, though both sides offered conflicting interpretations. The framework extends the ceasefire for 60 days to allow detailed negotiations.

Analysts warn the US may appear weakened, while Iran, though battered, retains leverage by controlling vital energy

supplies. Despite heavy strikes, Iran's government remains intact and more hardline, with its missile program and regional proxies still active. The MOU also leaves unresolved the fate of Iran's uranium stockpile, with vague commitments to dilute or destroy it.

Critics argue diplomacy could have achieved similar results without war. The deal's durability

Iran's arsenal. Though Trump touts Iran's pledge never to build a nuclear weapon, Tehran had long maintained such a stance under religious decree.

Ultimately, the preliminary deal may avert further conflict but leaves unresolved issues, persistent threats, and questions about whether the US gained more than it lost.

Several Republicans took to social media to hail Trump as the "deal-maker in chief". Congressman Robert Aderholt echoed Trump's claims that a pending deal with Iran would place more limits on Tehran's nuclear programme than the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

That deal, from which Trump withdrew in 2018, was reached under the administration of US President Barack Obama. It saw Tehran curtail its nuclear programme in exchange for sanctions relief. Tehran has for years maintained that it does not seek a nuclear weapon.

"Unlike the agreement reached under the Obama administration, this deal will not allow Iran to continue enriching uranium and build up the components necessary to build a nuclear weapon," Aderholt said.

US Vice President JD Vance pointed to falling oil prices in the immediate aftermath of the announcement as he touted what a "new era" for the Middle East.

➤ **US may exit war weaker, more precarious than before**

➤ **Despite losses, Iran retains leverage over vital oil waterway**

compared to the 2015 Obama accord remains uncertain. US officials insist sanctions relief will be gradual, while Iran expects upfront concessions, raising fears Trump may face accusations of funding Iran's ambitions.

The war has killed thousands, drained US resources, and strained alliances. Israel, Trump's wartime partner, refuses to join the MOU, while Gulf allies remain wary of

Ghalibaf seen as public face of post-Khamenei Iran

Iranian Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf has stepped into the spotlight as a central figure in the Islamic Republic's leadership following the death of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei during the US-Israeli war. A veteran of Iran's establishment for three decades, the 64-year-old former Revolutionary Guards commander and Tehran mayor has become the public face of both Iran's war effort and its diplomacy.

Ghalibaf led high-stakes negotiations that produced yesterday's agreement to halt hostilities, after surviving weeks of attacks that killed Khamenei, senior official Ali Larijani, and others. His first major public appearance came in April, when he headed Iran's delegation in Islamabad for talks with US Vice President JD Vance – the highest-level contact between the two nations since 1979. Images circulated by Iranian embassies showed him animated at the table, overshadowing Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi.

Analysts say Ghalibaf's prominence reflects both his ambition and Iran's uncertain leadership transition.

What we know about Iran-US deal to end war

AFP, Tehran

Iran and the United States have reached a landmark agreement to end nearly four months of war, setting the stage for 60 days of negotiations on Iran's nuclear programme and sanctions relief. Few official details have been released, but Iranian media have circulated what they claim are elements of a 14-point framework.

FROZEN ASSETS

According to Iran's Mehr news agency, the deal calls for a "permanent and immediate cessation of war on all fronts, including Lebanon."

It also provides for the release of \$24 billion in frozen Iranian assets, half of which would be made available before negotiations begin.

Sanctions on Iranian oil and petrochemical sales would be suspended, while the US would lift what Tehran describes as a naval blockade imposed since April 13 and withdraw forces from Iran's vicinity.

Deputy Foreign Minister Kazem Gharibabadi said talks would only start once Washington fulfills urgent commitments, including ending military operations and releasing blocked funds.

Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi pledged to disclose the framework's full details once finalized.

STRAIT OF HORMUZ DISPUTE

US President Donald Trump announced that the Strait of Hormuz would be open "toll free." Iranian media, however, reported that Tehran intends to reopen the waterway within 30 days under its own arrangements.

Fars news agency claimed Iran had secured the right to impose maritime service fees, a move Araghchi defended as legal under international norms. He emphasized that future arrangements would be coordinated with Oman, adding that Iran views the strait as a strategic "instrument of deterrence."

NUCLEAR PROGRAMME, SANCTIONS

The framework is intended as a precursor to 60 days of negotiations on key disputes, including Iran's nuclear programme.

Issues including Iran's enrichment activities, its stockpile of highly enriched uranium, and longstanding US and UN sanctions are expected to be discussed during that period.

Another issue to be discussed is post-war "reconstruction and economic development", according to Gharibabadi, although he did not elaborate.

He added that a mechanism ensuring compliance with the deal would also be discussed.

Araghchi said on Friday that Iran's preferred approach to its stockpile of highly enriched uranium would be "to dilute it inside Iran".

Yesterday, the New York Times reported on a phone interview with Trump in which he said talks were ongoing over whether Iran would suspend its enrichment for 20 years but hinted that he might settle for a 15-year suspension.

He also insisted that Iran's uranium enrichment levels could never be used by the military and that it "can never go beyond a certain amount".

WHAT'S MISSING?

It remains unclear whether the negotiations will address Iran's missile programme or its support for groups known collectively as the "Axis of Resistance" opposed to Israel.

Both issues have long been central concerns for Israel.

In its report, Mehr had said that Iran's "missile programme and support for resistance groups have been definitively removed from the agenda."



China links its military growth to world peace

Rejects think tank's Australia strike warning

AFP, Beijing

China said yesterday that strengthening its military is beneficial to world peace, slamming a think tank report that warned the threat of a direct strike by Beijing on Australia was increasing.

A Lowy Institute report said on Sunday that China is capable of a direct missile strike on Australia and the threat of such a move is growing as Beijing amasses long range and hypersonic weapons and builds islands in the South China Sea.

China's capacity to strike Australia would grow over the next decade as "the DF-27 intermediate range ballistic missile, and potentially a conventionally armed intercontinental ballistic missile, grow in service numbers", the Sydney-based group said.

China condemned the report's "serious strategic misjudgement" yesterday, saying it was committed to "a path of peaceful development".

"The growth of China's military strength represents an increase in the forces for world peace," foreign ministry spokesperson Lin Jian told reporters at a news briefing.

"China's development of military strength is intended to safeguard national sovereignty, security and

development interests and is not directed at any specific country," he added.

The report found the main threat to Australia was from Chinese missiles fired from ships, submarines and a new intermediate-range ballistic missile that could reach the island continent from China.

The DF-27 missile has a range of 5,000 to 8,000 kilometres (3,100 to 5,000 miles), the US military said in December.

The main threat to Australia was a new ballistic missile that could reach the island continent from China

The report said it was assessing Beijing's capability and not its intentions. Lin urged the "relevant institutions" yesterday to "stop hyping up the so-called China threat" and to view the country's development in an objective, fair and rational manner.

Australia reshaped its military strategy three years ago in response to China's rapid navy build-up and rising friction between Beijing and Washington, focusing on deterring an adversary from its northern approaches.



University students take part in a protest against government policies, including state budget spending, free meals programme, and expanded military roles in civilian affairs, in Jakarta, Indonesia, yesterday. PHOTO: REUTERS