

# Iran fires air defence batteries and diverts flights after explosions

**JERUSALEM, APR 19:** Iran fired air defence batteries Friday and some flights were diverted or grounded after reports of explosions near a major airbase and nuclear site where drones were spotted. It was unclear if the country was under attack, but tensions are high after Iran's unprecedented missile-and-drone attack on Israel. The Israeli military did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Israel has vowed to respond to Iran's unprecedented weekend attack, leaving the region bracing for further escalation after months of fighting in Gaza. Allies have urged Israel to hold back on any response to the attack that could spiral.

On Thursday, the United States vetoed a widely backed UN resolution that would have paved the way for full United Nations membership for a state of Palestine. The vote in the 15-member Security Council was 12 in favour, the US opposed, and two abstentions.

Separately, the US and Britain an-

nounced that they were imposing a new round of sanctions on Iran. The moves came as European Union leaders meeting in Brussels vowed to ramp up sanctions on Iran to target its drone and missile deliveries to proxies in Gaza, Yemen and Lebanon.

Regional tensions have increased since the start of the latest Israel-Hamas war on October 7, when Hamas and Islamic Jihad — two militant groups backed by Iran — carried out a cross-border attack that killed 1,200 people in Israel and kidnapped 250 others. Israel responded with an offensive in Gaza that has caused widespread devastation and killed more than 33,900 people, according to local health officials.

Currently:

— Iran fires air defence batteries in provinces as explosions heard near Isfahan.

— The US and Britain issue new sanctions on Iran in response to Tehran's weekend attack on Israel.

— NATO and the EU urge G7 nations to step up air defence for



Ukraine and expand Iran sanctions.

— The US vetoes a widely supported resolution backing full UN membership for Palestine.

— Palestinian soccer renews call for sanctions against Israel at FIFA congress amid Hamas conflict.

Here is the latest:

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — Iran fired air defence batteries early Friday morning at a major air base and a nuclear site near its central city of Isfahan over drones being spotted, raising fears of a possible Israeli re-

taliatory strike following Tehran's unprecedented drone-and-missile assault on the country.

It was unclear if the country was under attack, as no Iranian official directly acknowledged the possibility and Israel's military did not respond to a request for comment. However, tensions have remained high in the days since the Saturday assault on Israel amid its war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip and its own strikes targeting Iran in Syria. Air defences fired in several provinces over reports of drones being in the air, state television reported.

The facility at Isfahan operates three small Chinese-supplied research reactors, as well as handles fuel production and other activities for Iran's civilian nuclear program.

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — Dubai-based carriers Emirates and FlyDubai began diverting around western Iran about 4:30 am local time. They offered no explanation, though local warnings to aviators suggested the airspace may have been

closed.

Iran later announced it grounded commercial flights in Tehran and across areas of its western and central regions. Loudspeakers informed customers of the incident at Imam Khomeini International Airport in Tehran, online videos purported to show.

Iranian state television began a scrolling, on-screen alert acknowledging a "loud noise" near Isfahan, without immediately elaborating.

Hossein Dalirian, a spokesperson for Iran's civilian space program, said on the X social media platform that several small "quadcopter" drones had been shot down. A state television reporter in Isfahan said the same in a live report, saying "several small drones were flying in the sky over Isfahan, which were fired at."

Meanwhile in Iraq, where a number of Iranian-backed militias are based, residents of Baghdad reported hearing sounds of explosions, but the source of the noise was not immediately clear.

## CRPF jawan on poll duty killed in accidental explosion of grenade in Chhattisgarh

**BIJAPUR, APR 19:** A 32-year-old jawan of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) deployed on poll duty in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur district was killed on Friday when a shell of Under Barrel Grenade Launcher (UBGL) exploded accidentally, police said.

The incident took place near Galgam village under Usoor police station limits when a team of security personnel was out on an area domination operation half a kilometer away from a polling booth, said an official.

Bijapur district comes under the Bastar Lok Sabha constituency where voting is underway in the first phase of Lok Sabha elections.

The injured jawan, iden-



tified as constable Devendra Kumar of CRPF's 196th battalion, was shifted to Jagdalpur, headquarters of Bastar district, in an air ambulance helicopter and admitted to the

Medical College Hospital there.

But he succumbed to the injuries during treatment, the police official added.

A team of experts was sent to Galgam for investi-

gation into the explosion, he said.

Constable Kumar's last rites will be conducted in his native Dhobiguda village in Bastar district on Saturday, the official said.

## Two persons killed, seven others missing as boat capsizes in Odisha's Mahanadi River

**BHUBANESWAR, APR 19:** At least two persons were killed and seven others were missing as a boat they were travelling in capsized in Mahanadi River in Odisha's Jharsuguda district on Friday, police said.

The incident took place when the boat carrying around 50 passengers was going from Patharseni Kuda to Banjipalli in Bargarh district.

The boat capsized as it was about to reach Sarada Ghat in Rengali police station in Jharsuguda district, a police officer said.

Local fishermen have rescued 35 passengers and brought them to the bank, he said.

Later, police and fire



services personnel rescued seven more passengers, he said.

Seven other passengers are still missing and a

search operation has been launched, the police officer said.

Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik has announced

an ex-gratia amount of Rs 4 lakh for the next of kin of the deceased and five divers were sent for the rescue operation.

## LS polls 2024: Rahul calls for 'defeating hatred', Didi says 'battle for independence'

**NEW DELHI, APR 19:** An estimated 50 per cent turnout was recorded till 3 pm on Friday in the first phase of Lok Sabha elections covering 102 seats across 21 states and Union territories amid sporadic incidents of violence in West Bengal while an accidental explosion of a grenade launcher shell in Chhattisgarh left a CRPF jawan dead.

An Election Commission spokesperson said the turnout figure of 49.78 per cent was only approximate and polling was progressing "smoothly and peacefully".

Assembly elections are also being held simultaneously in Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim.

Among the voters were first-timers, many newlywed couples who came in their traditional attires, physically-challenged people and some elderly persons carried on stretchers and wheelchairs.

As polling began in the first phase of the Lok Sabha polls on Friday, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi urged voters to strengthen democracy and open 'Mohabbat ki Dukaan' in every corner of the country by defeating hatred.

"Today is the first phase of voting! Remember, each and every vote of yours is going to decide the future of India's democracy and its generations," Gandhi said in a post in Hindi on 'X'.

"Go out and strengthen democracy by applying the balm of your vote on the wounds inflicted on the soul of the country in the last 10 years," he said.

Meanwhile, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata



Banerjee on Friday accused the BJP of inciting violence during Ram Navami celebrations in the state and said the saffron camp only believes in bloodshed and violence to serve its political interests.

Addressing a rally at Hariharpara in minority-dominated Murshidabad district, Banerjee said the 2024 Lok Sabha polls are nothing less than a "second battle for the country's independence," as BJP's return to power for the third consecutive term would endanger the existence of the constitution and democracy.

She claimed that Ram Navami violence in Murshidabad district was "pre-planned" and accused the saffron party of orchestrating it ahead of the Lok Sabha polls.

Open 'Mohabbat Ki Dukaan' in every corner of the country by defeating hatred, the Congress leader added.

Minor EVM glitches were reported at some

booths in Tamil Nadu, Arunachal Pradesh, Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Assam.

Polling began at 7 AM and will end at 6 PM. Election officials said the turnout in West Bengal was 66.34 per cent till 3 pm and Meghalaya 62 per cent while six districts of eastern Nagaland wore a deserted look as people stayed indoors following an indefinite shutdown call by an apex body of tribal organisations to press for its demand for a separate state.

In West Bengal, polling was marred by violence in the Cooch Behar seat. TMC and BJP workers clashed with each other and lodged 80 and 39 complaints respectively related to poll violence, voter intimidation, and assault on poll agents, sources from both parties said.

In strife-torn Manipur, around 45.68 per cent polling was recorded.

An altercation broke out between locals and uniden-

tified persons in Thongju assembly constituency under the Inner Manipur Lok Sabha seat in Chhattisgarh, 58.14 per cent voters cast their votes in the Naxal-hit Bastar Lok Sabha constituency where the CRPF jawan after the grenade accidentally went off while an officer was injured in an IED blast in another incident.

In Tamil Nadu, where polling is spread over 39 constituencies, a voting percentage of over 40 per cent was recorded.

Voting was delayed by an hour in some polling booths in the state such as the one near Tambaram due to technical glitches in the electronic voting machines.

Arunachal Pradesh saw 53 per cent of the total 8,92,694 voters exercising their franchise. Though the turnout was moderate in the morning hours due to inclement weather, it gathered momentum with weather conditions improving.

In a few polling stations in the state, polling was delayed as the electronic voting machines (EVMs) developed technical snags which were later replaced, Chief Electoral Officer Pawan Kumar Sain said.

Supporters of two candidates clashed near a polling station in the Bameng constituency in East Kameng district, Inspector General of Police (Law & Order) Chukhu Apa said, adding the situation was brought under control and polling is continuing.

Incidents of EVM damage were also reported from three polling stations in East Kameng, Kurung Kumey and Upper Subansiri districts, the police officer said.

Andaman and Nicobar Islands saw a voting percentage of 45.4 per cent. There were some minor EVM glitches but it was addressed immediately, officials said.

For the first time in the Union territory, seven members of the Shompen tribe, a particularly vulnerable tribal group of Great Nicobar Islands voted for the lone Lok Sabha seat.

Assam also reported EVM malfunctioning at three polling booths of Bihpuria in Lakhimpur, one each in Hojai, Kaliabor and Bokakhat, and one in Naharkatia of Dibrugarh, an official said.

"Most of the glitches were noticed during the mock poll, which started 90 minutes before the commencement of actual voting. Those glitches were rectified immediately. Voting started sometime late in those booths and now it is going smoothly," officials said.

## Adultery can be a ground for divorce, not for granting custody of child: Bombay HC

**MUMBAI, APR 19:** Adultery can be a ground for divorce but not for granting custody of a child, the Bombay High Court said while granting custody of a nine-year-old girl to her mother.

A single bench of Justice Rajesh Patil on April 12 dismissed the petition filed by the man, son of a former legislator, challenging an order passed by the family court in February 2023 granting custody of his daughter to his estranged wife.

The couple tied the knot in 2010, and their daughter was born in 2015. In 2019, the woman claimed that she was removed from their home. The petitioner, however, alleged that his wife had left of her own volition.

The petitioner's counsel, Indira Jaising, submitted to the court that the woman had multiple affairs, and hence, it would not be proper to hand over the custody of the child to her.

Justice Patil noted that the allegations of adulterous behaviour would have no bearing or doubt while deciding the matter of the child's custody.

"Not being a good wife does not necessarily mean she is not a good mother. Adultery can be a ground for divorce, however, the same cannot be a ground for not granting custody," the court observed.

The man, in his plea, claimed that it was in the child's best interest to live with him and his parents, as she was not happy with her mother and there were some behavioural changes in her.

Jaising told the court that the authorities at the



girl's school had written emails to the petitioner's mother, raising concerns about her behaviour.

The high court, however, refused to accept this and questioned why the school got in touch with the paternal grandmother when the parents were well-educated.

It noted that the petitioner's mother was a former legislator aspiring to contest the Lok Sabha elections.

"According to me, the school authorities have no reason to inform about the issues relating to the girl to the grandmother, who is a politician, when both the parents of the child are available, well-educated, and in fact, the mother of the child is a doctor," the court said.

Justice Patil noted that the girl was only nine, which is a pre-puberty age, and in such custody matters, the court must consider the welfare of the child as paramount.

The girl was taken care of by her maternal grandmother, and her academic record during her custody with the mother was also good, he said.

"Therefore, according to me, there is no reason to change the custody from the wife to the husband," the court said.

The bench directed the petitioner to hand over his daughter's custody to the wife by April 21.

In 2020, the woman lodged a police complaint against her husband and her in-laws, alleging harassment, assault, and criminal intimidation. She claimed that her daughter was taken away from her.

The woman also filed a complaint under the Domestic Violence Act before a magistrate's court and an application before the family court seeking custody of her daughter.

The man also filed a petition in the family court seeking divorce from the woman and custody of the daughter.

In February 2023, the family court handed over custody of the girl to the mother and allowed access to the father.

However, in February this year, when the girl went to her father's residence for weekend access, he refused to hand the child over to the mother.