

Ahmedabad firecracker factory blast

Unit continued operations despite licence cancellation, 8 killed



GUJARAT, JULY 18: At least eight people were killed and several others injured after a powerful explosion ripped through a firecracker manufacturing unit in Ahmedabad's Ramol area on Friday. Preliminary investigations revealed that the factory had continued operations despite its licence being cancelled, raising serious concerns over regulatory en-

forcement and safety compliance. The blast caused extensive damage to the premises, trapping workers under debris and triggering a large-scale rescue operation by fire and emergency services. According to officials, the factory owner allegedly ignored the cancellation of the licence and continued manu-



facturing firecrackers illegally. Senior police officers said an FIR will be registered under the Explosives Act and other relevant provisions, while authorities investigate how the unit remained operational despite regulatory action. The injured have been admitted to nearby hospitals, and officials are working to identify the victims and determine the exact cause of

the explosion. The incident has once again highlighted concerns over illegal firecracker units and lapses in safety oversight. Authorities have assured strict legal action against those responsible and said the investigation will examine whether negligence or violations of safety norms contributed to the deadly blast.

Rahul Gandhi condemns Sonam Wangchuk's removal, accuses BJP of 'Asatya and Hinsa' politics

NEW DELHI, JULY 18: Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi on Saturday criticised the removal of climate activist and education reformer Sonam Wangchuk from the Jantar Mantar protest site, calling the action "wrong" and accusing the BJP-led government of following a path of "asatya (falsehood) and hinsa (violence)."

His remarks marked his first public response after Wangchuk was shifted to a hospital while observing an indefinite hunger strike. In a post on social media,



Gandhi said peaceful protest is a fundamental democratic right and alleged that silencing voices through force weakens democ-

ratic values. Wangchuk, who had been fasting for more than 20 days, was removed from the protest site by Delhi Police fol-

lowing medical advice and concerns over his deteriorating health. Authorities later asked other demonstrators to vacate the area to maintain public order. Maps

The incident has triggered political reactions, with several opposition leaders questioning the government's handling of the protest. Police have maintained that the decision to move Wangchuk to a hospital was taken to ensure his health and safety after medical experts warned of potential complications.

Ram Mandir donation scam probe widens, 50 staff members and land deals under scanner

NEW DELHI, JULY 18: The investigation into the alleged Ram Mandir donation scam has widened, with authorities extending their probe beyond the eight people already arrested to examine the role of temple staff, Trust-linked officials and land transactions.

Investigators are scrutinising nearly 50 employees and functionaries associated with the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust to determine whether there were irregularities in the handling of donations or if any individuals amassed assets disproportionate to their known sources of income.

Officials are also reviewing property records and financial transactions linked to those under scrutiny as part of an effort to trace the flow of funds and identify any



possible misuse of donations.

The Special Investigation Team (SIT) is expected to revisit Ayodhya to question additional Trust functionaries and examine whether procedural lapses or collusion contributed to the alleged em-

bezzlement.

Authorities have maintained that the investigation remains ongoing and that all leads are being pursued.

Investigators have not announced any fresh arrests so far, but officials said further action will depend on the ev-

idence gathered during the expanded probe.

The case has attracted significant public attention, with authorities emphasising their commitment to ensuring transparency and accountability in the management of temple donations.

'US Violated All Commitments': Iran Suspends Ceasefire MoU As Conflict Escalates

IRAN, JULY 18: Iran has announced that it is suspending its commitments under the Islamabad Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), accusing the United States of violating the agreement first. Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister Kazem Gharibabadi said Tehran had decided to halt the implementation of its obligations after Washington allegedly failed to honour its commitments under the pact. The US has violated and suspended all its commitments within the framework of the Islamabad MOU," Gharibabadi said in a

statement carried by the Fars news agency. He added, "We have also suspended our commitments; we are not implementing them, and we are busy defending the country." (The announcement comes days after US President Donald Trump signalled that Washington no longer considered the agreement effective. Speaking to reporters alongside NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte ahead of the NATO summit, Trump said, "To me, I think it's over. I don't want to deal with them." He further criticised Iran's leadership, saying,

"They're scum. They're sick people. They're led by sick people. As far as I'm concerned, it's just a waste of time dealing with them." Pakistan has urged Iran and the United States to abide by the Islamabad Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) and avoid further escalation, hours after Tehran announced the suspension of its commitments under the agreement. Pakistan's Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar said the understanding reached between the two countries must be honoured and stressed the need to prevent the situation from worsening.

US, Iran trade strikes over Strait of Hormuz; Kuwait suffers infrastructure damage

DUBAI, JUL 18: The United States and Iran exchanged strikes aimed at infrastructure and military targets on Saturday as their battle over the Strait of Hormuz intensified.

The region has endured days of back-and-forth attacks in a conflict increasingly focused on control of the strait, an essential waterway that used to carry a fifth of the world's crude oil. The collapse of an interim ceasefire leaves no clear end in sight for the war that the US and Israel began more than four months ago.

The US Central Command said early Saturday that its seventh straight night of strikes had hit "surveillance sites, military logistics infrastructure, underground weapons storage, and maritime capabilities."

The most significant damage on Saturday occurred in Kuwait after Iran struck a water desalination plant and an oil facility, according to the Kuwait authorities and the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation. Both declined to provide locations.

The strikes injured several people at the oil facility and caused a fire at the desalination plant, forcing several power generation units offline. It was the second attack against a desalination plant in two days in the tiny desert nation, which depends on desalination for 90 per cent of its drinking water.

Several firefighters and a worker were injured while battling two other blazes

sparked by Iranian strikes, according to the Kuwait Fire Force.

Kuwait briefly closed its airspace in the morning due to missile threats, and Kuwait Airways said it was rescheduling most flights to and from the capital.

Iran targets several Mideast nations

Iraq said it shot down attack drones over the city of Irbil. Jordan's state-run Petra news agency said that the kingdom's air defence systems had downed Iranian missiles, while air sirens sounded multiple times in Bahrain, according to the government.

Iranian officials say recent US strikes have killed dozens of people and wounded hundreds in Iran. The US military also acknowledged that several more service members were injured.

Iran effectively closed the strait to shipping traffic after the war started February 28. That sent the price of oil soaring and gave Iran significant leverage in negotiations. The price of oil rose Friday above USD 86 a barrel, close to its highest level in a month, as crossings through the strait fell to a three-week low, according to an international shipping tracker. In an address to the American public on Thursday evening, Trump insisted the war was going well. "We are likewise winning big in Iran, and you will see the fruits of that labour very, very shortly," he said. Before the war began, the US had been

in talks with Iran over its nuclear program. Trump now faces political pressure to bring the war to a close and avoid the kind of prolonged Middle East conflict he had campaigned against.

US airstrikes hit an electricity and desalination plant in Iran's southern Hormozgan province, Iranian state television reported. The attacks hit Bonji, a village on Iran's coast on the Strait of Hormuz.

Overnight strikes damaged two tunnels and a bridge, disrupting one of the main highways towards Bandar Abbas, a city which sits near the narrowest part of the Strait of Hormuz, according to Iran's state-run news agency. Iran also reported strikes on the strategic Qeshm Island inside the Strait.

The previous day, Iranian state media reported that the US hit highways and railway bridges, seemingly aimed at cutting off Bandar Abbas, Iran's main port, from roads leading into the Islamic Republic's central region onward to Tehran, the capital.

Iran acknowledged "attacks on power infrastructure" during the US airstrike campaign for the first time Friday when its Energy Ministry issued a call for people to use less power in southern provinces "experiencing extreme heat." The ministry did not specify what was hit.

Iranian authorities said at least 50 people have been killed and more than 500 wounded in US strikes in the

past three weeks, including eight killed in a strike on a bridge Friday.

The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps on Saturday stepped up its warning that countries hosting U.S. forces should be "prepared to receive a corresponding response," according to Iran's State TV, as pro-Iranian protesters continued their nightly demonstrations in the capital, as they have done for more than 100 days.

US officials acknowledged 13 additional US service members — 10 Army soldiers and three Navy sailors — had been injured since Monday, but offered no further details. Since the war began, 14 US service members have been killed and 427 wounded.

Iran has said the strait must be under its sole control and that vessels should pay fees to Tehran — even though the world for decades has considered it an international waterway.

Trump has returned in recent days to his threats to target Iranian power stations and bridges to try to compel Iran to loosen its hold on the strait, through which about a fifth of all oil and natural gas traded once passed in peacetime. The US also reimposed a naval blockade on Iranian ports to halt its shipments of crude oil. A growing amount of the region's energy is being shipped through pipelines, but not nearly enough to offset the decline in shipping through the strait.

Trump blames Canada for wildfire smoke, threatens additional tariffs over pollution costs

WASHINGTON, JULY 18: US President Donald Trump has blamed Canada for the wildfire smoke drifting across parts of the United States and warned that his administration will add the "cost" of the pollution to existing tariffs on Canadian goods. In a social media post, Trump accused Canada of poor forest management and described the smoke affecting several American cities as "filthy, polluted and unhealthy." He said the additional costs would be factored into ongoing trade measures against Canada.

The remarks come as dense smoke from large wildfires in Canada continues to spread across the US Midwest and Northeast, prompting air quality alerts and health advisories in multiple states. Canadian officials have defended their



wildfire response, highlighting investments in prevention, emergency management and cross-border firefighting cooperation. Experts have also pointed to cli-

mate change as a major factor behind the growing intensity and frequency of wildfires.

Trump's latest comments add to ongoing trade tensions between the two neigh-

bouring countries, with both sides already engaged in tariff disputes. The proposed move is expected to further strain US-Canada relations as wildfire season continues.

Ukrainian drone strikes kill seven warehouse workers, trigger fire at oil depot in Russia

UKRAINE, JULY 18: At least seven warehouse workers were killed and more than two dozen others injured after waves of Ukrainian drone attacks struck Russia's Tambov region, while another strike sparked a fire at an oil depot near Moscow, Russian authorities said on Saturday.

The dead were working the night shift at a warehouse owned by Wildberries, Russia's largest online retailer, in the city of Kotovsk. Regional officials said air defence systems intercepted several drones, but some reached their targets.

Tambov Governor Evgeniy Pervyshov said 25 people were injured in the warehouse attack, while another drone strike caused a blaze at an oil depot in Noginsk, east of Moscow. Two people were reportedly injured in the oil depot incident, and a nearby maternity



hospital was evacuated as a precaution. Emergency crews were deployed to contain the fire and assess the damage.

The attacks are part of

Ukraine's continuing campaign targeting Russian infrastructure deep inside the country, while Russia has intensified missile and drone strikes across Ukraine. The

latest exchange underscores the escalating cross-border conflict, with both sides increasingly targeting strategic economic and logistical facilities.