

Trump backs away from further conflict after Iran hits U.S. troops

Attack was in retaliation for the American killing of its top General in Iraq

REUTERS
BAGHDAD/WASHINGTON/DUBAI

U.S. President Donald Trump said on Wednesday that Iranian missile strikes on bases in Iraq had not harmed any U.S. troops stationed there and damage was minimal, an outcome he said showed Tehran wanted to prevent an escalation into conflict.

Iranian forces fired missiles at military bases housing U.S. troops in Iraq early on Wednesday, saying it was in retaliation for the killing in a U.S. drone strike of powerful Iranian commander Qassem Soleimani on January 3.

“All of our soldiers are safe and only minimal damage was sustained at our military bases,” Mr. Trump said. “Iran appears to be standing down, which is a good thing for all parties concerned and a very good thing for the world.”

“The fact that we have this great military and equipment, however, does not mean we have to use it. We do not want to use it,” the U.S. President said in an address, flanked by Vice-President Mike Pence, Defense Secretary Mark Esper and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and military officers.

He urged world powers to quit a 2015 nuclear accord with Iran that Washington withdrew from in 2018 and



Striking back: An explosion at a military base housing U.S. troops in Iraq after Iran fired missiles. ■ IRAN PRESS/REUTERS

work for a new deal, an issue that has been at the heart of rising tensions between Washington and Tehran. Iran has rejected new talks.

‘Big retreat from threats’

There was no immediate reaction from Iranian officials to Mr. Trump’s comments. The semi-official Fars news agency described the U.S. President’s remarks as a “big retreat from threats”.

Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who

earlier in the day addressed a gathering of Iranians chanting “Death to America”, said Iran’s attacks were a “slap on the face” of the U.S. and said U.S. troops should leave the region.

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif had said the strikes “concluded” Tehran’s response to the killing of Soleimani, who was responsible for building up Iran’s network of proxy armies across the Middle East. He was buried in his hometown

Will end U.S. presence in West Asia: Iran

“America’s corrupt presence must come to an end in this region,” Iran’s Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said in a live broadcast on state television. “If America has committed a crime... it should know that it will receive a decisive response. They cut off the hand of our dear Soleimani. The revenge for him is to cut off America’s feet from this region,” President Hassan Rouhani said. ▶ PAGE 14

Kerman on Monday after days of national mourning.

Iranian state television said Iran had fired 15 ballistic missiles from its territory at U.S. targets in Iraq.

The Pentagon said al-Asad air base and another facility in Erbil, Iraq, were struck. Iranian television had said 80 “American terrorists” had been killed, without saying how it obtained this information.

FROM THE BRINK OF WAR
▶ EDITORIAL
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Ukrainian plane crash in Iran kills all 176 on board; no hint of foul play

Victims are mostly Iranians, Canadians; Ukraine warns against speculation

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
TEHRAN

A Ukrainian airliner crashed shortly after take-off from Tehran on Wednesday killing all 176 on board, mainly Iranians and Canadians.

Search and rescue teams were combing through the smoking wreckage of the Boeing 737 flight from Tehran to Kiev but officials said there was no hope of finding anyone alive.

The vast majority of the passengers on the Ukraine International Airlines (UIA) flight were non-Ukrainians, including 82 Iranians and 63 Canadians, officials said.

The crash occurred amid high tensions in West Asia and shortly after Tehran launched missiles at bases in Iraq housing U.S. troops. But there was no immediate indication of foul play and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky warned against “speculating” on the cause of the disaster.

U.S. imposes flying ban

The U.S. aviation authority said it had banned U.S.-registered carriers from flying over Iraq, Iran and the Gulf, and airlines, including Lufthansa and Air France, suspended flights through the Iraqi and Iranian airspace.



Fatal flight: Rescue personnel shifting the body of a plane crash victim from a farmland at Shahriar near Iranian capital Tehran on Wednesday. ■ AP/PTI

UIA, the ex-Soviet country’s privately owned flagship carrier, said flight PS752 took off from the Tehran airport at 6.10 a.m. and disappeared from radars just two minutes later. It slammed into a farmland at Khalaj Abad in Shahriar county, about 45 km northwest of the airport, Iranian state media said.

Footage released by the Iranian state media showed a field on fire and the smoldering wreck of the plane. Rescue workers carried body bags, and the passengers’

personal items – including luggage, clothes, a Santa Claus doll and a boxing glove – were scattered in the debris.

Students among victims

The passengers included 10 Swedes, four Afghans, three Germans and three Britons, Ukraine’s Foreign Minister said. Eleven Ukrainians, including the nine crew, were on board. At least 25 were under the age of 18.

Iran’s semi-official news agency ISNA said 13 of the

passengers were students from Tehran’s Sharif University, the most prestigious in the country.

Iran’s civil aviation authority said the airliner’s two black boxes had been found but it would not hand them over to Boeing or U.S. authorities. The airline said the Boeing 737 was built in 2016 and checked only two days before the accident. It was Kiev-based UIA’s first fatal crash.

WON’T GIVE BLACK BOXES TO U.S. OR BOEING: IRAN ▶ PAGE 14

NEARBY

Strike by unions evokes partial response in Delhi

NEW DELHI
The strike by industrial workers, bank employees and students on Wednesday against the anti-labour policies of the government and the CAA evoked a partial response in Delhi.
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DU students march against JNU violence

Police have not yet identified the masked perpetrators or made any arrests related to the attack



DU students during a protest on Wednesday.
■ SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Thousands of Delhi University students took to the streets on Wednesday in support of JNU students and teachers, who were brutally beaten by masked attackers on Sunday, and also demanded the scrapping of the CAA-NRC-NPR regime.

As demands for bringing the masked perpetrators to justice continued, the stand-off in JNU is expected to continue with the Central govern-

ment showing no indication of removing Vice-Chancellor M. Jagadeesh Kumar from the post as demanded by students.

A government statement claimed that “about 3,300 students” had registered for the upcoming winter semester, which is less than half of JNU’s total strength of 8,700 students. The date by which students can register has been extended till January 12 even as no exams have been held for the semester gone by.

The Delhi police continued to treat Sunday’s attack as a “clash” between two student groups, prompting JNUSU to tweet, “For the last time, what happened on Sunday night was no ‘clash’. It was a brutal attack, an assault, an act of terrorism on students and teachers assembled for a peace march. Such wording only goes on to obfuscate facts and distort the truth.” Till Wednesday night, the Delhi police had not identified any of the masked attackers

or make any arrests. A police official told *The Hindu* that a total of 11 complaints had been received – seven “from the Left” and three from ABVP – but no fresh FIRs had been registered.

In her complaint, JNUSU president Aishe Ghosh, who suffered grievous head injuries, stated that she had been attacked by a mob of 20-30 persons, who used filthy language about her.

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Bihar shelter home girls alive: CBI to apex court

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Thirty-five girls believed to have been murdered in the Muzaffarpur shelter home sexual abuse case had been found to be alive, the CBI told the Supreme Court on Wednesday.

Allegations about the ‘murders’ had first surfaced last year in the statements of girls rescued from the shelter home run by kingpin Brajesh Thakur in Bihar. The CBI had also found that the

names of these had mysteriously disappeared from the *balikagarh* (girls’ home).

In March 2019, the agency told the court that 35 girls with identical or similar names had indeed lived in the shelter home at one point of time or the other. On Wednesday, Attorney-General K.K. Venugopal, for the CBI, said the agency had tracked each and every one of the 35 girls.

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Cabinet nod for FDI in coal mining

Ordinance to ease rules approved

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved an ordinance to amend two laws to ease mining rules, enabling foreign direct investment in coal mining.

At a Cabinet meeting chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the ordinance to amend the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957, and Coal Mines (Special Provisions) Act, 2015, was approved, Parliamentary Affairs and Coal Minister Pralhad Joshi said at a press conference.

Mr. Joshi said the “historic” decision would boost the ease of doing business and increase growth avenues for coal mining. Coal India, he said, would be strengthened and the government was aiming to achieve production of 1 billion tonnes of coal by 2023-2024. Mr. Joshi said “end-use restrictions” had been done away with, allowing “anyone to participate in the auction of coal blocks”. The ordinance would strengthen the auction process of mines whose leases are expiring on

March 31, 2020. Seamless transfer of clearances would also be facilitated, he said. Petroleum and Natural Gas and Steel Minister Dharmendra Pradhan said the steel industry would get cheaper inputs, leading to an increase in “competitiveness”.

The Centre has also given in-principle approval for the strategic disinvestment of Neelachal Ispat Nigam Ltd by allowing its public sector shareholders to sell their stakes in the company. The strategic buyer will be identified through a two-stage auction procedure. According to an official statement, the decision was taken at a meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs, held on Wednesday.

“It is also expected that the successful strategic buyer may bring in new management/technology/investment for the growth of the company and may use innovative methods for the development of the business operations of the company, which may generate more employment opportunities,” it added.

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