

MUSTREAD

Currently no plans to buy additional F-35 jets, Berlin says

Berlin: Germany currently has no plans to purchase additional F-35 fighter jets, a government spokesperson said on Thursday, after sources said Berlin was considering ordering more of the planes, which are made by U.S. contractor Lockheed Martin (LMT.N), opens new tab. "There are no plans, and there is no decision," the spokesperson said. One source said earlier that Berlin was in talks that could lead to the purchase of more than 35 additional jets. A second source did not specify the number. Both sources cautioned that the outcome was still uncertain.

One killed, nine children wounded in shooting

Mexican City: Nine minors and two adults were wounded, and another adult was killed in an armed attack at a park in the Mexican city of San Francisco del Rincon, the newspaper Milenio reported, citing local authorities. According to the report, the ages of the wounded minors range from five to 16 years. The Excelsior newspaper reported that no information on suspects has been released and notes that the state of Guanajuato, where the attack occurred, has experienced systematic security problems in recent years.

Austrian President backs longer conscription

Vienna: Alexander Van der Bellen has voiced support for extending Austria's compulsory military service and reinstating reservist training, citing growing geopolitical challenges. In January, a military service commission recommended increasing mandatory service from six to eight months. As Supreme Commander-in-Chief, Van der Bellen endorsed the proposal, saying the move would strengthen soldier safety and improve training standards for the federal army. "Austria needs a modern and combat-ready army," he wrote on X on Wednesday. He also backed the commission's proposal to reintroduce a two-month reservist training program. Separately, Chancellor Christian Stocker in late January called for reform of the military service system and proposed a nationwide survey on the future of Austria's armed forces.

Drought deepens hunger in northern Kenya as aid cuts bite

Turkana, Kenya: Four years after a record drought devastated northern Kenya, failed rains are once again causing starvations, with aid cuts forcing agencies to scale back their efforts and feed fewer people. In the barren plains of Turkana county, 76-year-old widowed grandmother Echakan Amaja sits outside her mud hut in Loperot village, surviving on foraged gingerbread fruit and the scant aid rations she can get her hands on. The family's difficulties have mounted after her son was killed a fortnight ago in a cattle rustling raid while herding animals. All their livestock was stolen in the raid. "When my livestock were stolen by bandits, all my grandchildren came back home," Amaja told Reuters, explaining how she now has the responsibility for feeding her five daughters and seven grandchildren.

Questions mount over CTD encounter killings in Balochistan

Balochistan, Pakistan: The Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) has reported that six armed men were killed during an intelligence-led raid in Barkhan, claiming that security forces remained unharmed in the exchange of fire. However, the incident has triggered renewed controversy after some of the deceased were identified as previously missing persons, as reported by The Balochistan Post. According to the Balochistan Post, CTD officials stated that the operation was launched after receiving confidential information about the presence of armed suspects in the area. Authorities said that when personnel moved in, a gun battle ensued, resulting in six fatalities. The bodies were later transferred to Rakhni Hospital for legal procedures. The department maintained its position that the deceased were militants killed during an armed confrontation.

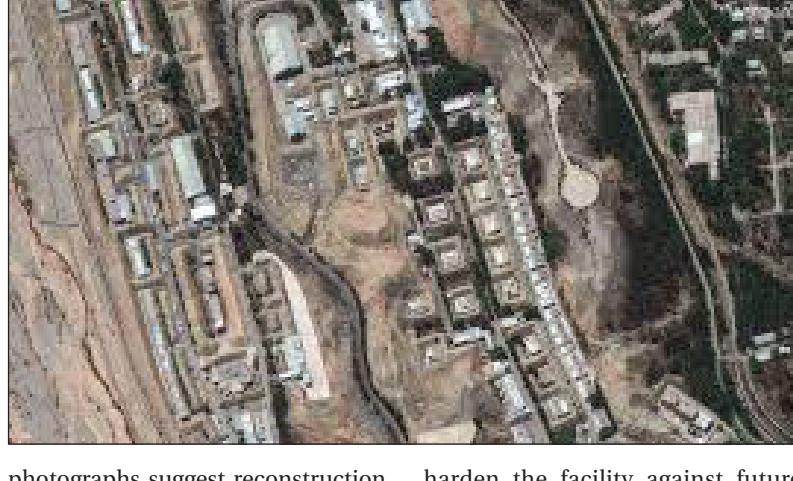
Satellite images reveal Iran strengthening sensitive military-nuclear sites

Tehran (UNI)

Recent satellite imagery has revealed new construction and fortification efforts at several sensitive Iranian military and nuclear sites, highlighting rising tensions with Washington and Jerusalem as nuclear negotiations continue under the shadow of potential military escalation.

Experts analysing the images say Iran has erected a concrete shield over a newly developed facility at the Parchin military complex, subsequently covering it with layers of soil in what appears to be a protective measure. The work is taking place at a site reportedly struck by Israel in October 2024, according to regional security sources.

Imagery shows that prior to the reported Israeli strike, a large rectangular building at Parchin stood intact. Post-strike images indicated extensive structural damage. Recent



photographs suggest reconstruction is underway, including reinforced overhead protection. Analysts interpret the addition of concrete shielding and earth cover as an attempt to

harden the facility against future airstrikes, as per sources.

Located roughly 30 kilometres southeast of Tehran, Parchin has long been regarded as one of Iran's

most sensitive military sites.

Western intelligence agencies have previously alleged that Iran conducted experiments directly linked to nuclear weaponisation two-decades ago, though Tehran has consistently denied the claim, maintaining that its nuclear programme is strictly peaceful, something made heavily doubtful amid the massive 60% nuclear enrichment in Tehran's uranium deposits.

Satellite analysis has also highlighted activity at the Isfahan nuclear facility complex, one of three uranium-enrichment facilities bombed by the US during Israel's 12-day conflict with Iran last year in June.

In addition to housing facilities linked to the nuclear fuel cycle, Isfahan contains underground infrastructure where diplomats believe a significant portion of Iran's enriched uranium stockpile has been stored.

US military strikes on Iran could be imminent



Washington (UNI)

A US military operation against Iran could be imminent if Tehran continues to reject President Donald Trump's demands in ongoing negotiations. Though President Donald Trump has yet to make a final decision on whether he'll authorize such actions.

The White House has been briefed that the military could be ready for an attack by the weekend, after a significant buildup in recent days of air and naval assets in the Middle East, the sources said. But one source cautioned that Trump has privately argued both for and against military action and polled advisers and allies on what the best

course of action is.

The massive US military buildup in the Middle East indicates that the United States may be ready to initiate a bombing campaign against Iran, as the number of US military personnel currently stationed in the region is sufficient for a large-scale operation that could last for several weeks. More than 150 military transport flights have delivered weapons and ammunition to the region in recent days, the report said.

The probability of a US military operation against Iran in the coming weeks stands at 90%, Axios reported, citing an unnamed adviser to President Trump.

The War Zone, citing open-source flight tracking data, reported that U-2 Dragon Lady reconnaissance aircraft, F-16 Fighting Falcon and F-22 Raptor fighters, as well as E-3 Sentry airborne early warning aircraft, have been crossing the Atlantic or have recently arrived in Europe.

California man convicted of USD 1.2 million fraud scheme targeting Optum

Minneapolis: A California man has been found guilty of orchestrating a years-long fraud scheme that siphoned more than \$1.2 million from Optum, Inc., federal prosecutors announced Wednesday.

US Attorney Daniel N. Rosen of the District of Minnesota said that Karan Gupta, 47, was convicted following a six-day jury trial in US District Court in Minneapolis.

The jury found Gupta guilty of one count of conspiracy to commit wire fraud, 10 counts of wire fraud, and one count of money laundering conspiracy.

The case was presided over by US District Court Judge Kate M. Menendez.

According to court documents and trial evidence, Gupta served as a senior director of data analytics at Optum, a subsidiary of UnitedHealth Group headquartered in Minnesota.

Washington (UNI)

The US may just be edging closer to a potential war-like scenario with Iran, which, as per officials within the Donald Trump administration, could unfold far sooner than the majority of the American public's expectations.

A US military operation targeting Iran would likely resemble a sustained, weeks-long campaign rather than a limited strike, according to sources familiar with internal deliberations. Unlike last month's targeted action in Venezuela, any move against Tehran would be broader in scope and could amount to a full-fledged war.

As per Axios, officials said this would likely involve close coordination with Israel and extend beyond narrow objectives to strike at core el-

US imposes visa sanctions on Iranian officials over protest crackdown



Washington (UNI)

The United States announced new visa restrictions on Thursday, targeting Iranian officials and telecommunications leaders accused of suppressing the Iranian people's right to free expression during nationwide protests late last year.

According to an official statement, the action comes in response to the Iranian regime's violent crackdown on widespread protests in December 2025 and January 2026.

US officials said Iranian authorities used force against tens of thousands of peaceful demonstrators and imposed a near-total nationwide internet shutdown, severely limiting independent reporting and isolating citizens from the outside world.

The visa restrictions, imposed under Section 212(a)(3)(C) of the Immigration and Nationality Act, were authorized by Secretary of State Marco Rubio.

The measures apply to 18 Iranian regime officials and telecommunications industry leaders, along with their immediate family members.

Russian-Dutch trade hit harder by sanctions: Russian Ambassador

Moscow: Trade between Russia and the Netherlands has suffered more than other sectors from the EU's anti-Russian sanctions, Russian Ambassador to The Hague Vladimir Tarabrin told RIA Novosti.

"Trade has become the most affected sector due to the severance of ties with our country and the imposition of unilateral EU sanctions. Let me provide some figures."

In 2024, bilateral trade amounted to 5 billion euros [\$5.9 billion], whereas in 2019 it stood at 41.4 billion euros [\$48.8 billion], and at its peak in 2012 amounted to 82.7 billion euros [\$97.5 billion]," Tarabrin said.

The energy sector, mechanical engineering, and the financial sphere have suffered the most significant damage from European restrictions, he added.

"It is in these industries that supplies and practical cooperation with the Russian side have been almost completely halted," the ambassador said.

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elements of Iran's military and nuclear infrastructure.

Such a conflict would carry sweeping consequences for the Middle East and could shape the remainder of Trump's presidency. Yet with Congress and much of the public focused on domestic political battles, there has been little sustained debate in Washington about what could become the most consequential US military intervention in the region in more than a decade.

Earlier this year, Trump reportedly came close to authorising strikes against Iran following the killing of thousands of protesters by security forces.

France pledges support for UN humanitarian reforms in call with UN official

Paris: France's Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs, Jean-Noël Barrot, spoke on Thursday with UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Tom Fletcher, reaffirming Paris's commitment to international humanitarian law and the protection of civilians.

Barrot praised the efforts of French NGOs, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), and the International Committee of the Red Cross, highlighting the importance of safeguarding humanitarian workers and ensuring safe, unhindered access for aid operations worldwide.

The two officials discussed major global humanitarian crises and agreed to continue collaboration to assist populations in conflict zones.

Supporters of former South Korean President protest outside Court building



Seoul (UNI/Sputnik)

Supporters of former South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol have gathered outside the court building where he was sentenced to life imprisonment and are continuing to protest, with police cordoning off nearby alleys, a Sputnik correspondent reported on Thursday.

Earlier in the day, the Seoul police

UK condemns 10-year sentence for British couple in Iran

London: British foreign minister Yvette Cooper on Thursday condemned as "totally unjustifiable" the 10-year sentence given to a British couple in Iran for spying, saying the government would continue to press for their release.

Craig and Lindsay Foreman had been charged with espionage after Iran accused them of gathering information in several parts of the country.

"We will pursue this case relentlessly with the Iranian government until we see Craig and Lindsay Foreman safely returned to the UK and reunited with their family," Cooper said in a statement.

The Foremans were arrested on January 3 of last year while travelling through Iran on a global motorcycle journey.

Bangladesh PM directs ministers to prioritise national interest

Dhaka (UNI)

Post appointment of ministers, Bangladesh's newly-elected PM Tarique Rahman has directed all cabinet ministers and state ministers to prioritise the best interests of the people.

He gave the directives while presiding over his first cabinet meeting at the Secretariat, said State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shama Obaid Islam in a meeting with reporters after the meeting, adding that Rahman's directive primarily focused on the mandate entrusted to the government by the people.

Saying that the prime minister's instructions centred on serving citizens "faithfully and wholeheartedly," in line with the commitments made during the campaign, quoting Rahman, Islam said, "we have been elected by the people to stand by their side and serve them faithfully."

Rahman emphasised that each minister must carry out its duties diligently and comprehensively, ensuring that governance remains people-focused rather than bureaucratic, reports The Daily Star.

Venezuela, US agree to develop cooperation plan on drug trafficking: Vice President

Carcass: Venezuela and the United States have agreed to begin work on a bilateral cooperation agenda to combat drug trafficking and address migration issues following a visit by US Southern Command Gen. Francis Donovan, Communications and Information Minister Miguel Angel Perez Pirela said.

"During the meeting, both countries agreed to work on developing a bilateral cooperation agenda to combat illicit drug trafficking in our region, migration and other issues," Perez Pirela wrote on X.

Hamas tightens grip in Gaza as Trump pushes peace plan



Agencies, Cairo/Jerusalem

Hamas is cementing its hold over Gaza by placing loyalists in key government roles, collecting taxes and paying salaries, according to an Israeli military assessment seen by Reuters and sources in the Palestinian enclave.

Hamas' continuing influence over key Gaza power structures has fuelled widespread scepticism about the prospects of US President Donald Trump's peace plan, which requires the militant group to give up its weapons in exchange for an Israeli military withdrawal from the territory.

Trump's International Board of Peace, which is meant to supervise Gaza's transitional governance, is

holding its inaugural meeting in Washington on Thursday.

"Hamas is advancing steps on the ground meant to preserve its influence and grip in the Gaza Strip 'from the bottom up' by means of integrating its supporters in government offices, security apparatuses and local authorities," the military said in a document presented to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in late January.

Hamas says it is ready to hand over administration of the enclave to a U.S.-backed committee of Palestinian technocrats headed by Ali Shaath, a former Palestinian Authority official in the occupied West Bank. But it says Israel has not yet allowed committee members to enter Gaza to assume their responsibilities.

Netanyahu did not respond to Reuters' questions about Hamas' control over Gaza. An Israeli government official, speaking on condition of anonymity, dismissed any notion of a future role for the group as "twisted fantasy," saying, "Hamas is finished as a governing authority in the Gaza Strip."