

India sends 2.5 tonnes of emergency aid to Kabul following deadly airstrike

NEW DELHI, Mar 21 (ANI)

IN A humanitarian response to the devastating Pakistani airstrike on a drug rehabilitation centre in Kabul, India has delivered a 2.5-tonne consignment of emergency medicines, medical disposables, kits, and equipment to support the treatment and recovery of those injured in the attack in Afghanistan.

“To support the medical treatment and swift recovery of those injured in the heinous attack on 16 March, India delivers a 2.5-ton consignment of emergency medicines, medical disposables, kits and equipment to Kabul. India stands in solidarity with the Afghan people and will continue to extend all possible humanitarian support in this difficult hour,” Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal wrote on X.

The airstrike, carried out by Pakistani military forces on the night of March 16, struck a rehabilitation centre in Kabul, killing more than 400 people and injuring over 250, according to Afghan officials and local media reports. Many of the victims were patients and staff present at the centre at the time of the strike, which caused massive destruction.

Emergency teams rushed to the site, and hospitals across Kabul have been overwhelmed with casualties. The attack has become one of the deadliest single strikes on civilians in Afghanistan in recent years.

The attack has drawn widespread international condemnation. The United Nations Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in Afghanistan, Richard Bennett, expressed deep concern over the civilian deaths and urged both Kabul and Islamabad to respect international humanitarian law. The International Human Rights Foundation called



for an independent international investigation to hold those responsible accountable.

Relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan are already tense due to repeated cross-border operations. Some earlier incidents involved women and children in border provinces, which led to protests and condemnation inside Afghanistan.

Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid issued a stern warning to Pakistan, indicating that “the time for diplomacy with Pakistan is over and that the attack must be avenged,” raising concerns over potential escalation in the region.

Meanwhile, Pakistan had decided on a “temporary pause” in the ongoing Operation Ghazal-Haq against the Afghan Taliban in view of Eid al-Fitr and at the “request of brotherly Islamic countries,” Information Minister Ataullah Tarar announced on Wednesday.

Tarar said the pause would be applicable from “midnight March 18/19 to midnight March 23/24,” Dawn reported.

Shortly after the announcement, the Afghan Taliban also declared a temporary suspension of its military operation against Pakistan, ‘Dawn’ reported.

Afghan Taliban spokesperson

Aid agency says over 1,15,000 Afghans displaced amid Pakistan’s attacks

OSLO, Mar 21 (IANS)

THE Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) warned that over 1,15,000 people have been displaced in Afghanistan, with civilians facing worsening humanitarian conditions following the conflict between the Taliban and Pakistan.

“Families who were already on the brink of survival have been forced from their homes. Thousands have found refuge in makeshift camps and with local families. Others are being forced to rent substandard accommodation they can little afford. They have lost access to ‘clean water, health services, and, schooling,’ said Jacopo Caridi, Director of the NRC in Afghanistan.

Zabihullah Mujahid said the decision was made in response to requests from brotherly Islamic countries, including Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Qatar, Dawn reported.

Mojtaba denies recent attacks on Oman, Turkey

TEHRAN, Mar 21 (IANS)

IRAN'S Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamenei has stressed that the recent attacks on parts of Turkey and Oman were not carried out by the Iranian Armed Forces or its allies.

He made the remarks in a message to extend congratulations on the arrival of Eid-ul-Fitr on Friday (local time), which marks the end of the holy month of Ramzan, and Navroz, the beginning of the Iranian new year that falls on March 21, according to a statement published on his website.

Khamenei said Iran has appropriate relations with both Turkey and Oman, warning about Israel's "deception" of resorting to "false flag" operations to cause division between Iran and its neighbours, reports Xinhua news agency.

He added that such operations may be carried out in other countries too.

He highlighted the importance the country attaches to its relations with neighbours, and called on Afghanistan and Pakistan to establish better relations with each other, voicing his readiness to take the necessary measures to that end.

The Iranian leader also emphasised the need to enhance citizens' living standards and the nation's infrastructure, with a focus on welfare and wealth creation for the public, while declaring the new year as the "year of resistance economy in light of national unity."

First randomisation of EVM-VVPATs completed: EC

NEW DELHI, Mar 21 (IANS)

THE Election Commission of India (ECI) on Saturday announced that the first randomisation of EVM-VVPATs for the upcoming Assembly elections has been completed in Assam, Kerala and Puducherry.

The poll body had, on March 15, announced the schedule for the General Election to Legislative Assemblies of Assam, Kerala, Puducherry, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal and by-elections in six States.

EVM and VVPAT randomisation is a secure, two-stage process conducted by the poll panel using specialised software to randomly allocate machines to con-

stituencies and polling stations.

This prevents tampering and human intervention, ensuring fairness by keeping the machine's location unknown until just before the election, witnessed by political party representatives.

Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) are distributed to their assigned polling stations through a two-stage randomisation process.

In the first stage, EVMs are randomly allocated from district-level warehouses to Assembly constituencies. In the second stage, EVMs are randomly assigned from the Assembly constituency level to individual polling stations.

According to the ECI's direc-



Electoral officers demonstrate functioning of EVM-VVPAT during a special training of polling and presiding officers ahead Assembly election in Tezpur College, Sonitpur, on Friday. (ANI)

tions, the District Election Officers (DEOs) in all poll-bound States/UTs must complete the first randomisation of EVM-VVPATs that have passed the First Level Checking (FLC).

"First randomisation of EVMs has accordingly been completed for the general elections of the States of Assam and Kerala and the UT of Puducherry as well as for the by-elections in the States of Goa, Karnataka, Nagaland and Tripura, which are going to polls on April 9, 2026," the ECI said in a statement.

The First Randomisation was done through the EVM Management System (EMS) by the DEOs in the presence of the representatives of National and

State Recognised Political Parties, it further said.

Lists of randomised EVMs and VVPATs have been shared with the representatives of all National and State Recognised Political Parties at their respective district headquarters.

"These EVMs and VVPATs will be stored in the respective Assembly Strong Room in the presence of the representatives of National and State Recognised Political Parties," the ECI stated.

"After finalisation of the list of contesting candidates, the list of first and second randomised EVMs and VVPATs will be shared with all the contesting candidates also," it added.

US lifts sanctions on Iranian oil at sea for a month

■ By Sagar Kulkarni

WASHINGTON, Mar 21 (PTI)

THE United States has announced the temporary lifting of sanctions on the sale of Iranian oil stranded at sea in an effort to cool down soaring global crude prices.

US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said the temporary measure will make available 140 million barrels of Iranian oil to global markets. "This temporary, short-term authorisation is strictly limited to oil that is already in transit and does not allow new purchases or production," Bessent said in a long post on X.

The price of Brent crude has witnessed sharp swings from roughly USD 70 per barrel before



the war began to as high as USD 119.50 this week. "Today, the Department of the Treasury is issuing a narrowly tailored, short-term authorisation permitting the sale of Iranian oil currently stranded at sea," Bessent said.

The US official claimed that at present, sanctioned Iranian oil is being hoarded by China on the cheap. By temporarily unlocking this existing supply for the world, the United States will quickly

bring approximately 140 million barrels of oil to global markets, expanding the amount of worldwide energy and helping to relieve the temporary pressures on supply caused by Iran, he said.

"In essence, we will be using the Iranian barrels against Tehran to keep the price down as we continue Operation Epic Fury," Bessent said.

The pause on sanctions on Iranian oil loaded on vessels begins on Friday and is set to end on April 19. Petrol prices have increased from USD 3 a gallon in the US before the war began to USD 3.99 on Saturday.

"This temporary, short-term authorisation is strictly limited to oil that is already in transit and does not allow new purchases or

production," Bessent said.

Further, Iran will have difficulty accessing any revenue generated, and the United States will continue to maintain maximum pressure on Iran and its ability to access the international financial system, he said.

So far, Trump Administration has been working to bring around 440 million additional barrels of oil to the global market, undercutting Iran's ability to leverage its disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz, the US official said.

Earlier Friday, US President Donald Trump said that the United States was considering "winding down" military operations against Iran but was not seeking a ceasefire with the Islamic Republic.



INS Taragiri before its commissioning ceremony at Visakhapatnam. (PTI)

Navy to launch frigate 'Taragiri' on Apr 3

NEW DELHI, Mar 21 (ANI)

IN A ceremony that marks a defining moment for India's maritime sovereignty, the Indian Navy is preparing to commission its latest stealth frigate, Taragiri (F41), on April 3.

According to a statement, the ceremony, scheduled to be presided over by the Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, will serve as a powerful testament to the nation's journey toward becoming a completely self-reliant naval power.

As the fourth potent platform of the Project 17A class, Taragiri is not merely a ship; it is a 6,670-tonne embodiment of the 'Make

in India' spirit and the sophisticated engineering capabilities of our indigenous shipyards.

Built by Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited (MDL), Mumbai, this Frigate represents a generational leap over earlier designs, offering a sleeker form and a significantly reduced Radar Cross-Section that allows it to operate with lethal stealth. With indigenous content exceeding 75 per cent, the ship highlights the maturity of a domestic industrial ecosystem that now spans over 200 Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, contributing to the Govt's Aatmanirbharta initiatives and supporting thousands of Indian jobs.

Trump hints at wind-down of war...

...US sends 3 assault ships and 2,500 Marines to Middle East
...US-Israel hit Natanz N-facility; Iran says, no radiation leak

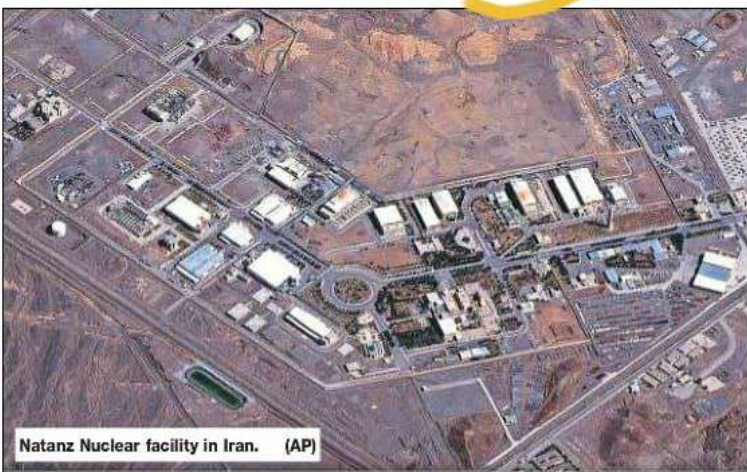
DUBAI, Mar 21 (AP)

IRAN'S Natanz nuclear enrichment facility was hit in an airstrike on Saturday, the official Iranian news agency Mizan reported. There was no radiation leakage, it said, as the war in the Middle East entered its fourth week.

Natanz, Iran's main enrichment site, was hit in the first week of the war and several buildings appeared damaged, according to satellite images. The United Nations' nuclear watchdog had said that "no radiological consequence" was expected from that earlier strike.

The nuclear facility, located nearly 220 kilometres (135 miles) southeast of Tehran, had been targeted by Israeli airstrikes in the 12-day war between Iran and Israel in June 2025, and by the United States.

The strike comes a day after US President Donald Trump said he was considering "winding down" military operations in the



Natanz Nuclear facility in Iran. (AP)

Middle East even as the US is sending three more amphibious assault ships and roughly 2,500 additional Marines to the region.

Trump's post Friday on social

media followed an Iranian threat to attack recreational and tourist sites worldwide and another day of the airstrikes and drone and missile attacks that have engulfed

the region.

The mixed messages from the United States came after another climb in oil prices plunged the country's stock market, and was

followed by a Trump administration announcement it was lifting sanctions on Iranian oil already loaded on ships, a move aimed at wrangling soaring fuel prices.

The three-week-old war has shown no signs of abating, with Israel saying Iran continued to fire missiles at it early Saturday, while Saudi Arabia said it downed 20 drones in just a couple of hours in the country's eastern region, which is home to major oil installations. The attacks came a day after Israeli airstrikes hit in Tehran as Iranians celebrated the Persian New Year, known as Nowruz, a normally festive holiday that has been muted by the war.

The US and Israel have offered shifting rationales for the war, from hoping to foment an uprising that topples Iran's leadership to eliminating its nuclear and missile programmes. There have been no public signs of any such uprising and no end to the war in sight.

(Contd on page 3)

Iran fires 2 missiles at Diego Garcia

TEHRAN, Mar 21 (ANI)

IRAN fired two intermediate-range ballistic missiles towards the joint US-UK military base at Diego Garcia in the Chagos Archipelago as US President Donald Trump said Washington is "very close" to winding down its military operations against Tehran. The 'Wall Street Journal' reported, citing US officials.

As per WSJ, one missile failed during flight, while a US warship launched an SM-3 interceptor at the second missile. However, it remains unclear whether the interception was successful.

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