

Iran stages mass weddings for couples ready for war 'sacrifice'

AFP | Tehran

Iranian authorities held mass public weddings in Tehran for couples who signed up to a state-sponsored scheme declaring their readiness to sacrifice their lives in the war against the US and Israel.

The ceremonies conducted late on Monday involved hundreds of couples in several major squares in the capital, including more than 100 in the vast Imam Hossein square in central Tehran, according to reports in Iranian media.

They were broadcast on state TV in a bid to boost wartime morale, with US

President Donald Trump repeatedly threatening new military action against Iran amid a shaky ceasefire which halted the fighting that began on February 28.

Those involved had signed up, according to Iranian media, for the so-called "self-sacrifice" scheme (janfada in Persian) where people pledged to put their lives on the line in the war by, for example, forming human chains outside power stations. Iranian authorities say millions of people, including top figures such as speaker of parliament Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf and President Masoud Pezeshkian, have put their names forward.

Israeli military issues fresh evacuation warnings for south Lebanon



Israeli soldiers speak to civilians after taking cover near the Israel-Lebanon border following a Hezbollah drone attack that hit the northern border

AFP | Jerusalem, Undefined

The Israeli military yesterday warned residents of 12 towns and villages in southern Lebanon to immediately evacuate ahead of expected attacks against Hezbollah, the latest despite a ceasefire.

"Hezbollah's continued violations of the ceasefire compel the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) to operate against it. The IDF does not intend to harm you. For your safety, we urge you to distance yourself from the area and immediately move at least 1,000 metres away," the military's Arabic-language spokesman Mr. Avichay Adraee posted on X.

Lebanon's state-run Na-

tional News Agency reported a new series of Israeli strikes targeting several locations in southern Lebanon on Tuesday (May 19, 2026).

Meanwhile, Hezbollah said in a statement that it had targeted a gathering of soldiers and vehicles in northern Israel with "a swarm of attack drones." The Israeli military said that following sirens in several areas of northern Israel, a drone "that crossed from Lebanon to Israeli territory was intercepted".

On Monday (May 18, 2026), the Lebanese health ministry said the death toll from Israeli strikes since the start of the war on Monday (March 2, 2026) had reached 3,020

Trump said Gulf leaders had asked him "to hold off on our planned Military attack of the Islamic Republic of Iran, which was scheduled for tomorrow, in that serious negotiations are now taking place".

But instructed the US military to be "prepared to go forward with a full, large scale assault of Iran, on a moment's notice, in the event that an acceptable Deal is not reached".

Trump shows off site of new \$400-mn ballroom

AFP | Washington, United States

US President Donald Trump on Tuesday showed off the site of his huge new White House ballroom, a \$400 million project that critics say flies in the face of voter anger over the cost of living.

The billionaire property magnate appeared in his element as he took reporters to see the construction work, barely audible above the sounds of hammering, sawing and clanging.

"This is a gift to the United States of America," said Trump, standing by yellow railings on the edge of a cavernous concrete basement space.

"This is all my money and



Trump speaks to the media alongside posters of his proposed White House ballroom amid construction at the White House

donors' money. This is tax free." But Democrats have bitterly opposed a proposed \$1 billion security allocation of taxpayer money tied to Trump's ballroom, and are using the issue to attack Republicans ahead of crucial midterm elections in November.

Trump went into detail about what he said were the security aspects of the ballroom project, saying there were six storeys below ground that would house military installations, research facilities and even a hospital.

"The ballroom becomes a shield that will totally protect what's going on downstairs," 79-year-old Trump said.

He added that drones would "bounce" off the roof of the ball-

room and said it would be a good site for snipers.

The property developer in Trump was also in full display, as he talked about how one facade of the ballroom was styled after ancient Greece, and another after Rome.

Trump bluntly said last week that "I don't think about Americans' financial situation" when it comes to the Iran war, insisting that preventing Tehran from getting a nuclear weapon was his priority.

But his opponents are using the comment to paint him as out of touch, with the midterm elections, which will decide who controls the US Congress, less than six months away.



Trump has repeatedly said the ballroom -- whose cost has doubled from an initial estimate of \$200 million -- is being met by private donors, including his wealthy supporters and a slew of corporations.

Trump says held off assault

(Picture: Truth Social)



● Trump told reporters at the White House that he had been just "an hour away" from relaunching Washington's attacks on Iran

AFP | Washington, United States

President Donald Trump warned Tuesday that the United States may strike Iran again, a day after he said he had held off a major assault in hope of a deal to end the war -- but Tehran's army threatened to open "new fronts" if he went ahead.

Trump told reporters at the White House that he had been just "an hour away" from relaunching Washington's attacks on Iran before postponing the order, after weeks of a fragile ceasefire and talks to end the war that began on February 28.

"You know how it is to negotiate with a country where you're beating them badly. They come to the table, they're begging to make a deal," he said.

"I hope we don't have to do the war, but we may have to give

them another big hit. I'm not sure yet."

He added that Iran's military had used the ceasefire as an opportunity "to strengthen its combat capabilities".

Trump offered a deadline of

several days for resuming strikes if a deal was not agreed.

"I'm saying two or three days, maybe Friday, Saturday, Sunday, something, maybe early next week, a limited period of time," he said.

Trump's new deadline came after he said on Monday that Gulf leaders had asked him to hold off on an attack at the 11th hour, which he did because "serious negotiations are taking place".

But if a deal was not agreed, he said he instructed the US military to be "prepared to go forward with a full, large-scale assault of Iran, on a moment's notice."

Trump had already indefinitely extended the truce and made clear he wants to exit a war that has proven to be a political liability, with Iran's control of the Strait of Hormuz rattling the global economy and hurting Americans at the pump.

Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister Kazem Gharibabadi wrote on X that Trump's comments meant the US leader was "calling a 'threat' a 'chance for peace!'"

Iran has repeatedly rebuffed Trump's offers on a deal and its control over the vital Hormuz strait has sent global oil prices spiraling.

Iranian foreign ministry spokesman Esmaeil Baqaei confirmed exchanges with the United States through mediator Pakistan and said Tehran made clear its "concerns".

Rubio to attend 'Quad' meeting in India: US embassy

New Delhi, India

India will host a meeting of the "Quad"



group, which includes Australia, Japan and the United States, the US embassy in New Delhi said on Tuesday without specifying a date.

The embassy said Secretary of State Marco Rubio would attend and that it looked forward to welcoming him "for his first visit to India, ministerial Quad meetings, high level engagements, and celebrating 250 years of America".

US Ambassador Sergio Gor said earlier that Rubio would be in New Delhi at the weekend.

The so-called Quad security alliance is seen as a counterweight to Beijing's presence in the Indian Ocean and wider Asia-Pacific region.

The four-way partnership was first conceived by late Japanese prime minister Shinzo Abe, who foresaw an alliance of democracies surrounding China -- which has repeatedly alleged that the Quad is a way to contain it.