



5 killed

as illegal gold mine collapses in northern Kenya



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KOCHI

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Israel strikes Rafah day after top UN court orders it to halt offensive

Govt intends to renew talks for Gaza hostage release deal next week: Israeli official

JERUSALEM

ISRAELI air strikes and artillery pounded Rafah on Saturday, as the government dismissed a UN top court's order to immediately halt its military offensive in the Gaza city.

At the same time, renewed international efforts were underway aimed at securing a ceasefire in the war sparked by Palestinian militant group Hamas's unprecedented October 7 attack on Israel.

An Israeli official said on Saturday the government had an "intention" to restart stalled negotiations "this week".

In a case brought by South Africa alleging the Israeli military operation amounts to "genocide", the International Court of Justice ordered Israel to halt its Rafah offensive and demanded the immediate release of hostages still held by Palestinian militants.

The ICJ, whose orders are legally binding but lack direct enforcement mechanisms, also instructed Israel to keep open the Rafah crossing between Egypt and Gaza, which Israeli troops took over earlier this month, effectively shutting it.

Israel gave no indication it was preparing to change course in Rafah, insisting the court had got it wrong.

The ruling said Israel must "immediately halt its military offensive, and any other action in the Rafah Governorate, which may inflict on the Palestinian group in Gaza conditions of life that could bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part".

But National Security Adviser Tzachi Hanegbi, in a joint statement with the foreign ministry, said "Israel has not and will not carry out military operations in the Rafah area that create living conditions that could cause the destruction of the Palestinian civilian population, in whole or in part".

Hamas, the Iran-backed Islamist group that has ruled Gaza since 2007, welcomed the



Palestinians search for survivors at the site of an Israeli strike on the Al-Daraj neighbourhood in Gaza City | AFP

Italy to fund UN agency for Palestinian refugees

Rome: Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani announced on Saturday that Rome would resume funding for the United Nations agency for Palestinian refugees, at a meeting with Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammed Mustafa. "Italy has decided to resume financing specific projects intended for assistance to Palestinian refugees but after rigorous controls that guarantee that not even a penny risks ending up supporting terrorism," he said.



TOLL SO FAR

37,560

Israeli strike kills 2 Hezbollah fighters

An Israeli drone strike in central Syria killed two fighters from Lebanon's Iran-backed Hezbollah movement on Saturday, a war monitor said. "An Israeli drone fired two missiles at a Hezbollah car and truck near the town of Qusayr in Horns province, as they were on their way to Al-Dabaa military airport, killing at least two Hezbollah fighters," said Syrian Observatory for Human Rights

Spain demands Israel comply with ICJ order

Madrid: The Spanish government demanded on Saturday that Israel comply with an order by the top UN court to immediately stop its bombardment and ground assault on the Gaza city of Rafah. It stressed that the ruling on Friday by the ICJ was legally binding.

ICJ ruling on Rafah but criticised its decision to exclude the rest of the Palestinian territory from the order.

An Israeli official said Saturday the government intended to renew talks for a Gaza hostage release deal in coming days, after a meeting with mediators in Paris.

"There is an intention to renew the talks this week and there is an agreement," the official told AFP on condition of anonymity.

The Israeli official did not elaborate on what had been agreed but Israeli media reported that intelligence chief David Barnea had agreed a new framework for the stalled negotiations with mediators CIA Director Bill Burns and

Qatari Prime Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani. Washington said top diplomat Antony Blinken had also spoken with Israeli war cabinet minister Benny Gantz about new efforts to achieve a ceasefire and reopen the border crossing in Gaza's far-southern city of Rafah.

Al-Qahera News, which has links with Egyptian intelligence, said Cairo was continuing "its efforts to reactivate ceasefire negotiations and exchange prisoners and detainees". It added that Egypt was exerting "all kinds of pressure on Israel to urgently let in the aid and fuel" stranded at the Rafah crossing after its closure by Israel earlier this month.

Pandemic prevention talks end without deal

GENEVA

NEGOTIATIONS on a landmark global agreement on handling future pandemics ended Friday without a deal—though countries said they wanted to keep pushing for an accord.

Scarred by the devastation caused by Covid-19—which killed millions of people, shredded economies and crippled health systems—countries have spent two years trying to hammer out binding commitments on pandemic prevention, preparedness and response.

The talks gathered momentum in the final weeks, but failed to meet a final deadline before next week's World Health Assembly—the annual gathering of the WHO members.

"This is not a failure," WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus insisted as the talks ended at the UN health agency's headquarters in Geneva.

He urged countries to see it as a "good opportunity to re-energise". "The world still needs a pandemic treaty and the world needs to be prepared," he commented. The assembly, which runs from Monday until June 1, will take stock and decide what to do next. The talks co-chairs Roland Driech and Precious Matsofo told AFP that countries clearly wanted to reach a final agreement. "It's not the end," stressed Matsofo, noting that the same ministers who decided they wanted a pandemic agreement would be the ones deciding on the next steps.

"They are the ones who are going to say, 'OK, you haven't finished this. Please go back, finalise it,'" she said.

G7 weighs measures to level the field with China on trade

STRESSA

G7 finance ministers on Saturday cited "concerns" over China's trade policies, saying they would consider steps to "ensure a level playing field" for all economies, according to a draft statement seen by AFP.

"We will continue to monitor the potential negative impacts of over-capacity and will consider taking steps to ensure a level playing field, in line with World Trade Organization (WTO) principles," they said in the draft statement after talks in Stressa, northern Italy.

G7 ministers cited "progress" in finding ways to use profits from frozen Russian assets to help Ukraine, envision-

ing a concrete proposal to present to a leaders' summit next month.

A search for creative yet legally sound solutions was top of the agenda at the two-day Group of Seven meeting in Stressa, northern Italy that wrapped up on Saturday, as Kyiv continues its urgent appeals for more funds from Western allies in its third year of war with Russia.

"We are making progress in our discussions on potential avenues to bring forward the extraordinary profits stemming from immobilised Russian sovereign assets to the benefit of Ukraine, consistent with international law and our respective legal systems," the ministers said in a

draft final statement seen by AFP. The ministers urged Israel Saturday not to disrupt "vital financial transactions" in the occupied Palestinian territories, following indications it could cut off Palestinian banks. "We call on Israel to take the necessary measures to ensure that correspondent banking services between Israeli and Palestinian banks remain in place, so that vital financial transactions and critical trade and services continue," read the final statement following the talks in Italy.

And they asked Israel "to remove or relax other measures that have negatively impacted commerce to avoid further exacerbating the economic situation in the West Bank."

Over 200 could have been inside bombed Kharkiv store: Zelensky

KYIV

RUSSIA on Saturday bombed a hardware superstore in Ukrainian city of Kharkiv, killing two and injuring 33, in an attack condemned as "vile" by President Volodymyr Zelensky.

"As of now, we know that more than 200 people could have been inside the hypermarket," Zelensky said on Telegram, condemning the daylight attack on an "obviously civilian" target.

Kharkiv governor Oleg Syngubov said at least two people were killed and 33 injured when "two Russian guided bombs hit a construction hypermarket". "Two people were killed. They were men who

worked in the hypermarket," Syngubov said in a video posted on Telegram. "The number of wounded has gone up to 33 people," he added in a later post.

Thick black smoke billowed from the gutted building of the Epitsentr DIY superstore as firefighters sprayed water on a blaze sparked by the strikes, an AFP video journalist saw. The hypermarkets chain sells household and DIY goods.

Ukraine's rescue service posted images of firefighters spraying water inside the blazing building with the roof torn open and debris strewn around. They said the fire was raging over an area of 10,000 square metres but that the firefighters managed to localise it.

Maldives govt demands funds to battle rising sea level

MALÉ

THE Maldives on Saturday demanded international funding to battle rising sea levels, saying the low-lying Indian Ocean archipelago was being unfairly excluded from the most generous support measures.

"The Maldives is liable for just 0.003 percent of global emissions, but is one of the first countries to endure the existential consequences of the climate crisis," President

Mohamed Muizzu wrote in Britain's Guardian newspaper.

"Wealthier nations have a moral responsibility to communities like ours."

Muizzu's comments came ahead of a once-a-decade conference of Small Island Developing States (SIDS)—many of them known as luxury tourism destinations but threatened by rising sea levels—he will co-chair in Antigua and Barbuda, which opens on Monday. SIDS receive "only about 14 per-

cent of the finance that the least developed countries receive", he said.

According to the IMF, the Maldives has a higher GDP per capita than Chile, Mexico, Malaysia or China, but Muizzu called gross domestic product a "legacy metric". "Thanks to the Maldives' healthy tourism industry, we are ranked as an emerging economy and therefore shut out from the cheaper financing set aside for the lowest income countries," the IMF said.

IDBI BANK advertisement featuring a 'SALE NOTICE' for an E-Auction of immovable assets. The notice includes details about the bank, the auction process, and a list of 18 properties for sale with their respective descriptions, locations, and financial details.