

Rocket fire raises concern over Gaza truce

AFP, Gaza City

Renewed rocket fire from the Gaza Strip targeted Israel yesterday amid concern that violence could flare up further as a six-month truce in and around the Palestinian territory ends this week.

The Israeli army said 10 rockets were fired at southern Israel from the tiny coastal strip, causing no casualties or damage.

Islamic Jihad said its armed wing, the Al-Quds Brigades, fired five rockets in retaliation for Monday's killing by Israeli force of one of its members in the occupied West Bank.

The radical movement had claimed similar attacks on Monday, which prompted two air Israeli air strikes in Gaza.

In a statement claiming responsibility for the rocket attacks, Islamic Jihad reiterated its opposition to any renewal of the truce that ends this week.

Hamas, the Islamist movement that rules Gaza, has also spoken out against extending the Egyptian-mediated six-

month ceasefire that went into effect on June 19, but it indicated it was yet to make a final decision.

Israeli officials have said they want to continue the truce but warned that they would not hesitate to use military force should Gaza militants fail to halt rocket and mortar attacks.

Several ministers have called for a tougher line against Gaza militants, and Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, who hopes to become premier after the February 10 election, has said Israel "cannot allow Gaza to remain in the hands of Hamas."

Since the truce went into effect, Palestinian militants have fired more than 320 mortar rounds and rockets at southern Israel, according to the military.

Defence Minister Ehud Barak said crossings into the Palestinian territory would remain closed on Wednesday because of the rockets.

Since a November 4 surge in violence, Israel has responded by completely sealing off Gaza, which is home to 1.5 million people.

EU parliament approves climate change package

AFP, Strasbourg

The European Parliament yesterday approved the EU's climate change package, aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 20 percent by 2020, lifting the last hurdle to the ambitious plan.

Six texts on the package, already agreed by the 27 European Union member states, were passed by a large majority of the MEPs present.

"We have sealed the climate package," said European Parliament President Hans-

Gert Poettering, after the vote.

The so-called "20-20-20" climate package, which Europe hopes will serve as a model to other nations, will oblige EU nations to cut carbon dioxide emissions by 20 percent by 2020 from 1990 levels, make 20 percent energy savings and bring the use of renewable energy sources up to 20 percent of the total.

The parliamentary approval came five days after EU heads of states worked out a compromise deal on the package at a summit in Brussels.

N Korea says border closure will continue

AFP, Seoul

North Korea will continue its strict restrictions on contacts with South Korea because Seoul's calls for dialogue are two-faced, a senior Pyongyang official was quoted as saying yesterday.

Lieutenant-General Kim Yong-Chol was speaking during his inspection of a Seoul-funded joint industrial estate in the North, South Korea's unification ministry said.

The communist North on December 1 imposed strict border controls and ordered hundreds of South Korean staff to quit the Kaesong estate in protest at what it called the Seoul government's confrontational policies.

S Africa refuses to join calls for Mugabe to quit

AFP, Pretoria

South African President Kgalema Motlanthe refused yesterday to join calls for Robert Mugabe to quit, expressing hope that Zimbabwe's stalled power-sharing agreement will be implemented this week.

Mugabe's regime has come under pressure from world powers to resign amid a deadlock between rival parties over a power-sharing deal, a growing cholera epidemic and economic ruin.

Russia to deploy new missile systems by 2020

AFP, Moscow

Russia's armed forces will be equipped with new nuclear-capable missiles by 2020 that can overcome defensive measures like the controversial US missile shield, the military said yesterday.

"By 2015-2020 the Russian strategic rocket forces will have new complete missile systems with improved combat characteristics," said General Nikolai Solovtsov, the commander of Russia's missile forces.



PHOTO: AFP

In this handout made available by the Iraqi Prime Minister's office yesterday, British Prime Minister Gordon Brown (top-L) meets with Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki (top-R) in Baghdad. British forces will wrap up their mission in Iraq in the first half of next year, British Prime Minister Gordon Brown said during a surprise trip to Baghdad.

France heads into christmas period on terror alert

AFP, Paris

Shoppers were being searched yesterday before being allowed into one of Paris's top department stores as France moved into its hectic Christmas shopping period on terror alert.

The searches at the Printemps store were aimed at protecting customers after an unknown group on Tuesday placed five sticks of dynamite, without a detonator, in a toilet in the men's clothing section, a store spokesman said.

The group calling itself the Afghan Revolutionary Front said it had planted the explosives in the store on Boulevard Haussmann and threatened more attacks unless Paris pulls its 2,600 troops out of

Afghanistan by the end of February.

The dynamite was made safe by police after they had evacuated the store and closed off surrounding streets.

Experts cast doubt on the notion that the warning, which came in a letter sent to AFP, could have come from an Islamic group such as the Taliban or Al-Qaeda, which have previously threatened France.

But the government took the threat seriously, with President Nicolas Sarkozy calling for "vigilance because unfortunately anything can happen" and his prime minister saying there was a "strong terrorist threat to France."

Interior Minister Michele Alliot-Marie summoned top

police and intelligence officials to meet Wednesday with representatives of major department stores and transport and airport officials to review security.

She said that police reinforcements would be deployed across the country following the discovery of the dynamite.

"I have decided to reinforce security arrangements in Paris and major provincial cities," she told the French Senate on Tuesday. "It is our role to be constantly vigilant, whatever the circumstances."

In November, an Afghan Taliban leader had warned in a video broadcast on an Arab satellite network of attacks in Paris unless France withdrew its soldiers.



PHOTO: AFP

North Korean dancers perform during a rehearsal at Hanoi's Opera House yesterday. Filled with revolutionary fervor and drilled to artistic perfection, North Korea's elite dance troupe rehearsed in communist Vietnam at the start of a rare week-long overseas concert tour.

UN war crimes court to rule on Rwanda genocide

AFP, Arusha

The UN-backed tribunal for Rwanda will today give its verdict on the alleged mastermind of the 1994 genocide there, in which some 800,000 people were killed.

Theoneste Bagosora and three former top military officers are accused by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) of genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and conspiracy to commit genocide.

The indictment accuses them of having conspired to "work out a plan with the intent to exterminate the civilian Tutsi population and eliminate members of the opposition, so that they could remain in power."

If convicted, it would mark the first time the tribunal has sentenced any suspect for having actually conspired to carry out the genocide.

ICTR chief prosecutor Hassan Bubacar Jallow has charged that the four were involved in a conspiracy that began in late 1990 when hundreds of Tutsis were arrested after an attack by a Tutsi-dominated rebel group.

"All the four were involved in the arrest," Jallow said during his submission in May last year.

Turkey bombs Kurd rebels in Iraq

AFP, Ankara

Turkish fighter jets yesterday bombed Kurdish rebel targets in northern Iraq, the second raid in as many days, the military said in a statement.

The strike, like the previous one Tuesday, targeted Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) hideouts in the Qandil mountains, where some of the rebels' major bases are located, a statement on the army's website said.

"The planes completed their mission successfully and returned safely to their bases," it said.

The statement made no mention of PKK losses, while stressing that measures were taken to prevent any damage to the civilian population of the region.

The Turkish army has been pounding PKK bases in northern Iraq -- with the help of intelligence from its NATO ally the United States -- under a parliamentary authorisation for cross-border military action, which was first approved in 2007 and renewed for another year in October.



PHOTO: AFP

Pedestrians walk past a lit up Christmas tree decorating the front of an office building in Beijing yesterday. China's government has set an initial target for inflation next year of between three and 4.8 percent, state media reported, suggesting Beijing is less pessimistic about the prospects for 2009 than many independent observers, who believe the economic slowdown could cause prices to fall early in the year. Though not celebrated officially, the festive season of Christmas has become increasingly popular in China, with people keen on the retail opportunities as well as some of the religious traditions.

বিশাল মানুষ, বিরাট নেতা, সবই নিলাম নেবে

আমার নেতা সত্যসি কি? সেটাও নেবে জেতে

আমার ভোট আমি দেবো

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