

Troops, militants clash in Gaza despite truce

Israeli soldier, Palestinian killed

AP, AFP, Jerusalem/Dubai

A Palestinian was shot dead and an Israeli soldier reportedly killed in a blast yesterday as the deadliest flare-up since the end of the Gaza conflict cast a dark shadow over the new US peace envoy's maiden mission to the region.

Palestinian militants detonated a bomb next to an Israeli army patrol near the Gaza Strip yesterday and Israeli soldiers quickly crossed the border in search of the attackers in the first serious clash since a ceasefire went into effect more than a week ago.

Heavy gunfire was audible along the border in central Gaza and Israeli helicopters hovered in the air, firing machine gun bursts, Palestinian witnesses said. The Israeli military said the bomb targeted an Israeli patrol near the border community of Kissufim but would not provide further details.

One Israeli soldier was killed and three others were wounded in an explosion on Tuesday near the Gaza Strip, the pan-Arab Al-Arabiya television channel reported.

The Dubai-based channel reported the information citing one of its correspondents in Israel.

Qatar-based Al-Jazeera reported that the soldier was killed when a shell hit a group of Israeli troops on the Gaza border.

There was no claim of responsibility for the attack.

An Israeli jet broke the sound barrier and set off a loud sonic boom over Gaza City not long afterward, possibly as a warning, but there were no further reports of Israeli retaliation. Since ending a punishing three-week offensive against Hamas on Jan. 17, Israel has said it will respond in force to any attack from Gaza.

A Palestinian was killed on Tuesday by Israeli fire in Gaza, medics said, shortly after Arab television reported that an Israeli soldier was killed in a blast near the border of the Hamas-run enclave.

Anwar al-Dreim, 24, was killed near Gaza's border with Israel, they said. It was not immediately clear what type of fire, artillery or helicopter gunships, killed him, they said.

Two Nato soldiers among 9 killed in Afghanistan

AFP, Kabul

Two soldiers in the Nato-led force helping the Afghan government fight an insurgency were killed Tuesday, while five Taliban militants and two policemen died elsewhere, security officials said.

Nato's International Security Assistance Force did not say how its soldiers died nor did it give their nationalities.

"Two Isaf servicemen were killed today in southern Afghanistan," it said in a statement.

Southern Afghanistan is a notorious hotspot for the Taliban-led insurgency, with several districts out of government control.

There more than 22,000 foreign soldiers in the south,

most of them American, British, Canadian and Dutch.

The latest deaths take to 21 the number of international soldiers to die in Afghanistan this year, according to the icasualties.org website that tracks the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Afghan authorities reported that local and international troops killed five Taliban in an operation in the southern province of Helmand on Monday.

"Five Taliban were killed and the bodies were left at the site," said provincial police chief Assadullah Shirzad.

In the eastern province of Kunar, a bomb struck a police vehicle killing two policemen and wounding four late Monday, border police commander Mohammad Zaman Mamozai said.



Indian President Pratibha Patil (C) poses with foreign delegates and folk dancers during India's 60th Republic Day celebrations at the Presidential Palace in New Delhi yesterday.

US envoy predicts 'direct diplomacy' with Iran

AP, United Nations

President Barack Obama's administration will engage in "direct diplomacy" with Iran, the newly installed US ambassador to the United Nations said Monday.

Not since before the 1979 Iranian revolution are US officials believed to have conducted wide-ranging direct diplomacy with Iranian officials. But US Ambassador Susan Rice warned that Iran must meet UN Security Council demands to suspend uranium enrichment before any talks on its nuclear programme.

"The dialogue and diplomacy must go hand in hand with a very firm message from the United States and the international community that Iran needs to meet its obligations as defined by the Security Council. And its continuing refusal to do so will only cause pressure to increase," she told reporters during a brief question-and-answer session.

Her comments, reflecting Obama's signals for improved relations with America's foes after eight years under President George W. Bush, came shortly after meeting with Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on her first day in her new job.

Global warming 'irreversible' for next 1,000 years: Study

AFP, Washington

Climate change is "largely irreversible" for the next 1,000 years even if carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions could be abruptly halted, according to a new study led by the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

The study's authors said there was "no going back" after the report showed that changes in surface temperature, rainfall and sea level are "largely irreversible" for more than 1,000 years after CO2 emissions are completely stopped.

NOAA senior scientist Susan Solomon said the study, published in this week's Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences journal, showed that current human choices on carbon dioxide emissions are set to "irreversibly change the planet."

Researchers examined the consequences of CO2 building up beyond present-day concentrations of 385 parts per million, and then

completely stopping emissions after the peak. Before the industrial age CO2 in Earth's atmosphere amounted to only 280 parts per million.

The study found that CO2 levels are irreversibly impacting climate change, which will contribute to global sea level rise and rainfall changes in certain regions.

The authors emphasised that increases in CO2 that occur from 2000 to 2100 are set to "lock in" a sea level rise over the next 1,000 years.

Rising sea levels would cause "irreversible commitments to future changes in the geography of the Earth, since many coastal and island features would ultimately become submerged," the study said.

Decreases in rainfall that last for centuries can be expected to have a range of impacts, said the authors. Regional impacts include -- but are not limited to -- decreased human water supplies, increased fire frequency, ecosystem change and expanded deserts.

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