

GAZA CRISIS

Kerry reaches out to Hamas allies

AFP, Cairo

US Secretary of State John Kerry yesterday spoke to his counterparts in Qatar and Turkey, which support the Palestinian Islamist group Hamas, as he pressed for a Gaza ceasefire.

Kerry -- who is in Egypt, which has drafted a truce proposal for the Israel-Hamas conflict -- spoke by phone with the foreign ministers of Qatar and Turkey, a US official said.

The top US diplomat was hoping Qatar and Turkey would use their influence to encourage Hamas to accept a ceasefire plan, which the Islamist group has so far rejected, the official said.

The 17-day conflict has killed more than 780 Palestinians, many of them civilians.

Hamas has rejected the ceasefire proposal by Egypt's military-backed government insisting that Israel end its eight-year siege on the impoverished Gaza Strip.

But a senior Hamas official acknowledged Wednesday that it was unrealistic to expect the blockade to end in tandem with a ceasefire and instead called for a firm agreement on principles on how to lift the siege.

"There needs to be an agreement on the principles, the schedule (for ending the blockade) and the mechanism," the official said.

Hamas's chief Khaled Meshaal on Wednesday again insisted on a ceasefire only after an end to the siege, in force since militants kidnapped an Israeli soldier in 2006.

The official, who works closely with Meshaal, said however that they understood that the blockade would be eased only after the ceasefire, but they required a schedule in place first.

Israel, which initially accepted a truce, has said it will keep up its military campaign as it eliminates tunnels that infiltrate the Jewish state from Gaza.



'SADDEST PHOTO'

The Great Wall of China may not be visible from space, but from the International Space Station (ISS) the violence in Gaza and Israel is. A German astronaut has captured a striking photograph of rocket fire and explosions above the conflict zone. Flight engineer Alexander Gerst, who is currently in the middle of a six-month stay on the ISS, took the image from 200 miles above Earth. The 38-year-old shared the image with his 85,000 Twitter followers yesterday evening, calling it his "saddest photo yet". In the photo, streams of light appear to illustrate the trajectory of the rockets, while sparks of light illuminate the explosions.

France announces \$14.8m Gaza aid

AFP, Paris

President Francois Hollande yesterday announced a \$14.8 million aid package to the besieged Gaza Strip, where an Israeli military offensive has left more than 700 people dead. An advisor to Hollande said the humanitarian aid, eight million of which will be given to the Palestinian Authority and the remainder to UN bodies and NGOs working in Gaza, was approved after a meeting with non-governmental organisations working in the strife-torn region.

US, Russian airlines resume flights to Israel

AFP, Moscow

US and Russia yesterday said they were resuming flights to Israel, two days after suspending traffic along with other major airlines over security concerns. In the United States, the FAA yesterday lifted its two-day ban on US airlines flying into or out of Ben Gurion International Airport, Israel's only international hub. Russia's largest airline, Aeroflot, said late Wednesday it was resuming flights to Israel.

PHOTO: @ASTRO_ALEX

ISIS orders FGM for all women

AFP, Geneva

Jihadists in Iraq have ordered that all women between the ages of 11 and 46 must undergo female genital mutilation (FGM), which could affect up to four million women and girls in the war-ravaged country, a UN official said yesterday.

The UN's second most senior official in Iraq, Jacqueline Badcock, said, "It is a fatwa (or religious edict) from ISIS, we learnt about it this morning. We have no precise numbers."

The Islamic State, formerly known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, took over large swathes of the country last month and has begun imposing its extreme Salafist interpretation of Islam.

Badcock said that if you took UN population figures as a guide, around "four million girls and women could be affected".

FGM is unusual in Iraq and is only practised in "certain isolated pockets of the country", she added.

She said only 20 families from the ancient Christian minority now remain in Mosul, the northern Iraq city which ISIS has taken as the capital of its Islamic state. Most have reportedly fled north into Kurdish-controlled territory.

Badcock said some Christians have converted to Islam, while others have opted to stay and pay the jizya, the tax on non-Muslims. ISIS has imposed.

IRAQ CRISIS

New president elected

UN chief pushes for unity; prison convoy ambush kills 60

AFP, Baghdad

Kurdish politician Fuad Masum became the new president of Iraq yesterday, in a step towards forming a new government that visiting UN chief Ban Ki-moon said must be inclusive for the country to survive.

A June onslaught on Sunni Arab areas north and west of Baghdad led by the jihadist Islamic State group has brought Iraq to the brink of breakup, with the government struggling to assert any authority beyond its Shiite power base.

Parliament elected Masum, who served as the first prime minister of Iraq's autonomous Kurdish region more than two decades ago, by an overwhelming majority of 211 votes to 17.

He had been almost guaranteed the job after Kurdish parties struck a late-night deal to support him.

Under an unofficial power-sharing deal, Iraq's Kurds traditionally get the post of president.

The move could pave the way for a deal on the much



Fuad Masum

more powerful post of prime minister.

The UN chief met current Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki and stressed the need for a broad-based government to be formed as soon as possible to save the country from collapse.

Meanwhile, insurgents launched a spectacular pre-dawn assault yesterday on a convoy transferring inmates convicted of terrorism charges in Taji, only 25 kilometres (15 miles) north of Baghdad.

According to police and medical sources, at least 60 people died in the attack, which saw militants ram a security convoy with a suicide car bomb before detonating other bombs and raking it with gunfire.

Nearly all of the 60 prisoners believed to be on the bus died.

It was not immediately clear how many attackers died nor how the prisoners they were apparently trying to free were killed.

West 'losing sympathy' for Israel, warns Britain

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Philip Hammond, the new Foreign Secretary, was to tell Benjamin Netanyahu that the West is becoming less sympathetic to Israel's cause, it has been reported.

Hammond has called for an urgent ceasefire to end the conflict in Gaza, where the death toll on both sides has now risen to 775.

Last night he met with the Palestinian President, Mahmoud Abbas, and promised to push for a "stable solution" in the region that would allow Israelis and Palestinians to "live in peace together".

But at the same time he has rejected comments from the UN's top human rights official that Israel may have committed war crimes over the course of the air, sea and ground offensive that began on 8 July.

Speaking yesterday in a joint press conference in Jerusalem alongside the Israeli Prime Minister, Hammond warned that Britain was "gravely concerned" by the number of civilian casualties suffered in Gaza over the course of the past two and a half weeks, Sky News reported.

It followed comments he made to the BBC's Andrew Marr Show on Sunday, when he urged Israel to act "in a way that is proportionate" and do all it can to "prevent unnecessary loss of civilian life".

He has now joined the diplomatic effort on the ground in the Middle East, telling reporters he came "to bring this conflict to an end", and put his support behind an Egyptian ceasefire proposal that would see an immediate end to fighting followed by discussions on the terms of a longer-term peace deal.

ODDLY enough



Indian teen had 232 teeth!

AFP, Mumbai

Surgeons in Mumbai have removed 232 teeth from the mouth of an Indian teenager in what they believe may be a world-record operation, the hospital said yesterday.

Ashik Gavai, 17, sought medical help for a swelling on the right side of his lower jaw and the case was referred to the city's JJ Hospital, where they found he was suffering from a condition known as complex odontoma, head of dentistry Sunanda Dhivare-Palwankar told AFP.

"We operated on Monday and it took us almost seven hours. We thought it may be a simple surgery but once we opened it there were multiple pearl-like teeth inside the jaw bone," she said.

After removing those they also found a larger "marble-like" structure which they struggled to shift and eventually had to "chisel out" and remove in fragments, she added.

Doctors said the literature they had come across on the condition showed a maximum of 37 teeth being removed in such a procedure.

"I think it could be a world record," she said.

Gavai's jawbone structure was maintained during the operation so it should heal without any deformities, the surgeon added.

TRAGEDY STRIKES INDIA



Indian onlookers gather at the scene of the collision between a school bus and a train in Hyderabad, yesterday. Top right, the wreckage of the bus and the train. The passenger train rammed into the school bus in southern India, killing 25 children, officials said.



PHOTO: AFP

Rivlin replaces Perez as Israeli president

AFP, Jerusalem

Far-right hawk Reuven Rivlin was sworn in as Israel's 10th president yesterday at a formal ceremony in parliament which saw elder statesman Shimon Peres stepping down.

"In prayer, in awe and humility, on your behalf and at your command, I come to faithfully fulfil my role as 10th president of the state of Israel," he said, a skullcap on his head and his left hand resting on a copy of the Old Testament.

Rivlin, 74, is taking over the presidency at a time of crisis for the Jewish state when it is locked in a bloody showdown with Gaza militants. He will officially begin his term in office on Monday.

A lawyer by profession, Rivlin has won widespread support from across the politi-

cal spectrum for his determined defence of democracy and civil rights. But his political outlook is diametrically opposed to that of Peres, being a firm opponent of a Palestinian state and a keen backer of the settlements.

He will have a tough act to follow, with Peres's charisma and global standing enabling him to transcend the largely ceremonial position of the presidency and use it to promote a political message of peace.

Shimon Peres is the last of Israel's founding fathers and a hawk-turned-dove whose international aura will be sorely missed by many Israelis.

Now 90, Peres has stood at the forefront of Israeli politics for 65 years, demonstrating resilience in the face of innumerable challenges.



Shimon Peres



Reuven Rivlin

Outrage after execution lasts 2 hours in US

AFP, Washington

America's death penalty debate raged yesterday after it took nearly two hours for Arizona to execute a prisoner who lost a Supreme Court battle challenging the experimental lethal drug cocktail.

Convicted killer Joseph Wood gasped and snorted during the 117 minutes it took him to die Wednesday after he was injected with a relatively untested combination of the sedative midazolam and painkiller hydromorphone, witnesses and his lawyers said.

It marked the third time so far this year that a US inmate took more than the usual 10 minutes to die by lethal injection.

Wood, who was convicted for the 1989 murders of his girlfriend Debbie Dietz and her father Gene, finally died at 3:49 pm (2249 GMT).

Just a day before he was finally put to death, the US Supreme Court had denied Wood's request to halt the execution because of the state's secrecy over the nature and origin of the drug cocktail.

Capital punishment opponents vowed to redouble their efforts to outlaw the practice, which most other countries have abandoned.

Wednesday's execution was the 26th in the United States, and the first in Arizona since October.



Announcement
Written Test for the post of
Junior Officer (Computer)

The written test for the posts of Junior Officer (Computer) for Information Technology Division, Card Department, Regional Offices and Corporate Branches will be held on **Friday, 08 August 2014, 3:30 PM to 5:00 PM** (01 hour 30 minutes). Details of the test will be available in the Admit Card.

The candidates are requested to download and print their Admit Cards for the written test from the Bank's website:

www.pubalibangla.com/career.asp

Admit Cards will be available at the website only for the short-listed candidates.



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