

Israeli jets hit Gaza after rocket fired into Israel

AFP, Jerusalem

Israeli aircraft struck Hamas bases in Gaza early yesterday, the military said, after a rocket fired by Palestinian militants hit a Jewish theological seminary in southern Israel.

There were no reported casualties on either side. "Last night, a rocket was launched from the Gaza Strip into Israeli territory," yesterday's military statement said.

It said that in response the Israeli Air Force "fighter jets and aircraft targeted terror infrastructure in military compounds and a Hamas naval force military compound as part of a strike on a number of Hamas terror sites throughout the Gaza Strip."

The seminary, in the town of Sderot, was empty at the time of the rocket attack as students had left to return to their homes elsewhere to celebrate the Jewish sabbath -- which begins yesterday-- with their families.

"If the rocket had hit a few hours earlier there would have been a disaster," former defence minister Amir Peretz, a Sderot resident, said in an interview yesterday with Israeli public radio.

Israeli police said the building was damaged when it was hit "with full force".

The Sderot incident came hours after Israeli warplanes bombed bunkers at a Hamas base in southern Gaza on Thursday, causing no casualties, according to a Palestinian security source.

That strike came after Israeli air defences intercepted a previous rocket launched from Gaza, the first since hundreds were fired from the enclave in early May in a flare-up which killed 25 Palestinians and four Israelis.

Israeli authorities on Wednesday announced a ban on fishing off Gaza, in response to the launching of balloons, fitted with incendiary devices, into Israeli territory to set fire to farmland.

"Due to the continuous launching of incendiary balloons and kites from the Gaza Strip towards Israel ... not to allow access to Gaza's maritime space until further notice," the Israeli defence ministry department responsible for Palestinian civil affairs, COGAT, said.

A spokesman for the Israeli fire service said incendiary balloons from Gaza caused seven fires on Tuesday alone.



A tow truck pulls a damaged car after it was side-swiped by a bus on Airport Road in the capital yesterday.

Less tax for well-off

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On the other hand, the surcharge-free net wealth ceiling was increased from Tk 2.25 crore to Tk 3 crore, which will give a slight relief to the high-income group.

In its analysis, the private think-tank said a number of rich people will remain out of the surcharge net.

For instance, a taxpayer who owns four 2,000sqft flats in the capital's Gulshan area will remain outside the purview of the surcharge.

The think-tank, however, used the prices put during land/flat registration for its calculations. The prices quoted tend to be lower than the actual transaction amount.

In order to widen tax net and attain the budgetary target of Tk 113,912 crore, up 20 percent from this fiscal year's target, the NBR seeks to make the submission of taxpayer identification number (TIN) mandatory for electricity bill payment in city corporations, cantonment boards, and municipalities.

"Based on the submitted TINs, we will check whether the users submit income tax returns," said an NBR official.

There are 20 lakh electricity connections in Dhaka city and many of them do not pay tax despite having taxable income, he said.

There are four crore people who are included in the middle-income group, but the number of taxpayers is only 21-22 lakh, according to the finance minister.

The total number of taxpayers would be increased to one crore as soon as possible, he said.

To that end, tax offices would be set up in every upazila and reforms in tax department would be made.

AF Nesaruddin, president of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Bangladesh, welcomed the plan to bring tax administrative reforms. "Digitalisation of the whole process is a need of the time. The government should focus more on this area."

Programmes must be undertaken to make taxpayers aware of digitalisation, Nesaruddin said.

Steps regarding online return filing and reducing the hassles of taxpayers are missing, CPD's Khan said.

To achieve the higher tax collection target for the next fiscal year, the NBR has sought to raise the withholding tax on the interest earnings from national saving certificates to 10 percent from 5 percent.

It has also sought to hike the tax at source on cash subsidy on exports to 10 percent from 3 percent and impose advance income tax on imports of various items and purchase of raw materials.

The NBR also wants to treat the advance income tax slapped at the import stage of cement, iron rod and steel products, as the minimum tax.

These measures are expected to bring a chunk of the additional tax the NBR is seeking, according to the NBR official.

There is not much good news for companies either.

Despite calls for cuts in tax rates to attract investment, the finance minister has sought to keep the corporate tax rates unchanged for all.

This means, the reduced tax benefit for the garment and textile sectors, the main export earner, will be carried over to the next fiscal year.

The finance minister has extended the tax holiday benefit on income from investment in infrastructure and 21 types of industries in economically lagging regions for the next five years to encourage private investment and job creation.

Offers are also there for black money-holders: they will be able to invest the undisclosed income without facing any question from taxmen about the source of funds.

Holders of undeclared money will be allowed to invest in establishing factories in economic zones and hi-tech parks by paying only 10 percent tax.

Until now, their investment scope was limited to properties in city corporations and municipalities.

"It shows that privileged persons get more benefits. This is unjust and it will increase inequality in the society," Khan said.

Train baby

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predicament when Emma Tote, the on board catering assistant, heard a woman screaming in the toilet and went to help.

The driver was informed, an ambulance requested and passengers with a medical background asked to make themselves known to staff.

Dr Alan Devine, a GP from Galway, was one of those who stepped forward to assist, although he said two nurses "were running the show" by the time he arrived on the scene, reports RTE.

He was "there to catch the baby when it came out" about 20 minutes later while the train was stopped at Kildare.

Both mother and baby are recovering well having been whisked to hospital after the train arrived in Dublin.

"In what must have been a very stressful situation, the response of customers and staff in both assisting and ensuring the privacy of the mother was excellent," added Iamróid Éireann.

It's not the first time a child born on board has benefited from complimentary travel.

In June 2017, a baby born during a Jet Airways flight from Dammam in Saudi Arabia to Kochi was awarded free flights for life by the airline.

Two ships

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ship to keep a safe distance but he was not responsive."

The S-shaped channel is only 280-metre wide and does not leave much space for a third vessel to pass. Moreover, the incident took place at Gupta Bend, where the channel has an almost 180-degree curve, the official said.

Six CPA tug boats, ambulance ships, and rescue ships rushed in and cleared the channel for navigation by 11:00am.

Capt Alam said the two foreign vessels were stuck with each other, and the CPA marine department team had difficulty bringing them apart.

Though the channel was cleared within less than three hours, no vessel could use it immediately because the morning high tide was gone by then, he said.

Vessel operations resumed during the evening tide.

Ships need to cross the port channel because Chatogram Port is located in the Karnaphuli estuary, 16km from the outer anchorage in the sea.

Unesco to put Sundarbans on the list

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objections about the power plant since the government took the initiative of constructing it at the edge of the forest.

Although the government has always claimed that the power plant would not pose any threat to the Sundarbans, the Unesco and environmentalist groups were never convinced.

In 2017, a government delegation attended the 41th meeting of the Unesco World Heritage Committee to discuss the issue.

The Unesco in a document last week mentioned that the government did not make enough progress in undertaking a Structural Environment Assessment (SEA) on the region to

ascertain potential dangers posing the Sundarbans.

Rather, the government allowed construction of two additional power plants on the Payra river and numerous other industrial projects in the periphery of the Sundarbans.

The authorities are also dredging the Payra, which could pose another threat to the forest, says the Unesco document. Following a series of correspondence between the government and World Heritage committee, the Unesco came to the conclusion that "little progress has been achieved to address the significant threats to the property".

"Despite the committee's requests, no serious consideration was given to possible alternatives

to the construction of the Rampal power plant, and its construction is progressing..."

"All taking place in the absence of the SEA.

"It is regrettable that the National Oil Spill and Chemical Contingency Plan (NOS COP) has still not been finalised, and that no details on financial and human resource allocation have been provided for its implementation."

The Unesco committee sent the government a letter requesting it to submit to the World Heritage Centre by February 1 next year an updated report on the state of conservation of the property for examination by the World Heritage Committee at its 44th session in 2020.

Don't take risky sea route to Europe

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Libya, while talking to this correspondent over phone yesterday.

"Tunisian Red Crescent is providing them with food, but they are still in the sea."

Sheikh Sekander Ali, Bangladesh ambassador to Libya, and a junior officer have already flown to Tunisia to have meetings with the Tunisian authorities.

"We will try to negotiate with the Tunisian authorities that we will send back our people home if they allow the people on the boat to disembark," Ashraf said.

There are possibilities that human traffickers involved in arranging the sea journeys from the Libyan coast to Europe often discourage those stranded in the sea from returning to the Libyan or Tunisian coast, he said.

The labour counsellor said they had information that those who were adrift at sea did not want to come to ashore rather wanted to go to Europe.

The ambassador was scheduled to hold a meeting with the Tunisian authorities yesterday, he said.

At least 65 migrants drowned last month when their boat capsized in the Mediterranean Sea off the Tunisian coast after they had left Libya hoping to reach Europe. Of them, some 40 Bangladeshis were feared dead while 14 others survived.

In the first four months of this year, 164 people are known to have died on the route, a smaller number but a higher death rate than that of previous years, the UN Refugee Agency said.

Apart from that, Libyan coastguard has intercepted a number of boats

heading for Europe and detained migrants of different nationalities. Some of them are Bangladeshis, said a statement of Bangladesh Embassy in Libya yesterday.

It said Europe has taken a tough stance against the sea journeys by the migrants. On the other hand, Libyan coastguard too is strongly enforcing the maritime boundary.

"Under such circumstances, sea journeys have become impossible. On behalf of the embassy, we are requesting the Bangladeshis in Libya and their relatives and friends to be careful about such journey," said Ashraf.

There are an estimated of 20,000 Bangladeshis living in Libya, which has plunged into a civil war after the fall of president Muammar Gaddafi in 2011.

US blames Iran

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Tehran has said the United States and its regional allies, such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, were "warmongering" by making accusations against Iran.

'UNWISE ESCALATION' The cause of Thursday's blasts remains unclear. An initial report that Kokuka Courageous, which was being towed to a UAE port yesterday, had been struck by torpedo was dismissed by a source familiar with the issue. The owner of the tanker, which carried methanol, later said it was hit by two "flying objects".

A source has said a magnetic mine

could have caused the explosion on Front Altair, which had a cargo of naphtha. Its owner said yesterday the fire erupted was put out. The blaze that sent smoke towering into the air charred the ship's hull.

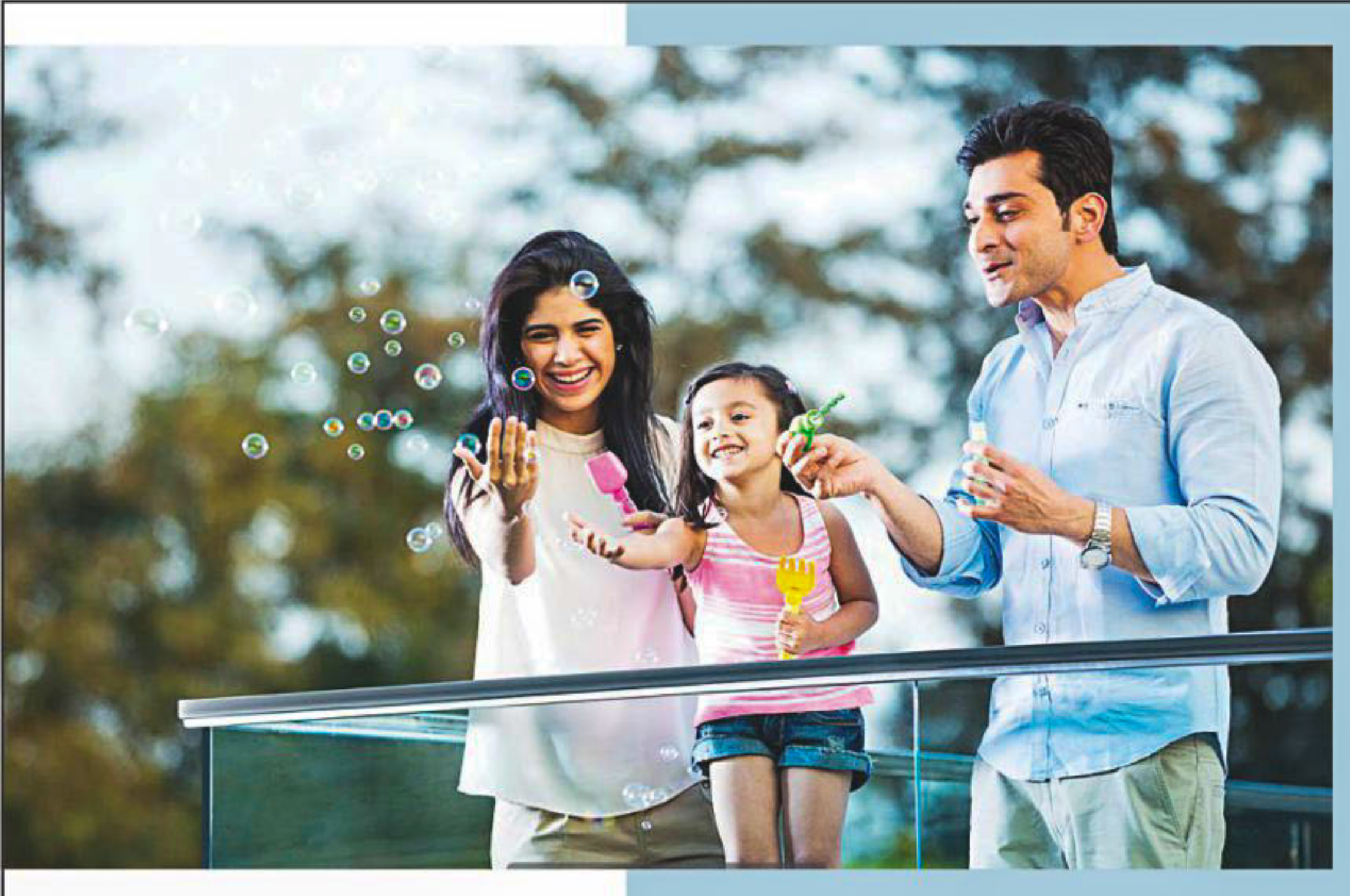
Iranian TV showed 23 crew in Iran believed to be from Front Altair yesterday, and said experts would assess whether they could return to the ship. The crew from Kokuka Courageous were picked up and handed to a US Navy ship on Thursday.

US and European security officials, as well as regional analysts,

have cautioned against jumping to conclusions, leaving open the possibility that Iranian proxies, or someone else entirely, might have been responsible for Thursday's attacks.

Britain said it took the matter "extremely seriously" and, if Iran was involved, "it is a deeply unwise escalation."

Iranian-US tensions began ratcheting up after US President Donald Trump pulled out of a deal last year between Iran and global powers that aimed to curb Tehran's nuclear ambitions in exchange for relief from international sanctions.



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