

WORLD REACTS



We stand ready to offer all appropriate means of support to the government and people of Israel. Israel has a right to defend itself and its people. The US warns against any other party hostile to Israel seeking advantage in this situation

US President
Joe Biden

We will stand by the Palestinian fighters until the liberation of Palestine and Jerusalem

Yahya Rahim Safavi,
adviser to Iran's Supreme
Leader Khamenei

This attack is having a horrific impact on Israeli civilians ... Civilians must never be the target of attack

UN High Commissioner for
Human Rights
Volker Tuerk

Deeply shocked by the news of terrorist attacks in Israel. We stand in solidarity with Israel at this difficult hour

Indian Prime Minister
Narendra Modi



A man carries a crying child as he walks in front of a building destroyed in an Israeli air strike in Gaza City yesterday. Inset: Burnt out vehicles in Ashkelon are pictured following a rocket attack from the Gaza Strip into Israel yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Why did Hamas attack Israel now?

AGENCIES

Hamas spokesperson Khaled Qadomi has told Al Jazeera that the group's military operation is in response to all the atrocities the Palestinians have faced over the decades. "We want the international community to stop atrocities in Gaza, against Palestinian people, our holy sites like Al-Aqsa. All these things are the reason behind starting this battle," he said.

"This is the day of the greatest battle to end the last occupation on Earth," Mohammed Deif, the Hamas military commander said, adding that 5,000 rockets were launched.

"Everyone who has a gun should take it out. The time has come," Deif said, according to reports.

Hamas called on "the resistance fighters in the West Bank" as well as "our Arab and Islamic nations" to join the battle, in a statement

posted on Telegram, reports Al Jazeera.

The rockets were fired as far north as Tel Aviv. Hamas also sent fighters into southern Israel.

Israeli media said that gunmen had opened fire on passers-by in the town of Sderot, and footage circulating on social media appeared to show clashes in city streets as well as gunmen in jeeps roaming the countryside. One report claimed Hamas fighters had taken control of multiple Israeli civilian population centres, where residents were begging for help from their government.

The Israeli army says dozens of fighter jets were carrying out attacks on Hamas targets in the Gaza Strip.

Currently, the gun battles are taking place in and around the towns of Kfar Aza, Sderot, Sufa, Nahal Oz, Magen, Be'eri, and the Re'im military base, the Times of Israel reported.

The Israeli army warned Israelis who live

near Gaza to stay in their homes or head to shelters.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu says his country is in a war it "will win".

Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant said Israel "will win this war." Hamas, he said, had made a "grave mistake this morning and launched a war against the State of Israel".

Israeli media reported gunbattles between bands of Palestinian fighters and security forces in towns in southern Israel. Israel's police chief said there were "21 active scenes" in southern Israel.

Al Jazeera's Walid al-Omari, bureau chief in Ramallah, says Israeli forces surrounded a house in the Ofakim settlement and negotiations are under way with Palestinian fighters who are allegedly holding hostages.

The Ministry of Health in Gaza has issued a call for blood donations at hospitals in the besieged enclave.

How the attack unfolded

REUTERS, Jerusalem

COVERING ROCKET BARRAGE

At about 6.30 am (0430 GMT) Palestinian Islamist group Hamas fired a huge barrage of rockets across southern Israel, with sirens heard as far away as Tel Aviv and Beersheba. Hamas said it had fired 5,000 rockets in a first barrage. Israel's military said 2,500 rockets were fired. Smoke billowed over residential Israeli areas and people sheltered behind buildings as sirens sounded overhead. At least one woman was reported killed by the rockets.

DAWN INFILTRATION

The barrage served as cover for an unprecedented multi-pronged infiltration of fighters, with the Israeli military saying at 7.40 am (0540 GMT) that Palestinian gunmen had crossed into Israel. Most fighters crossed through breaches in land security barriers separating Gaza and Israel. Videos issued by Hamas showed fighters breaching the security fences, with the dim light and low sun suggesting it was at around the time of the rocket barrage.

FIGHTING AT ISRAELI MILITARY BASES

Israel's military said at 10:00 am that Palestinian fighters had penetrated at least three military installations around the frontier - the Erez border crossing, the Zikim base and the Gaza division headquarters at Reim. It said fighting at Erez and Zikim continued. Hamas videos showed fighters running towards a burning building near a high concrete wall with a watchtower and fighters apparently overrunning part of an Israeli military facility and shooting from behind a wall.

BORDER TOWN RAIDS

Fighters raided the Israeli border town of Sderot and were reported to be in another border community, Be'eri, and the town of Ofakim 30km (20 miles) east of Gaza, according to Israeli media citing phone calls from residents. A video verified by Reuters showed several gunmen riding the back of a white pickup truck moving through Sderot. Israel's military ordered residents to shelter inside, saying on the radio "we will reach you".

TAKING CAPTIVES

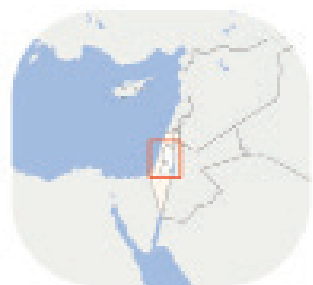
Israeli media has reported that gunmen have seized hostages in Ofakim. Islamic Jihad said it was holding several Israeli soldiers captive and Hamas social media accounts showed footage of appearing to show captives being taken alive into Gaza.

ISRAELI STRIKES

At 9.45 am blasts were heard in central Gaza and Gaza city and at 10.00 am. Israel's military spokesperson said the airforce was carrying out strikes in Gaza. Medics in Gaza said dozens of people were killed in the strikes.

Rockets fired from Gaza hit Israel

Barrages of rockets were fired at Israel from the Gaza Strip as militants from the Palestinian enclave infiltrated Israel



Israeli settlement
Barrier
Green line (1949 armistice)

Map data:
Natural Earth, OSM, JRC
Sources: Bf Isralim, UN OCHA, Peace Now



AFGHANISTAN EARTHQUAKE

Magnitude 6.3 jolt kills 15

AFP, Herat

A magnitude 6.3 earthquake hit western Afghanistan yesterday killing 15 and injuring dozens more, officials said, predicting the toll could rise after reports of landslides and victims trapped under collapsed buildings.

The United States Geological Survey said the epicentre was 40 kilometres (25 miles) northwest of the region's largest city Herat, and was followed by seven aftershocks with magnitudes between 4.6 and 6.3.

Crowds of residents fled buildings in the city at around 11:00 am (0630 GMT) as the quakes began, lasting just under three hours.

"We were in our offices and suddenly the building started shaking," 45-year-old Herat resident Bashir Ahmad told AFP.

"Wall plasters started to fall down

and the walls got cracks, some walls and parts of the building collapsed." "I am not able to contact my family, network connections are disconnected. I am too worried and scared, it was horrifying," he said.



Men, women and children stood out in the wide streets, away from tall buildings, in the moments after the first quake and remained wary of returning to homes as aftershocks continued.

"The situation was very horrible,

I have never experienced such a thing," said 21-year-old student Idrees Arsal, the last to safely evacuate his classroom as the quakes began.

In a video statement, National Disaster Management Authority spokesman Mullah Jan Sayeq said "around 40" had been injured in tremors felt across three provinces, in addition to 15 killed.

"These are the preliminary numbers. There is the possibility the numbers could increase," he said.

Earlier in the day he told AFP there had been landslides in nearby rural and mountainous areas.

Public health director of Herat province Mohammad Taleb Shahid put the fatality figure slightly lower at 14, with 78 injured, but agreed the tally would likely rise.

"We have information that people are buried under rubble," he told AFP.



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