

ISRAEL-HAMAS WAR

Saudi prince, Iran president hold call

Discuss the 'need to end war crimes against Palestine'

AFP, Riyadh
Saudi Arabia's de facto ruler and Iran's president spoke by phone about the war between Israel and Hamas...

Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman received a call on Wednesday from the Iranian leader, Ebrahim Raisi...

Prince Mohammed told Raisi that Riyadh is "communicating with all international and regional parties to stop the ongoing escalation"...

Iranian news agency IRNA also reported on the call, saying the two men discussed the "need to end war crimes against Palestine"...

Hamas launched a surprise attack on Israel on Saturday that Israeli forces say killed more than 1,300 people...

reported 1,354 people killed in Israel's retaliatory campaign of air and artillery strikes.

As war rages on, fears have mounted over the fate of at least 150 hostages - mostly Israelis but also including foreign and dual nationals - held in Gaza by Hamas.

Analysts say the war has dealt a heavy blow to a possible landmark normalisation deal between Saudi Arabia, home to the holiest sites in Islam, and Israel.

That process has been driven by US President Joe Biden's administration, with Riyadh bargaining hard for benefits from Washington including security guarantees and help developing a civilian nuclear programme.

Saudi Arabia and Iran announced in March they had agreed to restore ties.

Prince Mohammed also spoke by phone on Wednesday with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, during which the prince said he was "exerting unremitting efforts through regional and international communication to achieve coordination that pushes for a halt of the current escalation"...



Plumes of smoke billow during Israeli air strikes in Gaza City yesterday as raging battles between Israel and the Hamas movement continue for the sixth consecutive day.

Jailed ex-Pak PM Imran says he is 'stronger than ever'

AFP, Islamabad

Former Pakistan prime minister Imran Khan said he is "stronger and fitter than ever" since being jailed two months ago...

Khan was convicted of graft in August and jailed for three years, with the election commission subsequently banning him from contesting polls scheduled for January 2024.

"Let it be known that there's a difference of day and night between the Imran Khan of today and Imran Khan who was imprisoned on August 5," he said in the first statement to be released on his behalf since he was jailed.

"Today I am stronger and fitter; spiritually, mentally and physically, than ever before," added the former international cricket superstar. The statement also appeared on Khan's X account.

Khan said he has spent his time in jail reading the holy Quran, adding that he has "adjusted well to prison conditions"...

"Do not give up," Khan told his supporters in yesterday's statement. "Keep raising your voice against this unselected predatory group and their facilitators at every forum and keep demanding a fair and transparent election in the country."

Since being ousted last year Khan has been tangled in a slew of legal cases he says are designed to stop him from contesting elections.

Gazans have no hope, no escape

Officials in the Palestinian territory say the collapse of health system has 'truly begun' amid Israel's heavy bombardment

REUTERS

Most of the 2.3 million people in the Gaza Strip have no electricity and no water. And, with hundreds of Israeli strikes raining down on their tiny enclave, they have nowhere to run.

The health ministry in Gaza has just issued its latest update warning that the healthcare system "has begun to truly collapse"...

The Palestinian territory, one of the most crowded places on Earth, has been under siege since Saturday in a near-constant bombardment that Gazan health officials say has killed 1,354 people. The blitz is retaliation for a devastating attack on Israel by Gaza's ruling group Hamas which the Israeli military says killed more than 1,300 people.

Gaza's sole power station, which had been working intermittently for days, cut out on Wednesday after running out of fuel. Without power, water can't be pumped into houses. At night there's nearly total darkness punctuated by fireballs and the pin-pricks of light from phones used as flashlights.

"I lived through all the wars and incursions in the past, but I have never

witnessed anything worse than this war," said Yamen Hamad, 35, a father-of-four, whose home had been destroyed by Israeli strikes on the northern Gaza town of Beit Hanoun.

At a hospital in Khan Younis in southern Gaza, relatives and friends lined up outside the overloaded morgue where bodies were laid out on the floor because coolers were full or had no power.

The mourners were desperate to bury their loved ones swiftly before the unseasonable heat took its toll. They spoke briefly over the bodies, praying for the souls to rest in peace, before they carried them to graves nearby, with stretchers if they were available, or otherwise without.

Reuters interviewed more than three dozen people in Gaza, and most echoed Hamad's sentiments. They painted a picture of dread and hopelessness in the face of what they described as the worst violence they'd ever seen.

With the strip's only other border, to Egypt, blocked by Egyptian authorities, the people said they were trapped. They feared the worst was yet to come, including a possible ground invasion, as Israel seeks retribution for the deadliest

Palestinian fighter attack in the country's 75-year history.

That surprise raid, launched on Saturday, saw Hamas fighters burst out of Gaza and kill hundreds of people, leaving corpses strewn around a music festival and a kibbutz community. Scores of Israelis and others have been taken to Gaza as hostages, some paraded through the streets.

The Hamas attack drew strong condemnation by the United States and other Western governments. The fighter group's 1988 founding charter called for Israel's destruction, and the group is branded a terrorist organisation by Israel, the United States, the European Union, Canada, Egypt and Japan.

Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant has pledged intensify the military campaign in Gaza, saying on Wednesday that Israel would wipe Hamas "off the face of the Earth"...

Beit Hanoun, near the frontier with Israel, was among the first places hit hard by retaliatory Israeli strikes, with many roads and buildings destroyed and thousands of displaced, according to Hamas and local residents. There was no escape for Ala al-Kafarnah's family.

The 31-year-old said he fled the town on Saturday with his pregnant wife, his father, brothers, cousins and in-laws. They drove to Beach Refugee Camp on the coast, where they hoped they would be safer, but air attacks began targeting that area too so they headed to Sheikh Radwan, another district deeper east.



China ups 'military intimidation' Says Taiwan minister

AFP, Taipei

Taiwan's defence minister said yesterday China has stepped up "military intimidation" this year by flying an increased number of warplanes around the island as well as accelerating the deployment of ballistic missiles. China claims self-ruled Taiwan as part of its territory to be seized one day - by force if necessary - and has ramped up pressure on the island in recent years, staging two rounds of war games. Beijing has "stepped up the intensity of its military intimidation to strengthen control over our surrounding waters and airspace"...

Israel strikes Damascus, Aleppo airports Says Syrian state TV

AFP, Damascus

Israeli strikes targeted Syria's two main airports yesterday, Syrian state television said, in the first such attack since a Hamas assault on Israel at the weekend triggered fierce fighting. "Israeli aggression targets Damascus and Aleppo airports," the state television reported on the messaging app Telegram, without providing additional details. Israeli strikes have repeatedly caused the grounding of flights at the airports in Aleppo and the capital Damascus, both of which are controlled by the government of war-torn Syria. The latest strikes came as Hamas and Israel traded heavy fire for a sixth day yesterday.

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ETHNIC VIOLENCE
Manipur govt bans circulation of photos, videos
THE INDIAN EXPRESS ONLINE
Three days after a video of a Kuki-Zomi man being burned began doing the rounds on social media and Whatsapp, the government of India's Manipur state on Wednesday declared it will book and prosecute people found circulating images and videos of violence.

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