

Gazans look for loved ones as blackout eases

REUTERS, Gaza

Gazans searched for loved ones and heard news of family members killed as communications gradually returned to the enclave yesterday after a near total blackout as Israel's troops and armour pushed into the Hamas-ruled enclave.

Shaban Ahmed, a public servant who works as an engineer and has five children, described the Israeli attacks as "doomsday".

"This morning, Sunday, I discovered that my cousin has been killed in an air strike on their house on Friday," Ahmed, who stayed in Gaza City despite an Israeli warning to evacuate south, told Reuters.

"We only knew today. Israel cut us off from the world in order to wipe us out, but we are hearing the sounds of explosions and we are proud the resistance fighters have stopped them at metres distance."



This image taken from the Israeli border with the Gaza Strip yesterday, shows black smoke ascending from the Gaza Strip amid the ongoing battles between Israel and the Palestinian group Hamas.

PHOTO: AFP

US says Israel must protect civilians in Gaza

REUTERS, Washington

Israel has a responsibility to protect the lives of innocent people in Gaza, White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan said yesterday amid a growing outcry over Palestinian civilian deaths.

With the death toll in the Gaza Strip in the thousands and climbing, US President Joe Biden's administration has been under increasing pressure to make clear that its steadfast support of Israel does not translate into a blanket endorsement of all that its ally is doing in the impoverished coastal enclave.

In a round of television interviews, Sullivan said Washington was asking hard questions of Israel, including on issues surrounding humanitarian aid, distinguishing between terrorists and innocent civilians and on how Israel is thinking through its military operation.

"What we believe is that every hour, every day of this military operation, the IDF (Israel Defense Forces), the Israeli government should be taking every possible means available to them to distinguish between Hamas terrorists who are legitimate military targets and civilians who are not," Sullivan said on CNN.

Israeli actions 'may force everyone' to act

Says Iran's Raisi; Turkey-Israel ties in tatters over Erdogan address

AFP, Tehran

Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi yesterday said Israel's ongoing bombardment of Gaza "may force everyone" to act in the latest warning issued by the Islamic republic since the start of the Israel-Hamas conflict.

Israel has been pounding the tiny Palestinian territory since Hamas gunmen stormed across the border on October 7 and, according to Israeli officials, killed more than 1,400 people, most of them civilians.

Since then, more than 8,000 people have been killed, half of them children, according to the health ministry in Hamas-run Gaza, an impoverished strip of land which is home to 2.4 million people.

"The crimes of the Zionist regime have crossed the red lines, and this may force everyone to take action," Raisi said on X, formerly Twitter, yesterday.

"Washington asks us to not do anything, but they keep giving widespread support to Israel," he said.

"The US sent messages to the Axis of Resistance but received a clear response on the battlefield," he said, using a term often used by Iranian officials to refer to the Islamic republic and its allies like Lebanon's Hezbollah, Yemen's Huthis and other Shia forces in Iraq and Syria.

Although it was not immediately clear what he was referring to,



there have been a string of attacks on US forces in Iraq and Syria as well as increasing exchanges of fire between Hezbollah and Israeli forces on the Lebanon border since the Gaza conflict began.

Meanwhile, Israel said Saturday it was recalling its diplomatic staff from Turkey after President Recep Tayyip Erdogan delivered a fierce attack on its military operation against Hamas in Gaza.

The announcement dealt a body blow to the sides' nascent efforts to restore political and economic relations after a decade of all but frozen ties.

Israel and Turkey — an overwhelmingly Muslim nation that forms the bulwark of Nato defences on the edge of the Middle East — had only just agreed to reappoint

ambassadors last year. Iran, which financially and militarily backs Hamas, hailed the October 7 attacks as a "success".

But it has insisted it was not involved in the onslaught, during which 230 people were also taken hostage, according to Israeli authorities.

"Iran considers it its duty to support the resistance groups, but ... the resistance groups are independent in their opinion, decision, and action," the Iranian president said in an interview with Al Jazeera on Saturday, according to excerpts released by state news agency IRNA.

"The United States knows very well our current capabilities and knows that they are impossible to overcome," he said.

Path to Biden-Xi meeting 'not smooth'

Says Chinese FM

AFP, Beijing

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said the path to a meeting between President Xi Jinping and Joe Biden was "not smooth", state media reported as the top diplomat wrapped up a rare visit to Washington.

Wang met with Biden and other senior US officials this week, with both sides agreeing on Friday to set up a meeting between the leaders next month.

Biden has invited Xi to San Francisco in November for the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit at a time of tense relations between the two powers. Xi has not yet confirmed he will come.

Wang on Saturday told the audience at a Washington event hosted by the Aspen Strategy Group that "both sides hope to stabilise and improve bilateral relations as soon as possible and agreed to work together toward a San Francisco summit between the two heads of state," state news agency Xinhua reported.

"The path to San Francisco is not smooth and cannot be left to 'autopilot'," Wang warned, according to Xinhua.

Biden and Xi have had no contact since a meeting in Bali in November 2022.

PRAYER MEETING Serial blasts kill one in Kerala

45 injured; 48-yr-old suspect surrenders

NDTV ONLINE

One woman was killed and 45 were injured in a series of blasts at a convention centre in India's southern state of Kerala yesterday, sending shockwaves across the country. At least three blasts were reported within minutes after the prayer meeting started. The incident took place during a Jehovah's Witnesses convention at the centre in Kalamassery, about 10 kilometres from Kochi. Hours after the blasts, a 48-year-old man claimed responsibility and has surrendered. The suspect, Dominic Martin, has claimed that he belongs to the same Christian denomination that organised the prayer meet. Security has been tightened in New Delhi and Mumbai following the blasts. The meet was attended by nearly 2,000 people. People who were present at the convention centre told the media that the first blast occurred in the middle of a prayer. Officials said explosives had been placed inside a tiffin box. Kalamassery MP Hibi Eden said that the first explosion occurred in the centre of the hall. He added that the group had an evacuation plan which kicked into action immediately after the first blast. "Luckily, they had an evacuation plan. Every time the group meets, they discuss and prepare an evacuation plan. But there was a lot of smoke, which led to a stampede," Eden told NDTV.

INDIA'S SPYING CONCERNS Sri Lanka lets Chinese ship conduct research

AFP, Colombo



Sri Lanka has granted 48 hours for a Chinese vessel to conduct marine research off the island's west coast under supervision, the foreign ministry said yesterday, despite Indian concerns that it could be a spy ship. Ministry spokesman Kapila Fonseka said Chinese research ship

Shi Yan 6, which has been in Colombo since Wednesday, would be allowed to carry out work for two days starting today. Earlier, Sri Lanka allowed the vessel to enter the main port of Colombo only for "replenishments" over concerns raised by neighbouring India that the craft could be used to spy against them. New Delhi is suspicious of China's increasing presence in the Indian Ocean and its influence in Sri Lanka, which is strategically placed halfway along key east-west international shipping routes. A spacecraft-tracking Chinese vessel last year raised security concerns from India, and Sri Lanka prohibited it from undertaking any research activities while in its waters. Fonseka said local scientists will be onboard Shi Yan 6 during two days of research activities along the western seaboard of the island. "Apart from our scientists and researchers, the Sri Lanka navy too will be monitoring this vessel," Fonseka told AFP. The 90-metre (300-foot) vessel is anchored at the Colombo harbour where a Chinese state-run company operates a deep sea terminal. A pair of Chinese submarines docked there in 2014, raising protests from India. There was no immediate comment from either the Chinese or Indian diplomatic missions in Sri Lanka after Colombo granted limited approvals to Shi Yan 6.

Mouse embryos grown in space for first time

AFP, Tokyo

Mouse embryos have been grown on the International Space Station (ISS) and developed normally in the first study indicating it could be possible for humans to reproduce in space, a group of Japanese scientists said.

The researchers, including Teruhiko Wakayama, professor of University of Yamanashi's Advanced Biotechnology Centre, and a team from the Japan Aerospace Space Agency (JAXA), sent frozen mouse embryos on board a rocket to the ISS in August 2021.

Astronauts thawed the early-stage embryos using a special device designed for this purpose and grew them on the station for four days.

"The embryos cultured under microgravity conditions developed" normally into blastocysts, cells that develop into the foetus and placenta, the scientists said. The experiment "clearly demonstrated that gravity had no significant effect," the researchers said in a study that was published online in journal iScience on Saturday.

They also said there were no significant changes in condition of the DNA and genes, after they analysed the blastocysts that were sent back to their laboratories on Earth.

This is "the first-ever study that shows mammals may be able to thrive in space," University of Yamanashi and national research institute Riken said in a joint statement on Saturday.



People chant slogans while holding placards, some of which translate as 'Reveal The Truth' as they attend a vigil in Seoul, South Korea yesterday, to mark the first anniversary of the tragic crowd crush that killed 159 people during Halloween celebrations, in Seoul's popular Itaewon nightlife area a year ago.

PHOTO: AFP

Myanmar ex-info minister arrested: junta

AFP, Bangkok

Myanmar's former information minister has been arrested and charged with encouraging dissent against the military, the junta said yesterday, the latest in a series of high-profile arrests.

In recent months the military, who has faced armed resistance since seizing power in a 2021 coup, detained a number of trade and commerce officials as the civil conflict batters Myanmar's already struggling economy.

Ye Htut was information minister and presidential spokesperson under the military government of Thein Sein, which ceded power to Aung San Suu Kyi following 2015's landmark elections.

In a statement, the junta information team said the 64-year-old had been detained on Saturday evening in connection with "spreading wrong information on social media".