

Israeli army issues Gaza evacuation zone map

REUTERS, Jerusalem

The Israeli army said yesterday that with the resumption of fighting it had published a map to advise Gazans of safe areas for their evacuation.

Its statement linked to an Israeli army website in Arabic showing an Evacuation Zone Map. It said an Arabic-language video had been released on social networks and the map was being distributed by the army in Gaza.

"This divides the territory of the Gaza Strip into areas according to recognizable areas to enable the residents of Gaza to orient themselves and understand the instructions..." the statement said.

On Thursday, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken told Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that Israel's campaign in southern Gaza must not repeat the massive loss of civilian life.



Palestinians inspect the damage following an Israeli strike in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip yesterday, as fighting resumed shortly after the expiration of a seven-day truce between Israel and Hamas.

PHOTO: AFP

'We take this very seriously' Says US after Indian charged in alleged murder plot

NDTV ONLINE

The White House National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby yesterday stressed that the US continues to improve its strategic partnership with India.

On the other side, he added that the US "takes this very seriously," referring to the indictment by the US Department of Justice against an Indian in an alleged foiled assassination plot.

While speaking at a press briefing, Kirby said, "India remains a strategic partner, and we are going to continue to work to improve and strengthen that strategic partnership with India."

Referring to the US Justice Department indictment of an Indian national in an alleged foiled assassination plot in the US, Kirby added, "At the same time, we take this very seriously. These allegations and this investigation, we take very seriously."

He further said that India is also taking it seriously by announcing their "own efforts to investigate this."

"We have been clear that we want to see anybody that's responsible for these alleged crimes to be held properly accountable..." Kirby stressed.

'Hell on Earth has returned to Gaza'

UN deplores 'catastrophic' resumption of fighting in Palestinian enclave; aid deliveries jeopardized

REUTERS, Geneva

The United Nations deplored the resumption of conflict in Gaza yesterday, describing the hostilities as "catastrophic" and urging parties to bring about a lasting ceasefire.

Jens Laerke, spokesperson for the United Nations humanitarian office in Geneva, said the resumption of hostilities meant "hell on Earth has returned to Gaza".

Israeli warplanes resumed bombing Gaza, sending Palestinian civilians fleeing for shelter, after a week-old truce ran out with no deal to extend it.

"The resumption of hostilities in Gaza is catastrophic," said Volker Turk, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

"Urge all parties and states with influence over them to redouble efforts, immediately, to ensure a ceasefire - on humanitarian and human rights grounds."

In a post on X social media platform, United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said he regretted the resumption of hostilities and hoped a new pause could be

established.

"The return to hostilities only shows how important it is to have a true humanitarian ceasefire," he said.

Laerke said that the week long truce had seen significantly larger humanitarian convoys entering densely populated Gaza, even reaching north of Wadi Gaza, which prior to the pause had received almost no supplies.

"With the resumption of war, we fear that the continuation of this (aid) is now in doubt," he said.

"The Rafah crossing is closed as of now. We need a resumption of a humanitarian pause, not a return to war."

Appealing for a lasting ceasefire, Unicef called inaction on Gaza "an approval of the killing of children".

"A lasting ceasefire must be implemented," James Elder, spokesperson for Unicef, told reporters via video link from Gaza.

"Inaction at its core is an approval of the killing of children.... It is reckless to think more attacks on the people of Gaza will lead to anything other than carnage."

Iran yesterday blamed Israel and

the United States for resumption of the fighting in the Gaza Strip.

"After killing more than 15,000 Palestinians, the Zionist vampires have started a new round of killing under the continued support of the American government," Iran's foreign ministry spokesman Nasser Kanani said in a post on X, formerly Twitter.

Kanani added that "the political and legal responsibility for the continuation of the aggression and massacre" rests with Israel, the US and "a few governments that support this apartheid regime."

On Thursday, US top diplomat Antony Blinken, meeting Israeli and Palestinian officials, called for the pause in hostilities to be extended, and warned any resumption of combat must protect Palestinian civilians.

Other world leaders, and aid groups, had also sought an extended pause.

"The nations and the vast majority of the governments of the world are shouting for the continuation of the ceasefire and the complete stop to the Zionist regime's attacks against Gaza and the West Bank," Kanani said.

Iran has denied any direct involvement in Hamas's attack on Israel. During the truce, mediated by Qatar with Egyptian and American support, 80 Israeli hostages were freed in exchange for 240 Palestinian prisoners.

SATELLITE LAUNCH

US, partners target North Korea with sanctions

REUTERS, Washington

The United States on Thursday targeted North Korea with fresh sanctions after its launch of a spy satellite last week, designating foreign-based agents it accused of facilitating sanctions evasion to gather revenue and technology for its weapons of mass destruction program.

The US Treasury Department in a statement said it also applied sanctions to cyber espionage group Kimsuky, accusing it of gathering intelligence to support North Korea's strategic and nuclear ambitions.

Thursday's action, taken in coordination with Australia, Japan and South Korea, comes after North Korea last week successfully launched its first reconnaissance satellite, which it has said was designed to monitor US and South Korean military movements.

"Today's actions by the United States, Australia, Japan, and the Republic of Korea reflect our collective commitment to contesting Pyongyang's illicit and destabilizing activities," Treasury's Under Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence, Brian Nelson, said in the statement.

Russia advancing on all fronts in Ukraine

Says defence minister; Kyiv holds line against attacks in east

AGENCIES

Russia yesterday said its troops were progressing in all areas of the Ukrainian front, despite observers seeing little movement more a year and a half after Moscow launched a full-scale assault on Ukraine.

"Our servicemen are acting competently and decisively, occupying a more favourable position and expanding their zones of control in all directions," Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu said, as his troops intensify assaults on the eastern front.

Despite the frontlines having barely shifted in 2023, fighting has remained intense, with the nearly encircled industrial town of Avdiivka the latest major flashpoint.

Russia launched a renewed bid to capture the war-battered town in October, and analysts suggest Moscow's forces have made incremental gains, though at an enormous human cost.

"Russian troops are effectively and firmly inflicting fire damage on the Ukrainian armed forces, significantly reducing their combat capabilities," Shoigu said.

His ministry announced Wednesday it had taken control of Khromove, a small village on the outskirts of Bakhmut in Ukraine's eastern Donetsk region, reports AFP.

Ukraine has said Russian troops had "considerably increased" their operations in the east, but that its forces were holding on.

SOUTH CHINA SEA ROW

Philippines builds monitoring station on island

REUTERS, Manila

The Philippines has built a new coast guard station on the contested island of Thitu in the South China Sea, boosting its ability to monitor movements of Chinese vessels and aircraft in the busy disputed waterway. As tension mounts over territorial claims in the area, the Philippine coast guard had early this year spotted a Chinese navy ship and dozens of militia vessels around the island, one of nine features Manila occupies in the Spratly archipelago.

Inaugurated yesterday, the new three-storey facility is equipped with state-of-the-art technology such as radar, automatic identification, satellite communication, and coastal cameras, the Philippine coast guard said in a statement. "The behaviour of the Chinese coast guard, People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy and Chinese militias are sometimes unpredictable," Eduardo Ano, the Philippine national security adviser, said during a visit to the island. "They do not adhere to the international order, to the rule of law," he told reporters yesterday. "What they're describing as gray-zone tactics... are pure bullying and it's purely illegal. It's not acceptable in the international order."

The Chinese embassy in Manila did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Manila's outpost of Thitu is its biggest and most strategically important in the South China Sea, largely claimed by Beijing, despite conflicting territorial claims by several regional nations. Known locally as Pag-asa, Thitu lies about 300 miles (480 km) west of the Philippine province of Palawan. Home to about 200 people, it is used by Manila to maintain its territorial claim. Besides the Philippines, Brunei, China, Malaysia, Taiwan and Vietnam have competing claims of sovereignty in the South China Sea, a conduit for goods in excess of \$3 trillion every year.



AFGHANISTAN'S HERAT

7 killed in attack on Shia clerics

AFP, Herat

At least seven people were killed yesterday when unidentified gunmen opened fire on a rickshaw carrying two Shia clerics in western Afghanistan, an official and residents said.

The official from Herat's intelligence department told AFP the attack happened in the Kora Milli area of the city, adding seven people were killed and one wounded.

Locals said four women were among the dead and that both clerics were killed.

"They were returning home in a three-wheeler... when they were targeted by unknown gunmen with gunfire," one resident told AFP.

"The target of this shooting was probably two religious scholars who were Shias," he said.

Shias are a minority in Afghanistan and are drawn mostly from the Hazara community, a frequent target of attacks by militants from the Islamic State (IS) group, who consider them heretics.

Violence has reduced dramatically since the Taliban ended their insurgency after seizing power in August 2021, but a number of armed groups - including the regional chapter of IS - remain a threat.

Meanwhile, Afghanistan's Taliban administration has appointed a former spokesperson as ambassador to China, the foreign affairs ministry said yesterday, its first officially accredited envoy to any country since taking over in 2021.

Former administration spokesman Bilal Karimi arrived in China late in November to take up the role, the Taliban-run foreign ministry said in a statement.



Commuters wade across a flooded street after heavy rains in Chennai, India yesterday. Chennai and several other districts of Tamil Nadu saw intense rain along with thunderstorms and lightning yesterday, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said.

PHOTO: AFP

FLOOD OF ABUSE

Trump gag order reimposed

AFP, New York

An appeals court on Thursday reimposed a limited gag order on former president Donald Trump intended to protect court staff at his New York civil fraud trial after a flood of online abuse.

Judge Arthur Engoron had slapped gag order on Trump on October 3 after he insulted judge's principal law clerk in a post on his Truth Social platform.

Trump's attorneys appealed the order claiming it violated his right to free speech and it had been suspended pending a hearing.

The appeals court panel on Thursday rejected Trump's appeal and reimposed the speech restrictions. "On a daily basis, the judge and his staff are being inundated with hundreds of harassing and threatening phone calls, voicemail messages, and emails," according to a document.