



This picture taken from Deir el-Balah shows smoke billowing into the sky during an Israeli bombardment on the Hamad residential district and its surroundings in Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

## GOVT FORMATION IN IRAN Pragmatist picked as top diplomat

REUTERS, Dubai

Iran's new president yesterday presented his cabinet to parliament for a vote of confidence, state media reported, proposing seasoned pragmatic diplomat Abbas Araqchi as foreign minister at a time of heightened regional tensions.

President Masoud Pezeshkian is shaping his cabinet at a time of an increased risk of escalation of the conflict in Gaza into a broader regional war, after the recent killings of Palestinian Islamist group Hamas' leader Ismail Haniyeh in Iran and of Hezbollah military commander Fuad Shukur in Beirut drew threats of retaliation against Israel.

Following the death of hardline President Ebrahim Raisi in a helicopter crash in May, Pezeshkian won a snap election last month by promising to improve ties with the world, promoting a pragmatic foreign policy, and to ease social restrictions at home.

Pezeshkian's proposed cabinet lineup requires lawmakers' approval and parliament speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf said that parliamentary commissions will start reviewing his candidates today.

Araqchi, 61, who was Iran's ambassador to several countries, including Japan, played a key role in negotiating Tehran's 2015 nuclear agreement with six world powers, which then US President Donald Trump exited in 2018 and re-imposed sanctions on Iran.

Araqchi later led Iran's negotiators during multilateral efforts - ultimately unsuccessful - to revive the pact via indirect diplomacy with Washington before he was replaced by hardline Ali Bagheri Kani in 2021.

The president's powers are limited in the Islamic Republic by those of the Supreme Leader, who is commander-in-chief of the armed forces, appoints the head of the judiciary and has the last say on major policies.

## Abbas to visit Russia today

AFP, Moscow

Palestinian Authority President Mahmud Abbas will visit Moscow next week to discuss the Gaza war with Russian President Vladimir Putin, a Palestinian envoy said.

Russia's state-run TASS news agency cited the Palestinian ambassador in Moscow as saying Abbas will arrive on Monday and meet Putin tomorrow.

Abbas heads the Fatah Palestinian movement.

Ambassador Abdel Hafiz Nofal said the two leaders would discuss events in Gaza since the October 7 attacks on Israel. "They will talk about Russia's role, what can be done."

He added: "We have a very difficult situation, and Russia is a country that is close to us. We need to consult each other."

Moscow for years tried to balance relations with all major players in the Middle East -- including Israel and the Palestinians.

But since the Israel-Hamas war and Russia's own offensive on Ukraine, Putin has moved closer to Israel's foes, Hamas and Iran.

# 'Children torn apart'

### Israel strike rains hell on Gaza dawn prayers

AFP, Gaza City

White body bags littered the floor and mourning filled the air after a school housing displaced Palestinians was struck with Israeli missiles Saturday -- a horrific and increasingly common sight in the Gaza war.

Dawn prayers were shattered by the early morning triple air strike from Israeli warplanes, which gutted Al-Tabieen religious school and mosque in Gaza City.

In the hellish aftermath, body parts were strewn around the rubble and charred, bloodied bodies slumped in the wreckage of the two-storey complex.

Grim-faced volunteers piled corpses in blood-stained blankets into an ambulance, as seriously wounded men lay groaning on the ground.

Gaza's civil defence agency said at least 93 people were killed, 17 of them women and children, making it one of the war's deadliest strikes.

Israel's military disputed the death toll, saying the school was targeted with "precision munitions" because it "served as an active Hamas and Islamic Jihad

military facility".

Such incidents have become a pattern in recent weeks. According to an AFP tally, at least 14 schools sheltering Gaza's displaced have been hit since July 6, killing more than 280 people.

"Peaceful people -- women, children, and youths -- were performing the Fajr prayer as usual when suddenly a missile hit them," said Abu Wassim, who lives nearby and came to survey the scene.

"They were reduced to remains. Children were torn apart, and women were burned. What can we say or do? What is in our power?"

As the sun climbed and mourners gathered, one man stroked the face of a dead child shrouded in a plastic body bag.

"They dropped a missile on them while they were just praying. Fear God, people! Fear God, Arabs!" a woman wailed over the body.

Another man looked lost as he held a small corpse wrapped in a blanket. Nearby, six body bags lay on the ground, three of them children. Tattered Qurans were piled on a window ledge.

"We woke up before dawn to the sound of a strike," said Sakr, a

resident from the neighbourhood who gave just one name.

"We headed to the site and found body remains of civilians who were peacefully performing prayers. We found bodies of children scattered in the street."

Another man said: "You can't even recognise the bodies, there were scattered remains."

"The ones who were struck are displaced people taking shelter in a school. What's their fault? What have they done wrong?"

Mohammad Al-Mughayyir, director of the supply and equipment department of Gaza's civil defence service, told AFP that six schools in Gaza City had been targeted in the past week alone.

Israeli military spokesperson Lieutenant-Colonel Nadav Shoshani said that about 20 Hamas and Islamic militants were operating from the Al-Tabieen complex.

Later on Saturday, Gaza civil defence agency spokesman Mahmud Bassal told journalists that the strike "directly targeted" two floors of the school.

The strike hit "the upper floor housing women and children and the ground floor that was used for prayers by the displaced people," he said.

Since October 7, Israel's military campaign in Gaza has killed at least 39,790 people, according to the health ministry in Hamas-run Gaza, which does not give details of civilian and militant deaths.

## China backs Iran's right to defend its 'dignity'

REUTERS, Beijing

China supports Iran in defending its "sovereignty, security and national dignity", Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi told Iran's acting foreign minister in a phone call yesterday, according to a statement by China's foreign ministry.

In the phone call, Wang repeated Beijing's denunciation of the assassination of Hamas chief Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran on July 31, saying the strike had violated Iran's sovereignty and threatened regional stability.

Iran and the Palestinian Islamist group Hamas have accused Israel of carrying out strike that killed Haniyeh.

Israel has not claimed or denied responsibility for the killing, which has fueled concern that the war between Israel and Hamas in the Gaza Strip was turning into a wider Middle East war.

Iran has vowed to "harshly punish" Israel over the assassination.

Tensions between Iran and the West have also increased over Tehran's fast-advancing nuclear programme.



## BRAZIL PLANE CRASH All 62 victims body recovered

REUTERS, Vinhedo

Brazilian emergency crews has recovered the remains of the 62 victims aboard an airliner that plunged to the ground in the town of Vinhedo, near Sao Paulo the day before, killing all on board.

The bodies of most of the victims - 34 males and 28 females - had already been moved to Sao Paulo's police morgue for identification. The bodies of the pilot and co-pilot were identified earlier in the day, said Dario Pacheco, mayor of Vinhedo.

Four people with dual citizenship were among the victims, three Venezuelans and one Portuguese woman, said regional carrier Voepass, which operated the aircraft.

On Friday Voepass said the plane was carrying 57 passengers and four crew, but on Saturday the firm confirmed another unaccounted-for passenger had been on the flight, putting the number of casualties at 62.

The plane's so-called "black box" containing voice recordings and flight data was undergoing analysis.

The plane, an ATR-72 turboprop, was bound for Sao Paulo from Cascavel, in the state of Parana, and crashed around 1:30 p.m. (1630 GMT) in Vinhedo, some 80 km (50 miles) northwest of Sao Paulo. Despite coming down in a residential area, no one on the ground was hurt.

## How to spot online fake news?

### England mulling review of national curriculum in primary and secondary schools

AFP, London

The UK government said on Sunday schools in England could teach children how to spot extremist and online content spreading "putrid conspiracy theories", under planned changes to the national curriculum.

Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson said she was launching a review of the curriculum in primary and secondary schools to introduce critical thinking across multiple subjects.

It follows recent disorder in more than a dozen English towns and cities following the Southport knife attack, which officials say were fuelled by misinformation online and far-right agitators.

The stabbing spree, allegedly carried out by British-born Axel Rudakubana, who was aged 17 at the time, left three children dead. Police have not disclosed a suspected motive for the attack but said it is not being treated as terrorism.

Online speculation in the immediate aftermath of the tragedy falsely claimed Rudakubana was a Muslim immigrant.

"It's more important than ever that we give young people the knowledge and skills to be able to challenge what they see online," Phillipson told the Sunday Telegraph newspaper.

"That's why our curriculum review will develop plans to embed critical skills in lessons to arm our children against the disinformation, fake news and putrid conspiracy theories awash on social media."

Under the envisaged changes, students would analyse newspaper articles in English lessons to help spot fabricated clickbait, while computer classes would include analysing statistics in context.

However, the review is not set to report its findings and recommendations until next year, meaning reforms would not come into force until the school year starting in September, 2025, according to the Telegraph.

The moves are set to be combined with tougher regulation of social media sites and online content, with Prime Minister Keir Starmer suggesting imminent action on Friday.



A firefighting helicopter makes a water drop as a wildfire burns in Varnava, near the capital Athens, Greece, yesterday. Residents in two areas near Athens were ordered to evacuate yesterday as dozens of firefighters battled to contain blazes fuelled by strong winds and hot temperatures.

PHOTO: REUTERS