

25 held after attack on UN peacekeepers Says Lebanon

AFP, Beirut

Lebanese authorities yesterday said that more than 25 people have been arrested following an attack on a United Nations convoy that wounded two peacekeepers, including the force's outgoing deputy commander.

UN and Lebanese officials have condemned Friday's attack, which came as Hezbollah supporters blocked the road to the country's only international airport for a second night over a decision to bar two Iranian flights from landing.

The UN Interim Force in Lebanon has demanded a "full and immediate investigation" after one of its vehicles was set on fire in the attack, which wounded outgoing deputy force commander Chok Bahadur Dhakal, who was heading home to Nepal after completing his mission.



Former Palestinian prisoners, released as part of the sixth hostage-prisoner exchange, are welcomed by friends and relatives upon arriving at the European Hospital in Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

ROHINGYA 'GENOCIDE' Argentine court issues warrants for Myanmar officials

AFP, Buenos Aires

An Argentine court has issued arrest warrants for the head of Myanmar's military junta and former officials including Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi over alleged "genocide and crimes against humanity" targeting the Rohingya minority group.

The court ruling, seen by AFP on Friday, was issued in response to a complaint filed in Argentina by a Rohingya advocacy group.

It was filed under the principle of "universal jurisdiction" by which countries can prosecute crimes regardless of where they occurred if, like genocide or war crimes, they are considered sufficiently serious.

Warrants were issued for military and civilian officials including current junta leader Min Aung Hlaing, ex-president Htin Kyaw, and former elected civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi in her capacity as "state counsellor" from 2016 to 2021, when she was ousted in a coup.

In that time, she has been accused by detractors of doing little to stop the abuse of Rohingya.

Hlaing is also under investigation by the International Criminal Court, while the International Court of Justice -- the UN's highest tribunal -- is examining a complaint of "genocide" against Myanmar.

The Rohingyas, mainly Muslims, are originally from Buddhist-majority Myanmar where, according to Amnesty International, they have been subjected to a regime akin to apartheid.

Beginning in 2017, many have been forced to flee persecution and violence to richer and predominantly Muslim Malaysia, or to refugee camps in Bangladesh, where about a million of them live.

Myanmar has been in turmoil since the 2021 coup that sparked renewed clashes with ethnic rebels and saw the formation of dozens of "People's Defense Forces" now battling the junta.

In her ruling issued Thursday, Judge Maria Servini said the allegations listed in the complaint "constitute crimes that violate human rights recognized in various international criminal law instruments, subscribed to by most countries in the world."

They included "internationally known crimes such as genocide and crimes against humanity, committed by the political and military authorities in power in that country," she added.



Defying truce, Israel still destroying Gaza homes

AL JAZEERA ONLINE

Israel has destroyed dozens of homes in Rafah, southern Gaza, despite the ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, satellite imagery analysis conducted by Al Jazeera's fact checking agency, Sanad, has revealed.

The crossing between Egypt and Gaza at Rafah, which has served as a critical lifeline into the enclave for decades, was closed by Israel in May 2024.

Since seizing control of the border area, in breach of its 1979 peace agreement with Egypt, Israel has been digging in the Philadelphi Corridor, a 14-km (8.7-mile) strip of land along the boundary between Egypt and Gaza.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has emphasised the importance of remaining in the corridor, despite the illegality.

According to Sanad, the images, taken between January 19 and 21, show the Israeli army to have built sand fortifications across the Rafah crossing.

Additionally, the agency said, a new military outpost has been established just to the north of the crossing.

The army has also constructed a 1.7 km (1.1-mile) road surrounding the crossing, running parallel to the sand fortifications.

Israeli forces have also kept thousands of Rafah residents from their homes, Israeli vehicles shooting at dozens of people trying to go home, injuring and killing them.

Israel, in essence, is constructing "a buffer zone that allows you to push any kind of fighters or, in technical terms, any hostile within an otherwise friendly environment away from you", Palestinian defence analyst Hamze Attar said.

As part of the ceasefire, which began on January 19, Israel agreed to reduce its forces in the area before completely withdrawing its troops by the 50th day of the agreement.

However, analysis carried out

on satellite images taken between January 19 and February 1 shows the Israeli army has continued construction in the area, demolishing and bulldozing 64 buildings within the city of Rafah, specifically in the as-Salam, Idari, and Tel Zaarab neighbourhoods.

The demolitions occurred only 700 metres from the Egyptian border. At the same time, Sanad also

200,000 people sheltering in the al-Mawasi Khan Younis area and other locations across Gaza, unable to come home.

According to him, initial estimates indicate that 90 percent of Rafah's homes have been damaged, with approximately 52,000 units suffering various degrees of destruction.

Meanwhile, Hamas expects



identified at least six homes razed in Tal as-Sultan, west of Rafah, a little more than 750 metres (820 yards) from the Egyptian border.

"This is a war crime because they are destroying residential houses," Attar said, referring to the fourth Geneva Convention, which prohibits the destruction of private property.

Meanwhile, Munir al-Bursh, director-general of the Ministry of Health in Gaza, said on Tuesday that Israeli attacks, unexploded ordnance, or fatal injuries sustained earlier have killed 118 people since the ceasefire agreement took effect.

In addition to military breaches of the ceasefire, Israel has not allowed in sufficient amounts of essential humanitarian aid, such as food, fuel, tents, and emergency shelters.

Rafah Mayor Ahmed al-Sufi said most of the city's residents remain displaced, with an estimated

indirect negotiations with Israel for the second phase of an ongoing truce in Gaza to begin "early next week", an official of the Palestinian militant group said Friday.

"We expect the second phase of the ceasefire negotiations to begin early next week," Hamas official Taher al-Numu said.

Another source familiar with the talks told AFP that "mediators informed Hamas that they hope to start the second phase of negotiations next week in Doha".

Under the terms of the first phase of the ceasefire agreement brokered by Qatar, Egypt and the United States -- which came into effect on January 19 -- negotiations for the second phase were due to start on February 3.

The 42-day phase one revolves around the release of 33 Israeli hostages in exchange for around 1,900 prisoners, most of them Palestinian, being held in Israeli jails.

Raid on Pak fort kills at least 4 soldiers

AFP, Peshawar

A militant raid on a Pakistan fort killed at least four soldiers yesterday, a senior intelligence official and the military said, the latest in a streak of attacks targeting state forces.

More than 1,600 people were killed in attacks in Pakistan in 2024 -- the deadliest year in almost a decade -- according to the Center for Research and Security Studies, an Islamabad-based analysis group.

Most militant violence in Pakistan takes place in its western regions bordering Afghanistan and Iran.

The attack on Tall Fort in Miran Shah -- a northwestern town just over 10 kilometres (six miles) from the Afghan border -- began around 10:00am, according to the intelligence official, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

"More than two dozen armed militants launched a heavy-weapon assault," he told AFP.

He said initial reports indicated an officer and four soldiers were killed, "while an exchange of fire between the forces and militants from the banned group is still ongoing". "There are concerns that the death toll may rise," he said.

The Pakistan military's media wing said in a statement four soldiers, including an officer, had been killed in a Miran Shah firefight and that six militants were "effectively neutralised".

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the attack on the fort.

CYBER SCAM CENTRES Ready to deport 10,000 workers Says Myanmar militia

AFP, Yangon

A Myanmar ethnic militia yesterday said it was preparing to deport 10,000 people linked to cyber scams in the area it controls to Thailand as part of a crackdown on the illicit compounds.

Scam compounds have mushroomed in Myanmar's borderlands and are staffed by foreigners who are often trafficked and forced to work, swindling people around the world in an industry analysts say is worth billions of dollars.

"We have announced to get rid of all scams from our soil. We are now implementing it," Karen Border Guard Force (BGF) spokesman Major Naing Maung Zaw told AFP yesterday.

"We have made a list and are prepared to transfer about 10,000 people (to Thailand)," he said.

Cyber scam compounds often lure people from around the globe with promises of high-paying jobs but then effectively hold them hostage and force them to commit online fraud.

Europe must ready 'plan of action' on security: Tusk

AFP, Warsaw

Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk yesterday pressed Europe to urgently establish its own stances on Ukraine and security as the United States sows doubts about its commitment to Europe.

On Friday, US Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth warned during a visit to Poland that Europe needed to boost its defence spending because it cannot assume that the presence of American troops on the continent will "last forever".

Tusk posted on X that "Europe urgently needs its own plan of action concerning Ukraine and our security, or else other global players will decide about our future. Not necessarily in line with our own interest. This plan must be prepared now. There's no time to lose."

His statements echoed those of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, who called on Europe "to act for its own good" and to have "its own armed forces" to defend itself against Russia.



Lebanese Army riot-control forces attempt to disperse protesters during a Hezbollah-organised rally to block the road to Beirut International Airport over a decision to bar two Iranian flights from landing there. The photo was taken in Beirut yesterday. PHOTO: AFP



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