

ISRAELI OPERATION IN WEST BANK Tens of thousands flee refugee camps

Palestinians say Israeli bulldozers demolish houses, dig up roads

REUTERS, Jerusalem

Tens of thousands of Palestinians living in refugee camps in the occupied West Bank have left their homes as a weeks-long Israeli offensive has demolished houses and torn up vital infrastructure in the heavily built up townships, Palestinian authorities said.

Israeli forces began their operation in the refugee camp in the northern West Bank city of Jenin on January 21, deploying hundreds of troops and bulldozers that demolished houses and dug up roads, driving almost all of the camp's residents out.

"We don't know what's going on in the camp but there is continuous demolition and roads being dug up," said Mohammed al-Sabbagh, head of the Jenin camp services committee. The operation, which Israel says is aimed at thwarting Iranian-backed armed groups in the West Bank, has since been extended to other camps, notably the Tulkarm refugee camp and the nearby Nur Shams camp, both of which have also been devastated.

The camps, built for descendants of Palestinian refugees who fled or were driven from their homes in the 1948 war around the creation of the state of Israel, have long been major centres for armed groups.

They have been raided repeatedly by the Israeli military but the current operation, which began as a ceasefire was agreed in Gaza, has been on an unusually large scale.

According to figures from the Palestinian Authority, around 17,000 people have now left Jenin refugee camp, leaving the site almost completely deserted, while in Nur Shams 6,000 people, or about two thirds of the total, have left, with another 10,000 leaving from Tulkarm camp.

"The ones who are left are trapped," said Nihad al-Shawish, head of the Nur Shams camp services committee. "The Civil Defence, the Red Crescent and the Palestinian security forces brought them some food on Monday but the army is still bulldozing and destroying the camp."

The Israeli raids have demolished dozens of houses and torn up large stretches of roadway as well as cutting off water and power, but the military has denied forcing residents to leave their homes.

"People obviously have the possibility to move or go where they want, if they will. But if they don't, they're allowed to stay," Lieutenant Colonel Nadav Shoshani told reporters.



Residents stand at the site of an apartment building and a clinic hit by a Russian drone strike in Odesa, Ukraine, yesterday. The drone attack injured four people, including a child, and caused widespread power cuts, interrupting heating supplies to about 500 apartment buildings, 13 schools, a kindergarten, and several hospitals, officials said.

PHOTO: REUTERS

'I can't sell Ukraine'

Says Zelensky on US minerals deal

REUTERS, KYIV

President Volodymyr Zelensky yesterday rejected US demands for \$500 billion in mineral wealth from Ukraine to repay Washington for wartime aid, saying the United States had supplied nowhere near that sum so far and offered no specific security guarantees in the agreement.

The Ukrainian leader, who is under major pressure from Trump's White House, said Washington had supplied his country with \$67 billion in weapons and \$31.5 billion in direct budget support throughout the nearly three-year war with Russia.

"You can't call this 500 billion and ask us to return 500 billion in minerals or something else. This is not a serious conversation," Zelensky said.

Trump has said he wants \$500

billion in rare earth minerals from Kyiv to secure Washington's assistance and his team last week proposed a deal that Kyiv declined to sign in its current form.

Zelensky has said the proposed deal did not contain the security provisions Ukraine desperately needs to protect it from Russian aggression. He said the draft deal proposed the US taking ownership of 50 percent of Ukraine's critical minerals.

"I defend Ukraine, I can't sell our country. I said OK, give us some sort of positive. You write some sort of guarantees, and we will write a memorandum... some sort of percentages," he said.

"I was told: only 50 (percent). I said: OK, no. Let the lawyers work some more, they did not do all the necessary work. I am just the decision maker, I don't work on the details of this document. Let them work on it."



Israeli strike kills one in south Lebanon

AFP, Beirut

Lebanese official media said Israel struck a vehicle in the south yesterday, killing one person -- the first death since Israeli troops withdrew from most of the border area a day earlier.

"An enemy drone struck a vehicle... in the town of Aita al-Shaab," near the southern border, the official National News agency said, reporting one person was killed.

It had earlier said one person was wounded in the Wazzani region, elsewhere along the frontier, after Israeli forces opened fire "while residents were inspecting" restaurants and cafes in the area.

Trump restricts AP access over Gulf of Mexico issue

REUTERS

US President Donald Trump said on Tuesday that he will block the Associated Press from the Oval Office and Air Force One until the news agency stops referring to the Gulf of Mexico.

Trump signed an executive order in January directing the Interior Department to change the name of the body of water to the Gulf of America. The AP, citing editorial standards, said it would continue to use the gulf's established name.

The White House has kept the AP out of several press pool gatherings during the past week, calling the news agency's decision divisive and misinformation. "We're going to keep them out until such time as they agree that it's the Gulf of America," Trump told reporters at Mar-a-Lago in Florida on Tuesday evening in his first public comments on the issue.

The agency has retained access to the White House complex itself. The AP says in its stylebook that the Gulf of Mexico has carried that name for more than 400 years. As a global news agency, the AP says it will refer to the gulf by its original name while acknowledging the new name Trump has chosen.

Cash reward for mosquitoes to beat dengue in Manila

AFP, Manila

Residents in a central Manila neighbourhood lined up yesterday, as dengue cases spike nationwide, to collect a bounty -- one peso for every five mosquitoes, dead or alive.

Carlito Cernal, village captain in Addition Hills, said the awareness-raising project he initiated could have a "huge impact" on curbing the tropical disease's spread when combined with local clean-up efforts.

Philippine health officials and experts were less convinced, but enthusiasm was high among residents who carried pails, cups and other containers filled with dengue-spreading mosquitoes to exchange for cash at the village hall. Iluminado Candasa brought three live specimens in a sealed plastic cup that were duly counted and transferred by village officials to their so-called death chamber.



An aerial view shows a mosque and residential buildings surrounded by flood waters after overnight heavy rain in Karak, Malaysia's Pahang state, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP



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