

Israel carries out strike on Hamas in northern Gaza

Hamas pushes for phase two of Gaza truce, stresses urgent need for aid to re-enter enclave

AFP, Gaza City

Israel carried out an air strike on Hamas members in northern Gaza yesterday, rattling an already fragile ceasefire as it prepared for fresh talks in Doha on the future of its truce with Hamas.

Hamas called for an immediate start to negotiations on the ceasefire's second phase, which it hopes will lead to a permanent end to the war.

Representatives of the Palestinian group met with mediators in Cairo over the weekend, stressing the urgent need for humanitarian aid to re-enter the besieged territory "without restrictions or conditions", according to a Hamas statement.

- ➔ Hamas's key demands for 2nd phase include a full Israeli withdrawal from Gaza
- ➔ Israel wants an extension of truce's first phase until mid-April

"Hamas stresses the urgency of forcing the occupation to immediately begin second-phase negotiations under the agreed parameters," senior Hamas leader Mahmoud Mardawi told AFP, adding that this would pave the way for a permanent end to the war.

Hamas's key demands for the second phase include a full Israeli withdrawal from Gaza, an end to the Israeli blockade, the reconstruction of the Palestinian territory and financial support, Mardawi said. Following talks with mediators, Hamas spokesperson Abdel Latif Al-Qanoua said indicators were so far "positive".

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said it would send delegates to Doha today, while the Israeli media reported that the government's security cabinet was due to discuss the matter later yesterday.

Israel says that it wants an extension of the truce's first phase until mid-April.

The initial period of truce ended on March 1 after six weeks of relative calm that included the exchange of 25 living hostages and eight bodies for the release of about 1,800 Palestinian prisoners held in Israel.

The truce largely halted more than 15 months of fighting in Gaza, where virtually the entire population was displaced by Israel's relentless military campaign.

It also enabled the flow of vital food and medical assistance into Gaza. After Israel cut off that flow again, UN rights experts accused the government of "weaponising starvation".



A truck and ambulances transport the coffins of Hezbollah fighters and civilians killed in the recent war with Israel, during their funeral procession, along a war-devastated road in the southern Lebanese border village of Kfar Kila yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

Iran won't negotiate under US 'bullying'

Says Supreme Leader Khamenei

REUTERS, Dubai

Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said later on Saturday that Iran will not be bullied into negotiations, a day after US President Donald Trump said he had sent a letter to the country's top authority urging Tehran to negotiate a nuclear deal.

In an interview with Fox Business, Trump said, "There are two ways Iran can be handled: militarily, or you make a deal" to prevent Tehran from acquiring nuclear weapons.

At a meeting with senior Iranian officials, Khamenei said Washington's aim was to "impose their own expectations," Iranian state media reported.

"The insistence of some bullying governments on negotiations is not to resolve issues. ... Talks for them is

a pathway to have new demands, it is not only about Iran's nuclear issue. ... Iran will definitely not accept their expectations," Khamenei was quoted as saying, without directly mentioning Trump.

In response to Khamenei's comments, White House National Security Council spokesman Brian Hughes reiterated almost word for word the choice of negotiations or military action that Trump said he had presented to Iran.

"We hope the Iran Regime puts its people and best interests ahead of terror," Hughes said in a statement.

While expressing openness to a deal with Tehran, Trump has reinstated a "maximum pressure" campaign that was applied during his first term as president to isolate Iran from the global economy and drive its oil exports to zero.

Pak Taliban attack kills 4 paramilitary troops: police

AFP, Peshawar

At least four Pakistani paramilitary troops were killed when local Taliban fighters attacked a security checkpoint in a northwestern border region, a police official said yesterday.

The attack occurred in Kurram district, located on border with Afghanistan, in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, where there has been a rise in violence in recent years. "Heavily armed militants" launched the attack yesterday morning, the official said.

"At least four security personnel were martyred, and seven others were injured," he said.

US Secret Service shoots armed man near White House

AFP, Washington

US Secret Service agents shot an armed man near the White House during the night, an agency spokesman said early yesterday, while President Donald Trump was spending the weekend at his Mar-a-Lago residence in Florida.

The man had been hospitalised and his condition was "unknown," the spokesman said in a statement that did not specify whether the White House or Trump may have been the intended target.

No injuries to Secret Service agents were reported, according to the statement posted by spokesman Anthony Guglielmi on social media platform X.

The agents had been warned by local police of a "suicidal" man travelling to Washington from Indiana and around midnight found his parked vehicle near 17th and F Streets, the statement said - very near the White House. They then spotted an individual nearby who matched the description they had been given, the statement said.

COMMUNAL CLASHES

Syria leader issues plea for national unity, peace

AFP, Damascus



Syrian leader Ahmed al-Sharaa yesterday called for peace and national unity after days of clashes between security forces and loyalists of the former government that have killed more than 1,000 people, most of them Alawite civilians.

"We must preserve national unity (and) civil peace as much as possible and, God willing, we will be able to live together in this country," Sharaa said in a speech delivered from a mosque in Damascus where he spent part of his childhood. He added that as long "the mosques have taught their children morality... and fairness and justice among the people, there is no fear for Syria, God willing".

Two pregnant women, 5-yr-old raped

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The OC also said that three of them raped her. As another one attempted to rape her, locals gathered there, hearing her screams. They caught two of them and handed them over to the police while the two others managed to escape.

A case was filed under the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act, the OC said, adding that the woman said she was four months into her pregnancy.

The other case against five people over the alleged rape of a seven-month pregnant woman was recorded at Madhabdi Police Station yesterday, according to the UNB.

The station's Officer-in-Charge Md Nazrul Islam said the 23-year-old victim lives in a rented house in the Bhagirathpur area of Pachdona union.

The incident occurred between February 19 and 21, during which the woman was reportedly held captive in a room for two days as her husband was in jail in a case linked to the July uprising, the UNB reported.

Citing the victim, Additional Superintendent of Police Md Anwar Hossain said the main suspect

Iqbal Hossain, 43, of Asmandirchar in Pachdona union, promised to help secure her husband's release by posing as a lawyer.

Later, four people allegedly drugged her, confined her to a building, and sexually assaulted her in turns, according to the police. The victim named another person, Pappu Mia, 29, as accused.

One of the accused was arrested and a drive was underway to arrest the other suspects, said OC Nazrul.

In Sherpur's Nokla upazila, police arrested a 60-year-old day labourer named Chand Mia alias Locha Mia for allegedly raping a five-year-old girl on Saturday.

The victim's father lodged a case with Nokla Police Station that evening and police arrested the suspect at night.

The accused was produced before a court that sent him to jail yesterday, said Md Habibur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Nokla Police Station.

According to the case statement, Locha lured the child with a chocolate, took her to a maize field and raped her.

Her mother rescued the girl and informed the neighbours about the incident after hearing her screams while Locha managed to flee the scene. The victim was sent to Sherpur General Hospital for medical tests.

In Narayanganj's Bandar upazila, police arrested the foster father of a 14-year-old madrasa student for allegedly undressing her and recording her nude video on his mobile phone when she was asleep in the early hours of February 28. The same night, he also allegedly harassed her sexually.

The following day, the accused showed the girl the video and threatened her so that she would not reveal the matter to anyone, according to a case filed by the foster mother against the man under the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act and the Pornography Control Act yesterday.

However, the girl told her foster mother everything upon her return from work on March 2, said Tariqul Islam, officer-in-charge of Bandar Police Station.

The foster mother refrained from pursuing

legal action at first, but enraged locals assaulted the accused, and handed him over to the police on Saturday night after the girl told a neighbour about the incident, OC Tariqul added.

The accused was sent to jail through the court yesterday. The victim was also brought to the court for the recording of her statement, the police officer said.

In Thakurgaon Sadar upazila, the teacher of a government primary school, arrested on charges of attempting to rape a 12-year-old fifth grader in the institution, was beaten by an angry crowd at the court premises yesterday.

Witnesses said that a group of enraged people attacked the teacher and punched him as soon as he was brought to the court compound.

Police then beefed up security in the area. Later, Additional Chief Judicial Magistrate Md Shariful Islam ordered to send him to jail, said Court Police's Inspector Md Belal Hossain.

[Our correspondents in Sherpur, Narayanganj and Thakurgaon contributed to this report]

India clinch record third Champions Trophy

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New Zealand to 251-7 after India's spinners called the shots.

The Black Caps won the toss and elected to bat first in Dubai after they suffered an early blow when fast bowler Matt Henry missed out due to a shoulder injury.

India came in unchanged from their win over Australia in the semifinal and their four spinners kept the opposition on the backfoot for a large part of the 50 overs.

Varun Chakravarthy and Kuldeep Yadav took two wickets each on a sluggish pitch that has aided the slow bowlers in the 50-over tournament played in Pakistan and the United

Arab Emirates.

Mitchell made 63 and put on key stands, before the left-handed Bracewell smashed an unbeaten 53 off 40 balls to boost the total.

New Zealand openers started cautiously before previous-match hero Rachin Ravindra took on the bowling attack.

The left-handed Ravindra, fresh from a century in the semi-final against South Africa in Lahore, smashed pace bowler Mohammed Shami for a six and two fours.

Wrist spinner Chakravarthy struck first to send back Will Young, out lbw for 15, but the runs came quickly, albeit with some help from sloppy

fielding.

Ravindra survived two reprieves when Shami failed to take a return catch and Iyer dropped a tough chance in the deep.

But Kuldeep bowled Ravindra, for 37, on his first ball of the match with a googly from the left-arm wrist spinner.

Kuldeep then got a largely Indian crowd - a sea of blue - on their feet when he had senior batsman Kane Williamson caught and bowled for 11.

Mitchell and wicketkeeper batsman Tom Latham attempted to rebuild as the pair took the team past 100, but soon Ravindra Jadeja struck with his left-arm spin.

Jadeja trapped the left-handed Latham lbw for 14 as New Zealand slipped to 108-4.

Mitchell, who survived a dropped catch by skipper Rohit Sharma on 38, stood firm and with Glenn Phillips, who made 34, put on 57 runs.

Phillips was bowled by Chakravarthy off a fast googly.

Mitchell put on another stand with Bracewell before he fell to Shami caught out at extra cover.

Bracewell finished with a flourish with three fours and two sixes but their total of 251 eventually proved short in face of India's batting prowess.



Relatives and friends of Ukrainian prisoners of war from the Azov Brigade and other units hold placards during a rally to call for their exchange with Russian prisoners in Kyiv yesterday, amid the Russian invasion in Ukraine. PHOTO: AFP




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