

SOUTH, CENTRAL GAZA
Israel steps up
air raids past
yellow line

Hamas calls for fighters to be
allowed out of tunnels under Rafah

AGENCIES

Israeli forces launched airstrikes in southern and central
Gaza, hitting areas beyond the yellow line despite ceasefire
terms.

Some of the strikes yesterday morning targeted buildings
in central Gaza's Bureij camp and eastern Khan Younis.

They add to hundreds of attacks that Gaza's civil
defence said were brazen violations of the fragile seven-
week ceasefire.

Israel Defense Forces (IDF) also carried out another
wave of raids and arrests across the occupied West
Bank, including in the areas of Qalqilya, Tubas, Hebron,
Tulkarem and Nablus.

During their raid in Tubas, Israeli forces conducted field
interrogations and assaulted at least 25 people who required
medical treatment, according to a local Palestinian Red
Crescent official quoted by the Wafa news agency.

Hamas called on mediating countries Wednesday
to pressure Israel to allow safe passage for dozens of its
fighters holed up in tunnels in the southern Gaza Strip,
reports AFP.

The request came after the Israeli military said it
killed over 20 Hamas members over the past week
"who attempted to flee from the underground terror
infrastructure in the area", and apprehended eight more.

"We hold (Israel) fully responsible for the lives of our
fighters and call upon our mediators to take immediate
action to pressure (Israel) to allow our sons to return
home," Hamas said in a statement.

Meanwhile, discussions are under way on how to
transition to the second phase of Gaza ceasefire, which is
to include deploying an armed international stabilisation
force, tasked with demilitarising Gaza, and developing an
international body to temporarily govern the Gaza Strip
and oversee reconstruction, reports Al Jazeera online.

The first stage of the Gaza truce completed on
Wednesday after Israel transferred the bodies of 15
Palestinian prisoners to Gaza authorities, a day after
Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad handed over the
body of another Israeli captive.

Palestinian armed groups have now released all living
captives and returned the remains of 26 of 28 captives
stipulated to be transferred under the deal.



Smoke rises from the site of an Israeli airstrike on the southern Lebanese village of El Mahmoudiyeh
yesterday. Israel has repeatedly bombed Lebanon despite a year-old ceasefire with Hezbollah, saying it targets
the group's members and infrastructure to prevent rearmament.

PHOTO: AFP

Russia to halt war if
Ukraine withdraws: Putin

AFP, Bishkek

Russian President Vladimir Putin
said yesterday that Moscow would
end its Ukraine offensive if Kyiv
withdrew from territory Moscow
claims at its own - otherwise they
would take it by force.

The Russian army has been
slowly but steadily grinding
through eastern Ukraine in costly
battles against outnumbered and
outgunned Ukrainian forces.

Washington has meanwhile
renewed its push to end the nearly

four-year war, putting forward
a surprise plan that it hopes to
finalise through upcoming talks
with Moscow and Kyiv.

"If Ukrainian forces leave the
territories they hold, then we will
stop combat operations," Putin
said during a visit to Kyrgyzstan.
"If they don't, then we will achieve it
by military means." Russia controls
one-fifth of Ukraine's territory.

The issue of occupied land, which
Kyiv has said it will never cede, has
become the key stumbling block in
the peace process.

Putin repeated the claim that
Russia had encircled the Ukrainian
army in Pokrovsk and Myrnohrad in
Ukraine's eastern Donetsk region.

"Krasnoarmeysk and Dimitrov
are completely surrounded," he said,
using the Russian names for the
cities. Moscow was also advancing
in Vovchansk and Siversk, as well as
approaching the important logistic
hub of Guliaipole, he added. The
Russian offensive "is practically
impossible to hold back, so there
is little that can be done about it",
Putin said.

6.6M quake hits
Indonesia

Residents rush outside as
jolt lasts 7 seconds

AFP, Jakarta

A magnitude 6.6 earthquake hit an island off the
coast of Sumatra in western Indonesia yesterday,
according to the United States Geological Survey
(USGS), with no immediate reports of damages or
tsunami warning.

The quake, which struck Simeulue Island at
11:56 am (0456 GMT) at a depth of 25 kilometres,
prompted locals on the island to immediately rush
outside.

"I was sitting down at a coffee shop, suddenly
the table was shaking. Many people rushed outside
of buildings and houses," Ahmadi, who like many
Indonesians goes by one name, told AFP.

"The earthquake was quite long. I think
probably around seven seconds or more."

He said there were several aftershocks but the
tremors were relatively shorter compared to the
earlier quake, adding that he had yet to receive any
information about damages.

The Indian Ocean tsunami warning centre
said after the quake that "there is no threat" of a
potential tsunami generated from the quake.

WASHINGTON SHOOTING
Terror probe launched

AFP, Washington

The FBI yesterday said it was launching a full-scale
terror probe after a gunman carried out what
officials described as an "ambush style" attack
near the White House, shooting two National
Guard soldiers multiple times with a revolver.

The young soldiers shot Wednesday remained in
critical condition.

The shooter was identified as 29-year-old
Afghan national Rahmanullah Lakanwal, who
worked with US forces in his country during the
war against the Taliban.

The shooter faces charges of assault with
intent to kill, and if the guardsmen die he will
face first-degree murder charges, US Attorney for
the District of Columbia Jean Pirro told a news
conference.

Last path to safety shuts

Say Afghans as US halts visas after Washington DC shooting

REUTERS, Kabul

Afghans who fled the Taliban
and have waited years for a US
resettlement decision say their
last path to safety has shut since
Washington froze all Afghan
immigration cases following a
shooting near the White House.



heard this news. We have completed
all the required review procedures,"
said Ahmad Samim Naimi, 34, from
Afghanistan's Panjshir province,
who had worked as a TV presenter
and press adviser under the previous,
US-backed government.

He fled to Pakistan after the
Taliban began detaining journalists
and former government workers, and
had applied for resettlement in the
United States. "If I go back, one day
you will certainly hear news of either
my arrest or my death," he said.

Remaining in Pakistan has
become increasingly difficult as
the authorities have launched a
crackdown on Afghans without
formal refugee status.

ordered a review of Afghans who
entered the country during Joe
Biden's presidency.

For Afghans sheltering in
Pakistan, tens of thousands of
whom are awaiting US resettlement
decisions, the announcement felt
like their last safe route had closed.

"I was deeply distressed when I

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