

INTERNATIONAL

World gave Israel 'licence to torture Palestinians'

Says UN expert

AFP, Geneva

The world has given Israel "a licence to torture Palestinians", a UN expert said Monday, with life in the occupied territories "a continuum of physical and mental suffering".

Francesca Albanese, the UN's special rapporteur on the rights situation in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, alleged that "torture has effectively become state policy" in Israel.

"Israel has effectively been given a licence to torture Palestinians, because most of your governments, your ministers, have allowed it," she said, as she presented her latest report to the UN Human Rights Council.

Albanese has faced harsh criticism, allegations of anti-Semitism and demands for her removal, from Israel and some of its allies, over her relentless



criticism and long-standing accusations of "genocide".

"Francesca Albanese is not a promoter of human rights; she is an agent of chaos... and any document she produces is nothing but a politically-charged, activist rant." Israel's mission in Geneva said in a statement Monday.

Albanese "advocates dangerous extremist narratives to undermine the very existence of the State of Israel", it said. Albanese's report claimed Israel was systematically torturing Palestinians on a scale "that suggests collective vengeance and destructive intent".

"Torture extends far beyond prison walls, in what can only be described as a torturous environment imposed by Israel across the entire occupied Palestinian territory," she told the Human Rights Council.

She said torture destroys the conditions that make life meaningful, stripping away human dignity, leaving empty shells behind.

"The testimonies that I and many others are documenting are not only tragic stories of suffering; they are evidence of atrocity crimes targeting the totality of the Palestinian people," she said.



An emergency worker walks at the site of a building damaged during overnight Iranian missile barrages in central Israel, amid the ongoing conflict involving the US, Israel, and Iran, in Tel Aviv, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

ATTACKS ON POWER PLANTS

Trump's halt to Iran ultimatum raises doubt

CNN ONLINE

President Donald Trump's recent reversal on his big red line for Iran is prompting some questions on what, exactly, is motivating his wartime decision-making.

On Saturday evening, Trump said Iran had 48 hours to either open up the Strait of Hormuz and unshackle the global economy or he would strike Iran's biggest power plant. By Monday morning, he said he would give it five more days, citing improved negotiations with Tehran.

But Iran has denied any dialogue with Washington. And while there's certainly reason to not take officials at their word, the diverging stories — and Trump's own credibility problems — open the possibility that something else motivated him to back down. That includes possible fears that such a move could escalate the war and global economic pain.

Trump's critics are calling it Trump's latest TACO — an acronym for "Trump Always Chickens Out." That's difficult to prove, but the decision follows another undeniable Trump pattern: His announcements often seem conveniently tied to the open and close of financial markets.

And he's repeatedly made these kinds of announcements at times that seem geared towards the markets — regardless of how substantive and lasting the



A member of the Iranian Red Crescent comforts a resident of a destroyed apartment block in northern Tehran.

PHOTO: AFP

declarations themselves turned out to be.

A major one was his "Liberation Day" global tariffs on April 2. The press conference was scheduled for 4:00 pm Eastern time, but after talking for a while, Trump announced the actual details shortly after markets closed at 4:30 pm.

He also said the tariffs wouldn't start until shortly after midnight on Saturday, April 5 — when markets would also be closed.

A week later, after a historically rough week for the stock market, Trump posted minutes after the markets opened at 9:30 am Eastern Time, "BE COOL! The next

day, after markets had slumped to their lowest level of the year, he announced a 90-day pause on nearly all tariffs over 10 percent — which then sent stocks to their best single day since 2008.

It also seems telling that there was still about 12 hours left for Trump to sus out just how serious Iran was about its purported interest in a deal. That might have been wise, given how much Trump has warned Iran can't be trusted. Why not just wait a bit longer to make sure?

But now, Trump has conveniently delayed his own red line — as it happens, until after the markets are closed for the weekend.

Colombia military plane crash kills 66

Four still missing; rescuers shuttle dozens of survivors to nearby hospitals

REUTERS, Bogota

A Colombian military plane crashed in a takeoff disaster on Monday, killing 66 people as rescuers shuttled dozens of survivors to nearby hospitals and searched for four who were still missing, according to a top official.

The Lockheed Martin-built Hercules C-130 transport plane was carrying 128 people, including 11 Air Force members, 115 army personnel and two national police officers, according to Hugo Alejandro Lopez, head of the nation's armed forces.

The death toll was nearly double that of the previous figure given by authorities, who continued search and recovery efforts at the site of the deadly crash.

The accident occurred as the plane was taking off from Puerto Leguizamo, on the border with Peru, Defense Minister Pedro Sanchez said on X.

The plane was believed to have suffered an impact near the end of the runway as it was taking off, firefighter Eduardo San Juan Callejas told Caracol, with a wing of the plane later clipping a tree as it was plummeting.

Russia rains drones on Ukraine; 8 killed

AFP, Lviv

Russia fired almost 1,000 drones on Ukraine over the last 24 hours, unleashing one of its largest-ever daytime attacks, killing at least eight people and hitting the UNESCO protected city centre of Lviv, officials said yesterday.

Two people were killed and a maternity hospital damaged in a drone strike on the western city of Ivano-Frankivsk, with another person killed in the central Vinnytsia region — part of an assault that followed an overnight barrage on residential buildings in several cities that killed another five people.

In Lviv, a western city far from the front, an AFP reporter saw a column of flames rising from a building next to the 17th-century St. Andrew's Church and Bernardine Monastery in the city centre, which was struck during evening rush hour.

Firefighters were working to put out the blaze at the apartment building, whose roof had been smashed in and windows blown out.

Russia fired 550 drones during the day on Tuesday, following 392 overnight, Ukraine's air force said in a statement.

Moscow has typically fired its barrages overnight in the four-year war, which started with Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and has killed hundreds of thousands of people.

The daytime strikes on the centre of Ivano-Frankivsk killed two people and wounded four, including a six-year-old child, regional head Svitlana Onyshchuk said on social media.

Around 10 residential buildings and a maternity hospital were damaged, she said.

In the Vinnytsia region, one person was killed and 11 wounded, the regional head said.

In Lviv, at least 13 people were hospitalised. The attacks came with Ukraine concerned that it could struggle to repel relentless Russian aerial strikes as its supplies of US air defence systems dwindle amid the war in the Middle East.

"These numbers clearly show that more protection is needed to save lives from Russian strikes," Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said on social media.

Overnight, Russian missiles and drones rained down on residential areas and transport and energy infrastructure across Ukraine, local authorities said.

Five people were killed and dozens wounded in strikes across the central Poltava region, the eastern city of Kharkiv, and Zaporizhzhia and Kherson in the south.

Dhaka 'got green signal'

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Riaz Hamidullah, Bangladesh High Commissioner to India, also called on Jaishankar and Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal on March 20 to discuss ways to advance relationships and trade and economic partnership.

In late February, Bangladesh missions in India resumed issuance of all categories of visas to the Indians.

ENERGY

On March 12, Power, Energy, and Mineral Resources Minister Iqbal Hasan Mahmud Tuku said Dhaka had written to New Delhi, seeking additional fuel through the existing pipeline amid the US-Israel war on Iran. Bangladesh has been importing diesel from India via this pipeline since 2017.

Asked if there is any update on the matter, State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shama Obaed yesterday told journalists that Dhaka "got a green signal".

However, she added, the energy ministry is in a better position to provide details.

EXTRADITION

West Bengal Police recently arrested three suspects in the killing of Inqilab Moncho leader Sharif Osman Hadi.

On the consular access sought by Bangladesh for meeting the suspects, Shama said the Bangladesh mission in Kolkata was yet to have the access.

"The home ministry is looking after the matter... Extraditing and trying the suspects is our top priority," she said.

With Pranay Verma in Dhaka, the government also discussed the issues of extraditing deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina and others hiding in India, the state minister said, without elaboration.

Faisal Karim Masud, the main accused in the murder of Hadi, and Faisal's associate Alamgir Hossain have been handed over to India's National Investigation Agency through a court in Bidhannagar, West Bengal.

On Monday night, the NIA took them to Delhi on transit remand. They will be presented before the NIA's special court there, reports the Prothom Alo.

Ex-Lt Gen Masud

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attempts to arrest him had failed beforehand.

Replying to a query on the allegations regarding alleged illegal wealth of Masud, the DB officer said the Anti-Corruption Commission and the Criminal Investigation Department were investigating multiple complaints against him on these allegations.

Masud was general officer commanding (GOC) of 9 Infantry Division at Savar when a state of emergency was declared across the country on January 11, 2007. The same year, he was made chief coordinator of the National Coordination Committee on Serious Crimes and Corruption and shortly afterwards promoted to the position of lieutenant general. On June 2, 2008, he was appointed to the National Defence College, and in less than a week, he was assigned to the Bangladesh High Commission in Canberra.

The coordination committee, led by military officers, detained and interrogated prominent politicians and business figures, bringing corruption charges against them. Many of them alleged that they were tortured in custody.

Masud became an MP from Feni-3 in 2018, and then again in the January 2024 election boycotted by the BNP and many other parties. Rivals from the then ruling Awami League fought their own party candidates in the election, who were widely called dummy candidates.

Regarding allegations of torturing political leaders during the army-backed caretaker government, DB's Shafiqul said the law enforcers were focusing on specific cases which are under investigation.

However, he emphasised that no

offender will be spared and urged victims to seek legal recourse if they have been affected.

Masud was escorted to a packed courtroom of the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court amid tight security. When he was being taken back to the court lockup after the hearing, a group chanted slogans against him. Some of them were seen throwing eggs towards him.

During the hearing, Dhaka Metropolitan Public Prosecutor Omar Faruqi alleged that Masud had tried to kill BNP leader Tarique Rahman, currently the prime minister, through torture.

He accused Masud of introducing harassment, torture and crippling of political leaders, and the "Minus-Two Formula" — an alleged conspiracy to drive out then BNP chairperson Khaleda Zia and Awami League President Sheikh Hasina from politics.

Masud, in cahoots with one side, led a "blueprint to destroy and eliminate Khaleda and her family", Faruqi said.

The prosecutor also alleged that Masud and his accomplices collected, embezzled and laundered abroad thousands of crores of taka by promising pardon to those who would confess to their crimes.

"After the 1/11 changeover, there was hardly any businessman in Bangladesh whom they did not detain and extort money from. And Masud was the mastermind behind all this," Faruqi further said.

Defence counsel Morshed told the court that the allegations against Masud were "fabricated". He also pleaded Masud's bail on the grounds of his age, which he claimed was 80, and different diseases.

War grinds on amid global push for talks

FROM PAGE 1

Israel's army said it had conducted a "large wave" of airstrikes across several areas of Iran, which had earlier launched a "direct hit" on a building in an upscale area of Tel Aviv.

Earlier, Iranian media reported US-Israeli warplanes had struck two gas facilities and a pipeline.

Gulf nations Bahrain, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia said they intercepted renewed drone and missile attacks yesterday. The UAE defence ministry said that a Moroccan contractor with the Emirati military was killed in Bahrain in an Iranian attack.

On Monday, Trump said that his administration was speaking with an unidentified "top person," and paused his threat to attack Iranian energy sites for five days.

But Tehran's parliamentary speaker, Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf rebuffed it as "fake news" and said no negotiations were underway. He said lies are being "used to manipulate financial and oil markets".

Despite the denial, Iran's foreign ministry acknowledged that messages had been relayed by "some friendly countries" indicating a "US request for negotiations aimed at ending the war".

Yesterday, Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said Islamabad was prepared to host negotiations to stop the war, a day after he spoke with Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian.

US media outlet Axios reported US negotiators Witkoff and Jared Kushner may meet an Iranian

delegation for talks in Pakistan as soon as this week, with Vice President JD Vance possibly joining.

Traditional mediator Qatar yesterday said it "supports all diplomatic efforts" to end the war.

Amid the confusion over talks, China's top diplomat Wang Yi yesterday urged his Iranian counterpart Abbas Araghchi in a phone call that "talking is always better" than fighting.

Araghchi told Wang that "the Iranian side is committed to achieving a comprehensive end to the conflict, not just a temporary ceasefire", and thanked China for its humanitarian assistance.

The US State Department announced that Secretary of State Marco Rubio would meet G7 counterparts in France on Friday to discuss Iran, his first foreign trip since the war began.

In unusually strong comments, German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier yesterday said the US-Israeli war on Iran was "a politically disastrous mistake".

Israel meanwhile stepped up its campaign against the Iran-backed Hezbollah militant group in Lebanon, saying its military would take control of south Lebanon up to the Litani river, around 30 kilometres from the border.

Israeli pounded Beirut's southern suburbs throughout the night while a strike on Bshamoun, south of the capital, killed two people yesterday, according to Lebanon's health ministry.

Meanwhile, Israeli emergency services said a woman was killed in the north of the country yesterday following rocket fire from Lebanon.

Israel's attacks in Lebanon have killed more than 1,000 people, according to Lebanon's health ministry, and displaced more than a million people.

The war has killed at least 3,230 Iranians, including 1,400 civilians, according to the US-based Human Rights Activists News Agency. AFP cannot access strike sites nor independently verify tolls in Iran.

Meanwhile, The New York Times, citing US officials, reported that Saudi Arabia's de facto leader, Prince Mohammed bin Salman, has been pushing Trump to continue the war against Iran, arguing that the US-Israeli military campaign presents a "historic opportunity" to remake the Middle East.

According to the report, in a series of conversations over the last week, Prince Mohammed has conveyed to Trump that he must press toward the destruction of Iran's hard-line government.

Analysts familiar with Saudi government thinking say that while the prince probably preferred to avoid a war, he is concerned that if Trump pulls back now, Saudi Arabia and the rest of the Middle East will be left to confront an emboldened and furious Iran on their own.

In this view, they say, a half-finished offensive would expose Saudi Arabia to frequent Iranian attacks. Such a scenario could also leave Iran

with the power to periodically close the Strait of Hormuz.

Tehran had vowed to deploy naval mines and strike power and water infrastructure across the region if its power sites are targeted, threatening to escalate an energy crisis of already historic proportions.

Analysts also doubt a positive outcome from the talks, even if they take place, given the conditions likely to be set by Iran and the US.

Sources in Tehran say Iran's negotiating posture has hardened sharply since the war began, with the Revolutionary Guards exerting growing influence over decision-making.

In any talks with the US, Iran would not only demand an end to the war but concessions that are likely red lines for Trump — guarantees against future military action, compensation for wartime losses and formal control of the Strait of Hormuz, the sources said.

Iran would also refuse to negotiate any limitations to its ballistic missile programme, they said.

The three senior sources said Iran had only had preliminary discussions with Pakistan, Turkey and Egypt over whether the groundwork existed for talks with the US over ending the war.

Three senior Israeli officials also yesterday said that, although Trump seemed determined to reach a deal, they viewed it as unlikely that Tehran would agree to US demands, which they believed would include an end to Iran's ballistic missile and nuclear programmes.