

## Deadliest strike: Attacks on Gaza City accelerate amid ceasefire attempts

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**Gaza City:** Israeli air strikes on Gaza City flattened three buildings and killed at least 42 people on Sunday, medics said, as Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu suggested the war between Israel and Palestinians in Gaza would continue despite international efforts to broker a ceasefire.

In a televised address, Netanyahu said the attacks were continuing at “full force” and would “take time.”



*Palestinians search for survivors in a destroyed building after an Israeli air strike in Gaza City on Sunday.*

Israel wanted to levy a “heavy price” from Gaza’s militant Hamas rulers, he said, flanked by his Defence Minister and political rival, Benny Gantz, in a show of unity. The conflict comes at a crucial moment for Netanyahu, who is fighting for his political survival after months spent trying to form a government.

The Israeli air assault earlier on Sunday was the deadliest single attack since heavy fighting broke out between Israel and Hamas nearly a week ago, marking the worst fighting since the devastating 2014 war in Gaza.

Israel earlier said it bombed the home of Gaza’s top Hamas leader in a separate strike. It was the third such strike targeting the homes of Hamas leaders in the past two days. The Palestinian militant group ruling Gaza has fired hundreds of rockets into Israel.



*Palestinians attend the funeral of two women and eight children of the Abu Hatab family in Gaza City, who were killed by an Israeli air strike, on Saturday.*

The bloody attacks came the day after a dramatic escalation in Israeli air strikes, that included the killing of a family of 10 in a refugee camp — most of them children — and pulverising a high-rise that housed the Associated Press and other media.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres told the UN Security Council on Sunday that the hostilities were “utterly appalling” and called for an immediate end to fighting.

Opening the 15-member council’s first public meeting on the conflict, Guterres said the United Nations was actively working towards a ceasefire and called on both sides to allow mediation talks.

Palestinian Foreign Minister Riyad al-Malki told the Security Council that “each time Israel hears a foreign leader speak of its right to defend itself, it is further emboldened to continue murdering entire families in their sleep.”

Israel’s UN ambassador Gilad Erdan said Israel’s response to attacks by Hamas adhered to international law and that the country was trying to avoid civilian casualties.



*The building housing the offices of the Associated Press and other media in Gaza City collapses after it was hit by an Israeli air strike.*

“Israel uses its missiles to protect its children. Hamas uses children to protect its missiles,” Erdan said.

The UN Security Council met privately twice last week over the worsening violence, but has so far been unable to agree on a public statement because the United States – a strong ally of Israel – did not believe it would be helpful, diplomats said.

“We call upon the US to shoulder its responsibilities, take a just position, and together with most of the international community support the Security Council in easing the situation,” said Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, who chaired Sunday’s meeting as China is council president for May.

US President Joe Biden, who has called for a de-escalation but has backed Israel’s campaign, spoke separately by phone with Netanyahu and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas late on Saturday. Still, Israel stepped up its assault overnight, vowing to shatter the capabilities of Hamas.



*Palestinians burn tyres in response to Israeli strikes at a rally marking the 73rd anniversary of the Nakba Day.*

Since the conflict began, Israel has levelled a number of Gaza City's tallest office and residential buildings, alleging they house Hamas military infrastructure. On Saturday, it turned to the 12-storey al-Jalaa Building, where the offices of the AP, the TV network Al-Jazeera and other media outlets are located, along with several floors of apartments.

"The campaign will continue as long as it is required," Netanyahu said in a televised speech following the attack. He alleged that Hamas military intelligence was operating inside the building.

Israel appears to have stepped up strikes in recent days to inflict as much damage as possible on Hamas as efforts to broker a ceasefire accelerate. A US diplomat is in the region to try to de-escalate tensions, and the UN Security Council is set to meet on Sunday.

The military said on Sunday it struck the homes of Yehiyeh Sinwar, the most senior Hamas leader inside the territory, and his brother Muhammad, another senior Hamas member. On Saturday it destroyed the home of Khalil al-Hayeh, a senior figure in Hamas' political branch.

Hamas' upper echelon has gone into hiding in Gaza, and it is unlikely any were at home at the time of the strikes. Hamas' top leader, Ismail Haniyeh, divides his time between Turkey and Qatar, both of which provide political support to the group. Hamas and the Islamic Jihad militant group have acknowledged 20 fighters killed since the fighting broke out last Monday, while Israel says the real number is far higher.

At least 188 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza, including 55 children and 33 women, with 1230 people wounded. Eight people in Israel have been killed, including a 5-year-old boy and a soldier.

Hamas and other militant groups have fired some 2900 rockets into Israel since Monday, when tensions over a flashpoint holy site in Jerusalem and the threatened eviction of dozens of Palestinian families boiled over.

About half of those projectiles have fallen short or been intercepted, according to the Israeli military, but rockets have reached major cities and sown widespread panic. On Sunday, Israeli warplanes struck several buildings and roads in central Gaza City. Photos circulated by residents and journalists showed the air strikes punched a crater that blocked one of the main roads leading to Shifa hospital, the largest medical centre in the strip.

The Health Ministry said the latest air strikes left at least two dead and 25 wounded, including children and women. There was no immediate comment from the Israeli military.

Israel routinely cites a Hamas presence as a reason for targeting certain locations in air strikes, including residential buildings. The military also has accused the militant group of using journalists as human shields, but provided no evidence to back up the claims.

The AP had operated from its building in Gaza for 15 years, including through three previous wars between Israel and Hamas. During those conflicts as well as the current one, the news agency's cameras from its top floor office and roof terrace offered 24-hour live shots as militants' rockets arched toward Israel and Israeli airstrikes hammered the city and its surroundings.

"We have had no indication Hamas was in the building or active in the building," AP president and chief executive Gary Pruitt said. "This is something we actively check to the best of our ability. We would never knowingly put our journalists at risk."

In the afternoon, the military called the building's owner and warned a strike would come within an hour. AP staffers and other occupants evacuated safely. Soon after, three missiles hit the building and destroyed it, bringing it crashing down in a giant cloud of dust.

"The world will know less about what is happening in Gaza because of what happened today," Pruitt said. "We are shocked and horrified that the Israeli military would target and destroy the building housing AP's bureau and other news organisations in Gaza."

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken later spoke by phone with Pruitt, offering his support for independent journalists and media organisations, and the White House said it had communicated directly with Israel to urge safety for journalists.

The tensions began in east Jerusalem earlier this month, when Palestinians protested attempts by settlers to forcibly evict a number of Palestinian families from their homes and Israeli police measures at Al-Aqsa Mosque, a frequent flashpoint located on a mount in the Old City revered by Muslims and Jews.

Hamas fired rockets toward Jerusalem late on Monday, triggering the Israeli assault on Gaza.

The turmoil has also spilled over elsewhere, fuelling protests in the occupied West Bank and stoking violence within Israel between its Jewish and Arab citizens, with clashes and vigilante attacks on people and property.

**AP, Reuters**