

At least 50 killed in Israeli strikes across Gaza Strip

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Israeli military strikes in Gaza have reportedly killed at least 50 Palestinians as the army intensified its offensive around Jabalia. Health officials stated that numerous casualties occurred in various locations, including Al-Falouja and Bani Suhaila.

In Jabalia, which has faced ongoing Israeli bombardment for over 10 days, many houses have been destroyed, raising concerns that Israel is attempting to clear residents from the area. The UN human rights office noted that the military appears to be isolating North Gaza completely.

Israeli forces have encircled Jabalia and deployed tanks in surrounding towns, targeting Hamas fighters. Residents have been urged to evacuate south, but officials and the UN assert that there are no safe areas in Gaza.

The health ministry reported that medical facilities are overwhelmed, and hospitals are under pressure to evacuate despite the dire situation. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has condemned the high civilian casualties. Currently, around 400,000 people remain in northern Gaza, with many displaced due to the ongoing conflict.

The CEC criticizes exit polls and trends broadcasted by TV channels, calling for necessary corrective measures.

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE



Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar criticized exit polls for creating unrealistic expectations that do not align with actual results, calling for corrective measures. He described the practice of news channels reporting early leads before counting begins as "nonsense."

Responding to concerns about the accuracy of exit polls while announcing upcoming election schedules, Kumar emphasized the lack of transparency in how these polls are conducted, noting that sample sizes and methodologies are often not disclosed. He urged pollsters and the media to reflect on their practices, stating that self-regulatory bodies like the News Broadcasters & Digital Association should take action.

Kumar highlighted that counting starts at 8:30 a.m., yet leads are often reported as early as 8:05 a.m., which he deemed misleading. He pointed out that the gap between exit poll predictions

and actual results can lead to public frustration.

Regarding Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), he reaffirmed that representatives from all political parties oversee the entire process. On the issue of Artificial Intelligence's influence in elections, Kumar

noted that the Election Commission is monitoring social media and taking legal action as needed, although no users have yet crossed a threshold warranting penalties.

The Health Ministry has directed States to appoint permanent organ transplant coordinators.

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE



The Union Health Ministry has warned States and institutions operating without regular transplant coordinators that support requests for these positions will not be considered after the financial year 2024-25, particularly for those exceeding the five-year support limit.

Under the current National Organ Transplant Programme (2020-21 to 2025-26), government medical colleges can receive funding for two transplant coordinators, while well-performing private colleges can receive support for one.

According to the Transplantation of Human Organs and Tissues Act (THOTA), hospitals must appoint qualified transplant coordinators to be registered for transplantation procedures. However, the Ministry's letter indicates that many States and institutions have not made significant progress in establishing permanent coordinator positions.

Given the legal requirement for transplant coordinators in hospitals, the Ministry is urging States to create these

permanent roles by the next financial year. India faces a severe organ shortage, with approximately 750 institutions providing transplant services.

Transplant coordinators are vital for managing deceased organ donation, including brain death identification, grief counseling, family consent, and logistical arrangements.

India, U.S. conclude \$3.5-billion deal for procurement of 31 armed UAVs

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS



India and the U.S. have finalized a \$3.5 billion deal for the procurement of 31 MQ-9B armed high-altitude long-endurance remotely piloted aircraft systems (RPAS) from General Atomics, as part of an inter-governmental agreement under the U.S. Foreign Military Sales program. The Defence Ministry announced that one contract was signed with the U.S. government for the tri-service acquisition of these systems, while another contract with General Atomics Global India Pvt Ltd covers

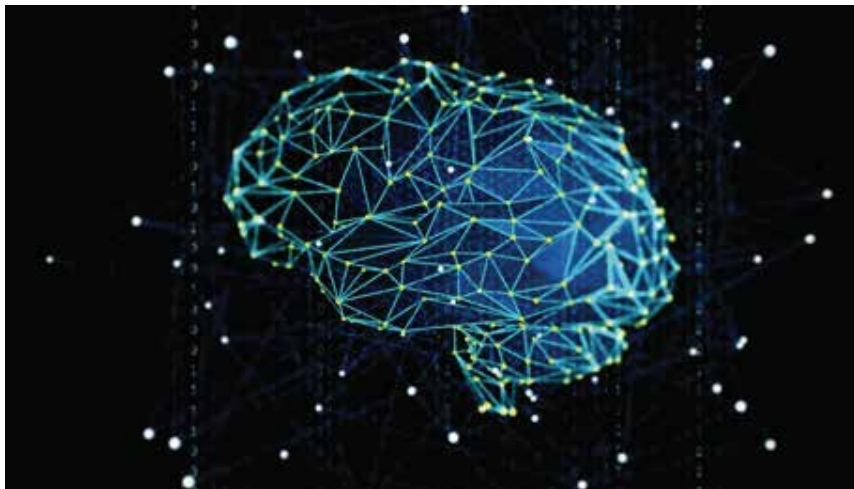
performance-based logistics and maintenance in India. This agreement was signed in the presence of Defence Secretary Giridhar Aramane.

The deal includes 170 AGM-114R Hellfire missiles, 16 M36E9 Hellfire captive training missiles, 310 GBU-39B/B laser-guided bombs, and 8 GBU-39B/B guided test vehicles, among other items. Approved by the Cabinet Committee on Security, this acquisition will enhance India's Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities, serving as a significant force multiplier for the Navy in monitoring the Indian Ocean Region while reducing the operational strain on its P-8I maritime patrol aircraft.

The MQ-9B can fly for up to 40 hours, utilizing satellite communications and integrating safely into civil airspace. Its Sea Guardian configuration is equipped for anti-surface and anti-submarine warfare, featuring advanced radar and monitoring systems.

Centre sets up three AI research hubs on health, agri and cities

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY



The Centre has announced the establishment of three Centres of Excellence (CoE) in artificial intelligence (AI) focusing on healthcare, agriculture, and sustainable cities. The All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) and the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) in Delhi will lead the healthcare CoE, while IIT Ropar in Punjab will oversee the agriculture CoE, and IIT Kanpur will develop the CoE for sustainable cities. These centres will collaborate with industries and start-ups.

Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan stated that the AI-CoEs aim to be solution providers, fostering a new generation of employment and wealth creation. The Union Budget allocated ₹990 crore for these CoEs from 2023-24 to 2027-28, and an industry-focused apex committee co-chaired by Zoho founder Sridhar Vembu has been formed to oversee their implementation.

Mr. Pradhan emphasized that these centres will enhance India's position in the global AI landscape and contribute to public policy solutions. Union Higher Education Secretary K. Sanjay Murthy noted that the CoEs will promote multidisciplinary research and collaboration for optimal results. Dr. Vembu added that the CoEs will benefit communities by nurturing talent and generating opportunities.



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The UAE will assess India's concerns regarding the surge in silver imports, according to the Centre.

ECONOMICS AND DEVELOPMENT

India has expressed concerns about a surge in imports of silver products, platinum alloy, and dry dates from the UAE, urging the country to ensure compliance with the rules under their free trade agreement (FTA). The UAE has agreed to review these concerns, according to the Commerce Ministry.

In response to the significant rise in imports since the FTA came into effect on May 1, 2022, India requested a review of certain provisions. The Indian delegation, led by Additional Secretary Ajay Bhadoo, met with UAE officials, including Juma Al Kait from the Ministry of Economy.

India raised issues regarding adherence to rules of origin, as many imports allegedly do not meet these standards. The Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) highlighted that the India-UAE CEPA allows unlimited imports of precious metals, but many do not qualify for concessions.

India's gold and silver imports from the UAE surged 210% to \$10.7 billion in 2023-24. The country offers 7% tariff concessions on silver and 1% on gold imports. Additionally, India requested that the Indian Jewellery Exposition Centre in Dubai be designated as a Designated Zone to benefit local jewellery manufacturers.

Both sides also discussed the need for mutual recognition agreements for professionals, enabling services without additional certification. They agreed to work on an actionable plan for these issues.

Govt. seeks to rein in firms greenwashing Indian consumers

ECONOMICS AND DEVELOPMENT

The government introduced comprehensive guidelines to regulate greenwashing and misleading environmental claims by companies, aiming to protect consumers and enhance transparency in eco-friendly marketing.

Greenwashing refers to companies' claims about the climate-friendly impacts of their products or services. The Consumer Affairs Ministry's guidelines require that all environmental assertions be backed by verifiable evidence and clear disclosures. Consumer Affairs Secretary Nidhi Khare emphasized that while the guidelines do not prohibit environmental claims, they ensure such claims are made with integrity. Terms like "100% eco-friendly," "zero emissions," and "cruelty-free" must now be substantiated with accessible qualifiers. The guidelines define "greenwashing" and "environmental claims," providing clear parameters for compliance.

Companies must use consumer-friendly language for technical terms and base comparative environmental claims on verifiable data, disclosing specific aspects of comparison. Aspirational claims require actionable plans for support. Advertisements must disclose all material information via QR codes, URLs, or other digital media.

Specific claims, such as "compostable" and "recyclable," must be backed by credible certifications or third-party verification, easily accessible to consumers. Companies are also required to explain technical terms like "environmental impact assessment" in consumer-friendly language.

These guidelines complement existing regulations, with the Consumer Affairs Ministry clarifying that specific laws will take precedence in case of conflict. The central authority's decision will be final in

disputes regarding interpretation.

Additionally, the government is reviewing whether quick commerce firms comply with the Legal Metrology Act, which mandates key product information disclosure, amid their growing popularity in India.

The IEA reports that the oil market remains "adequately" supplied despite the conflict in the Middle East.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS



The International Energy Agency (IEA) stated on Tuesday that global oil markets remain "adequately" supplied despite rising tensions in the Middle East, indicating that member nations are prepared to release reserves if needed.

Following Iran's missile attacks on Israel earlier this month, crude prices spiked amid fears of potential supply disruptions. However, the IEA noted that factors such as the end of a Libyan oil blockade, declining demand, and minimal output losses from hurricanes in the U.S. Gulf Coast have stabilized the market.

Currently, oil exports from Iran and neighboring countries remain unaffected, but the market is closely monitoring the situation. The IEA emphasized its readiness to act as supply developments unfold.

Established in 1974 to coordinate responses to oil supply disruptions, the IEA now has 31 member nations, including the U.S., Japan, and several European countries. In 2022, IEA members collectively tapped into emergency reserves to address soaring crude prices following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The UN has called for an independent investigation into the Israeli attack in northern Lebanon.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS



The UN's human rights office stated on Tuesday that an Israeli airstrike on an apartment building in northern Lebanon, which killed at least 22 people, requires an independent investigation.

Jeremy Laurence, a spokesperson for the office, expressed concerns regarding potential violations of war laws, noting credible reports that among the deceased were a dozen women and children. The Israeli military claimed the strike targeted a Hezbollah facility and stated it would investigate reports of civilian casualties.

The airstrike hit an apartment building in Aito, a village distant from Hezbollah's main strongholds, shocking residents and raising fears of an expanded Israeli offensive. Rescue workers uncovered a child's body and other remains while clearing debris.

Hezbollah's acting leader vowed to escalate strikes against Israel until it halts its air operations in Lebanon.

Naim Kassem emphasized the group's intent to "hurt the enemy" during a televised address, coinciding with the U.S. deploying troops to support Israel's missile defense system. Hezbollah has launched thousands of rockets into Israel over the past year in solidarity with Hamas in Gaza

West Asia 'conflagration' to top agenda at first European Union-Gulf summit

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Avoiding a "general conflagration" in West Asia will be the primary focus when European Union and Gulf leaders convene in Brussels this week, according to European officials.

Heads of state from six Gulf countries—Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE—are expected to attend the inaugural summit on Wednesday with their EU counterparts. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and chief EU diplomat Josep Borrell will also participate.

While trade, energy, and climate change will be discussed, the ongoing conflicts in Gaza and Lebanon, along with the potential for a broader regional war, are anticipated to dominate the agenda. One official noted that both sides are concerned about escalating tensions.

The EU aims to strengthen ties with Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) nations, which are its second-largest trading partners. However, trade pact negotiations have stalled, and differences remain on various issues, including the war in Ukraine.

Officials noted a shared desire for stability and de-escalation in West Asia, with the EU calling for a ceasefire in Lebanon and Gaza. Gulf monarchies, traditionally allied with the West, have increasingly aligned with Iran and have been active in advocating for a Palestinian state alongside Israel.



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