

Two rockets fired from Gaza at Tel Aviv area: army

Thu, 2019-03-14 22:20

JERUSALEM: Two rockets were fired from the Gaza Strip at the Tel Aviv area on Thursday, setting off sirens, and several explosions were heard, the Israeli military and witnesses said.

There were no immediate reports of damage or casualties. Video broadcast on Israeli TV showed two Israeli interceptor missiles streaking into the sky above Tel Aviv, Israel's commercial capital, and detonating.

Reuters journalists heard explosions, but it was unclear whether they were caused by the rockets or the interceptor missiles fired by Israel's Iron Dome system.

The military said two rockets were launched from the Gaza Strip and it would provide further details later. There was no immediate claim of responsibility in the territory, where its dominant Hamas group has been engaged in talks with Egypt on a long-term ceasefire with Israel.

Tensions have been high for the past year along the Israel-Gaza frontier since Palestinians began violent protests near Israel's border fence that have often drawn a lethal response from the Israeli military.



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[Hamas security break up Gaza protests](#)

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Thu, 2019-03-14 16:49

GAZA CITY: Hamas security broke up protests in the Gaza Strip Thursday, eyewitnesses said, cracking down on a rare public show of dissent in the Palestinian territory.

Dozens of security officials, many in plain clothes, dispersed a demonstration in northern Gaza, the eyewitnesses said.

Dozens of people had been protesting there.

Journalists were prevented from filming or taking pictures at the protest, an AFP journalist said.

In a separate protest in central Gaza, dozens of people demonstrated, including by setting tyres on fire.

The protests had been organised to call for an improvement in the quality of life in Gaza, which Israel has blockaded for more than a decade.

They were also seen as a challenge to Hamas, which has ruled the strip since 2007.

Videos posted on social media appeared to show Hamas security firing in the air to disperse the protests.

The Palestinian Non-Government Organisations Network, which includes more than 100 charities, said in a statement it "strongly condemned the campaign of arrests and aggression that the security forces launched in Jabalia in northern Gaza against the right of dozens of citizens."

It said the protesters were "gathering peacefully to demand an improvement in the life quality in the Gaza Strip".



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[Chemical weapons probe team to start in 'weeks'](#)

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Thu, 2019-03-14 15:08

THE HAGUE: A new chemical weapons investigation team with the power to assign blame for attacks such as those in Syria will start work in weeks, the head of the world's toxic arms organization said.

Member countries of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons agreed in June to allow the body to identify the perpetrators of chemical

attacks, but the new powers are strongly opposed by Moscow and Damascus. "The recruitment process of the members of the team is under way and is currently being finalized," OPCW chief Fernando Arias said in a statement to The Hague-based body on Tuesday.

Arias said the so-called Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) "will become fully operational in the coming weeks."

Western states immediately called for the team to start work on identifying the culprits behind a deadly attack in the Syrian town of Douma in April 2018.

The OPCW said in a report on March 2 that chlorine was likely used in the attack, which it said killed more than 40 people.

The report however did not apportion blame as it was not in the watchdog's mandate at the time.

Syria and Russia rejected the report, saying the Douma incident – which sparked western airstrikes against the regime of President Bashar Assad – was faked.

Canada's delegation to the watchdog tweeted that it "expects Douma case to be referred to OPCW Investigation/Identification Team. Those responsible must be held accountable."

Britain said that it "look(s) forward to further investigation by IIT to identify those responsible."

The West pushed through the new blaming powers after a string of chemical incidents in Syria, as well as a nerve agent attack on Russian former double agent Sergei Skripal in the British city of Salisbury in March 2018.

Russia tried last year to block the budget for the OPCW if it included funding for the investigations team.

China and Iran have also opposed the new powers.

OPCW chief Arias said the investigations team so far had 400,000 euros of funding but needed a further 1.13 million euros for the rest of 2019.

He added that the watchdog had discussed the investigations team with Syria during talks in February on destroying Damascus's chemical weapons stocks, and would now "seek to secure the cooperation of the Syrian Government" for probes.



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[Security Council members report no progress on Yemen deal](#)

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Wed, 2019-03-13 17:32

UNITED NATIONS: Security Council members said envoy Martin Griffiths reported no progress Wednesday in getting the warring parties in Yemen to withdraw their forces from the key port of Hodeidah and two smaller ports as called for in an agreement they signed in December.

France's Foreign Minister Francois Delattre, the current council president, told reporters after Wednesday's closed-door meeting that his report was "not good." Belgium's UN Ambassador Marc Pecsteen de Buytsverve was blunter, telling reporters: "At this point of time there is no progress so the council

might do something.”

Griffiths had been more optimistic last month, telling the council he expected the imminent pullout of forces, which would provide an opportunity to move to the major goal of ending the four-year conflict in Yemen that has created the world’s worst humanitarian crisis.

But Britain’s UN Ambassador Karen Pierce said council members have always said the agreement between Yemen’s government and Houthi militants reached in Stockholm “is fragile – and this is proof that it is fragile.”

“I wouldn’t say it was in more trouble than we expected,” she said. “It’s the age old problem of building trust and confidence between the parties.”

“It’s clear that one party has more problems than the other at the moment, but this tends to swing around,” Pierce said, without naming the party.

Griffiths did not speak to reporters.

UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric said Griffiths “informed council members they were still working with the parties to make the redeployment in Hodeida a reality.”

Responding to a question on whether the Hodeidah agreement was unraveling, Dujarric said, “I would not use the term unraveling. I think patience and determination are really the name of the game.”

“No one expected this to be easy,” Dujarric said. “This is the first agreement reached by the parties since the start of the conflict” and Griffiths and the UN redeployment monitoring team “are determined to help the parties to reach an agreement to implement what was actually agreed to.”

Germany’s UN Ambassador Christoph Heusgen said that at Wednesday’s council meeting “there was frustration that we haven’t made more progress.”

“But what was clear is that there is no alternative but to continue on that process and to use all the different channels that are at our disposal to get the parties to implement the Stockholm agreement,” he said.

On Tuesday, the five permanent members of the UN Security Council – China, France, Russia, Britain and the US– called on both sides to implement a peace deal on the port city.

Under the plan agreed on during talks in December, coalition-backed forces and Houthi militiamen would pull out of Hodeidah, while allowing a local force to take control. But on Sunday, fighting erupted in Hodeidah, the first significant clashes since warring sides agreed to a cease-fire.

The conflict in Yemen began with the 2014 takeover of the capital, Sanaa, by the Iranian-backed Houthis.

An Arab coalition including Saudi Arabia has been fighting the Houthis since 2015.

The fighting in the Arab world’s poorest country has killed thousands of civilians, left millions suffering from food and medical care shortages, and pushed the country to the brink of famine.



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[British MP demands World Cup probe after fans say Qatar should lose tournament](#)

Wed, 2019-03-13 21:58

LONDON: A prominent British MP has called for an investigation into Qatar hosting the 2022 World Cup after a poll revealed that more than nine in 10 football fans want to see the tiny Gulf state being stripped of the tournament.

Former leader of the Liberal Democrat party, Tim Farron, was commenting on a survey conducted by UK newspaper The Sunday Times.

The poll, as of 6:30 p.m. GMT on Wednesday, revealed that 93 percent of the 6,240 people who voted were adamant that Qatar should be shown the red card

and the tournament moved elsewhere. The poll runs until Friday 15 March.

Farron said that it should come as no shock to find out that so many fans are furious about where the 2022 sporting spectacle is set to be held.



“It’s not remotely surprising that so many fans want to see Qatar stripped of the World Cup,” he told Arab News.

“As fans they want the beautiful game to remain beautiful – not become mired in bribery and foul play,” added Farron, who headed the Liberal Democrats from 2015 to 2017.

“If these allegations remain unresolved, this could seriously damage the reputation of sport’s greatest competition. We need an independent investigation now.”

The poll comes after yet more allegations of corruption surrounding the controversial decision to award hosting rights for the 2022 tournament to Qatar.

It has long been claimed that the Gulf state offered bribes to FIFA officials in its bid to host the 2022 World Cup – and last weekend The Sunday Times reported that Qatar allegedly offered football’s governing body as much as \$880 million in secret payments at key stages in its efforts to host the 2022 World Cup.

Leaked files seen by The Sunday Times appear to show that Doha offered FIFA \$400 million 21 days before the decision to hold the tournament in the tiny

Gulf state was announced

Executives from the Qatari state-run broadcaster Al Jazeera made the offer at the height of campaigning over the tournament, in a clear breach of FIFA's own anti-bribery rules, the newspaper claimed.

In response to the newspapers's allegations, a FIFA spokesperson said: "Allegations linked to the FIFA World Cup 2022 bid have already been extensively commented by FIFA, who in June 2017 published the Garcia report in full on FIFA.com. Furthermore, please note that FIFA lodged a criminal complaint with the Office of the Attorney General of Switzerland, which is still pending. FIFA is and will continue to cooperate with the authorities.

"Generally speaking and since the implementation of the reforms in 2016, FIFA has consistently improved its governance and compliance standards also when it comes to transparency and fairness of its commercial agreements."





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Poll reveals 93 percent of fans want Qatar to be shown red card over 2022 World Cup hosting rights 'Risk to Qatar World Cup, contractors' following latest corruption allegations