

# *Israel expands Gaza ground assault as bombardment kills at least 91 people*

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Rafah, March 21 (RHC)-- Israel has expanded its military ground operations in Gaza as it continued to bombard the besieged territory for a third consecutive day, while the Palestinian group Hamas fired

rockets towards Israel for the first time since a fragile truce was shattered this week.

The Gaza Health Ministry said at least 91 people – including a newborn baby – were killed in the attacks that took place overnight and early on Thursday in the south and north of the Gaza Strip. Dozens were reportedly wounded in the assault.

“The Israeli attacks across the Gaza Strip have intensified, especially at dawn, when at least 11 residential buildings were flattened by the Israeli forces,” said Al Jazeera’s Tareq Abu Azzoum, reporting from central Gaza.

“Among those victims who have been killed today were a newborn baby alongside children and women,” Abu Azzoum said.

“There has been a clear strategic approach that Israel has been using, which does not pass any sort of warning to civilians before striking the buildings that they are taking refuge in,” he added.

Later on Thursday, Hamas said that it fired “a barrage of M90 rockets” at Israel’s commercial hub of Tel Aviv in response to what it called “massacres against civilians” in Gaza.

The attack marked Hamas’s first volley of rocket fire since Israel shattered the nearly two-month-long ceasefire with the group. Hamas has lost some senior figures in Israel’s strikes, including the de facto head of the Gaza government and the head of security services.

Israel’s army said it intercepted one projectile fired from Gaza, while two others fell in an open area. No casualties were reported.

Later on Thursday, the Israeli military announced the expansion of its ground operations to Rafah, saying that it was “conducting ground activity” in the Shaboura area of Rafah, Gaza’s southernmost city near the Egyptian border, while “simultaneously” continuing ground operations in northern and central Gaza. It said it had “dismantled... terrorist infrastructure” in Rafah.

Israeli attacks this week have killed at least 591 people, including 200 children, the Gaza Health Ministry said. At least 1,042 people have been injured, it added.

Many others are believed to remain buried under the rubble.

As Israeli troops resumed ground operations in central Gaza on Wednesday, they reclaimed control of the Netzarim Corridor, effectively cutting off northern Gaza from the rest of the enclave.

Israel’s Arabic language spokesperson Avichay Adraee said on Thursday that Palestinians wishing to travel from the north to the south should only do so via al-Rashid Street along the coast and should avoid approaching Israeli soldiers for their safety.

“The Israeli military’s move to reoccupy the Netzarim Corridor is bringing back bad memories from before the ceasefire,” said Al Jazeera’s Hani Mahmoud, reporting from Gaza City.

“During the ceasefire, Palestinians could cross it to get back to their homes in the north. But not anymore. Now people’s movement is quite limited. “Its reoccupation is a reminder that the Israeli military is advancing for a larger-scale operation,” Mahmoud said, adding that before the truce, Netzarim served as a launching pad for many Israeli military operations and was “a death trap for many Palestinians”.

The breakdown of the ceasefire has also been met with anger in Israel, where many support the families of captives seeking the return of their loved ones from Gaza.

Thousands of Israeli protesters massed in Jerusalem on Wednesday, accusing Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of resuming attacks on Gaza without regard for the safety of the captives still held in the coastal enclave.

In a statement quoted by the Palestinian Information Center, Hamas spokesman Abdul Latif al-Qanou said the group remains committed to the original ceasefire framework signed in January and is engaging with mediators to “compel” Israel to adhere to it and halt its renewed assaults.

“We are working with mediators to spare our people from war permanently” and ensure that Israel withdraws from Gaza, al-Qanou said.

Netanyahu said on Tuesday that the renewed bombing of Gaza was “only the beginning” and that Israel would press ahead until it achieves all of its war aims: destroying Hamas and freeing all the captives.

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