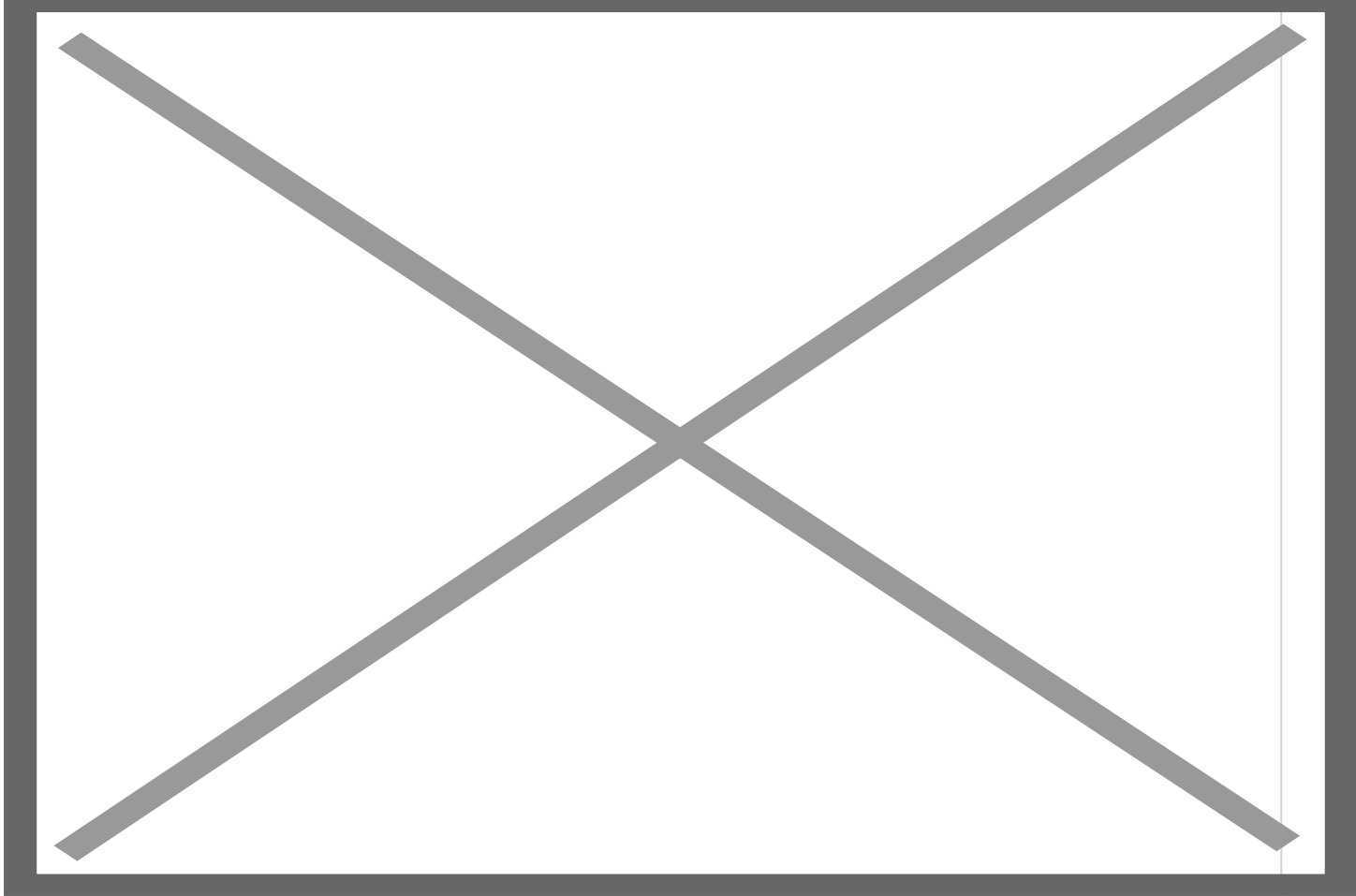


Israeli warplanes and drones hit Gaza Strip in fresh acts of aggression

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Israel has launched air raids on the Gaza Strip after rocket fire from the Palestinian enclave targeted the city of Ashkelon in southern Israel, following months of relative calm in the region.

Gaza City, June 18 (RHC)-- Israel has launched air raids on the Gaza Strip after rocket fire from the Palestinian enclave targeted the city of Ashkelon in southern Israel, following months of relative calm in the region.

Palestinian media said the Israeli strikes fell on agricultural land in Gaza on Saturday, but the Israeli military said it targeted military sites belonging to Hamas, the Palestinian group which rules the enclave.

There were no immediate reports of casualties in Gaza or Israel. There was no immediate response from Hamas, nor a claim of responsibility from any of the enclave's other groups.

The air attack comes a day after Israel launched military raids on Jenin in the occupied West Bank in which three Palestinians were killed and 10 were wounded. Also on Friday, an Israeli observation balloon crashed and fell in the northern Gaza Strip.

Palestinian news agency Wafa named the men killed in Jenin as Baraa Lahlouh, 24, Yusuf Salah, 23, and Laith Abu Suroor, 24. Hamas said one of those killed was among its members, while another group that draws on members of Palestinian faction Islamic Jihad claimed the dead men as its own.

The last cross-border rockets were in April when Israeli warplanes launched an attack in the Gaza Strip targeting what the military said was a weapons manufacturing site belonging to Hamas.

Although Saturday's cross-border fire did not appear to signal a wider escalation, violence has risen in Jerusalem, the occupied West Bank and Israel in recent months.

According to the Palestinian health ministry, more than 60 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli forces this year, many of them in raids. A string of Palestinian attacks since March has also killed 19 people in Israel.

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