Intense bombings by Israeli forces around Gaza hospitals amid blackout
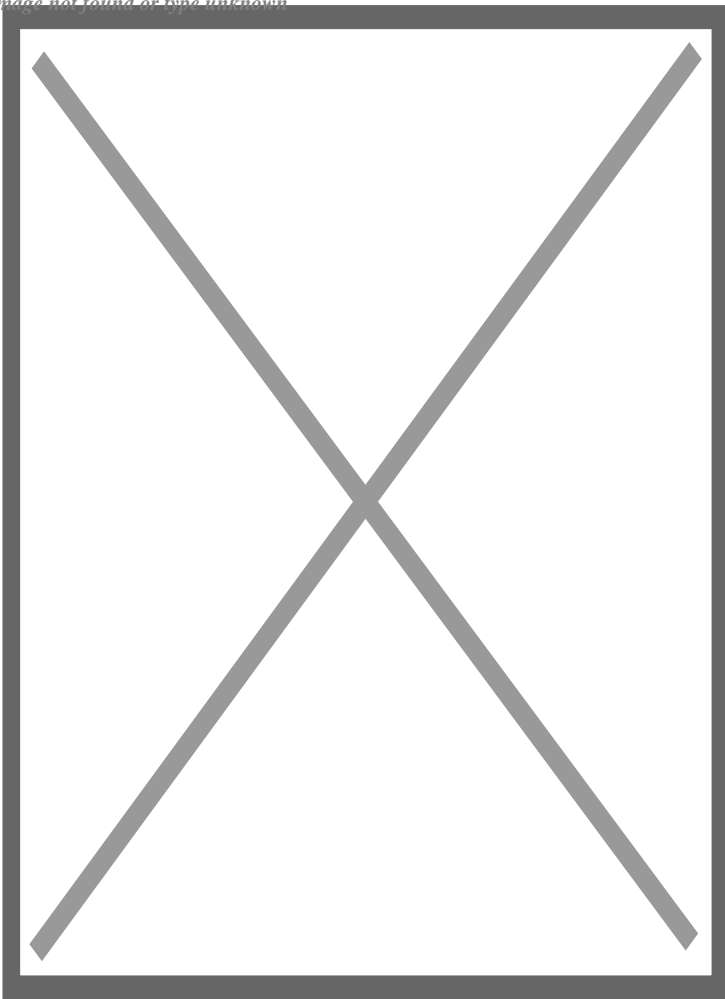

Gaza City, November 5 (RHC)-- Israel continues heavy shelling in the vicinity of several hospitals in the north of the Gaza Strip, officials in the besieged enclave say as all communications and internet services were once again cut.

"For more than an hour, intense bombings have been taking place around hospitals," Salama Maarouf, head of the Hamas government's media office, said on Sunday evening.

The vicinity of the Palestinian territory's largest hospital, Al Shifa, saw particularly heavy strikes, according to Marouf. Al Jazeera's Safwat Kahlout, reporting from Deir Al Balah in central Gaza, also said the most intense shelling on Sunday was taking place in the area surrounding the hospital.

"We can understand that these air strikes are aimed at pushing the Israeli troops surrounding Gaza City towards the Al Shifa Hospital. We know that thousands of people left their homes in these neighbourhoods towards the hospital, seeking shelter," he said.

"Which indicates that the Israeli army is planning for something big, maybe in the coming hours or in the coming days in terms of the Al Shifa Hospital itself."

Earlier on Sunday, an Israeli attack hit near Al Quds Hospital in Gaza City, wounding at least 14 people and damaging the building.

The bombing came after the Israeli military once again accused Hamas of using hospitals in their military campaign against Israel. "Hamas places forces and weapons inside, under and around schools, mosques, homes and UN facilities," Israeli military spokesman Daniel Hagari told reporters on Sunday.

"Among the worst of Hamas war crimes is the use of hospitals to hide their terror infrastructure."

The Israeli army confirmed that "significant" strikes were under way in Gaza on Sunday, with a military spokesman claiming Israel's ground assault had split the Palestinian territory in two. Israeli forces "have encircled Gaza City… Now there exists a south Gaza and a north Gaza," said spokesman Daniel Hagari. Troops "reached the coastline and are holding it," he added.

Internet access advocacy group NetBlocks.org reported a "collapse in connectivity" across Gaza. The blackout was confirmed by the Palestinian telecom company Paltel. "We have lost communication with the vast majority of the UNRWA team members," UN Palestinian refugee agency spokesperson Juliette Touma told The Associated Press. The first Gaza outage lasted 36 hours and the second one for a few hours.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has expressed concern for the safety of patients, health workers and the thousands of people sheltering in Al Quds Hospital. "WHO reiterates its call for an immediate ceasefire, active protection of civilians and healthcare, and respect for International Humanitarian Law," the agency said in a post on X.

"In our Al Quds Hospital, we are deeply concerned about the situation because of the heavy shelling in the last days, really hitting in the proximity of the hospital," Tommaso della Longa, a Geneva-based spokesperson for the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, told Al Jazeera.

"Yesterday [Saturday], literally the building in front of the hospital was hit," he said, adding that the attack broke windows and smoke entered the hospital, which is currently treating about 500 patients.

Hospitals and ambulances have been hit several times since the latest Israeli attacks began on October 7, killing patients, displaced civilians sheltering at the facilities as well as health workers.

According to the WHO, 39 health facilities have been damaged since the war began. Hospitals have also been forced to shut down or cut services after electricity and fuel supply was cut.

At least 9,770 Palestinians, including 4,008 children, have been killed in the Gaza Strip since the latest war began, while entire neighbourhoods have been reduced to rubble. More than 1,400 people were killed in an attack by Hamas on southern Israel, which started this war.

Nearly 1.5 million people are now internally displaced in Gaza, according to the United Nations.

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