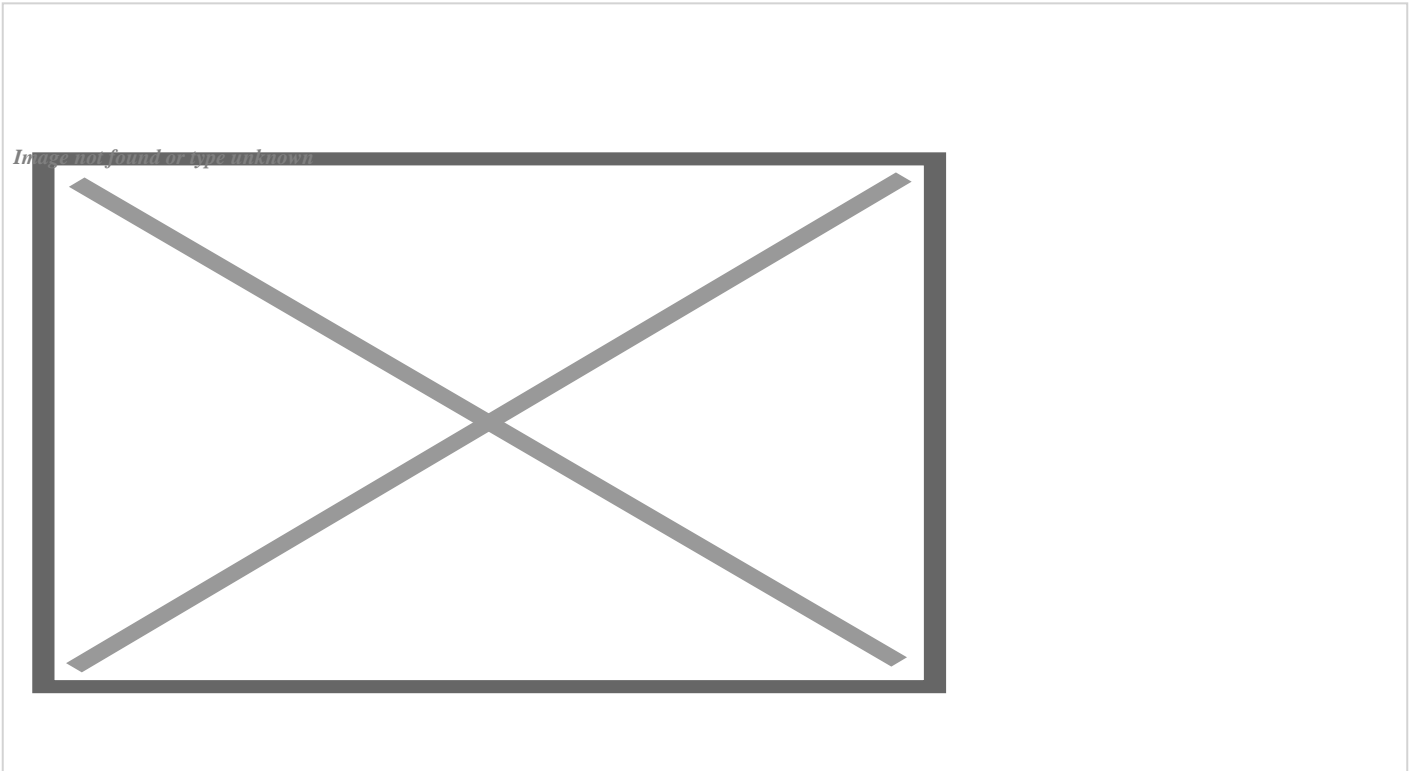


Israeli troops launch full-scale ground invasion of northern and southern Gaza



Gaza City, March 21 (RHC)-- The Israeli military assault on the Gaza Strip has continued for a fourth day as its ground forces invaded northern and southern Gaza and the Israeli defense minister threatened to seize land in the coastal enclave.

Defense Minister Israel Katz said on Friday that his country would “intensify” its military campaign against Hamas and use “all military and civilian pressure, including evacuation of the Gaza population south and implementing United States President Trump’s voluntary migration plan for Gaza residents”.

Katz instructed the army “to seize additional areas in Gaza, evacuate the population, and expand security zones around Gaza to protect Israeli communities and [Israeli army] soldiers,” local media quoted him as saying. He also warned that Israel would seize Gaza land until the Gaza-based armed group agrees to release all captives still held in the Strip.

“The more Hamas persists in its refusal to release the hostages, the more territory it will lose, which will be annexed to Israel,” Katz was quoted by The Jerusalem Post newspaper as saying. “If the hostages are not released, Israel will continue to take more and more territory in the Strip for permanent control.”

The development comes after Israeli troops invaded the Shaboura area of Rafah, Gaza's southernmost city near the Egyptian border, and Beit Lahiya in northern Gaza, late on Thursday.

Earlier this week, Israel said it had closed off the territory's main north-south route as part of its expanding ground operations.

Al Jazeera's Hind Khoudary, reporting from central Gaza, said according to residents in Beit Lahiya and Rafah, Israeli forces did not give any prior warnings of their activities. "They did not throw leaflets or drop any warnings asking people to evacuate those areas. Suddenly, Palestinians found endless air strikes and artillery shelling attacking them," she said.

The ground operations come as Israel broke the nearly two-month ceasefire in Gaza on Tuesday, killing more than 590 Palestinians, including some 200 children, the Gaza Ministry of Health has said.

Elsewhere, Al Jazeera reporters said Gaza City's Zeitoun neighbourhood in the north has come under "heavy" attack from Israeli aircraft on Friday. Air attacks have also been reported in Khuza'a and Abasan, east of the southern Gaza city of Khan Younis.

UNRWA, the United Nations agency for Palestinian refugees, said the situation in Gaza is gravely concerning amid huge reductions in distribution of aid supplies. "This is the longest period since the start of conflict in October 2023 that no supplies whatsoever have entered Gaza," UNRWA's Sam Rose told reporters, speaking from central Gaza. "The progress we made as an aid system over the last six weeks of the ceasefire is being reversed."

Meanwhile, Al Jazeera's Khoudary said health workers and hospitals in the Strip were overwhelmed amid Israel's renewed assault. "We are talking about 18 days of zero aid trucks entering the Gaza Strip. Not one single truck of medical supplies has been entering the Gaza Strip," she said.

Moreover, the lack of fuel in the coastal enclave was making the situation worse. "Most of Gaza's hospitals are at risk of collapsing and shutting down if they do not receive fuel in the coming days," Khoudary said.

On March 2, Israel blocked all humanitarian aid into Gaza after the first phase of the ceasefire expired, cutting off food, medicine and fuel. This raised global condemnation, with European nations warning the blockade could breach international humanitarian law.

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