

One Palestinian dead as Gaza-Israel border clashes enter third week



Palestinians evacuate an injured protester during clashes with Israeli security forces near the Gaza border fence on April 13, 2018

MAHMUD HAMS (AFP)

At least 33 Palestinians in Gaza have been killed by Israeli forces since the protests kicked off

One Palestinian was declared dead after being shot by Israeli gunfire Friday evening. Another 968 were wounded as another day of clashes erupted between Palestinian demonstrators and Israeli forces along the Israel-Gaza border.

The Palestinian Health Ministry in Gaza identified the 28-year-old as Islam Rushdi Hirzallah

Earlier Friday, thousands of Gazans began surging toward the fractious perimeter fence for the third consecutive week.

At least 30 were wounded by live fire, according to the health ministry, with one

shot in the head. In Ramallah, the ministry reported that 14 were injured, seven of which were from live bullets and two rubber bullets.

In addition, ten medics were treated for tear gas inhalation after a canister landed in their site, the ministry said.

Some 32 Palestinians were killed by Israeli fire over two consecutive weekends of protests in Gaza, demanding the right to return to their claimed ancestral homes in what is now Israel.

This week, the demonstration has been dubbed “the lifting of the flag of Palestine and the burning of the flag of Israel,” and is set again to attract crowds of Gazans.

Several thousand had already gathered at five locations on Friday morning local time, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) said, but the largest crowds were expected in the afternoon after the main weekly Muslim prayers.

The military, which has deployed snipers and tanks along the border, said that demonstrators in Gaza had thrown “explosives” and Molotov cocktails at the fence, and attempted to damage it.

One explosive device was seen attached to a kite and aimed towards IDF troops, but fell inside the Strip causing no damage or injuries.



A molotov cocktail is attached to a kite and launched at IDF soldiers during Gaza Strip protests

IDF

In northern Gaza, a large Israeli flag was burned that had earlier been set on the ground for protesters to walk over.

Dozens of Israeli flags were being burned in Jabalia in northern Gaza and hundreds of Palestinian ones were held aloft.

Near Khan Yunis in the south, protesters burned pictures of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, US President Donald Trump and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, whom they view as cooperating with Israel.

In the northern Gaza Strip, Sumaya Abu Awad, 36, attended the protest with her three daughters and son.

“I am from the village of Hiribya and it is my right to return to it,” she said, referring to a village north of Gaza destroyed in the 1948 war surrounding Israel’s creation. “I am not afraid of death because there is no life in Gaza already.”



An Israeli soldier aims his weapon as Palestinian protesters gather near the border fence with Israel, east of Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza city on April 13, 2018

Thomas COEX (AFP)

According to Amer Shreith, a member of the international committee for the “March of Return” — the name given to the six week long protest from March 30 to May 15 — hundreds of Palestinian flags will be raised, whilst a number of Israeli flags will be burned “in front of the eyes of the soldiers of the occupation”, he told *Ma’an* news agency.

He reiterated “the importance of a commitment to peacefulness” during the protests.

Israel claims that what was initially deemed a peaceful protest has been hijacked by Hamas, the Islamic militant group that presides over the Strip.

“Hamas is preparing to initiate another violent confrontation today on the Israel Gaza fence,” the Israeli foreign ministry tweeted on Friday ahead of the expected protests.

IDF spokesperson Brig. Gen. Ronen Manelis claimed last week that “Hamas and

Islamic Jihad and other groups would try to use the protests to mask terror attacks.”



Palestinians take cover from tear gas during clashes with Israeli security forces near the Gaza border fence on April 13, 2018

MAHMUD HAMS (AFP)

Whilst Defense Minister Avigdor Liberman said Sunday there were “no naive” people among Gaza’s two-million population. “Everyone’s connected to Hamas, everyone gets a salary from Hamas,” he added.

The IDF estimated that 20,000 demonstrators converged on the border last Friday, following a much larger protest the previous week.

A senior IDF officer told reporters on Friday that “hundreds” of people in Gaza were shot by live bullets, and that the army was forced to rely on them because rubber bullets are less effective over long distances.

He also said that Hamas may be willing to take risks even at the expense of escalation, and use the protests to mask abduction attempts

Six journalists were shot and one killed in last week’s demonstrations, sparking

international outcry and calls for an investigation. Israel's Defense Minister Avigdor Liberman accused the journalist of being an activist in Hamas' military wing.

The IDF, for the first time, backed up Liberman's claim on Friday but did not offer any evidence of his Hamas links.

The Palestinian Journalists Syndicate, arguing that Israel systematically targets Palestinian media workers, including by coercing the closure of Facebook accounts, in order to prevent news coverage.

The high death toll elicited expressions of alarm from the UN, European Union and Israeli opposition lawmakers. Palestinians accused Israel of using disproportionate fire saying IDF soldiers opened fire on protesters to who not pose a threat.



A Palestinian demonstrator covers his face with a traditional Palestinian Keffiyah scarf during a protest, on the Gaza-Israel border, east of Gaza City, on April 6, 2018

MOHAMMED ABED (AFP)

Israel has repeatedly defended its use of live fire and said it opened fire only when necessary against those taking an active part in violence. Israel accused Hamas of doctoring or fabricating video footage depicting live fire.

Despite mounting criticism Israel is preparing to ramp up its response if demonstrations continue next week, *Haaretz* reported on Saturday.

Gaza participants were said to be hurling Molotov cocktails and other explosives at Israeli troops stationed on the other side of the fence. It said that several attempts were made by Palestinians to penetrate the fence, but none were successful.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu “saluted” the Israeli soldiers “who protect us at all times.”

“They [the protesters] talk about human rights, but actually want to crush the Jewish state,” he said. “We won’t let them.”

On Thursday a Hamas militant was killed in an overnight Israeli air strike on one of the group’s outposts in response to an explosive device that was detonated against an Israeli army vehicle.

The “March of Return” is set to climax on May 15, when Israel will mark 70 years of independence — a day Palestinians mark as the “nakba” (“catastrophe” in Arabic) — and the United States will cut the ribbon on its controversial new embassy in Jerusalem.

AFP in Gaza and i24NEWS Senior Defense Correspondent Shai Ben-Ari on the Israel-Gaza border contributed to this report.

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