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# Israel unleashes airstrikes after vowing to press on in Gaza

Diplomatic efforts to negotiate ceasefire gather pace | Netanyahu pushes back against US demands to wind down offensive | Officials expect to declare truce in 24 hrs



Palestinians inspect a house hit during an Israeli airstrike in Rafah | AFP

#### **GAZA CITY**

ISRAEL unleashed another wave of airstrikes across the Gaza Strip early Thursday, killing at least one Palestinian and wounding several, and Hamas fired more rockets, even as expectations rose that a cease-fire could be coming.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has pushed back against calls from the US to wind down the Gaza offensive, appearing determined to inflict maximum damage on Hamas in a war that could help save his political career. Still, officials close to the negotiations say they expect a truce to be announced in the next 24 hours.

Explosions shook Gaza City and orange flares lit up the predawn sky, with bombing raids also reported in the central town of Deir al-Balah and the southern town of Khan Younis. As the sun rose, residents surveyed the rubble from at least five family homes destroyed in

Khan Younis. There were also heavy airstrikes on a commercial thoroughfare in Gaza City.

The Israeli military said it struck at least three homes of Hamas commanders in Khan Younis and another in Rafah, targeting 'military infrastructure,' as well as a weapons storage unit at a home in Gaza City. With hundreds already killed in the worst fighting since Israel and Hamas' 2014 war, US President Joe Biden told Israel on Wednesday that he expected

"a significant de-escalation today on the path to a cease-fire", but Netanyahu pushed back, saying he was "determined to continue this operation until its aim is met."

It marked the first public rift between the two close allies since the fighting began and poses a difficult test of the US-Israel relationship early in Biden's presidency.

Still, an Egyptian intelligence official said a cease-fire was likely late Thursday or ear-

ly Friday, after the US appeal bolstered Cairo's own efforts to halt the fighting. Khalid Okasha, director of the Egyptian Center for Strategic Studies, which has close ties to the government, also said a cease-fire was likely in that timeframe, as did Osama Hamdan, a senior Hamas official.

Visiting the region, German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas said Israel has 'the right to defend itself against such unacceptable attacks.'

AP

# UK to reunify national rail network under govt control

#### LONDON

BRITAIN plans to bring the national rail network back under government control, reversing one of the most controversial elements of the privatisation drive carried out by the Conservative governments of the 1980s and '90s.

Under plans announced Thursday, the government will create a new entity known as Great British Railways that will own all railroad infrastructure, set most fares and schedules, collect ticket revenue and run a single ticketing website. Private companies will continue to operate trains under contracts with the state.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson's government said the move would end 'a quarter-century of fragmentation' that created a confusing, expensive patchwork of privately run rail franchises.

That system was created after the railroads were privatised in the 1990s under former Prime Minister John Major who, like Johnson, led a Conservative Party government.

"I am a great believer in rail, but for too long passengers have not had the level of service they deserve," Johnson said in a statement.

The privatisation of Britain's railroads followed the sell off of other state-owned assets that began under Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, Major's predecessor.

While the government continued to own infrastructure such as railroad tracks and stations, rail services were run by private companies under a series of regional franchises. That led to high prices, inefficiency and a series of embarrassing episodes in recent years when the rollout of new schedules left commuters stranded and frustrated by a shortage of trains

The Covid-19 pandemic exacerbated the problem as passenger numbers plummeted, forcing the govt to reexamine the franchise model.

AP

# Roadside bomb kill 13 people in Afghanistan

## KABUL

ROADSIDE bombings in southern and central Afghanistan killed 13 people, including nine members of one family, officials said Thursday.

Meanwhile, militants stopped a bus in western Afghanistan, ordered three men to get out and shot and killed them.

No one has claimed responsibility for the latest attacks. The three men on the bus were ethnic Hazaras. The government blamed the Taliban but previous attacks on Hazaras, who are mostly Shiite Muslims, have been claimed by the Islamic State group. Large swaths of war-ravaged Afghanistan have been littered with bombs and land mines. Many have been planted by insurgents to target military convoys but often kill civilians instead.

One of the two bombs struck a car carrying a family of 12 in southern Helmand on Wednesday, said provincial police. *AP* 

### GOLD AUCTION NOTICE

CIN-L65910KL1992PLC006623 IV/470A (old) W638A(New), Manappuram Hose,

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