

Dozens of rockets fired from Gaza towards Israel

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Online Desk: Dozens of rockets were fired from the blockaded Gaza Strip towards Israel on Saturday, an AFP journalist in the Palestinian territory said, as sirens warning of incoming fire blared in Israel. The rocket fire was launched from multiple locations in Gaza starting at 06:30 am (0330 GMT), the AFP journalist reported. The Israeli army warned of sirens across the country's south and central areas for more than an hour, urging the public to stay near bomb shelters. The military also said "a number of terrorists have infiltrated into Israeli territory from the Gaza Strip," without providing further information.

A 70-year-old woman was in critical condition and another person was trapped after a rocket hit a building in central Israel, the Magen David Adom emergency services said. In a separate incident, medics said a 20-year-old man was hurt moderately from shrapnel. The office of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the premier will shortly convene security chiefs over the violence. There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the rocket fire.

– Earlier border protests –

Israel has imposed a crippling blockade on Gaza since 2007 after the Hamas militant group took power. Palestinian militants and Israel have fought several devastating wars since. The latest fire follows a period of heightened tensions in September, when Israel closed the border to Gazan workers for two weeks. The shutdown of the crossing came as Palestinian protest rocked the heavily-militarised border.

Protesters had resorted to burning tyres and throwing rocks and petrol bombs at Israeli troops, who have responded with tear gas and live bullets. Critics had slammed the border closure as collective punishment against thousands of Palestinian workers, who have far greater earning potential in Israel than Gaza, where unemployment is rife. Resuming their passage on September 28 had raised hopes of calming the situation in Gaza, home to 2.3 million people.

In May, an exchange of Israeli air strikes and Gaza rocket fire resulted in the deaths of 34 Palestinians and one Israeli. So far this year at least 247 Palestinians, 32 Israelis and two foreigners have been killed in the conflict, including combatants and civilians on both sides, according to Israeli and Palestinian officials. The vast majority of fatalities have occurred in the West Bank, which has been occupied by Israel since the 1967 Arab-Israeli conflict.

There has been a rise in army raids, Palestinian attacks targeting Israelis and Israeli settler violence against Palestinians and their property. Several far-right Israeli ministers live in settlements in the West Bank, which are deemed illegal under international law.