

In show of force, US to send carrier strike group closer to Israel

Washington: US defence secretary Lloyd Austin said Sunday he has ordered the Ford carrier strike group to sail to the Eastern Mediterranean to be ready to assist Israel after the surprise attack by Hamas.

The USS Gerald R Ford and its approximately 5,000 sailors and deck of warplanes will be accompanied by cruisers and destroyers in a show of force that is meant to be ready to respond to anything, from possibly interdicting additional weapons from reaching Hamas and conducting surveillance.

The large deployment, which also includes a host of ships and warplanes, underscores the concern that the US has in trying to deter the conflict from growing. The Israeli government formally declared war Sunday and gave the green light for "significant military steps" to retaliate against Hamas.

Along with the Ford the US is sending the cruiser USS Normandy, destroyers USS Thomas Hudner, USS Ramage, USS Carney, and USS Roosevelt and the U.S. is augmenting Air Force F-35, F-15, F-16, and A-10 fighter aircraft squadrons in the region. "The US maintains ready forces globally to further reinforce this deterrence posture if required," Austin said.

In addition, the Biden administration "will be rapidly providing the Israel defence Forces with additional equipment and resources, including munitions. The first security assistance will begin moving today and arriving in the coming days," Austin said. AP

Finland-Estonia pipeline shut over suspected leak

Helsinki: Finland and Estonia said Sunday that the undersea Balticconnector natural gas pipeline running between the countries across Baltic Sea was temporarily taken out of service due to a suspected leak. Gasgrid Finland and Elering, the Finnish and Estonian gas operators, said they noted an unusual drop in pressure in the pipeline around 2am Sunday, after which they shut off gas flow.

The pipeline is bi-directional, transferring gas between the two countries depending on demand and supply. AP

Conflict toll tops 1,100, Israel OKs 'major strikes' on Hamas

Fight On In South, Hezbollah Fires From Lebanon

Israel's government formally declared war Sunday and gave the green light for "significant military steps" to retaliate against Hamas for its attacks from Gaza Strip, portending greater fighting ahead as the toll from the conflict passed 1,100, with thousands wounded on both sides.

Israeli forces were still try-

FULL COVERAGE:
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ing to crush the last Hamas fighters in several towns of southern Israel. At least 700 people have reportedly been killed in Israel — a toll it has not experienced in decades — and more than 400 in Gaza as Isra-



Smoke and flames billow after Israeli forces struck a high-rise tower in Gaza Strip. Over 425 targets were reportedly hit in the tiny enclave

► **US to send military ships close to Israel, PAGE OPP**

► **May join a unity govt: 2 Israel oppn parties, PAGE OPP**

li pounded 426 targets there. Authorities were still trying to determine how many civilians and soldiers were seized by Hamas and taken to Gaza. Civilians on both sides were already paying a high price.

An exchange of fire in north Israel with Lebanese group Hezbollah raised fears of the conflict spreading. In Alexandria, two Israeli tourists were killed along with their Egyptian guide. **PAGE OPP**

Min: Govt making efforts to get students back

The Indian government is making "huge efforts" to bring back stranded Indian students from Israel with PM Narendra Modi and his office closely monitoring the situation, junior external affairs

► **Israeli tourists keen to return home, P 4 & 10**

minister Meenakshi Lekhi said on Sunday. There are close to 18,000 Indian nationals in Israel but so far no incident of violence involving any Indian has been reported, according to officials.

Meanwhile, **Air India has cancelled its flights to and from Tel Aviv till October 14**, and around 14 airline staff have returned. **P10**

Armed forces sealed ₹23.5k cr deals in last 1 yr amid LAC row

Emergency Procurements Include Missiles, Drones & Radars

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New Delhi: The armed forces have inked contracts worth around Rs 23,500 crore under emergency capital procurements in just the past one year to plug critical operational gaps amid the continuing military confrontation with China in eastern Ladakh, which now is into its fourth year.

The emergency procurements (EPs) include a wide array of missiles and remotely-controlled weapons, loiter and precision-guided munitions, drones and counter-drone systems, satellite and other communication systems, surveillance equipment and radars, personal protection gear and all-terrain and high-mobility reconnaissance vehicles.

"The revenue EPs, which are also substantial, are separate. EPs followed a fast-track procedure. They are different from big capital acquisition cases that follow the normal long-winded procurement procedure," a defence establishment source said.

The armed forces have reason to be pleased. The Army alone chalked up over 70 capi-



Unlike the first three tranches that saw deals with Russia, Israel and France, the last procurements were only from domestic firms

tal acquisition deals worth nearly Rs 11,000 crore in the EP-4 tranche from September 2022 to September 2023. The IAF, in turn, inked 65 contracts worth over Rs 8,000 crore, while it was 35 cases worth Rs 4,500 crore for the Navy in this timeframe, sources said. Interestingly, unlike the first three tranches that also saw deals with countries like Russia, Israel and France, the last EP-4 was reserved for procurements only from domestic manufacturers.

Earlier, apart from domestic sources, the EPs ranged from the French 'Hammer' air-to-ground precision-guided munitions for the new Ra-

fale fighter jets, which are designed to destroy bunkers and hardened shelters at a range of 20 to 70-km, to Israeli 'Heron' Mark-2 unmanned aerial vehicles and 'Spike' anti-tank guided missiles.

The government had first delegated capital and revenue financial powers for a limited time to the Army, Navy and IAF for "emergency and critical contracts" to build ammunition stocks and spares in the aftermath of the Uri terror attack in September 2016, which had led to heightened tensions with Pakistan. Those emergency powers were later renewed after the multiple Chi-

nese intrusions into eastern Ladakh in April-May 2020.

Overall, the Army has inked 140 deals worth Rs 17,500 crore under the capital EP mechanism, which includes 68 deals worth Rs 6,500 crore in the first three tranches.

With the operational utility of drones and AI-enabled drone swarms being driven home by recent conflicts ranging from Armenia-Azerbaijan to the ongoing Russia-Ukraine one, the Army spent close to Rs 1,500 crore for 14 projects on drones and counter-drone systems in the first three EP tranches. Another Rs 2,000 crore was then spent on 10 more such projects in EP-4.

Other EP-4 projects for the Army included Rs 1,300 crores for weapon systems, Rs 1,500 crore for ISR (intelligence, reconnaissance, surveillance), Rs 1,800 crore for communication and other equipment, Rs 1,300 crore for protective equipment and Rs 3,100 crore for about 25 projects on survivability and training.

"The EP initiative has been pivotal in addressing immediate operational requirements," another source said.

Zelensky aide dials Doval on peace summit in Ukraine

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelensky's top aide Andriy Yermak spoke to NSA Ajit Doval about the President's peace formula and the global peace summit that Ukraine wants to host later this year. He also briefed Doval about the current situation in Ukraine.

While there was no read-out of the phone conversation by India, Ukraine said the two officials also "touched upon" the importance of intensifying contacts between the defence ministers of the two countries. Yermak is the chief of Zelensky's office. He said the call took place on the President's instructions.

"Andriy Yermak informed his interlocutor about the current security situation, including the recent ter-



Doval and Andriy Yermak 'touched upon' the importance of boosting contacts between the defence ministers of the two countries

rorist acts by Russia that resulted in the loss of a significant number of Ukrainian civilians," said Zelensky's office in a statement.

"The head of the Office of the President also reported on the preparation for the upcoming third meeting of national security advisers, which will focus on the implementation of the Ukrainian

Peace Formula and the organisation of the Global Peace Summit. He said that the Ukrainian side has already held nine thematic meetings at the ambassadorial level dedicated to specific points of the Peace Formula, and with each meeting, the circle of participants is expanding, including countries from the Global South," it added.

Zelensky, who wants to visit India, has on several occasions in the past sought support from PM Narendra Modi for his peace formula that he proposed at the G20 summit in Bali.

"The head of the Office of the President of Ukraine and the adviser to the Prime Minister of India agreed to continue the dialogue and coordinate positions on important international agenda items," said the statement.

Rajnath to visit Italy, France this week to boost defence ties

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

PTI

New Delhi: Defence minister Rajnath Singh is headed for a four-day visit to France and Italy from Monday to expand bilateral strategic engagements and explore industrial cooperation for joint development of military systems.

The visit comes after the Singh-led defence acquisitions council gave the preliminary approval or "acceptance of necessity" (AoN) for the acquisition of 26 French Rafale-Marine fighter jets and three more Scorpene diesel-electric submarines on July 13, a day before the Modi-Macron summit in Paris. Apart from these two mega deals, which will cost upwards of Rs 80,000 crore (nine billion euros), India and France have also agreed to co-develop advanced fighter jet and helicopter engines.

Defence ministry officials said Singh will travel to Rome in the first leg of his



In Paris, Rajnath Singh will co-chair the fifth annual India-France defence dialogue

two-nation tour and hold wide-ranging talks with his Italian counterpart Guido Crisetto. In Paris, Singh will co-chair the fifth annual India-France defence dialogue with his French counterpart Sebastian Lecornu.

"India and France recently celebrated 25 years of strategic partnership. Both countries enjoy a deep and wide-ranging bilateral defence relationship, including significant industrial cooperation," an official said. "In both Rome and Paris, Singh will also interact with the defence industry CEOs and senior representatives to discuss potential opportunities for industrial cooperation," he added.

Israel Exchanges Fire With Lebanon's Hezbollah

Beirut: Israel and Lebanon's powerful armed group Hezbollah exchanged artillery and rocket fire on Sunday following the deadliest attack in years by Palestinian gunmen on Israel.

On Saturday, a multi-pronged attack by Palestinian gunmen on Israeli towns followed by Israel's retaliation left hundreds of people dead on both sides. PM Benjamin Netanyahu warned of a "long and difficult war" ahead, saying in a statement that Israeli forces were moving into an "offensive phase, which will continue with neither limitations nor respite until the objectives are achieved."

The scale of the attack prompted fears that a wider conflict could break out between Israel and other factions opposed to it in the region, including Lebanon's Hezbollah, an armed party backed by Iran that has previously clashed with Israel.

Hezbollah on Sunday said it had launched guided rockets and artillery onto three posts in the Shebaa Farms "in solidarity" with the Palestinian people. "Our history, our guns and our rockets are with you," said Hezbollah official Hashem Safiedine. The Israeli military was on high alert throughout Sunday and said it fired artillery into an area of Lebanon where cross-border fire was launched.

The Lebanese army said shells and rockets had been launched from southern Lebanon onto "occupied Lebanese territory", without saying who was responsible, and that returning Israeli fire had left several people wounded. The statement said army units had deployed along the southern border. Israel has held Shebaa Farms, 39sq-km patch of land, since 1967. Both Syria and Lebanon claim the Shebaa Farms are Lebanese.

Iranian-backed Hezbollah

ATTACK AND COUNTER-ATTACK

The militant attacks across Israel on Saturday made for one of the most violent and deadly days of fighting in the region in decades



Israeli tanks move along a road at an undisclosed location on the border with the Gaza Strip

HOW IT STARTED

Oct 7, 6.35am | First sirens warn of incoming rockets in central & southern Israel; Hamas hits Tel Aviv and Jerusalem



7.40am | Israel confirms Hamas fighters entry; authorities ask residents of southern Israeli towns to hide in their homes

8.15am | Sirens go off in Jerusalem, which is rare because of the Iron Dome defence system



HOSTAGES TAKEN

8.23am | Hamas takes hostages in southern Israel, fires rockets



Israel declares a state of alert for war, effectively calling up reservists

10.46am | Israeli fighter jets strike first targets in Gaza; **army spokesman later says 426 target struck**



NETANYAHU DECLARES WAR

11.35am | **PM Benjamin Netanyahu** gives first statement, tell Israelis they are at war



12.21pm | Israeli military sends troops to southern regions to reclaim towns taken by Hamas militants

US BACKS ISRAEL

6.08pm | **President Biden** speaks with Netanyahu, says US backing is 'rock solid and unwavering'



10.16pm | Netanyahu addresses the nation, vowing to turn where Hamas operates into 'cities of ruins' Overnight, sirens continue to warn of rockets across Israel. Israeli jets strike targets throughout Gaza

2.19am | Israel claims to have destroyed all sites used to launch the attacks

Iran backs Palestinian 'right to self-defence'

President Ebrahim Raisi said on Sunday that Iran supports the Palestinians' "right to self-defence" and warned Israel must be held accountable for endangering the region, a day after Hamas attacked Israel. He urged Muslim governments to "support the Palestinian nation" while praising "resistance" efforts by Hamas and Islamic Jihad as well as in countries including Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq. Raisi had spoken earlier with leaders of Hamas and Islamic Jihad, official media said. Iran does not recognise Israel and has made support for the Palestinian cause a centrepiece of its foreign policy since the 1979 Islamic Revolution. The bitter rivals have engaged in a shadow war for years, with Iran accusing Israel of sabotage attacks and assassinations targeting its nuclear programme. AFP

Arab League chief heads to Moscow

Arab League chief Ahmed Aboul Gheit headed to Moscow for talks with Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov on the situation in Gaza. After Hamas' attack, Russia expressed grave concern, calling on both Palestinian and Israeli sides to cease violence and blamed the West for blocking mediations. Moscow said a proper negotiation was necessary to provide for the creation of a Palestinian state within the borders of 1967 with a capital in East Jerusalem. AFP

is estimated to have tens of thousands of rockets at its disposal. Since its brutal 2006 war

with Israel, Hezbollah has stayed on the sidelines amid previous outbreaks of Israeli-Hamas

fighting. But if destruction in Gaza escalates, it may feel pressure to intervene. REUTERS&AP