

Six dead as Israel blows up tunnel

GAZA CITY: Six Palestinians were killed yesterday as Israel blew up what it said was a tunnel stretching from the Gaza Strip into its territory, a rare case of such an incident since a devastating 2014 war. Ashraf Al-Qudra, spokesman for the Hamas-led Gaza health ministry, confirmed six men had been killed. One of the men came from Hamas' armed wing, the Ezzedine al-Qassam Brigades confirmed, while at least some of the others were believed to be from Islamic Jihad, an allied militant group.

Their deaths were announced after Israel "neutralized a terror tunnel leading into southern Israel," military spokesman Jonathan Conricus told journalists. "The tunnel was detonated from within Israel, close to the security fence." Tunnels dug by Gaza's Islamist rulers Hamas were a key issue in the last war with Israel in 2014, but discoveries of those stretching into the Jewish state have since been rare. Islamic Jihad said in a statement that the tunnels were "part of the policy of deterrence to defend the Palestinian people". It added they were studying potential responses to this "dangerous escalation".

Conricus said the Israeli military was not seeking a further escalation. He said the tunnel was targeted around two kilometres from the Israeli village of Kissufim, but added that no Israelis had been in danger. He said the tunnel was still being dug and no opening was found in Israeli territory. The military had been monitoring it for "some time", Conricus said, declining to say when it was first discovered. In April 2016,

Israel's military said it had located and destroyed a tunnel extending from the Gaza Strip into Israel in the first such discovery since the 2014 conflict.

'Breakthrough technology'

Hamas forces have used tunnels in the past to enter Israel and carry out attacks. "We are developing breakthrough technology to deal with the tunnel threat," Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said in a statement. "We are implementing it. Today we located a tunnel and destroyed it. Whoever seeks to harm us will be hit." Conricus also said Israel used advanced technology to locate the tunnel but declined to elaborate.

Yesterday's operation came as Palestinian rival factions Hamas and Fatah seek to follow through on a reconciliation deal signed earlier this month aimed at ending a decade-long rift between them. Hamas is due to hand control of the Gaza Strip back to the Palestinian Authority by Dec 1 under the agreement. The Islamist movement seized the enclave in a near civil war with Fatah, based in the occupied West Bank, in 2007.

Israel has warned that it will not accept a unity government that includes Hamas if the Islamist movement does not disarm and recognize the country, among other demands. Israel launched its 2014 operation in Gaza with the stated objectives of halting rocket fire and destroying attack tunnels into Israel. During the war, 32 tunnels were discovered, including 14 that extended into Israel, according to a UN report on the conflict. It was the third war in Gaza since 2008 and the longest, deadliest and most destructive. It killed 2,251 Palestinians, while more than 10,000 were wounded and 100,000 were left homeless. On the Israeli side, 74 people were killed, all but six of them soldiers. Israeli leaders have been keen to show they are addressing the threat of tunnels from the Gaza Strip. — AFP

Death brings home reality of...

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Most migrants believe they will be able to make good money in Dubai in just a few years - an illusion unscrupulous agents create. "When people started leaving for Gulf states (in the 1980s), this region was reeling from years of drought. They had no option but to migrate," said Suresh Reddy, a politician from Telangana who has worked on the migration issue. "When they left, there were some economic gains but they paid a heavy price for it - working in inhuman conditions and leaving their families behind."

Chittam's annual savings rarely exceeded 12,000 Indian rupees (\$185) and he sent home 4,000 to 5,000 rupees every few months. He worked in Dubai for 13 years and visited his wife and two children just five times during that period. "He was planning to return for good next year after making a little more money," Gangadhar said, as Chittam's wife Laxmi looked on, numb and impassive.

Ramanna Chitla had worked in Dubai for 16 years when he returned to Jagtial, a town in Telangana, last year, determined to work to stop others from being tricked by agents. "I saw a lot of misery there. Workers were underpaid and poorly treated. They were cheated by their agents with false promises so I thought I would come back and bring a change," Chitla said.

Over the years, the Indian government and non-governmental groups have received a steady stream of complaints from migrant workers, ranging from non-payment of wages to torture and abuse. Workers often take loans of 50,000 to 100,000 Indian rupees (\$750 to \$1,500) to pay agents, hoping to earn enough from working as cleaners and as labourers on construction sites to repay the loan, but their salaries rarely match promises. "They don't visit doctors when they are unwell to save money," Chitla said, adding that deaths attributed to ill health are often due to exploitative work conditions.

Government figures show there are some 6 million Indian migrants in the six Gulf states of Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Oman. According to official data, more than 30,000 Indian nationals died in the Gulf states between 2005 and 2015. The UAE embassy in New Delhi said in an emailed statement the Gulf state had introduced a number of reforms over the last few years to combat abusive labor practices including improving transparency of contracts, a wage protec-

tion system for foreign workers and a "Know Your Rights" campaign in five languages.

As a government-authorized agent, Chitla's job is to ensure migrants understand their job contracts, the employer does not alter the terms of employment later, and that all the paperwork of the applicant is fair and complete. But he fails to attract the same number of workers as illegal agents. "There are at least 50 unlicensed agents who are sending hundreds of workers. I have sent 48 so far," Chitla said. India's foreign ministry has made attempts to streamline the recruitment process and help workers in need. Jingles asking workers to go through only authorized agents play on radio every day but many are lured by the promises unauthorized agents make.

Chandrasekhar Boragalla, 26, a father of two, stepped out of Jagtial for the first time two years ago when he sat on a bus to Mumbai about 800 km away and had an interview in a seafront office for a cleaner's job in Dubai. "I paid 70,000 rupees to the agent for this job. When I reached there, they made me sign a two-year bond for a salary much lower than what was promised. I wasn't even paid for three months. I was asked to pay 85,000 rupees for leave to go home," he said. Boragalla returned penniless to Jagtial three months ago. He now works as a welder and is still repaying the loan he took to pay the agent from the 400 rupees he earns as daily wages. "It's not enough. Dubai is danger. I will not go back," he said.

Kallela could easily be mistaken for a prosperous village with lush farmlands and maize fields lining its roads. But earnings from farming are rarely enough to feed families. "They are marginal farmers and own less than 5 acre (2 hectares) of land which does not support their families. Water is scarce as this is a rain fed region," said land rights lawyer Sunil Reddy, who takes up cases of the rural poor. "When Telangana was created as a separate state in 2014, two promises were made - more jobs and more irrigation water. But the situation is the same," Reddy said.

Laxmi Malaya, now a widow, has a small piece of land on which she grows maize, turmeric and rice. Two harvests yielded an annual income of about 60,000 Indian rupees (\$925), which supplemented the money her husband sent home. Migrant rights campaigners are seeking a compensation for the widows of Gulf migrants. "Compensation is their right. The money workers send back is pumped into the state's economy," said activist Bheem Reddy. Jayesh Ranjan, principal secretary with the Telangana government said financial compensation for widows has been proposed as part of the state's Non Resident Indian policy. For now, all that's on offer is the free transportation of bodies of workers like Chittam from Hyderabad airport back to their home villages. — Reuters

In Oman desert, a gateway to...

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to be a sneak preview into the future," said Groemer, describing a U-shaped encampment where "an exquisitely compiled suite of experiments" will take place.

Those include experiments designed to test human factors that could affect pioneering astronauts, such as mental fatigue and depression. Just 15 people will enter the isolation phase, when their only way to troubleshoot snags will be through remote communication with "earth" in Austria.

The total cost of the project is expected to be around half-a-million euros, covered mainly by private donations from industry partners. Critics of such space missions see the massive amounts of money as a luxury in a time of austerity measures in Europe and depressed oil prices in the Gulf. The Austrian Space Forum argues the money is not being "thrown into

space" and that the tools being developed are not only useful for life on a distant planet but for our own. "Most people every day use a handful of space technologies without even knowing it," said Groemer, listing off satellite imagery, fuel injection for cars and breast cancer screening software.

Yesterday the Austrian Space Forum signed a memorandum of understanding with Oman, making the sultanate's selection as the mission site official. For the Omani Astronomical Society, which invited the Austrian Space Forum, the mission is a way to inspire the country's youth. A series of lectures is taking place at Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque in Muscat, geared especially toward hundreds of young students.

Al-Khattab Ghalib Al-Hinai, deputy head of the steering committee for AMADEE-18 and vice chairman of Oman's State Council, says a high school team will even participate, conducting a geophysics experiment to find water. "The whole idea is to ignite imagination within the young society in Oman, female and male, and I hope this journey of discovery will help them to always search for the unknown," the geologist said. "I hope to see astrophysicists in Oman, I hope to see geologists. I hope to see astronauts in the future." — AFP

Harbi approves new dental...

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The new mechanism stipulates that for procedures needing more than one session to be completed, the patient pays only once.

Temporary fillings following procedures such as a root canal will be considered within the treatment and extra charges will not be collected. The decision exempts expat children with special needs, cancer patients and those with congenital defects in the mouth cavity up to 12 years of age from paying the new fees.

Mobile prosthodontics for upper and lower jaws will cost KD 30. Dentures for either jaw cost KD 15, partial dentures KD 10, in addition to fixing one mobile tooth for KD 5. As for surgeries, fees for extraction will be

KD 2, but surgical extraction and removal of abscess will cost KD 5. Treatment of fractures of the mouth and jaws will cost KD 35.

Cleaning of gums will cost KD 5, but operations of all types for each tooth will cost KD 10. Root canal will cost KD 2 for partial removal, while preliminary treatment of the front tooth costs KD 5 and KD 10 for the back tooth, with the same fees for repeated treatment of the front tooth and KD 15 for repeated treatment of the back tooth.

Temporary fillings cost KD 2, and permanent ones KD 5. For children, the fee for cleaning and treatment by fluoride and preventive fillings for each temporary tooth is KD 2. A permanent filling will cost KD 5, and KD 10 for root canal of every temporary tooth with a metal crown. KD 5 will be charged for each root canal with a permanent filling. Extracting a milk tooth will cost KD 2, and KD 5 for each space protector for each side, and the treatment of a broken tooth. The fee for x-rays for each tooth is KD 2, KD 5 for a panoramic x-ray and KD 10 for a CT scan.

First charges, plea deal emerge in Russia...

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with the 2016 presidential election," the indictment states. Trump soon took to Twitter to dismiss the explosive indictments, once again insisting there was no collusion with Russia and calling on political rival Hillary Clinton to be investigated. "Sorry, but this is years ago, before Paul Manafort was part of the Trump campaign. But why aren't Crooked Hillary & the Dems the focus?????" Trump tweeted. ".....Also, there is NO COLLUSION!"

In all, Manafort and Gates were hit with 12 charges of conspiracy against the United States, conspiracy to launder money, failing to register as a foreign agent, making false statements and failure to report offshore bank accounts. "Manafort and Gates generated tens of millions of dollars in income as a result of their Ukraine work," the indictment states. "In order to hide Ukraine payments from United States authorities, from approximately 2006 to at least 2016, Manafort and Gates laundered the money through scores of United States and foreign corporations, partnerships and bank accounts," it added.

On Sunday, Trump had called the investigation a

"witch hunt". With the Mueller investigation entering this dramatic new phase, Republican officials and conservative media have stepped up attacks on Democrats - especially Clinton - though opponents are dismissing the accusations as blatant attempts to divert attention.

Manafort was among the participants of a June 9, 2016 meeting at Trump Tower with a Kremlin-linked lawyer that raised suspicions of collusion between the campaign and Moscow. The meeting was arranged by Trump's eldest son, Donald Jr, in hopes of receiving damaging information on Hillary Clinton, the Democratic candidate. Manafort's indictment made no mention of Russian involvement in the US campaign, however, focusing instead on Manafort's earlier Ukrainian ties.

A long-time political operative and consultant, he was recruited in March 2016 to round up pro-Trump delegates to the Republican Party convention. Then in June Trump named him campaign chairman, replacing fired Corey Lewandowski. But in August he resigned as Ukraine corruption investigators released files showing large payments to Manafort companies and it became clear he was under investigation in the United States in relation to that. Federal law enforcement officials were reportedly aware of wire transfers linked to Manafort as far back as 2012, when they began investigating whether he committed tax fraud or helped the Ukrainian regime - at the time close to Russian leader Vladimir Putin - launder money. — AFP



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