



Biden deal allows aid convoys into Gaza as leaders visit Jerusalem

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Highlight: US President Joe Biden and British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak have visited Jerusalem as the humanitarian crisis continues.

Body

Dubai: US President Joe Biden used his eight-hour visit to Tel Aviv to broker a deal between Israel and Egypt to allow 20 trucks of humanitarian aid into Gaza as early as Friday. At the same time, he backed intelligence blaming a Palestinian group for a devastating hospital blast.

His visit was followed by that of British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, who welcomed the opening of the humanitarian corridor into Gaza and vowed to stand by Israel in its "darkest hour".

"We absolutely support Israel's right to defend itself in line with international law, to go after Hamas, to take back hostages," Sunak said in remarks alongside Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. From Israel, he planned to fly to Saudi Arabia for crisis talks.

Outrage over the Tuesday explosion that claimed the lives of hundreds of innocent civilians has reverberated around the globe, including in **Australia** where Minister for Industry and Science Ed Husic accused Israel of collectively punishing Palestinians in its war on Hamas.

Husic told the ABC he felt "very strongly" that Palestinians were paying "for Hamas' barbarism".

"I really do feel there is an obligation on governments, particularly the Israeli government, to ... follow the rules of international law and to observe in particular that innocents should be protected," he said.

[Link to Image](#)

Alex Ellinghausen

A quarter of NSW Labor government MPs also publicly declared their support for Palestinians, exposing growing internal divisions as they signed a statement calling for all actors to follow international law.

Foreign Affairs Minister Penny Wong deferred to the US intelligence that found Israel was not responsible for the explosion at Al Alhi Arab Hospital in Gaza, while urging political unity after her ministerial colleague **Anne Aly**, the minister for youth, called for an investigation into whether Israel has committed war crimes.

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Netanyahu's concession to allow the entry of aid from Egypt marks the first break in a punishing 10-day total siege of Gaza, which has stopped the flow of all food, water and medicine. However, he insisted no supplies would flow from Israeli territory until hostages were released by Hamas.

The Israeli military said on Thursday that Hamas was holding 203 people as hostages in Gaza. This figure has been increasing over the last few days from initial estimates of around 150.

Aid organisations, however, have questioned the logistics of crossing the Rafah border from Egypt, where trucks carrying tonnes of critical supplies have already been banked up for days. They have also expressed concern that the 20 trucks permitted entry in coming days will only contain food, medicine and water, and not fuel, which is desperately needed.

Biden brokered the humanitarian deal during a frantic visit to Israel that was overshadowed by the fallout from the blast.

The US president also unveiled a separate \$US100 million (\$158 million) aid package for Palestinian people impacted by conflict in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, after [key Arab leaders boycotted a crucial meeting with him during his fly-in fly-out visit to the region](#).

"What sets us apart from the terrorists is we believe in the fundamental dignity of every human life," Biden told reporters on his flight back to Washington. If that was not respected, "then the terrorists win".

He also said he would ask the US Congress for an "unprecedented" aid package this week.

Fury has erupted across Arab nations this week over who was behind the hospital explosion, with Hamas insisting it was the fault of an Israeli airstrike. That belief triggered [fiery protests held in the Israeli-occupied Palestinian West Bank, Lebanon, Turkey, Tunisia and Jordan](#).

In Iran, Hamas' key backer and Israel's arch foe, masses of protesters brandished banners that read "Death to America" and "Death to Israel".

Israeli intelligence has said the hospital blast was caused by a missile misfire by Islamic Jihad. Israel released drone footage, audio and other information to support its claim that it was not responsible. It cited no impact crater from any missile or bomb and no structural damage to surrounding buildings as evidence.

Backing Biden's earlier remarks that the explosion appeared to be the fault of "the other team", US officials said their own intelligence showed the blast was caused by an errant rocket from an armed Palestinian group.

"While we continue to collect information, our current assessment, based on analysis of overhead imagery, intercepts and open-source information, is that Israel is not responsible for the explosion at the hospital in Gaza," said Adrienne Watson, a spokesperson for the National Security Council.

The Hamas-run Gaza Health Ministry maintains that an Israeli airstrike responsible for the blast which killed at least 471 Palestinians, among them patients and evacuated residents sheltering from the war.

The ministry says more than 3500 Palestinians have been killed and at least 12,065 injured in Israeli airstrikes on the besieged enclave since October 7, when Hamas terrorists attacked across swaths of Israel. More than 1400 Israelis were killed and almost 200 kidnapped during the onslaught.

The UN estimates up to a million Palestinians have fled their Gaza homes, with nowhere to go. Reports from the agency outline that water in Gaza is now being rationed to a single litre per person per day.

Fears of increasing threats from the Iran-backed Hezbollah in Lebanon have continued to escalate, with the Australian government upgrading its travel advisory for Lebanon to "do not travel" because of the "volatile security situation and the risk of the security situation deteriorating further".

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It followed warnings to Australians in Israel that the final flight organised by the government would leave on Wednesday.

Wong urged all Australians that it would be the last flight. "I repeat, today's flight will be our last flight for the foreseeable future," she said.

Forty-six Australians remain trapped in Gaza, where food and fuel supplies are also running out. No progress has been made on their evacuation options, Home Affairs Minister Clare O'Neil said.

with AP, Reuters

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Graphic

Minister for Industry and Science Ed Husic and Minister for Early Childhood Education and Minister for Youth Dr Anne Aly at the start of Question Time on Thursday.

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