

# Israel announces sale of air defence system to new NATO member Finland

AFP | Jerusalem, Undefined

Israel's defence ministry on Sunday announced a 317 million euro (\$340 million) deal for the sale of its David's Sling air defence system to new NATO member Finland.

Calling it a "historic agreement," the ministry said the system jointly developed by Israeli and US companies can intercept ballistic and cruise missiles, aircraft and drones.

The announcement comes af-



Representative picture

ter Israel in September signed a \$3.5-billion deal -- the biggest ever for the small country's out-sized arms sector -- to sell its Arrow 3 hypersonic missile system to Germany.

The long-range Arrow 3 system was also jointly developed and produced by companies in Israel and its top ally the United States, and the sale had to be approved by Washington before it could be finalised.

That deal came as Germany has led a push to bolster NATO's



The Arrow 3 or Hetz 3 is an exoatmospheric hypersonic anti-ballistic missile, jointly funded, developed and produced by Israel and the United States. Undertaken by Israel Aerospace Industries and Boeing, it is overseen by the Israeli Ministry of Defense's "Homa" administration and the U.S. Missile Defence Agency.

air defences in Europe after the Russian invasion of Ukraine last year, urging allies to buy deterrence systems together.

Newly minted NATO member Finland was also quick to an-

nounce plans to buy an Israeli defence system against aircraft, rockets and missiles. Analysts say the ongoing war in Ukraine is likely to further increase European demand for Israeli arms.

## UN says 'significant' deaths in strike on one of its Gaza compounds

AFP | Jerusalem, Undefined

The United Nations said several people have been killed and wounded in strikes on a UN facility in Gaza City, where hundreds of Palestinians have taken refuge to escape the war.

"The shelling has reportedly resulted in a significant number of deaths and injuries," the United Nations Development Programme said in a statement issued late Saturday.

"The ongoing tragedy of death and injury to civilians ensnared in this conflict is unacceptable and must stop."

In a separate incident, AFP TV footage showed a crater in the middle of a compound of a school run by the UN agency for supporting Palestinians (UNRWA) in Beit Lahia in north Gaza.

Thousands of people displaced by the war had taken refuge in the school.

### German chancellor opposed to 'immediate' ceasefire in Gaza

Frankfurt, Germany

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said yesterday he opposed an "immediate" ceasefire in the Gaza Strip, as calls multiply globally to halt the conflict triggered by Hamas's unprecedented attack on Israel.

"I don't think the calls for an immediate ceasefire or long pause -- which would amount to the same thing -- are right," Scholz said in a debate organised by the German regional daily Heilbronner Stimme.



Olaf Scholz

"That would mean ultimately that Israel leaves Hamas the possibility of recovering and obtaining new missiles," he added, calling instead for "humanitarian pauses".

Israel has been bombing targets across the Gaza Strip since

Hamas fighters carried out an unprecedented deadly attack on

southern Israeli communities on October 7.

About 1,200 people, mostly civilians, were killed in the Hamas attacks and around 240 people taken hostage, according to Israeli officials.

In retaliatory Israeli strikes more than 11,000, also mostly civilians, have been killed in Gaza, according to Hamas health ministry in the territory.

The ministry has not given updated casualty figures for 48 hours, saying it has been unable to establish contact with hospitals.

It said dozens of bodies are scattered on the streets while ambulances have been unable to reach the casualties due to intense fighting and bombings.

UNRWA announced on Friday that more than 100 of its employees had died in the Gaza Strip since the start of the war.

## Icelandic volcano could destroy town of Grindavik: experts



The town of Grindavik on the southwestern coast was evacuated in the early hours of Saturday

AFP | Reykjavik, Iceland

An Icelandic town home to some 4,000 people near the capital Reykjavik could be heavily damaged by a volcano expected to erupt within hours or days, experts said on Saturday.

The town of Grindavik on the southwestern coast was evacuated in the early hours of Saturday after magma shifting under the Earth's crust caused hundreds of earthquakes in what was believed to be a precursor to an eruption.

"We are really concerned about all the houses and the infrastructure in the area," Vidir Reynisson, head of Iceland's Civil Protection and Emergency Management told AFP.

The town -- around 40 kilometres (25 miles) southwest of Reykjavik -- is located near the Svartsengi geothermal plant, the main supplier of electricity and water to 30,000 residents on the Reykjanes peninsula, as well as a freshwater reservoir.

Grindavik is also near the Blue Lagoon geothermal spa resort, a popular tourist destination which closed as a precaution earlier this week.

"The magma is now at a very shallow depth, so we're expecting an eruption within a couple of hours at the shortest, but at least within a couple of days," Reynisson said.

The most likely scenario would be a fissure opening in the ground near Grindavik.

"We have a fissure that's about 15 kilometres long, and anywhere on that fissure we can see that an eruption could

happen," Reynisson said.

However he did not rule out the possibility of an eruption on the ocean floor, which would likely cause a large ash cloud.

"It's not the most likely scenario, but we can't rule it out because the end of the... fissure goes into the sea," he said.

The quakes and ground lift caused by the magma intrusion have already caused damage to roads and buildings in Grindavik and its surroundings.

A large crack also tore up the greens on the Grindavik golf course, an image widely shared on social media networks.

Iceland, which has 33 active volcanic systems, has declared a state of emergency and ordered the mandatory evacuation of Grindavik early Saturday.

Emergency shelters and help centres have opened in several nearby towns, but most Grindavik residents were staying with friends or relatives, media reported.

## Greta, tens of thousands, in 'biggest ever' Amsterdam climate demo

AFP | Amsterdam, Netherlands

Environmental activist Greta Thunberg joined tens of thousands in the "biggest ever" climate march through Amsterdam Sunday, aimed at pushing the climate crisis up the political agenda 10 days ahead of crunch national elections.

Carrying placards reading: "Our house is on fire", "In 2050: 'Daddy, what are trees?'" and "Climate Justice Now," demonstrators packed into Amsterdam's central square and set off through the streets.

Around 70,000 people took part, smashing previous records for such a march, said organisers, a coalition of pressure groups, including Extinction Rebellion, Fridays for Future, Oxfam, and Greenpeace.

"We are not standing on the brink of a catastrophe, we are living in it," Thunberg told the crowd.

"People on the front lines of the climate crisis have been experiencing the first-hand consequences of it for decades now and they have been sounding the alarm, but we have not been



Around 70,000 people took part, smashing previous records for such a march

listening," she added.

Her speech was briefly interrupted by a protester, who said the demonstration was focusing too much on politics rather than the climate.

"The atmosphere is amazing. I can feel the energy of a lot of young people who want to change the world," 19-year-old

political science student Tijn Veenhoven told AFP.

"I'm just angry because the world is angry and no one is doing anything about it," said physics student Ieke Snel, 18.

Polls show the Netherlands election is currently a dead heat between the centre-right VVD of outgoing Prime Minister Mark

Rutte and a new party, the NSC, led by anti-corruption champion Pieter Omtzigt.

A coalition of the Greens and the leftist PvdA is sitting in third place, according to the polls. This party is led by former European Commission heavyweight Frans Timmermans, the architect of the EU's Green Deal agenda.

Surveys show the key issues of the election campaign have been the ongoing housing crisis in the Netherlands, living standards, and immigration.

According to the most recent poll by I&O research, climate change came in fifth of the issues on voters' minds, behind housing, healthcare, immigration, and poverty.

Climate change is now considered less of a key topic than was the case at the last election in 2021, according to the I&O research poll.

"With the crises continuing to stack up and a measly six years to achieve the Dutch climate goals in 2030, the upcoming elections are the most crucial ever," organisers said in a joint statement.



A massive eruption in April 2010 at another Iceland volcano -- Eyjafjallajökull, in the south of the island -- forced the cancellation of some 100,000 flights, leaving more than 10 million travellers stranded.