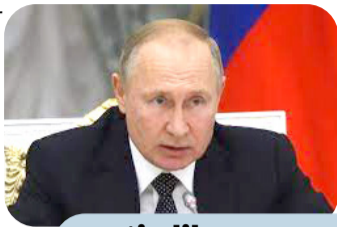


News in brief

◆ **Russian President Vladimir Putin** said Friday that Israel risked waging an "unacceptable" siege in Gaza comparable to the Nazi blockade of Leningrad during World War II, and called for mediation. "Various scenarios are emerging, including the possibility of military and non-military measures being taken against the Gaza Strip comparable to the siege of Leningrad during World War II," Putin told journalists on a visit to Kyrgyzstan. "We understand what that entails. In my opinion, this is unacceptable. More than two million people live there," he added. Putin renewed his call for negotiations on Friday, and offered Moscow as a potential mediator. When asked whether Moscow could help find a way to end the crisis, Putin said: "Russia can, by virtue of the fact that we have had good relations with Israel over the last 15 years."



Putin likens Gaza siege to Nazi blockade of Leningrad

◆ **A blast tore through a minority Shia mosque** in northern Afghanistan on Friday, locals said, with one reporting a "large number" of dead and wounded.

Blast rips through Shia mosque in north Afghanistan: witnesses

The nature of the blast in Pol-i-Khomri, the capital of Baghlan province, was not immediately clear but it was confirmed by the Taliban government. "I condemn it strongly, but currently I don't have all the information," deputy government spokesman Bilal Karimi told AFP. Local residents said the explosion rang out as Shiite worshippers gathered for Friday prayers at the city's Imam Zaman mosque.



◆ **Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas** on Friday warned against a "second Nakba" catastrophe facing Palestinians after the Israeli army ordered more than one million people to evacuate north Gaza. Abbas

Palestinian leader Abbas warns of 'second Nakba' catastrophe in Gaza

"completely rejects the displacement of our people from the Gaza Strip, because it will be tantamount to a second Nakba for our people," he said, according to a statement published by the official Palestinian news agency Wafa. The Nakba, or "catastrophe", refers to some 760,000 Palestinians who fled or were expelled from their homes during the 1948 war that coincided with Israel's creation. His remarks came after the Israeli military dropped leaflets on the blockaded Gaza Strip warning people to flee from the north, an area home to some 1.1 million people. Abbas's Palestinian Authority is seated in Ramallah, in the occupied West Bank, and is split from the militant group Hamas which rules Gaza.



Gazans flee as evacuation

More than 423,000 people have

● **Hamas's holding an estimated 150 Israeli, foreign and dual-national hostages**

● **Israeli sticks left one million people no food no water**

● **Israel's army said its fighter jets struck 750 military targets**

● **13 hostages, including foreigners, had been killed in strikes**

Gaza City, Palestinian Territories

Palestinians carried belongings through the rubble-strewn streets of Gaza City yesterday in search of refuge as Israel's army warned residents to flee immediately before an expected ground offensive in retaliation against Hamas for the deadliest attack in Israeli history. Hamas fighters broke through the militarised border barrier around the Gaza Strip enclave last Saturday, killing more than 1,300 people in Israel, in an attack compared to 9/11 in the United States.

There have been protests in support of the Palestinians across the Middle East and beyond, plus threats of a further confrontation between Israel and Iran-backed Hezbollah in neighbouring Lebanon.

At least five Palestinians were killed by Israeli fire across the occupied West Bank during rallies in solidarity with Gaza, the health ministry said.

In Gaza, United Nations officials said the Israeli military told them the evacuation should be



Riding in a damaged vehicle a Palestinian family flees with hundreds of other following the Israeli army's warning to leave their homes and move south before an expected ground offensive, in Gaza City

We'll do 'everything in our power' to free captive Americans: Biden

Washington, United States

US President Joe Biden vowed in an interview broadcast yesterday to do "everything in our power" to free Americans taken hostage by Hamas.

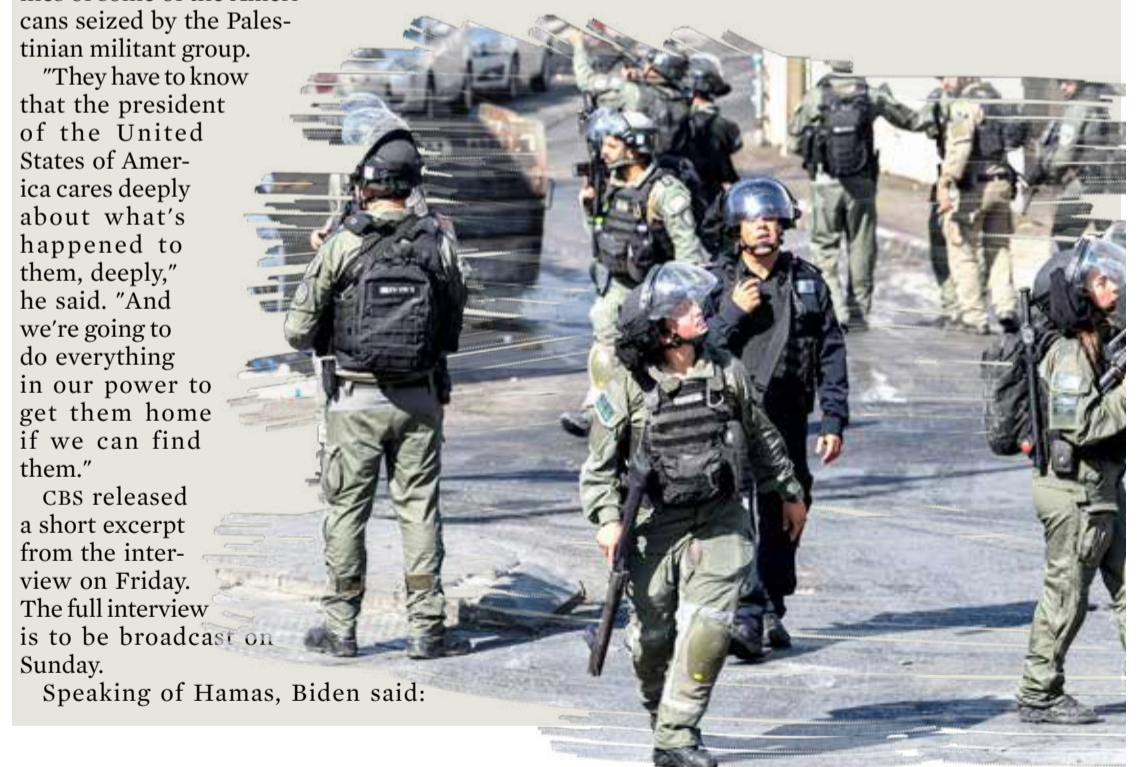
Biden told CBS's "60 Minutes" that he is to meet by videoconference on Friday with the families of some of the Americans seized by the Palestinian militant group.

"They have to know that the president of the United States of America cares deeply about what's happened to them, deeply," he said. "And we're going to do everything in our power to get them home if we can find them."

CBS released a short excerpt from the interview on Friday. The full interview is to be broadcast on Sunday.

Speaking of Hamas, Biden said:

"This is not even human behaviour. It's pure barbarism." The United States has not said exactly how many Americans it believes are being held in Hamas-controlled Gaza. At least 27 Americans died in Saturday's attack on Israel by Hamas which left more than 1,300 people dead, mostly civilians.



CURIOSER & CURIOSER

Man, 89, refused divorce by India's top court after 27-year case



Representative picture
New Delhi, India

India's top court has denied an octogenarian man the right to divorce his wife of six decades, 27 years after he first applied to dissolve their marriage.

Nirmal Singh Panesar, 89, married in 1963 but said in filings with India's notoriously glacial criminal justice system that his relationship had broken down irretrievably in 1984.

That year his wife Paramjit Kaur Panesar, now 82, had refused to move with him to the southern city of Chennai when the Indian Air Force posted him there.

Nirmal first filed for divorce in 1996 on the grounds of cruelty and desertion, granted by a district court in 2000 but overturned later that year after an appeal by Paramjit.

His case took another two

decades to make its way before the Supreme Court, which denied the divorce petition despite agreeing their marriage was "beyond salvation".

"The institution of marriage is still considered to be a pious, spiritual, and invaluable emotional life-net between the husband and the wife in Indian society," said the court's judgement, which was published Thursday.

The judgement said that granting the dissolution would be an "injustice" to Paramjit, who had told the court she did not want to die with the "stigma" of being a divorcee.

She also said she had made all efforts to respect their "sacred relationship" and was still ready to look after her husband in his old age.

The couple have three children together.



Ashraf al-Qudra, a spokesman for the health ministry in Hamas-controlled Gaza, said in a statement posted on Telegram that "hospitals are starting to lose capacity" in a worsening situation with medicine and fuel running out.

NASA journeys to the

AFP | Washington

It's a world like no other: a metal-rich asteroid that could be the remnants of a small planet, or perhaps an entirely new type

of celestial body unknown to science. A NASA spacecraft blasted off from the Kennedy Space Center Friday bound for Psyche, an object 2.2 billion miles (3.6 bil-

lion kilometers) away that could offer clues about the interior of planets like Earth. "We're going to learn all kinds of new things, how these things fly through the

solar system, and they hit each other and they cause the evolution of what we have today, our solar system," NASA chief Bill Nelson said shortly before lift off