

Fuelling discontent

The ongoing crisis in Egypt is leaving its toll on the Gaza Strip as the Rafah border crossing – the only one through which Gazans are allowed to travel – has been closed indefinitely since the weekend. The border witnessed fierce battles when Bedouins in the Sinai reportedly attacked the terminal, with border police fleeing the scene, leaving thousands of Gazans stranded in Egypt and abroad. Increased numbers of Gaza government border guards were posted along the Philadelphi corridor following the Egyptians' desertion.



At present, there are no patients scheduled for urgent, life-saving treatment abroad via Rafah. However, around 500 patients who are refused entry to Israel and the West Bank via Erez travel abroad for specialized treatment every month via Rafah. Tunnel trade – 80% of goods in Gaza are delivered through the dangerous tunnels due to the blockade – is also suffering as transport in Egypt has been largely stalled. This has led to price increases that were quickly felt on the Gaza market, particularly the price of cement, steel and fuel – all of which are banned by Israel from entering the Gaza Strip and are therefore smuggled through the tunnels. Meanwhile Oxfam staff in Cairo report that shops are running out of stocks and that bank machines have stopped giving money amidst skyrocketing prices for food.

Gaza government police were seen checking petrol stations to make sure that owners were not taking advantage of the situation by raising prices after rumors of fuel shortages and hoarding spread throughout the coastal enclave (the above photo shows Palestinians selling and buying fuel imported through the tunnels in Rafah). Eight out of a total of 12 major fuel transfer pipelines under the Gaza-Egypt border were reported to have shut down as the expected consignments of fuel failed to reach the tunnels.

The Gaza power plant – which has shifted all of its fuel procurement from Israel to Egypt over the last three weeks – is estimated to have enough fuel in store for another two to four weeks. But aid agencies are concerned that a protracted crisis in Egypt could lead to a severe impact on the blockaded enclave, affecting hospitals, homes that rely on fuel to run generators, and water and sanitation infrastructure, above and beyond the daily power cuts which Gazans already experience. . Israel has meanwhile postponed the transfer of all imports and exports through Kerem Shalom crossing and the complete closure of Karni crossing, which it had previously planned to shut down on 31 January. A week-long closure of Karni this month has already led to raised prices of bread because of the increased freight expenses to get imports through the Rafah-based crossing.

Oxfam partner Palestinian Centre for Human Rights called on Israel once again to immediately lift the blockade. “Gaza is under occupation and Israel as the occupying power is responsible to lift the closure that is illegal under international law,” said PCHR’s Director of the Democratic Development Unit, Hamdi Shaqqura. “Tunnels are a mere result of the Israeli closure of Gaza but they provide no alternative to a total lifting of the blockade. If anything, the situation we are witnessing shows just how volatile they are. Israel should abide by the Fourth Geneva Convention and open the crossings for the free movement of people, imports and exports.”

1. Headlines

- **Mortars/rockets/casualties/incursions:** Palestinian armed groups reportedly fired 2 home made rockets (HMR) and 1 anti tank missile towards Israeli forces this week, as compared to 11 rockets and 8 mortar shells reported fired the week before. There were reports of 4 incursions by Israeli forces and 2 fire fights this week, while 1 fire fight and 4 incursions were reported the week before. Last week, there were also reports of 10 shells fired by Israeli forces. No air strikes were reported this week or last week.

Two Palestinian boys, aged 10 and 15 were reportedly injured, while a 13 year-old boy was reportedly killed this week as a result of handling UXOs. Last week, there were reports of two Palestinian militants killed and three boys injured as a result of coming into contact with UXOs.

- **Fishermen:** There was 1 reported incident of an Israeli naval vessel firing at Palestinian fishermen this week, as compared to 4 incidents reported last week. Since January 2009, Israeli naval forces have restricted the access of Palestinian fishing boats to three nautical miles from the coast; in practice, access is sometimes restricted to as little as one nautical mile, banning access to around 85% of Gaza's fishing water.
- **Tunnel related fatalities:** No tunnel related fatalities were reported this week, while 1 Palestinian was reportedly killed when a tunnel collapsed in the Ma'an area, east of Khan Younis, last week. Egyptian security forces reportedly sealed off 4 tunnels under the border between Gaza and Egypt this week. Last week, 2 Palestinians were reportedly killed when Egyptian security forces destroyed 6 tunnels.
- **Palestinians in the "buffer zone":** 2 incidents of Israeli fire in the so-called "buffer zone" along the perimeter with Gaza were reported this week, including a shooting at scrap material collectors and farmers working in the area. Last week, 8 incidents were reported in the "buffer zone."

Israel restricts access to agricultural land up to 1,000-1,500 metres from the fence, which accounts for more than 30% of Gaza's agricultural land and significant number of water wells. Most of the Gaza Strip's animal production is concentrated in this area.

- **Rafah border crossing:** The Rafah border crossing was officially open 4 out of 7 days this week, with reports of 1,839 people entering Gaza from Egypt, 2,178 people leaving Gaza to Egypt, and 229 people who were denied crossing. Last week, the Rafah border crossing with Egypt was officially open 5 out of 7 days, with a total of 1,489 people entering Gaza through Rafah, 1,566 leaving and 211 who were denied entry to Egypt through Rafah.

Egyptian authorities officially sealed off the Rafah border closing on January 29th following an escalation of events taking place in Egypt, with reports of riots and looting on the Rafah side. There were additional reports of Egyptian soldiers at Rafah abandoning their posts. The Rafah border crossing is now closed until further notice. The closing of the Rafah border will likely have a severe impact on the already limited movement of people, Egypt serving as the main transit point for medical emergencies or people approved for medical treatment outside of Gaza.

- **Power plant and electricity supply:** 77,800 litres of fuel for Gaza's power plant were reportedly delivered this week from Israel, which is just .02 percent of the 3.5 million litres of fuel needed to run the plant at the maximum capacity of 80Mw. No fuel was delivered last week for Gaza's power plant, marking the third consecutive week that Israel did not transfer fuel.

The lack of regular fuel supplies has led to ongoing power cuts and blackouts across the Gaza Strip. All of the fuel for Gaza's power plant has been supplied through the tunnels underneath the

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Gaza-Rafah border for the last three weeks, but with fuel in short supply in Egypt due to the crisis, fuel procurement for the power plant is expected to resume from Israel at higher prices. The ongoing shortage of industrial fuel remains an area of humanitarian concern. The provision of essential services including regular water supply, sewage treatment and removal, and the functioning of health services, continues to be negatively affected by the chronic lack of electricity in Gaza.

- **Cooking gas:** 850 tons of cooking gas reportedly entered Gaza this week. This figure represents 48 percent of the 1,750 tons of cooking gas needed weekly. Last week, only 419 tons of cooking gas reportedly entered Gaza. The overall cooking gas shortage has been a main concern for humanitarian agencies since November 2009.
- **Diesel/petrol:** No diesel or benzine was reported to have been delivered to the private sector this week or last week. A near total ban on fuel imports for public sale was put in place by the Government of Israel in October 2008. Around 100,000 litres of diesel and 100,000 litres of petrol were reported to enter Gaza every day through tunnels prior to the current crisis in Egypt (OCHA, 4 May 2010).
- **Truckloads of supplies:** A total of 1,054 truckloads of supplies reportedly entered Gaza this week from Israel, 37 percent of the pre-blockade weekly average of all trucks entering Gaza.* Last week, 752 truckloads of supplies were reported to have been allowed entry into Gaza.

While imports remain limited, and raw materials severely restricted, exports remain banned almost entirely except for limited truckloads of strawberries and carnations exported to the Netherlands. As a result, the scale of economic activity remains heavily dependent on local demand in Gaza, which in turn is constrained by the low purchasing power of the population and the relatively small size of the local market. Until crossings are fully opened for export, the impact of the easing of the blockade on unemployment, poverty and food insecurity rates remains limited.

**Pre-blockade weekly average (2,807 truckloads) is calculated based on the monthly average of all truckloads that entered during the first five months of 2007, before Israel's imposition of the blockade.*

- **Exports:** This week, there were 23 truckloads of exports reported to have left Gaza through Israel, including 6 truckloads of cut flowers, 16 truckloads of strawberries, and 1 truckload of sweet peppers. Last week, 23 truckloads of exports were also reported. The limited exports are allowed as a result of an agreement between Israel and the Netherlands allowing limited exports of flowers and strawberries. The agreement resumed on 28 November 2010.

2. Humanitarian trucks (week):

Truck originator	Total for week 23-29 Jan
UNRWA	35
WFP	24
Gaza institutions	4
Commercial	693
Karni conveyor (gravel, wheat, grain, animal feed)	333
Total trucks for the week	1054
Percentage of pre-blockade average (first five months of 2007)	37%

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3. Fuel deliveries (week)

		Diesel	Petrol	Cooking Gas
23-29 January		0	0	850 tons
	Percentage of need *	0		48%
Previous week		0		419 tons
* Fuel association 2006 estimates - ** Imports of diesel and petrol for the general public and public sector in Gaza were exceptionally authorized on 6 occasions since October 2008				

Delivery of Industrial Fuel to the Power Plant (week):

Industrial diesel	Previous week	23 – 29 January
	0 litres	77,800 litres
Percentage of amount required to operate at maximum supply capacity of 80 MW		.02%

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