

Jerusalem: Rocket fired from Gaza hits home in south Israel; four treated

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Jerusalem: A rocket fired from Gaza struck a residential home in southern Israel early Wednesday and the Israeli military began attacking militant sites in Gaza in response as days of rising tensions appeared to be erupting into a new round of violence.

The Magen David Adom medical service said a woman and her three children in the home in Beersheba were being treated for shock symptoms after they fled to their shelter upon hearing sirens warning of the incoming projectile. It said two others were injured during the panic to seek cover.

Another rocket from Gaza struck a beach near one of Israel's larger cities. No injuries were reported. Following the attacks, schools in Beersheba were cancelled and Israel's military chief was cutting short his visit to the United States to come back and manage the crisis.

The rocket attack on Beersheba was the first in months and the first that hit an Israeli home since the 2014 summer war between Israel and Gaza's militant Hamas rulers. It comes a day after Israeli Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman said the time had come to deliver a "heavy blow" to Hamas after weeks of escalating violence along the border.

Lieberman announced that all crossings into Gaza were being shut in response to the attack and that Israeli military jets were pounding Hamas targets as a first response. No casualties were reported in Gaza.

Hamas has held weekly border protests for the past six months, aimed in part at easing a crippling Israeli-Egyptian blockade. The protests have intensified as Egyptian-mediated cease-fire efforts faltered.

Last week, some 14,000 Palestinians thronged to the border fence area, burning tires and throwing rocks, firebombs and grenades at soldiers stationed atop earth mounds on the other side of the barrier.

Some 20 Palestinians breached the border during Friday's protest. Seven Palestinians were killed, including four who the military said were shot while approaching a military position in Israeli territory.

In response, Israel halted Qatari-donated fuel shipments to Gaza's power plant and its leaders threatened that if the violence didn't stop there would be serious consequences.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu threatened "very painful blows," saying Israel was very close to waging a "different kind of activity." "If it has any sense, Hamas will cease its fire and violent outbursts now," he said.

Since March, 155 Palestinians have been killed during the protests. One Israeli soldier was killed by sniper fire.

- AP