

MONDAY 16/7/18 m/s 24

**All in ruins:**

A Palestinian woman walking through debris in the yard of the damaged Arts and Crafts Village, adjacent to a building that was hit by Israeli airstrikes in Gaza City.

— AFP



## Gaza ceasefire holds after heavy Israel strikes, Hamas rocket fire

**GAZA CITY:** A ceasefire announced by Hamas after the most severe exchange of fire between Israel and Palestinian militants in the Gaza Strip since a 2014 war, reducing fears of a wider conflict for now.

Hamas, the movement that runs the blockaded Gaza Strip, said late Saturday a ceasefire had been reached with the help of Egypt and others, though Israel declined to comment.

The United Nations' Middle East envoy Nickolay Mladenov was in Gaza and "working with all concerned parties to de-escalate the situation," a UN official said on condition of anonymity.

Despite a couple of lower-level exchanges of fire overnight, calm returned to the Gaza Strip yesterday morning after a day that saw dozens of Israeli airstrikes, killing two Palestinians, while some 200 rockets and mortars were fired from the enclave into Israel.

Four Israelis were wounded when a rocket hit a house in the city of Sderot near the Gaza Strip, authorities said. The two Palestinians killed were aged 15 and 16, caught in an Israeli strike on a building in the west of Gaza City, the enclave's health ministry said.

Twenty-five people were wounded across Gaza, the ministry said.

Hamas said it fired at Israel in defence in response to airstrikes, which came after a soldier was wounded by a grenade along the Gaza border.

Israel blamed Hamas for the escalation, pointing to months of protests and clashes along the border that its military argues the Islamist movement is seeking to use as cover for attacks.

There have also been hundreds of fires at Israeli farms caused by kites and balloons carrying fire-bombs from Gaza, leading to political pressure on the government and military to take action against Hamas. — AFP