

[Transcript] Global News Podcast / Efforts to allow aid into Gaza intensify

This is the Global News Podcast from the BBC World Service.

I'm Gareth Barlow and at 13 hours GMT on Monday, the 16th of October.

These are our main stories.

Amid a severe shortage of supplies in Gaza, the UN Humanitarian Affairs Chief is heading to the Middle East to try and broker an agreement to allow aid in.

Meanwhile, the US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has returned to Israel for more talks after visiting six Arab capitals.

And the Israeli military is evacuating dozens of villages near the Lebanese border because of the threat of rocket fire from the Hezbollah militant group.

We'll bring you all the latest from across the region.

Also in this podcast, Russia has agreed to return four Ukrainian children to their families as part of a deal brokered by Qatar.

And it was painted by both sides as a vote about which direction Poland takes and the opposition are talking about this being the vote for change.

Is Poland about to take a new political course with big implications for the EU and Ukraine?

We start the podcast in the Gaza Strip.

And even before the conflict in Gaza erupted just over a week ago,

the population of almost two and a half million people was largely reliant on aid.

Days of fighting and an Israeli imposed siege has made living conditions dire for those trapped in the Gaza Strip.

Today, efforts to get food, water, fuel and medicine into Gaza have all intensified.

As we record this podcast, we've just heard from the White House that the US is hopeful that the RAFA crossing between Gaza and Egypt will open for a few hours later today.

To what extent, though, is currently unclear?

UN and US officials are both hoping to broker a deal to allow some aid in and some people out.

Just north of the crossing is the southern Gaza city of Karnunis, which is normally home to 400,000 people.

Its population has more than doubled in recent days as people flee bombing further north.

Living conditions there are described as now almost impossible.

We've been hearing from the UN humanitarian affairs chief, Martin Griffiths, about the situation in Gaza.

As I understand it, about a million people from the north of Gaza have moved south in response to the Israeli directive or request or suggestion that they should move out of harm's way.

Of course, they are all over the south trying to find place of safety, which is very difficult.

That's number one.

Number two, there has been no movement.

And this is crucial.

And I want to make it upfront and early on the release of those hostages.

The taking of those hostages was an egregious, illegal, unacceptable, immoral act.

They must be released.

Imagine children as hostages playing that role.

They have to be released immediately.

Number three, we are in deep in negotiations, have been for days, helped a great deal, by the way, by Secretary Blinken and his constant efforts to arrange with the help of the Egyptians and the Israelis to get the first emergency aid into Gaza from RAFA to help those million and others who are situated in the south. There is an international humanitarian law requirement, as you know, that for people to move out of harm's way in a war is one thing. But to do it in a way that they have access to places of safety that they themselves can choose to manage an aid that will allow them to move safely is imperative. And this is also being breached.

Pouda is in her early 20s and is currently sheltering along with her aunt and 50 other family members in Gaza. She says she's staying put. Me and all of my family members are still at their homes because now we're here in Gaza safe, so we cannot evacuate because we don't have any shelters. When we go to the southern of Gaza Strip, so if we go there, we stay at streets. So because of that, we decide to stay at our home without any evacuation. And regarding the water bathrooms, actually here, the situation is so difficult to describe. Well, let's now hear from Ghassan Abu Sitar, a British Palestine and doctor volunteering in the El Chifa Hospital in the northern part of Gaza. He spoke to the BBC about the injuries he's treating. It's all blast injuries, which means that there are these horrendous injuries with shrapnel and burns and fallen masonry. People being dug out from underneath the rubble of their homes. 40% of the wounded that are coming are children. And unfortunately, some of these children that are being dug out from underneath the rubble are the sole survivors from their families. And every day we have these cases. I'll stay until there is a ceasefire. I can't now turn my back on my patients. I can't turn my back on my colleagues. Israeli military say around half a million Palestinians have moved following its order to leave northern Gaza as preparations continue for a ground offensive in retaliation for the attack by Hamas nine days ago that killed 1400 people. Nearly 2,700 people in Gaza have been killed in Israel's retaliatory bombardment. It's now been confirmed by Israeli authorities that the number of people abducted by Hamas was 199. For a brief half hour on Monday morning, there were suggestions of a ceasefire, but that was soon ruled out by both Hamas and Israel. Lieutenant Colonel Richard Hecht is a spokesperson for the Israeli Defense Force. We are preparing ourselves to the mission that we declared to destroy the Hamas infrastructure. Hamas equals ISIL. This will never happen to us again. We are very aware and we're doing everything we can on the humanitarian effort. We've already taken out Bilal Al-Qadra, who was responsible for the Kibbutz Mirim massacre,

head of the Nukba forces in the south.

Last night Muatiz Id, commander of Hamas National Security, were going after their people and were going after their infrastructure.

That's all I can say.

The voice there of Lieutenant Colonel Richard Hecht.

Well, just before recording this podcast, I got an update from Yola Nel on the movement of aid.

Well, there was a source at the petroleum authority in Gaza that told us at the BBC that there were 150,000 litres of fuel that were transferred earlier from an old tank that was designated for storing Egyptian fuel, and this was carried out in coordination with the United Nations.

And that fuel, we know, has been sent to water and wastewater pumping stations.

Just a reflection of how awful the situation has become in Gaza that, you know, even when Israel said that it would turn on a limited water supply a day ago, there was no fuel to run the pumps so that people could get that water.

And at the same time, the desalination station had to stop working because it had run out of fuel.

And then there's also these reports of getting sewage coming up into the streets, obviously a huge health hazard.

So wastewater pumping stations should also get some of this fuel, but it's really just a token effort at the moment.

And it's very strange because if you look at some of the footage that there is circulating, you can see that on the Egyptian side of the Rafa crossing, there are just these long lines of lorries that the UN and other donor countries around the region have sent hundreds of tonnes of aid, but it can't go in.

And on the Gaza side, there's a lot of frustration building as some of the people with foreign passports, Palestinians with foreign passports, been waiting for days now hoping to leave.

And there was this word yesterday when the US Secretary of State, Anthony Blinken, was in Cairo talking to them.

There was an expectation that the Rafa crossing would open very soon and the aid would go in. Now he's here in Jerusalem meeting Israeli officials, talking to them about a mechanism for getting aid in.

And what the Israelis have been insisting on up to now is that they want to see their citizens, people who were snatched by Hamas, taken hostage to be released as any part of a deal to let aid into Gaza.

And we're also seeing, whilst these efforts from Anthony Blinken are ongoing, that the United Nations Humanitarians Chief Martin Griffiths is also heading to the region. He said he was deep in negotiations to try and get some aid into the Gaza Strip.

That's right. It's just such an urgent situation.

The clock is really ticking here and aid is desperately needed.

It's been for many people days now that they've gone without having food imports into the Gaza Strip without having water sent into the Gaza Strip without electricity.

And all of this is set against the backdrop of a looming ground offensive by the Israeli forces, which would surely worsen the situation.

Indeed. And we're expecting this to be really a ground offensive on a scale that we have never seen before.

And massing at the borders, you can see the tanks there, armoured vehicles as well. But it will be an extremely dangerous operation for Israel to have so many boots on the ground.

And Hamas, of course, have been coming out saying that they're ready to pay with blood that they will not give up.

The BBC's Yoland now.

So as we've just been hearing then from Yoland, the US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken is back in Jerusalem after a weekend of shuttling between Arab states.

He's been holding more talks with the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Our Middle East analyst is the BBC's Sebastian Usher.

I asked him what Mr. Blinken's strategy might be.

Well, he's trying to achieve several things as far as Israel is concerned.

It was Israel that he landed in last Thursday when he came to the region.

It's to show Israel 100% that the US has their back, but it supports them in their self-defence as the US and Israel paint what they're doing.

But to send the message that they need to act within limits, within proportionality, as much as possible.

So that's very much the public message.

And that's the message that he would have been taken to the Arab states.

But he's just been, you heard Egypt, he was in Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, Jordan, all of which countries still support strongly the Palestinian issue, although in terms of the main issue of the forefront of Arab concerns, it had fallen away for some time.

And we've seen Bahrain, the UAE, for example, sign the Abraham Accords normalization deals with Israel.

Saudi Arabia looked to be on the road towards that.

Jordan, historically, of course, in Egypt have had long-term peace deals with Israel.

So his message to them, two things, I think, one, to try and stay united in terms of support for Palestinians, but not an aggressive condemnation of what Israel is doing for now.

He would like to get a very strong condemnation of Hamas from them, but I don't think that's what he has got or is likely to get.

But more importantly, the spillover into the region to get those states to use their contacts, to use their influence, to try and ensure that the non-state groups such as Hezbollah, for example, notice he didn't go to Lebanon, but also other groups in the region, to some extent, the feeling amongst Arab people on the street.

We've seen big protests all over the world.

That is rising all the time.

There is a disconnect between what ordinary Arabs feel about this and what the Arab states are presenting, and that's a problem for these Arab states.

So essentially, his message will be to everyone is to hold fast, hold firm, and hopefully, after this is over, when it's over, there'll be a chance to try to realign the way the Middle East and maybe get back to some serious negotiation discussion about the two-state solution in that Saudi Arabia is likely to play the absolute key role.

Sebastian, I'll show that.

Well, let's take you to northern Israel now, where, as a precautionary measure,

authorities are evacuating 28 communities within two kilometres of the Lebanese border. The BBC's Hugo Bacheja is in southern Lebanon and gave me an update on the Israeli withdrawals. I think this is the Israeli reaction to the escalating violence along the Israeli-Lebanese border. So the Israeli authorities have announced the evacuation of 28 communities in northern Israel near the border with Lebanon.

We still don't know whether this is a mandatory evacuation, whether this is a voluntary evacuation. Obviously, many residents have already left those areas because of the violence.

And one of these communities is the community of Stoula, where yesterday one man was killed, the first Israeli civilian to die as a result of a Hezbollah strike in this war.

And this announcement, which was made this morning, this announcement by the Israeli authorities came after the most intense exchange of fire between Israel and Hezbollah yesterday. And Israel said that overnight it attacked military infrastructure used by Hezbollah here in Lebanon. So the real fear here that this war between Israel and Hamas could spread across the region to include Hezbollah and Lebanon.

You say there that real fear. It's worth noting, isn't it, that these Hezbollah fighters and militants that operate in Lebanon as a group, its arsenal, its weaponry, it dwarfs some small countries. It's incredibly powerful.

And I think that's why the concern here that Hezbollah could become more involved in this conflict. It has tens of thousands of fighters with combat experience. Many of them were fighting in Syria.

The group has 150,000 missiles and rockets, including missiles, that could strike deep inside Israeli territory. So, you know, Hezbollah is much more powerful than Hamas.

So I think that's why all players here are incredibly concerned that Hezbollah could become more involved in this conflict. And I think that's why we're seeing a reaction from Western countries, the UK, the U.S. warning against an escalation in this conflict. And obviously, Hezbollah is supported by Iran. So we've seen that some Western leaders have been trying to warn Iran against an escalation, against a larger involvement of Hezbollah in this conflict. So I think everybody's paying attention to Hezbollah, but also to Tehran to which decisions are going to be made. Hugo Beshaga in Southern Lebanon.

Well, the last nine days have shaken them at least, but it's a conflict that's been going on for seven decades, and many are desperate for long-term change. Clive Myrie has been speaking to one family living in the shadow of the past. I do remember Dad always being away and always doing something important. Avighai is a 28-year-old engineer who could soon be deployed to Gaza with the Israeli army. His father, Edo, served in Gaza with the Defense Forces back in 2005.

He believed it was right for Israel to pull out of the occupied territory that year, allowing the Palestinians to govern themselves. He deeply believed in this move. He also passed this feeling on to me. Apparently, we're wrong, all of us. The Jewish people were supposed to be safe in Israel. They believed there'd be no more mass murder living in their own land.

But last week's attack resurrected painful ghosts. In 1947, after the United Nations recommended the partition of the land known as Palestine into two states, one for Arabs, one for Jews, Israel declared independence the following year. But the Arab world never accepted the new state, with at least 750,000 Palestinians forced from their homes, many ending up as refugees in Gaza. It's called the Nakba, the catastrophe. Multiple conflicts came and went. Battles for the return of their rightful lands, say the Arabs, struggles for survival, say the Israelis. War broke out again between neighboring Arab states and Israel in 1967. Israel won the

Six-Day War, with a million Palestinians now under Israeli control, including those in the seized territory of Gaza. The following years saw the Palestinians refuse to accept the occupation. There were uprisings and suicide bombing attacks, as Israel held on to occupied land, building new Jewish settlements. But eventually, Israel withdrew, dismantling the settlements and pulling out troops in 2005. From this moment on, the responsibility for all that takes place in Gaza St. lays on the Palestinians. It was a mistake. What did we did? What can I say to those 1500 people that was murdered now that I supported this? This wouldn't have happened if we wouldn't have withdrawn. Edo prayed things would have been different in Gaza. But in 2006, the Islamists of Hamas won elections in the territory, sparking a brief civil war with their secular Palestinian rivals, Fatah. Hamas eventually took control, and having never accepted Israel's right to exist, the Islamists continued to attack the Jews, Palestinian gunmen in the morning, firing rockets and kidnapping soldiers and civilians, while Israel continued to build on occupied land in the West Bank. Attempts to make peace in the 90s failed, and Israel put Gaza under blockade and launched a number of ground offensives into the territory. After last week's atrocity, troops are poised to enter once again. Palestinians are also war weary, but as determined as Edo and Abighai to battle on in a conflict where it seems no one wins. Still to come in the podcast, Cricket and Squash are among the new sports added for the Olympic Games in Los Angeles in five years time.

Welcome back to the Global News Podcast, and let's look at some of the other events taking place around the world. Four Ukrainian children are being reunited with their families in a pilot scheme to return more of the thousands abducted by Russia since its full-scale invasion last year. This all follows mediation by the Gulf state of Qatar. Our security correspondent, Frank Gardner, reports. Quietly behind the scenes, Qatar has been working with both Russia and Ukraine

to help resolve one of the most painful consequences of Russia's invasion.

Kyiv says up to 700,000 of its children have been forcibly separated from their families, taken across the border into Russia, and brainwashed into forgetting all about their Ukrainian heritage.

During the summer, Qatar's prime minister visited both countries after a request from Ukraine to act as a mediator. Now the first group of Ukrainian children are being returned with help from the Qatar embassy in Moscow. Their ages range from 2 to 17, and their families are from different parts of Ukraine. That report by Frank Gardner. The strongest party to emerge from

the Polish general election is unlikely to form the next government. Following Sunday's vote, the governing law and justice party is predicted to have won more seats than the main opposition's civic coalition, but it doesn't look as if it will be able to stay in office.

The civic coalition is being led by the former head of the EU council, Donald Tusk, who could be on course to become the next prime minister. So then, what does this all mean for Poland and for the EU? I heard more from our Eastern Europe correspondent, Sarah Rainsford. Well, the count is still very much underway. There's around about a third of the votes have been counted. And as you mentioned, the governing law and justice party or peace are winning in terms of the single party getting the most votes. But they currently, and according to the exit polls too, will not have enough to form a majority. And it is all the more liberal and centrist opposition parties who are inclined to come together and form a coalition who would

then have a majority in parliament. Obviously, we're a long way from the final results, but the exit polls have been accurate in the past. And we've now had three exit polls, all of them essentially giving the same picture. And I think it kind of tallows with the turnout as well, another of the key figures in this election. We're talking about a 73% turnout figure, which is the highest turnout for an election since the fall of communism, which I think is, you know, just illustrates how people in Poland have seen this as a really extremely important vote. It's been painted and it was painted throughout the election campaign as a historic moment, a time for polls to choose the direction their country takes. Would it be moving away from European values, away from its ties with the EU? In fact, there's more problems in the relationship with the EU that have been in recent years. Or would it be kind of coming back on track in that sense in terms of basic democratic principles, including the rule of law, which the EU has big questions about here in Poland. So lots and lots of issues at stake, a very divisive election, a very polarized campaign, but it does look at this point, and certainly this is the way the opposition are painting it, it does look like they're on course for a majority in parliament, but there's a long way to go and a lot of wrangling and political negotiations to be done before we're anywhere near the finish line here. And central to the opposition coalition is Donald Tusk, of course, who was president of the European Council from 2014 to 2019. So at the heart of the European project, this will surely be welcomed by near neighbours and by the European Union. Yes, I think it absolutely would be. It's interesting, you know, throughout this very vitriolic campaign,

in fact, the governing party piece had been presenting Donald Tusk as a foreign agent, almost a, well, in fact, specifically a foreign stooge, even a traitor. They talked about him as a German. They talked about him as a puppet of Europe. They tried to paint him as an enemy of this country. But, you know, talking to people at the polls, it was interesting to see that a lot of people felt that membership of the EU and good relations with the EU was extremely important. And I think that was particularly important for young people here in Poland. And they have turned out in very large numbers to vote. And they have generally, if you look at the results so far, they have generally been voting for the opposition. So I think, you know, Poland's relations with EU were absolutely fundamental to people here and the values that the EU represents.

Sarah Rainsford reporting. Let's take you to Ecuador now, where Danganoboa has won the second round of the presidential election after a tight race against the left-wing politician Luisa Gonzalez. The campaign was marred by violence that culminated in the murder of an anti-corruption candidate in August. At just 35 years old, Mr. Naboa is the youngest ever president-elect of the country. Addressing his supporters in the seaside town of Alon, he vowed to rebuild and restore peace. Tomorrow we start work for this new Ecuador.

We start working to rebuild a country seriously battered by violence, by corruption and by hate. From tomorrow, hope will start working.

For more on Danganoboa, my colleague Alex Ritzen spoke to the BBC's Ana Maria Rua, who's in the capital, Quito. He's a businessman graduated from Harvard and is the son of one of the richest man in Ecuador, Alvaro Naboa, who tried also to be president in five occasions, failing all. Danganoboa is promising firm hand against insecurity in Ecuador, with measures like the militarization of prisons and borders, and flotant prisons also to isolate the most violent prisoners. He also wants to create jobs to achieve this, he says. He wants to strengthen the private sector and reduce taxes. His critic says that he doesn't have much experience

to be a president. He has a short career of two years as a member of the last Congress. Is that violence which culminated in the murder of one of the rival candidates back in August? Is that violence in society the biggest challenge he's facing?

Definitely. The unprecedented security crisis this country is living now, with the sharp rise of violence and crime in this country, that used to be among the safest countries in Latin America, now is one of the most violent. So definitely this is going to be the main challenge of the president-elected Danyel Naboia. All this rise of violence is happening in the context of kind of a boom in the production of drug and the narcotraffic in the region. But violence is not only because of the context of narcotraffic. More than 30% of the population in Ecuador is now living in poverty or extreme poverty. And this means not access to basic services like health system, education, but the president-elected would need to negotiate in a very, very divided parliament with his new political movement. He only has 12 of the 136 seats. So it's going to be about negotiation. And he also has not much time. This new mandate will be over on May 2025. Annemarie Rua, there. The International Olympic Committee has added five more sports to the program for the Los Angeles Games in 2028. A meeting in the Indian city of Mumbai agreed to include cricket, which has a huge fan base across South Asia. Alex Campstick reports.

There was overwhelming support for the inclusion of cricket in the 2028 Olympics. It's an opportunity

for the game to expand in the US market and beyond, while the IOC will welcome the extra viewers and

broadcast income from the cricket mad South Asian subcontinent, especially India. Cricket will be joined by a non-contact form of American football called flag football, both baseball and softball lacrosse. And after years of frustration in its bid for Olympic recognition, squash has finally made it. Alex Campstick. And finally, the lava lamp is 60. The what you may ask? Well, here's Rachel Wright

with everything you ever wanted to know or needed about the lava lamp. Sold around the world, it's a British icon described by the manufacturers as a sleek metallic silhouette, which incases a glass lamp shaped a little like a rocket, my words, not theirs, with colourful globules of, well, as it turns out, wax eerily floating around in liquid. The British pop band Durran Durran even brought out a record in its honour.

And now the band have designed an autographed pink limited edition in honour of the lava lamp's 60th birthday, only 600, which have all sold out. Its inventor was a former RAF pilot called Edward Craven Walker, who became a pioneer in natureist films, especially underwater ones featuring naturally naked people. Then one day in 1963, he walked into a pub in southern England and saw a kind of egg timer object filled with two liquids, oil and water, which don't mix. So instead, the oil formed blobs and swirls. Craven Walker realised that lamps were not just a source of light, but a source of art. His wife Susan says he was obsessed with his new invention. Most of his life, he spent trying to perfect it and then tested it and tested it and retested it, driving nuts. Every step of the way, he was snubbed or came against a brick wall, but he just kept going, kept going. The lava lamp took off as a cultural 60s icon, after it was bought by Ringo Starr, drummer of the Beatles in 1963. It also appeared in iconic British productions such as Doctor Who and The Prisoner, and was displayed in David Bowie and Paul McCartney videos. Despite a recent drop in sales, the variously shaped lamps with their multi-coloured globules are considered a British design classic and a collector's item.

So happy birthday to the lava lamp. In the words of its inventor who died in 2000, the lava lamp is like the circle of life. It grows, breaks up, falls down, and then starts all over again. That report there by Rachel Wright.

And that's all from us for now, but there will be a new edition of the Global News Podcast a little later. If you want to comment on this one or any of the topics, send us an email.

The address is globalpodcasts at bbc.co.uk. You can also find us on x at Global News Pod.

This edition was mixed by Darcy Abrie. The producer was Tracy Gordon. The editor is always Kara Martin and I'm Gareth Barlow. Until next time, goodbye.