

[Transcript] Global News Podcast / Strike on Gaza hospital kills more than 500

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

I'm Charlotte Gallagher and in the early hours of Wednesday, the 18th of October, these are our main stories.

Part of the hospital are on fire, certainly the operating suite part of the room has fallen.

An explosion at a hospital in Gaza has killed hundreds of Palestinian civilians.

Many were in the building, sheltering from the violence.

Hamas says it was hit by an Israeli airstrike, but Israel denies it was responsible.

Let me be clear, the IDF's don't target hospitals. That's a sensitive side, it's a humanitarian side.

President Biden is travelling to the region for talks, but what chance has diplomacy at this point will get the latest from Jerusalem.

Also in this podcast, one of Donald Trump's biggest supporters in the Republican party fails in his first bid to become Speaker of the House

and the Oscar-winning Bond girl who has a new sporting challenge.

I never dreamt of being an actress, but as a child I always dreamt of being an Olympian because sports was very much part of my life going up.

But first, the U.S. President Joe Biden is flying to Israel as the conflict in Gaza escalates to an unprecedented level, with a devastating missile attack on the Al-Ali Arab Baptist Hospital in Gaza City. Palestinian health officials say at least 500 people have been killed.

Videos show chaotic scenes, bloodied and wounded people being rushed away on stretchers and in ambulances. Dr Ghassan Abu Sitta is a British surgeon who was in the hospital when the explosion happened and spoke to the BBC shortly afterwards.

Hamas officials say the hospital was hit by an Israeli airstrike,

and it's prompted the Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas to pull out of Wednesday's summit with President Biden. But the Israeli military has denied responsibility.

The spokesman for the Israeli Defence Forces Mark Regev had this to say.

Just before recording this edition of the Global News Podcast, our correspondent in Jerusalem, Tom Bateman, described the scenes at the hospital to James Kumrasami.

The street outside this particular area, the courtyard of the hospital, where it seems around a thousand people, displaced people, were sheltering, having taken shelter from these almost relentless Israeli airstrikes and the bombardment over the last week or so.

There were a thousand people there. Actually, that was far fewer than it had been a few days ago, because the hospital itself had said they said there was an Israeli airstrike on Saturday, which injured a few people. At that point, they said they had 6,000 people sheltering in the courtyard. This is an Anglican run hospital, and the numbers then were down to around a thousand. The whole scene is gray and blackened and charred, burned out vehicles and bodies and the wounded

lying in the streets. And what many of the medical staff there and others are saying is that they're still trying to pull people out from the rubble after the explosion. But as you say, in terms of what caused it, we have claim and counterclaim. Civil Defence in Gaza City said this was an Israeli airstrike. A witness speaking to the BBC said, as far as he was concerned, it was an Israeli airstrike. The Israelis are saying their early indications are this was a Palestinian rocket that fell short. And there's been an immediate reaction on the streets of the West Bank?

There has. There's been hundreds of people out in the city of Ramallah in the Occupied West Bank. They are coming out demanding that Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas steps down.

And this is in an environment where we've seen the Palestinian Authority, which is the internationally backed organization that has limited governance in parts of the West Bank. Many Palestinians see it as effectively unable to represent their interests, unable to prevent the effects of Israel's military occupation in the West Bank. They're very tired of the PA. It's extremely unpopular. And this seems to have been a trigger to many Palestinians coming out and demanding that Mahmoud Abbas stands down. On the eve of the U.S. President's visit, we see now the region slipping even further into crisis. That was Tom Bateman. The BBC's Rushdie Abu Alouf is now in Khan Yunus in southern Gaza, having left his home in Gaza City, along with hundreds and thousands of others told to do so by the Israelis. This was his reaction to the attack on the hospital. It's in the middle of the night and most people are indoors and it's very hard to find a witness that saw this. My sister, she literally lives 50 to 60 meters from the border of this hospital. Very difficult communication. I managed to talk to my nephew. I asked him what happened. He said, we don't know. We just heard two explosions and we thought they're just hitting something. And suddenly he said, we started to see hundreds of ambulances and people are shouting, running in the streets. So we rushed to the scene and he said, we were shocked to see hundreds of bodies on the ground, blood everywhere, people shouting, big chaos. So people started to transfer the serious injuries in their cars. We have to understand that even the life-saving kids are running out in the hospital. They were appealing even before this mass casualties arriving to the hospital. So the hospital was already overwhelmed by hundreds. We are talking about 10,000 people injured since the October the 7th. And most of them, they rushed to see the hospital. Imagine this hospital, which overwhelmed, which struggled to cope with the situation with the very little fuel they have. And suddenly they received 500 people either killed or seriously injured. So the situation is chaotic. That was Rushdie Abu Alouf in Gaza. Let's look now at the international reaction to this attack, which comes just a day before President Biden is due to arrive in the region on a crucial visit. He had been expected to meet the Israeli prime minister and then travel to Jordan to meet other regional leaders. But King Abdullah of Jordan, he was due to host the summit, blamed Israel for the strike on the hospital, describing it as a massacre and a war crime. Jordan has said that summit is now cancelled. Egypt too said it condemned the airstrike in the strongest possible terms. I've been speaking to our diplomatic correspondent, James Landale. What has been fascinating has been the way many countries, particularly Arab countries, have responded very, very quickly to the devastation of the hospital, blaming Israel. Countries like Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, UAE. In other words, countries that have links, some of them have links to Israel. Some of them have normalized relations, some of these countries. And yet they have all blamed Israel. And they have called it a heinous crime. They've called it a massacre and those kinds of things. All the while, there is claim and counterclaim over who is responsible for this attack. And so I think even before we know the full facts, what is clear is that these Arab governments feel very, very constrained. They have seen the speed with which people in many Arab countries have taken to the streets. And these Arab governments have realized that their room for maneuver is now constrained. And they simply had no alternative but to go out to condemn Israel. And that's what we've seen happen, despite the fact that there are now competing

claims over who was responsible and how. And all this has happened when President Biden is preparing to go to the Middle East. The Palestinian president has already said, I'm not going to meet you now. I mean, how much can he realistically achieve then? I think it has become hugely complicated

for the US president. It was hard before. It's got even harder now because the whole idea was that President Biden would come to Israel in particular, lavish support for Israel. But at the same time, say, look, you've got to act and get more humanitarian aid into Gaza. And you've got to create some safe spaces where, to quote Anthony Blinken, the US Secretary of State, civilians are out of harm's way. And then that would be enough for the Arab nations to buy into some kind of a deal. So they could say to their population, look, we've got some humanitarian aid and we've got a corridor. We've got some safe areas. That was supposed to be something of the deal. That's now completely blown out of the water. So there's no trust at the moment. There's different beliefs of what actually happened and who was responsible. And so the prospect of there being some kind of progress, I think, is, well, it's a lot, lot harder than it was before.

If it is proved that Israel did carry out this airstrike, obviously they say it wasn't them.

Could you see Western countries taking a much harder line with Israel when so far they've been incredibly supportive? Yeah, I think that whoever is proven responsible will be widely condemned and would have to be condemned because attacking a hospital is a war crime if it is proved to be deliberate. If, however, it's a mistake, then you get into a slightly different scenario. But the people who were responsible would still be condemned because there's no way you can do anything but condemn. I don't think any government could possibly not condemn something like this, you know, whoever is responsible for it. That was James Landale.

Israel was already facing mounting regional criticism of its ongoing bombardment of Gaza before the airstrike on the hospital. Another bone of contention is the delay in the opening of the Rafa crossing to allow desperately needed humanitarian aid like food and water, which the people of Gaza have been deprived of since Israel declared a siege.

Sameh Shukri is Egypt's foreign minister. In an interview with the BBC before the hospital airstrike, Nula McGovern asked him why Egypt had not opened the Rafa crossing with Gaza.

These attempts to misrepresent Egypt's position and the constant bombardment by the media among the BBC to highlight that Egypt is not opening is totally incorrect and inaccurate and improper. Egypt has said and I have said personally, as far as we're concerned, Rafa crossing on our side is officially open. Rafa crossing has been subjected to four aerial bombardments that have made the crossing inaccessible. In addition to the fact that there is no authorization for the safe passage of the multitude of lorries that are amassed between Aarish and the border crossing in Rafa, waiting to enter under safe conditions. I am in constant contact with the United Nations envoy to extract a safe passage for those humanitarian assistance that are much needed. Why the crossing is being bombarded and by whom it's being bombarded and what is the objective of it's being bombarded. I presume it's not being bombarded so that it remains open. If people however want to make that crossing and there were people as you will know massing at that border, you believe that Egypt would let them through? The crossing once safe for transit will continue to operate at the same level that it has always operated at. We will receive those people who need medical assistance, who are in need of the special attention. This is the normal status of that crossing. All those who are currently assembled by virtue of the instructions of Israel to displace them, which is a contradiction to international humanitarian law

from the north to the south and are now facing these dire circumstances without water, electricity, food and dwellings are in a very precarious situation and we have been imploring the entrance of tents and foods and water so that we can provide them the safe haven inside of Gaza that they deserve. It is not a matter of transferring the responsibility to Egypt, it is a matter of maintaining the safety and the well-being of Gazans on their own territory. They are civilians, this is the responsibility of Israel as the occupying power it must provide for the safety of civilians. The concentration is what Egypt would do to receive them rather than how we can the assistance and the humanitarian needs that they should receive. That should be the question. What Israel would say is that they do not want to allow aid in until hostages are released. Is that the responsibility of the civilian people of Gaza that they should suffer until such time that hostages held by an organization, what a lot of population of Gaza should suffer? That is something that's not acceptable at all that the people of Gaza should be penalized because the hostages have not been released, they have nothing to do with it. That was Sami Shukri speaking to Nuala McGovern and here's Jackie with some news about another special edition of the Global News Podcast. You might have heard the special edition we recorded answering listeners' questions on events in Israel and Gaza and international reaction to them. A lot of you have since been in touch to ask us to do it again, so we will. Send us your questions, anything you want explained and our correspondents will endeavour to provide context and clarity. Please record us a voice message or simply write your question and email it to globalpodcast@bbc.co.uk. Thank you.

Let's go to Washington now because the US House of Representatives have failed in their attempt to end a political deadlock and elect a new speaker. The previous one, Kevin McCarthy, was ousted by a small group of fellow Republicans from the hard right of the party. They were hoping to elect Jim Jordan, a close ally of Donald Trump. The Democrat politician, Jamie Raskin, said the Republicans were in turmoil. There's a civil war taking place within the Republican Party in caucus and that civil war might just turn into a purge of any moderates. It's starting to look like there is a consolidation of the party around Trump and around the mega wing.

So I think the GOP right now might be the POT, the party of Trump.

Our Washington correspondent, Gary O'Donoghue, was there to watch events unfold.

It's a bit of a shambles, to be honest. What we've just had is a vote in the House and Jim Jordan, who's the Republican nominee, was 17 votes short of getting a majority. 20 of his own party voted against him, voted for other people and now they've put the House into recess so they can start doing a bit of arm twisting. If you're Jim Jordan, you might look on the bright side because a week ago when he was seeking the nomination and other Republicans were also seeking it, he only got 99 votes. So in some ways he's done a lot better but 20 votes from his own party is a big slap in the face and some of those are very dead set against him becoming Speaker. He can only afford to lose three Republicans. That's the bottom line of the maths here and so there's an awful lot of work for him to do and in the meantime that means that none of this business of the House can get underway. This security funding for Israel, security funding for Ukraine, we've got a looming shutdown coming up because government spending hasn't been agreed

beyond November the 17th. None of this can be sorted until they sort of speak.

And how would you describe Jim Jordan because he's a polarizing figure, isn't he?

Yeah, he's on the far right of the Republican party, there's no question about that. He was once described by a former Republican Speaker as a legislative terrorist, which in this context means he tears things down according to that Republican he never built. He hasn't really passed any legislation. He's very much on that, what you might call the Maggerwing of the party. He, for example, refuses to acknowledge that Joe Biden won the 2020 election.

He was one of the key congressmen in touch with Donald Trump during that period after the election

and Donald Trump has been a strong backer of his for speaker. So he's very much in that part of the right of the party, the ultra conservatives, however you want to describe them and of course that means he's very polarizing. That was Gary O'Donohue. Next to the war in Ukraine and President Zelensky has confirmed his country has started using a type of long range missile supplied by the U.S. There had been speculation the weapons were used in overnight raids which struck Russian air bases in the south and east from Kiev James Waterhouse reports. Ukrainian special forces say nine helicopters and an ammunition depot were destroyed and dozens of Russian soldiers were killed in the strikes on Badansk and Luhansk. Pro-Russian social media accounts suggest the damage caused by this attack was significant. Ukraine has effectively used western missiles before. There will be a relief in Kiev that these latest models have come from the U.S.

given now it is also focusing on the conflict in the Middle East. Our agreements with President Biden are being implemented, said President Zelensky in his evening address. They are executed very accurately. He added, attackings have proven themselves. Now to a scientific discovery that could be good news for cancer treatment. At present certain drugs used to keep the disease under control can stop working because the patient's body has adapted. But a study here in Britain suggests a new way of reversing or even preventing that drug resistance is possible. Professor Johann De Bono who led the study explained to Michelle Hussain how they stopped cancers using a type of blood cells to grow. These white blood cells are hijacked into the chimer to feed the chimer with growth factors. So we have run a trial this is really more than 10 years of work showing that we can block these white blood cells feeding the cancer by preventing them getting into the cancer with a tablet taking every day that has minimal side effects and then can reverse resistance to their established anti-cancer therapies and these were men with prostate cancer as he said who really had no therapy options left. So we saw tumor shrinkage this can be in prostate cancer seen on the scans in blood tests and this can last quite a while in some men with little therapy option left over a year of disease control and we know when that happens

that as we move these drugs earlier we get more benefit from these treatments. So we remain hopeful

that this could have a substantial benefit not only to reverse resistance but eventually to prevent it evolving at all. What are the other similar types of cancer to prostate cancer that you would like to try it on next? There is a lot of evidence that this inflammation or we call the myeloid cells in the blood if they're more activated by the tumor to feed the tumor this impacts outcomes for many cancers and really impacts survival substantially. So based on that evidence which is also present in prostate cancer we believe this may be impactful for many tumors and I think this could impact broadly across several cancers. Okay but these tablets you used did you use something that's already gone through a process anyone listening who's

is in this position or know someone in this position will want to have an idea of how they could access it? At present these are only available on trials more trials are planned with actually better tablets so still much work to do from us but we will work hard to move this forward to more broad availability as soon as we can. Johan Dabone. The Oscar-winning actor Michelle Yeo has been voted on to the International Olympic Committee. The 61-year-old was introduced as a Malaysia Junior Squash Champion despite her successful career in Hollywood. Our sports correspondent Alex Capstick reports from the organization's meeting in the Indian city of Mumbai. Michelle Yeo was already a star in Asia when she got her Hollywood breakout role playing a Chinese secret agent working with Pierce Brosnan's James Bond in Tomorrow Never Dies. The action

theme has continued throughout her career from crouching tiger hidden dragon to her Oscar-winning

performance in everything everywhere all at once. All of these roles build on her sporting background as a youngster that was her passion she was good enough to become Malaysia's junior squash champion and now Michelle has become a member of the International Olympic Committee an organization with a reputation for being a little bit stuffy and certainly well not known for its pizzazz and glamour. So what was the attraction? I never dreamt of being an actress but as a child I always dreamt of being an Olympian because sports was very much part of my life going up and when you watch the Olympics you know that is the epitome of the best of the best and having that pride to be able to represent your family. Michelle Yeo also said she'd like to get involved in the IOC's team refugee program. She's one of eight new members elected at the organization's meeting in Mumbai. When the list of names was first proposed last month the IOC president Thomas Bach said they were chosen because of their experience and diverse expertise in different walks of life. Michelle agreed that they would all bring something different to the table. She'll soon find out what difference her stellar acting career can make in the world of sport. That was Alex Capstick back to our top story now and the attack on the hospital in Gaza City which has killed hundreds of people. Cannon Richard Saul is a priest at the Anglican Church of the Diocese of Jerusalem which owns the hospital. We got a missile attack on us on Saturday which hit the building and injured four people and 5,000 of the people who'd been sheltering in the grounds of the hospital at that point left fearing that it was not safe but a thousand people remained who you know were probably just two vulnerable, invalidated or elderly to leave despite the fact that there'd been a hit to the hospital and then the 600 patients it's a 600 bed hospital and then the staff there so it was those who were there and they are the ones that have taken the hit. It just sounds horrific and nightmarish and I just cannot imagine why vulnerable civilians would be targeted like this.

After that first hit were you fearful that maybe there would be other strikes maybe not on this scale but that it was in the firing line? Yes you are. Yeah definitely once that happens and you think deliberate or not deliberate it's in the firing line and of course it's in the evacuation zone it's north of Wadi Gaza so the Israelis have said that anywhere in that area could be hit but how can you move patients? How can you move people who have been injured in the attacks or there for any other reason and the hospital staff the doctors and nurses and others can't leave patients in bed to die or to be neglected and then the thousand who were there they just don't feel they've got a choice that some of them don't want to make the long trek south they don't feel it is safe to be on the road so it's just an utterly intolerable situation I can't believe

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that this will be allowed to stand. Is there anything you can do to help? We are praying for the situation and for the people for their sustenance for their courage but nobody can get in you can't get aid in we would send people in we would get people out it is impossible Israelis have declared it as a siege so when people are vulnerable and dying in a hospital they are totally without help it's unbelievable it's hard to find the words properly to describe the situation that they're in and how it could be done like this I find it profoundly distressing and disturbing. That was Canon Richardsall speaking to my colleague James Kumerisami and that's all from us for now but there will be a new edition of the Global News podcast later if you want to comment on this podcast or the topics covered in it you can send us an email the address is globalpodcast@bbc.co.uk you can also find us on X formerly known as Twitter at Global NewsPod this edition was mixed by Caroline Driscoll and the producer was Emma Joseph the editor is Karen Martin and I'm Charlotte Gallagher until next time goodbye