**Incendiary balloons spark dozens of fires in southern Israel**

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Balloon bombs launched from the restive Gaza Strip set off at least 33 fires in Israel's south on Wednesday, the Fire and Rescue Services reported.

While most of the fires were minor and posed no danger to residents of nearby communities, one of the balloon-strapped explosives landed near a playground in the Eshkol Regional Council area when children were nearby.

Another balloon reportedly landed in the vicinity of a residential house. Both explosives were neutralized without causing any casualties.

The fresh round of explosive-laden balloons come as Qatari envoy Mohammed al-Emadi continues his talks with the Hamas terrorist group in the coastal enclave.

According to reports in the Israeli media, Wednesday's negotiations did not see any real progress toward de-escalation, but they did not go up in flames either, with the parties set to continue on Thursday.

The explosive-laden balloon attacks continued despite a two-day lockdown announced by Hamas on Monday after spotting a local cluster of COVID-19 infections.

The lockdown did not appear to deter hundreds of Gazans from attending Tuesday's funeral for four Palestinian Islamic Jihad members who reportedly died in a botched rocket launch.

Earlier, the Israel Defense Forces hit targets in the coastal enclave in retaliation for the explosive-laden balloons launched on Wednesday.