

Israel orders Beirut residents to flee after Hezbollah targets Haifa area

AFP- Israel issued evacuation orders Sunday for parts of south Beirut where it is targeting Hezbollah militants, hours after the Iran-backed group said it fired on several Israeli military bases around the coastal city of Haifa.

Israel ordered residents of three areas in the capital's southern suburbs to leave ahead of planned strikes on multiple buildings, in a warning published on X by military spokesman Avichay Adraee.

Further south, overnight Israeli airstrikes and artillery shelling hit the flashpoint southern town of Khiam, some six kilometres (four miles) from the border, Lebanon's state-run National News Agency reported early Sunday.

The bombardment came after Israel's military reported a "heavy rocket barrage" on Haifa late Saturday and said a synagogue was hit, wounding two civilians.

Israel has escalated its bombing of Lebanon since September 23 and has since sent in ground troops, following almost a year of limited, cross-border exchanges of fire begun by Iran-backed Hezbollah militants in support of Hamas in Gaza.

In the Palestinian territory, where Hamas's attack on Israel triggered the war, the civil defence agency reported 24 people killed in strikes Saturday.

Security services in Israel said two flares landed near Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's residence in the town of Caesarea, south of Haifa, but he was not home.

The incident comes about a month after a drone targeted the

same residence, which Hezbollah claimed.

Israel's military chief said Saturday Hezbollah had already "paid a big price", but Israel will keep fighting until tens of thousands of its residents displaced from the north can return safely.

AFPTV footage showed fresh strikes Saturday on the southern suburbs of Beirut, a Hezbollah stronghold, after Israel's military told residents to leave.

The Israeli military said aircraft had targeted "a weapons storage facility" and a Hezbollah "command centre".

Hezbollah fired around 80 projectiles at Israel on Saturday, the military said.

– Lebanon rescuers mourned –

Israeli forces also shelled the area along the Litani River, which flows across southern Lebanon, NNA said Sunday.

The agency earlier reported strikes on the southern city of Tyre, including in a neighbourhood near UNESCO-listed ancient ruins. Israel's military late Saturday said it had hit Hezbollah facilities in the Tyre area.

In Lebanon's east, the health ministry said an Israeli strike in the Bekaa Valley killed six people including three children.

Hezbollah said it fired a guided missile that set an Israeli tank ablaze in the southwest Lebanon village of Shamaa, about five kilometres from the border.

Late Saturday, Hezbollah said it had targeted five military bases including the Stella Maris naval base.

In eastern Lebanon, funerals were held for 14 civil defence staff killed in an Israeli strike on Thursday.

“They weren’t involved with any (armed) party... they were just waiting to answer calls for help,” said Ali al-Zein, a relative of one of the dead.

Lebanese authorities say more than 3,452 people have been killed since October last year, with most casualties recorded since September.

Israel announced the death of a soldier in southern Lebanon, bringing to 48 the number killed fighting Hezbollah.

– Imminent famine –

In Hamas-run Gaza, the Israeli military said it had continued operations in the northern areas of Jabalia and Beit Lahia, the targets of an intense offensive since early October.

Israel said its renewed operations were aimed at stopping Hamas from regrouping.

A UN-backed assessment on November 9 warned famine was imminent in northern Gaza, amid the increased hostilities and a near-halt in food aid.

Israel has pushed back against a 172-page Human Rights Watch report this week that said its mass displacement of Gazans amounts to a “crime against humanity”, as well as findings from a UN Special Committee pointing warfare practices “consistent with the characteristics of genocide”.

A foreign ministry spokesman dismissed the HRW report as “completely false”, while the United States – Israel’s main military supplier – said accusations of genocide “are certainly unfounded”.

The Gaza health ministry on Saturday said the overall death toll in more than 13 months of war had reached 43,799.

The majority of the dead are civilians, according to ministry figures, which the United Nations considers reliable.

Hamas's October 7, 2023 attack that sparked the war resulted in the deaths of 1,206 people, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally of Israeli official figures.

– Tel Aviv protest –

Demonstrators in Tel Aviv on Saturday reiterated demands that the government reach a deal to free dozens of hostages still held in Gaza.

The protest came a week after mediator Qatar suspended its role until Hamas and Israel show "seriousness" in truce and hostage-release talks.

In a rare claim of responsibility for a strike on Syria, Israel said it had targeted the Islamic Jihad group on Thursday.

A statement from the group on Saturday confirmed that "prominent leader" Abdel Aziz Minawi and external relations chief Rasmi Yusuf Abu Issa had been killed in the air raid on Qudsaya, in the Damascus area.

Islamic Jihad still holds several Israeli hostages taken during the October 7 attack.

Hamas, Hezbollah and Islamic Jihad are all backed by Israel's arch-enemy Iran, which said Friday it supported a swift end to the nearly two-month war in Lebanon.

With diplomacy aimed at ending the Gaza war stalled, a top government official in Beirut said Friday that US ambassador Lisa Johnson had presented a 13-point proposal to halt the Israel-Hezbollah conflict.

It includes a 60-day truce, during which Lebanon would deploy troops to the border. Israel has yet to respond to the plan, the official added.

Reports: AFP