

# War spirals with fresh strikes

Fresh strikes and retaliatory attacks push widening conflict across Middle East and beyond

● Israel strikes damage Tehran buildings, vehicles

● Iran expands regional attacks

● Global powers drawn into conflict

● Energy markets face disruption

● Strait of Hormuz shipping drops

● Civilian and military casualties rise

● Drone hits Azerbaijan airport, threatens retaliation

● At least 1,230 killed in Iran since Saturday

● Tourism devastated across Middle East

● Australia deploys aircraft, Canada considers involvement

AFP | Tehran

Israel yesterday launched a fresh wave of strikes on Iran, which stepped up its attacks on Gulf nations, as the Middle East war spread throughout the region and beyond.

A conflict sparked Saturday with US-Israeli attacks on Iran that killed supreme leader Ayatollah



Mourners in the city of Kashan attend the funeral of those killed in the US-Israeli war with Iran

tollah Ali Khamenei has rapidly escalated, engulfing the region and drawing in global powers, while snarling shipping and energy markets.

The war has touched as far afield as the Sri Lankan coast, where a US submarine torpedoed an Iranian warship, and Azerbaijan, which threatened retaliation after a drone hit an airport.

Azerbaijan warned the attack "will not go unanswered" and vowed "necessary retaliatory measures," raising fears of another country entering the fray.

On another front, Tehran said it had hit Iraq-based Kurdish groups, as the United States reportedly seeks to arm Iranian Kurdish groups to infiltrate Iran.

Australia deployed two military aircraft to the theatre while Canada's Prime Minister Mark Carney said he could not rule out his armed forces taking part in hostilities.

The war has also dragged in NATO member Turkey after alliance air defences destroyed a missile launched from Iran heading towards Turkish airspace.

While a Turkish official said the missile appeared to have been aimed at a British base in Cyprus, Turkey summoned the Iranian ambassador over the incident.

### 'I'm not afraid'

Following yesterday's strikes on Tehran, AFPTV images showed blackened vehicles and mangled buildings, with smoke still rising from some.

A 30-year-old Tehran resident told AFP: "We're going through a very important page of our history and I'm not afraid."

"Hope is the only thing that we have right now."

An Iranian state-run foundation said the death toll from US and Israeli strikes on the Islamic republic has risen to 1,230, a toll AFP could not independently verify.

Iranian media reported yesterday that a sports complex, football stadium, municipality building and shop fronts across Tehran were damaged in Israeli and US strikes on the city.

Israel's Defence Minister Israel Katz said his US counterpart

Pete Hegseth had assured him of Washington's firm backing for their joint military campaign against Iran and urged him to continue the operation "to the end".

### 'Catastrophic'

The war could usher in a "prolonged period of flux" for the global economy, warned International Monetary Fund chief Kristalina Georgieva.

Iran's powerful Revolutionary Guards have claimed the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, the Gulf chokepoint through which a fifth of the world's crude oil flows, with oil tanker transits down 90 percent, according to market intelligence firm Kpler.

A tanker in the waters off Kuwait suffered a "large explosion" that caused an oil spill, the British maritime security agency UK-MTO reported.

According to Iranian state TV, Iran struck a US oil tanker in the Gulf with a missile, an incident that could not immediately be independently confirmed.

Facing energy shortages, South Korea said it was activating a \$68-billion market stabilisation fund, while China reportedly told oil refiners to stop exporting diesel and gasoline.

With flights scrapped and travellers stranded or hastily repatriated, the war is also hammering tourism in a region that has become a prized destination for holidaymakers worldwide.

"My last group of tourists left three days ago, and all the other groups planned for March have been cancelled," said Nazih Rawashdeh, a tour guide near Irbid, in northern Jordan.

"This is the start of the high season here. It's catastrophic," he said.

## Italy to send air-defense aid to Gulf countries: PM

AFP | Rome

Italy will send air-defense assistance to Gulf countries hit by Iranian strikes launched in retaliation for US-Israeli attacks, Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni said yesterday.

Separately, Defense Minister Guido Crosetto told parliament yesterday that Italy would send, along with France, Spain, and the Netherlands, naval assets to defend EU member Cyprus "in coming days."

In an interview with RTL 102.5 radio, Meloni said "Italy, like the UK, France and Germany, intends to send aid to the Gulf countries."

"We are clearly talking about defense, air defense, not just because they are friendly nations but because there are tens of thousands of Italians in that area and around 2,000 Italian soldiers that we must protect," she added.

## Israel tells Beirut suburb to evacuate

● Hezbollah stronghold Dahiyeh sees mass exodus

● 72 killed, 437 wounded since Monday

AFP | Beirut

Israel issued an unprecedented evacuation warning yesterday for the entirety of Beirut's southern suburbs, a stronghold of Hezbollah, sending residents in the district of hundreds of thousands of people fleeing in a panic.

Lebanon was dragged into the conflict on Monday, when the Iran-backed armed group Hezbollah attacked Israel to avenge the killing of Iranian supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in the US-Israeli strikes that launched the war.

Israel responded with air



People gather amid the debris of a destroyed building following airstrikes in Beirut's southern suburbs of Ghoibeiry neighbourhood

strikes and sent ground troops into some Lebanese border villages, and told residents of a large area of south Lebanon to leave in anticipation of military operations there.

In a message to the residents of Beirut's southern suburbs, known as Dahiyeh, an Israeli military spokesman said: "Save your lives and evacuate your residences immediately."

Such warnings typically foreshadow large-scale attacks, and massive traffic jams formed on the outskirts of the suburbs, as people fired guns in the air, urging locals to leave as soon as possible.

Earlier in the day, Israel said its forces had hit "several command centres belonging to the Hezbollah terrorist organisation" in south Beirut.

Lebanese authorities say at least 72 people have been killed, 437 wounded and 83,000 displaced from their homes since Monday.