

Lebanon says at least five dead as Israel pounds south

AFP | Beirut, Lebanon

Lebanese official media reported extensive Israeli strikes across the country's south yesterday as the health ministry said at least five people were killed and the war's overall toll rose to 2,055 dead.

Israel says the fragile Middle East ceasefire does not apply to its battle with the Iran-backed Hezbollah group and has kept up its attacks on the country, while the militants fight back.

The state-run National News Agency (NNA) reported Israel attacks on around 30 locations in the country's south on Sunday, with additional strikes on the adjacent West Bekaa area.

The health ministry said an Israeli strike on Qana killed five people, including three women, and wounded 25 others, while the NNA said the raid targeted "homes and infrastructure".

An AFP photographer in the southern town saw huge destruction as an excavator worked to clear debris and first responders carried a body out from under the rubble.

The ministry raised the overall toll in Lebanon to 2,055 dead, including 165 children and 87 health workers, since war erupted on March 2.

Pope Leo XIV, who visited Lebanon late last year, ex-



An excavator clears the rubble of destroyed buildings from the site of an Israeli strike that targeted the southern Lebanese village of Qana

pressed his closeness to the Lebanese people on Sunday and said there was a "moral obligation to protect the civilian population from the atrocious effects of war".

In south Lebanon's Bazuriyeh, Hassan Berro, a rescue worker from the Risala Scout association -- which is affiliated with the Hezbollah-allied Amal movement -- said: "Our emergency centre was hit and completely destroyed, along with all its contents, including beds and

medical equipment."

The AFP photographer saw windows shattered and debris covering several hospital beds in the building, where walls and ceilings were also damaged.

Hezbollah said it launched attacks on Israeli targets across the border and inside Lebanon, including against troops in the southern town of Bint Jbeil, where the NNA reported heavy fighting.

Israel's army on Sunday accused Hezbollah of using the

town's hospital compound "for military purposes".

Officials from Lebanon, Israel and the United States are due to hold direct talks in Washington on Tuesday, a move Hezbollah has rejected.

Commenting on the planned talks, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Saturday that "we want the dismantling of Hezbollah's weapons, and we want a real peace agreement that will last for generations".

Police say over 500 arrested at pro-Palestinian rally in London



An elderly man (C) is escorted away by police as protesters gather to call for the lifting of the ban on the Palestine Action group during a demonstration in Trafalgar Square in central London

AFP | London, United Kingdom

Police in London said they had arrested more than 500 pro-Palestinian protesters at a demonstration in support of the banned group Palestine Action on Saturday.

Officers carried away activists to cheers and clapping from other demonstrators who gathered for the sit-down demonstration in the capital's Trafalgar Square.

The protesters held placards in support of the banned group Palestine Action, making them liable for arrest.

London's Metropolitan Police said on social media platform X just before midnight that they had arrested 523 people aged between 18 and 87.

Palestine Action was proscribed as a terrorist organisation in July, making it a criminal offence to belong to or

support the group, punishable by up to 14 years in prison.

The High Court in London upheld a challenge to the ban in mid-February, saying it had interfered with the right to freedom of speech.

The government has been granted leave to appeal against the decision.

London's Metropolitan Police paused arrests in the wake of the High Court ruling before announcing in late March that they would resume.

"It's really important to continue to show up," said Freya, 28, manager of a London environmental organisation, one of those sitting towards the front of the crowd of protesters.

"It's important that we all continue to oppose genocide... The government might flip-flop in their legal argument but the morals of these people (here) do not change," she said.

Pope says he is 'closer than ever' to Lebanese people

AFP | Vatican City, Holy See

Pope Leo XIV expressed his closeness to the people of Lebanon yesterday, saying there was a "moral obligation" to protect them while calling on warring parties to seek peace.

"I am closer than ever, in these days of sorrow, fear, and unconquerable hope in God, to the beloved Lebanese people,"



the pope told the crowd at St Peter's Square following his Regina Coeli prayer.

"The principle of humanity, inscribed in the conscience of every person and recognised in international law, entails the moral obligation to protect the civilian population from the atrocious effects of war," he said.

As he has done in the past,

without citing names, the American pope called on the parties involved to seek a peaceful resolution.

The comments from the 70-year-old pontiff came as Iran and the United States failed to strike a deal during talks in Pakistan to end the war in the Middle East.

On Saturday during a prayer for peace, the soft-spoken Leo

made one of his most pointed criticisms yet of the war, imploring leaders to end the violence.

"Stop! It is time for peace! Sit at the table of dialogue and mediation, not at the table where rearmament is planned and deadly actions are decided!" he said.

"Enough of the idolatry of self and money! Enough of the dis-

play of power! Enough of war!"

The leader of the world's 1.4 billion Catholics has repeatedly urged de-escalation in the current US-Israeli war on Iran and a need for a diplomatic solution.

On Monday, the pope heads to Algeria for the start of an 11-day tour in Africa where he will bring a message of bridge-building with the Islamic world.

Legendary Indian singer Asha Bhosle dies aged 92

● Two-time Grammy nominee Bhosle breathed her last at the Breach Candy hospital where she was admitted with complaints of "extreme exhaustion" and chest infection.

AFP | Mumbai, India

Legendary Indian playback singer Asha Bhosle, whose voice defined Bollywood music through the 1970s and 80s, died Sunday in Mumbai aged 92, her family said.

Two-time Grammy nominee Bhosle breathed her last at the Breach Candy hospital where she was admitted with complaints of "extreme exhaustion" and chest infection.

"My mother passed away today (Sunday). Her last rites will be held tomorrow at Shivaji Park



Bollywood playback singer Asha Bhosle attends a press conference in Mumbai on August 8, 2023, to announce her 90th Live concert in Dubai.

in Mumbai," her son Anand Bhosle told reporters.

Bhosle recorded more than 12,000 songs in multiple Indian languages over a seven-decade career.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi said he was "deeply saddened" by her death.

"Her extraordinary musical journey, spanning decades, enriched our cultural heritage and touched countless hearts across the world," he said in a post on X. "She will continue to inspire generations and her songs will forever echo in people's lives."

Born on September 8, 1933 to a musical family, Bhosle began singing as a child alongside her elder sister, Lata Mangeshkar, after their father's death.

Often compared to Mangeshkar -- revered as "India's nightingale" who died in 2022 -- Bhosle forged her own path, embracing genres from pop to folk.

Her early life was marked by struggle, including a turbulent marriage at 16.

She went on to become one of Indian cinema's most versatile and celebrated voices, receiving the prestigious Dadasaheb Phalke Award in 2001 and earning two Grammy nominations.

Bhosle continued collaborating with global artists well into her later years, including a recent feature on British virtual band Gorillaz's album *The Mountain* ("Parvat").

Beyond music, she nurtured her passion for food, launching her "Asha's" restaurant chain in Dubai and Britain.



Asha Bhosle has recorded over 11,000 songs in more than 20 languages, making her one of the most recorded artists in music history.