

# Israel says struck Syrian army camps after Druze 'attacked'

AFP | Jerusalem

Israel's military said yesterday it had struck Syrian army camps in response to what it called attacks against the Druze community in the southern Sweida province, with the Syrian foreign ministry calling it "an outrageous assault".

The Israeli strikes came as war roiled the Middle East after the US and Israel attacked Iran on February 28 sparking a war that has engulfed much of the region.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) reported on Thursday that clashes broke out between government forces backed by tribal fighters against Druze factions in Sweida province, leaving at least four Druze fighters dead.

The shelling later hit residential neighbourhoods in the city of Sweida, sowing panic and fear among residents, the Observatory said.

"Overnight, the IDF struck a headquarters and weapons at Syrian regime military camps in southern Syria," the Israeli military said.

"This was in response to yesterday's events, in which Druze civilians were attacked in the (Sweida) area. The IDF will not allow harm to come to Druze in Syria and will continue to act for their protection."

The Syrian foreign ministry denounced it as "an outrageous assault on Syria's sovereignty



Lorries carrying army tanks drive along a road near the border with Lebanon in the Upper Galilee in northern Israel

and territorial integrity" and called the Israeli justification "flimsy pretexts and fabricated excuses".

The attack, it said, "constitutes an extension of the escalation policy pursued by the Israeli occupation, and a continuation of the policy of interference in internal affairs with the aim of undermining security and stability".

Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz said in a statement that "we will not allow the Syr-

ian regime to exploit our war against Iran and Hezbollah to harm the Druze. If necessary, we will strike with even greater force".

Clashes erupted last July in southern Syria between Druze fighters and Sunni Bedouin tribes.

The Syrian authorities said their forces intervened to stop the clashes, but witnesses and monitors accused them of siding with the Bedouin.

Israel bombed Syria during

the violence, saying it was acting to defend the minority group.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the fighting left more than 2,000 people dead, including 789 Druze civilians who were "summarily executed by defence and interior ministry personnel".

An official fact-finding committee the government later formed said on Tuesday it had documented the killing of 1,760 people.

The committee announced



Israel has conducted hundreds of strikes in Syria since Assad's fall in 2024, expanding operations even into the UN-monitored demilitarised zone on the Golan Heights

that it had drawn up "a list of suspects from the (Ministries of) Defence and Interior, Druze factions, and civilians -- including Bedouins and tribes -- for serious crimes and violations".

After the overthrow of Syria's longtime ruler Bashar al-Assad in December 2024, Israel moved its forces into the UN-patrolled demilitarised zone on the Israeli-annexed Golan Heights, and has carried out hundreds of strikes in Syria as well as regular incursions.

Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa said yesterday that he was working "to keep Syria away from any conflict," saying that his government is on good terms "with all neighbouring states regionally, as well as internationally".

## Mideast war forces NATO to shift Iraq mission to Europe

AFP | Brussels

NATO's mission in Iraq has been fully relocated to Europe because of the Middle East war, the alliance said, with the last staff from a non-combat force of several hundred leaving the country yesterday.

The mission was in an Iraqi military base in Baghdad's Green Zone near the US embassy, which has been targeted several times since the start of the US-Israeli war with Iran three weeks ago.

A statement from the alliance's European command said: "NATO Mission Iraq has adjusted its posture, safely relocating all its personnel from the Middle East to Europe."

NATO's mission in Iraq provides assistance, advice and training to the Iraqi security forces involved in counter-jihadist operations, aiming in particular to prevent any resurgence of the Islamic State (IS) militant group.

The mission will continue to operate from NATO's regional command in the Italian city of Naples, the alliance said.

General Alexis Grynkewich, Supreme Allied Commander Europe, offered thanks to the Iraqi government and allies "who assisted in the safe relocation of NATO personnel from Iraq."

## Action star Chuck Norris dead at 86: family



Actor Chuck Norris speaks with the media during a press meet (file photo)

AFP | Los Angeles

Chuck Norris, the US martial artist and Hollywood action star most famous for his role in "Walker, Texas Ranger," has died, his family said yesterday. He was 86.

"It is with heavy hearts that our family shares the sudden passing of our beloved Chuck Norris yesterday morning," the family said in a statement on Instagram.

"To the world, he was a martial artist, actor, and a symbol of strength. To us, he was a devoted husband, a loving father and grandfather, an incredible brother, and the heart of our family."

US media reported Thursday that Norris had been hospitalized for an undisclosed

condition while on the island of Kauai, several days after he celebrated his 86th birthday with a video of him boxing on social media and saying "I don't age. I level up."

In the statement, the family said it would like to keep the details of his passing private, adding "please know that he was surrounded by his family and was at peace."

The martial arts expert turned actor starred in a slew of action films since his acting debut with a cameo in a 1968 Dean Martin film "The Wrecking Crew."

Four years later, his epic fight with the kung-fu superstar Bruce Lee in "The Way of The Dragon" helped turn Norris into an icon on big and small screen alike.

## NASA returns moon rocket to pad, eyeing April 1 launch

AFP | Cape Canaveral

NASA on Thursday began returning its towering SLS rocket and Orion spacecraft to its Florida launch pad ahead of a planned flyby of the Moon, after completing necessary repairs.

Artemis engineers began the maneuver, which can take up to 12 hours, at 8:00 pm eastern, after which the US space agency will begin final preparations before its next launch window opens on April 1.

The immense orange and white Space Launch System rocket and the Orion vessel



NASA's Artemis II SLS rocket and Orion spacecraft, secured to the mobile launcher, stands vertical inside the Vehicle Assembly building

were to be slowly wheeled out of the Vehicle Assembly Building at the Kennedy Space Center in Florida, and painstakingly moved four miles (6.5 kilometers) to Launch Pad 39B.

If the tests are satisfactory, three Americans and one Canadian will head to the Moon as soon as early April to fly around Earth's satellite.

The mission, to last about 10 days, would be a huge step towards Americans once again setting foot on the lunar surface, a goal announced by President Donald Trump in his first term.

## North Korean leader, daughter try out new tank

AFP | Seoul

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and daughter Ju Ae tried out the country's new battle tank in large-scale military drills, state media reported yesterday, in the latest sign that she was being groomed as his heir.

Photos released by state media showed a chuffed-looking Kim sitting on top of the moving tank in his trademark leather jacket as the teenage Ju Ae's head popped out of a hatch during the exercises on Thursday.

The drills at the Pyongyang Training Base No. 60 involved armoured units firing anti-tank missiles while rear sub-units



North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and his daughter Kim Ju Ae boarding a tank

targeted simulated enemy the way for infantry and tanks, drones and helicopters, clearing the Korean Central News Agen-

cy said.

According to KCNA, the tank possesses advanced mobility, firepower, and defensive systems, including protection against missiles and drones.

"Watching with great pleasure the tanks violently make a charge, shaking the earth, he (Kim) expressed satisfaction that the majestic scene of tanks imposingly advancing forward represents the inherent bravery and pluck of our army," the agency reported.

The drill comes amid heightened regional tensions, following recent North Korean missile tests and just-concluded springtime military exercises by South Korea and the United States.