

Lebanon says Israeli strikes kill five as Hezbollah claims new attacks

Hezbollah launches new wave of attacks targeting Israeli military sites amid heavy bombardment

● Hezbollah targets Tel Aviv defense complex

● Over a million people now displaced

AFP | Beirut

Israeli strikes on Lebanon killed at least five people on Thursday, Lebanese state media said, as Hezbollah claimed they had staged a new wave of attacks on Israel.

The Israeli military announced, meanwhile, the killing of a soldier in fighting in south Lebanon, raising to three the total number of troops killed since Hezbollah drew Lebanon into war with Israel.

Hezbollah began firing rockets into Israel on March 2 to avenge the killing of supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei of Iran, the movement's backer.

Israel has since launched a sustained campaign of bombardment focused mostly, but not solely, on areas where Hezbollah has long held sway, while also sending ground troops across the border in a push to establish a buffer zone by reoccupying swathes of south Lebanon.

According to Lebanon's National News Agency, a strike on a building in the Nabatieh area of south Lebanon killed two



First aid responders are seen at the site of an Israeli airstrike that targeted the southern Lebanese village of Kfar Roummane

people.

Images showed a badly damaged building and smoke rising from the rubble, while rescue workers and firefighters worked at the scene.

Another strike in the border area of Bint Jbeil killed another three people, the agency said.

On Wednesday, Lebanon's

health ministry said Israeli strikes had killed 1,094 people since the start of the war, 121 of them children, and wounded more than 3,000 others.

A million displaced

With swathes of Lebanon under evacuation warnings, more than a million people have fled

their homes.

On Thursday, the Israeli military said it had killed 700 Hezbollah since the start of the war, though the movement has not announced its casualties.

With Israel pressing its bid to crush Hezbollah, the group claimed a new round of attacks against it.



Israel pushes to create a buffer zone by reoccupying southern Lebanon, while Hezbollah rejects negotiations under fire as "surrender" amid Iran's ambassador expulsion row

The group said it had targeted a defence ministry complex in Tel Aviv, as well as other military objectives in northern Israel.

Hezbollah also said it had fired rockets in Lebanon's Khiam, scene of fierce fighting between Israeli troops and the armed group.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Wednesday that his country's forces were expanding a "buffer zone" in southern Lebanon, adding that dismantling Hezbollah "remains central" to Israel's objectives in Lebanon.

Egypt's Foreign Minister Badr Abdelatty announced on a visit to Beirut on Thursday the delivery of 1,000 tonnes of humani-

1,094

Lebanese have been killed since war's start, including 121 children, per health ministry figures

tarian aid, while calling for the immediate cessation of what he called Israel's "aggression".

UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres also called for an end to the war.

"Hezbollah must stop launching attacks into Israel. And Israel must stop its military operations and strikes in Lebanon, which are hitting civilians the hardest," he said. "The Gaza model must not be replicated in Lebanon."

On Wednesday, Hezbollah chief Naim Qassem said any negotiations with Israel under fire would amount to "surrender", as he called on Lebanon's authorities to rethink their decision to "criminalise" his group's military activities.

Hezbollah and its Shia Muslim ally Amal condemned the government's decision to declare Iran's ambassador persona non grata, while movements aligned with the groups called for a sit-in to support the envoy Thursday afternoon.

Russian oil arrives as Philippines battles 'energy emergency'



A fisherman paddles before the Sierra Leone-flagged Sara Sky, which is carrying crude oil from Russia, anchored at Limay port, Bataan province

AFP | Manila

A ship carrying more than 700,000 barrels of Russian crude oil has arrived in the Philippines, a source with knowledge of the matter said yesterday, days after the country declared a national energy emergency over the Middle East war.

The Sierra Leone-flagged Sara Sky, bearing high-quality crude from Russia's ESPO pipeline arrived on Monday, with documents showing the consignee as Petron Corp, operator of the Philippines' sole oil

refinery, said the source, who asked to remain anonymous as they were not authorised to speak to press.

The Philippines is heavily dependent on imported fuel, the cost of which has hit historic highs since the US-Israeli war with Iran forced the partial closure of the Strait of Hormuz.

The Sara Sky was seen at anchor in Limay port just outside Manila, where the Petron refinery is located. It is believed to be the first shipment of Russian oil to the Philippines in five years.

North Korea, Belarus sign 'friendship' treaty during Lukashenko visit

AFP | Seoul

North Korea and Belarus's strongmen leaders signed a "friendship and cooperation" treaty on Thursday after Kim Jong Un gave a lavish welcome to President Alexander Lukashenko on his maiden visit.

Besides supporting Russia's war against Ukraine -- around 2,000 North Korean soldiers are thought to have been killed -- both nations are subject to Western sanctions and are accused of gross human rights violations.

Belarusian state media showed Kim and Lukashenko hugging at a lavish welcome programme on Wednesday involving an artillery salute and goose-stepping soldiers before a large flag-waving crowd at Kim Il Sung Square.

Kim "gladly" met and "warmly" welcomed Lukashenko at the start of the two-day visit, the Korean Central News Agency reported, which followed a meeting last year in Beijing.

Lukashenko said the "friendly relations between our countries, which date back to the days of the Soviet Union, have never been interrupted", according to Belarusian state media BelTA.

"Today, as a result of comprehensive and steady development, we are entering a funda-



Belarus' President Alexander Lukashenko and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un greet each other during a welcoming ceremony

mentally new phase," he added. Lukashenko visited the Kumsusan Palace of the Sun -- where Kim's embalmed father and grandfather lie in state -- to pay his respects, flanked by top North Korean officials, the report said.

Lukashenko, who has ruled

Belarus since 1994 and has swung firmly behind Moscow since the start of the Ukraine war in 2022, laid a bouquet on behalf of Russian President Vladimir Putin.

The world's "powerful" are "openly ignoring and violating the norms of international law",

Lukashenko said, according to BelTA, in apparent reference to the United States and Israel.

Independent countries must therefore cooperate more closely to "protect their sovereignty and improve the well-being of our citizens", he added.

In another event, Lukashenko laid a wreath at the Liberation Tower and observed a moment of silence with Kim "in memory of the fallen fighters of the Soviet Army who dedicated their precious lives to the sacred war for Korea's liberation", KCNA said, referring to the end of Japanese colonial rule in 1945 at the close of World War II.

Multipolar Belarus and North Korea are part of a push driven by Chinese President Xi Jinping and Putin to create what they call a "multipolar world" to break Western hegemony.

They have provided Moscow assistance in its Ukraine war, with Minsk serving as a launchpad for the invasion and Moscow stationing tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus.

South Korean and Western intelligence agencies have estimated that the North has sent thousands of soldiers to Russia, primarily to the Kursk region, along with artillery shells, missiles and rocket systems.