

Hezbollah says clashed with Israeli forces in two south Lebanon villages

Israel pushes deeper as Hezbollah battles intensify and civilian toll rises sharply

● Hezbollah reports direct ground clashes

● Fighting in Bayada and Shamaa villages

● Fighting in Bayada and Shamaa villages

AFP | Beirut

Hezbollah said yesterday its fighters had clashed directly with Israeli forces in two south Lebanon villages, as Israeli airstrikes on several areas killed at least six people, according to the health ministry.

Lebanon was pulled into the Middle East war when Tehran-backed armed group Hezbollah fired rockets towards Israel on March 2 to avenge the US-Israeli killing of Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Israel has responded with large-scale airstrikes on Lebanon and a ground offensive in the south.

In a statement, Hezbollah said its fighters had clashed with "Israeli enemy army forces in the villages of Bayada and Shamaa at point-blank range with light and medium weapons," while



United Nations peacekeepers with the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) drive past firefighters clearing the road at the site of an overnight Israeli airstrike in the area of Naqura in southern Lebanon

also claiming responsibility for attacks on Israeli border towns and positions.

The coastal village of Bayada, adjacent to Shamaa, lies eight kilometres from the border with Israel.

Israeli forces are pushing into numerous towns in southern

Lebanon, with officials saying they aim to create a security zone reaching the Litani River, some 30 kilometres from the border, to push Hezbollah back and protect northern Israeli communities.

Yesterday, Israel launched a series of airstrikes on several

areas, particularly in southern Lebanon, according to Lebanese state media.

One of the strikes, on the town of Saksakiyeh in the Sidon district, killed "four civilians and wounded eight others," in an initial toll reported by the health ministry.



Israeli army soldiers stand next to a self-propelled Howitzer artillery gun positioned in the upper Galilee in northern Israel near the border with southern Lebanon

At dawn, Israel had targeted the Tahouit al-Ghadir area in Beirut's southern suburbs without prior warning, killing two people, according to the health ministry.

Israeli army spokesperson Efrat Defrin said yesterday that "Contrary to the declaration by the Lebanese government earlier this year - Hezbollah is still operating and conducting attacks from southern Lebanon."

"If the Lebanese government will not disarm Hezbollah, the IDF (army) will," he said.

After nearly four weeks of war between Hezbollah and Israel, Nicolas Von Arx, region-

al director of the International Committee of the Red Cross, warned yesterday that "the humanitarian situation is worsening and civilians, as usual, are paying the highest price" in Lebanon.

After meeting Lebanese President Joseph Aoun, he said, "Civilians must be protected wherever they are, whether they remain in their homes or are forced to flee".

According to the authorities, the war has forced more than one million people to flee their homes, and more than a thousand people have been killed since the conflict began.

US Senate moves to end airport chaos



A TSA agent looks on as people wait in line to go through security at LaGuardia airport

AFP | Washington

The US Senate moved yesterday to end a budget standoff that has forced thousands of airport security staff to work without pay and caused long delays at airports.

A lapse in government funding has left Transportation Security Administration (TSA) staff -- who screen passengers, baggage and cargo -- working without pay since mid-February.

Airports in several cities have warned travelers to arrive hours earlier than usual because of long security lines.

The funding dispute centered on demands by opposition Democrats for reforms of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) authority, which has faced nationwide

criticism of its aggressive tactics against undocumented immigrants and for the killings of two US citizens this year.

Senators voted in favor of a bill shortly after 2:00 am (0600GMT) to fund all of Department of Homeland Security (DHS) -- which is the TSA's parent agency -- except ICE and Border Patrol, for 2026.

The bill would provide funding for the TSA, the Coast Guard and the Federal Emergency Management Agency, among other agencies.

It must now be passed by the House.

More than 300 TSA staff have quit and unscheduled absences have surged since the shutdown began, leading to extended travel delays and airports struggling to screen travelers.

Nepali rapper Shah sworn in as prime minister

AFP | Kathmandu

Nepal's rapper-turned-politician Balendra Shah was sworn in as prime minister yesterday after sweeping the first election since deadly anti-corruption protests toppled the government last year.

The 35-year-old reformist and his Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) dominated polls this month on a platform of youth-driven political change.

"I, Balendra Shah, in the name of the country and people, pledge that I will be loyal to the constitution," Shah said, dressed all in black, including his trademark dark



Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) leader Balendra Shah (2nd R) takes oath as prime minister during a swearing-in ceremony in Kathmandu

sunglasses.

Crowds at the ceremony cheered and chanted his name after he formally took office, where he named key cabinet posts, including former youth activist Sudan Gurung as interior minister.

At least 77 people were killed in the anti-corruption youth uprising, which began over a brief social media ban but tapped into longstanding fury over economic hardship in the nation of 30 million people.

Shah, better known as Balen, was sworn in a day after he released his first public statement since winning the March 5 elections, via a rap song posted on social media.

Mexico searches for missing boats ferrying aid to Cuba

AFP | Mexico City

The Mexican Navy was searching yesterday for two boats that went missing while transporting humanitarian aid to crisis-hit Cuba, authorities and the convoy organizers said.

The vessels set sail last Friday from Isla Mujeres in Mexico's southeastern state of Quintana Roo, with nine crew of different nationalities on board, Mexico's navy said Thursday in a statement.

But communication with the crew was lost, it added.

The Nuestra America Convoy said earlier that it would use



Mexican Navy ARM Papaloapan prepares to assist the boat Maguro, part of the Convoy with 30 tons of humanitarian aid bound for Cuba

air, land and sea to deliver food, medicine and supplies to the communist island which has risked being plunged into darkness since US President Donald Trump vowed in January to starve it of oil.

"Mexican authorities have activated their search and rescue protocol for two sailboats en route to Havana as part of the Convoy, which have not yet arrived," a spokesperson for the convoy told AFP.

"The captains and crews are experienced sailors, and both vessels are equipped with appropriate safety systems and signalling equipment," the spokesperson said.