

Israel launches airstrikes in Lebanon, Gaza Strip

International Desk

Israel conducted rare airstrikes in Lebanon and continued bombarding the Gaza Strip on Friday, an escalation that sparked fears of a broader conflict following violence over Israeli forces storming the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound and attacking Palestinian worshippers this week, AP reported.

Israeli jets hit sites in Lebanon and Gaza early on Friday, in retaliation for rocket attacks it blamed on Hamas.

Two explosions were heard in Gaza late on Thursday.

AFP reported at least three explosions in southern Lebanon's Tyre region with at least two shells falling near a Palestinian refugee camp near Tyre city. One missile fell on a farmer's house near the camp, causing material damage, an AFP correspondent in the area said. Al-Manar reported that the shelling had targeted three areas in southern Lebanon, including the refugee camp area.

Tensions are remaining high in Al-Quds since Israeli forces attacked worshippers in the al-Aqsa Mosque compound overnight on Wednesday, during the holy month of Ramadan. The raid on the sacred site left at least 12 Palestinians injured.

Clashes erupted between Palestinians and Israeli

forces when the occupation force's elite troops attacked worshippers at the Al-Aqsa Mosque in occupied Al-Quds; hundreds were injured and arrested, Press TV reported on Friday.

Dozens of heavily armed Israeli soldiers stormed the compound firing tear gas and stun grenades into the prayer hall where hundreds of men, women, elderly people, and children, were staying overnight to pray.

Two Israeli settlers killed

Amid heightened tensions across the occupied Palestinian territories, at least two Israeli settlers have been killed and another is seriously wounded after they came under a shooting attack in the northern part of the West Bank.

According to the Israeli ZAKA emergency service and local officials, the women were shot at near the illegal settlement of Hamra in the Jordan Valley on Friday. Two of the three settlers later succumbed to their gunshot wounds.

Meeting in Beirut

Meanwhile, as tensions are simmering across the occupied territories, the secretary-general of Lebanon's Hezbollah resistance movement met with a delegation of senior Hamas officials in Beirut.

Sayed Hassan Nasrallah met with notable deci-



sion-makers from the Gaza-based resistance movement, including Ismail Haniyeh, head of the political bureau of the group, Sheikh Saleh al-Aroui, deputy head of the Hamas' political bureau, and top officials Khalil al-Hayya and Osama Hamdan, according to Palestinian media outlets.

During their meeting, Nasrallah and the Hamas officials reviewed the latest political and field developments in Palestine, Lebanon and the Middle East, especially the recent confrontations in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and Al-Quds.

Nasrallah issued a warning

on Thursday to Israel over the regime's escalation at the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound.

"The resistance front has a high number of long-range missiles in its arsenal; but it is not using them at the moment.

"One of the options that resistance fighters would take in case Zionists commit a folly would be the launch of a significant number of ballistic missiles at sensitive Israeli centers," Nasrallah said.

The UN, Iran, Turkey and several other countries and bodies have expressed shock and concern about Israeli forces' incursions into the mosque.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres was "shocked and appalled" by images of Israeli security forces beating people at the al-Aqsa Mosque, his spokesman said on Wednesday.

Stephane Dujarric said Guterres viewed images of the "violence and beating" within the holy site, and found it more distressing because it came "at a time of a calendar which is holy to Jews, Christians and Muslims that should be a time for peace and non-violence."

"Places of worship should only be used for peaceful religious observances," he added.



Fire and smoke rise following an Israeli airstrike in recent Gaza Strip, on April 7, 2023.

● FATIMA SHBAIR/AP

NEWS IN BRIEF

China imposes sanctions on Taiwan's US envoy, US institutions



REUTERS - China imposed further sanctions on Hsiao Bi-khim, Taiwan's de facto ambassador to the US, prohibiting her and family members from entering the mainland, Hong Kong and Macau, state media reported on Friday.

The sanctions, announced by China's Taiwan Affairs Office, also ban investors and firms related to Hsiao from cooperating with mainland organisations and individuals. They come after Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen's meeting with US House Speaker Kevin McCarthy during a stopover in the US this week.

Americans divided over criminal charges against Trump: Poll



REUTERS - The prosecution of former President Donald Trump has evenly divided Americans but appears to have boosted his chances of winning the Republican nomination for the 2024 election, according to a Reuters/Ipsos poll released on Thursday.

Fresh protests hit France in pensions standoff

Hundreds of thousands of demonstrators took to the streets in nationwide protests in France Thursday against President Emmanuel Macron's pension reforms. The controversial reforms seek to raise the retirement age from 62 to 64, AFP reported.

French Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne on Friday said

the country needs "cooling off" after weeks of fierce clashes over Macron's pension reforms, apparently distancing herself from the inflexible president.

Divergence is rare between Macron and Borne, a career technocrat who regularly denies having further political ambitions.

"We have to give people

a rest. The country needs cooling off," Borne told media including daily Le Monde. After a meeting with worker representatives broke up without any progress Wednesday, she added that "the unions must not emerge humiliated" from the pensions battle.

"It's better to have calming words than stigmatising

words," Laurent Berger, head of France's largest union the CFDT, told broadcaster BFM on Friday morning.

Nevertheless, "if things are to be completely calmed down, this reform must be set aside" in line with demands from the united front of unions, he added.

In comments from Macron's multi-day state visit to Chi-

na this week, a source in the president's entourage had insisted the pension reform plan was democratically approved.

Opponents of the law were infuriated when the government last month used a constitutional provision to ram their changes through France's hung parliament without a vote.

Israel's regional desperation



Hanif Ghaffari
Middle East
affairs expert

EXCLUSIVE

As the foreign minister of Iran traveled to China and met with his Saudi Arabian counterpart in Beijing, Israel launched extensive attacks on the Gaza Strip and southern Lebanon while also arresting and injuring numerous Palestinians at Al-Aqsa Mosque. These seemingly disparate events are in fact interconnected, and comprehending their underlying implications requires accepting some assumptions.

Firstly, Israel considers the

maintenance of peace and stability in the Middle East region a danger to itself. The grand strategies of both Israel and the United States dictate that the components of peace and stability in the Middle East region must not be fortified. Consequently, they view any development that might disrupt this precarious balance with intense suspicion and hostility.

Secondly, Israel has been unequivocal in its opposition to the restoration of relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Israeli authorities had anticipated that the process of normalizing their relations with Arab countries could be employed as a means of

isolating Iran. However, the recent agreement between Tehran and Riyadh has left Israel feeling aggrieved and incensed.

Given these two assumptions, it is evident that Israel's recent attacks on southern Lebanon and the Gaza Strip, as well as its heightened bellicosity towards Iran, are a manifestation of its regional desperation. Israel views the establishment of peace and stability in the region as a direct threat to its strategic interests and is thus determined to undermine any development that could strengthen this trend.

Furthermore, Israel's recent actions serve a two-fold purpose: firstly, to di-

vert attention away from its internal conflicts and the surging tide of public protests, and secondly, to upset the balance of power that is gradually taking shape in the region as a result of the thaw in ties between Iran and Saudi Arabia. This new equilibrium promises to be conducive to the promotion of peace and stability in the region, which is a development that Israel finds deeply disconcerting.

However, the achievement of Israel's objectives depends on the presence of a stable and robust cabinet as well as effective coordination between politicians and top military brass. Such compo-

nents are lacking in Israel at present. The cabinet of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is in disarray, particularly in the aftermath of the protests against the judicial reform bill, and is plagued by a lack of coherence and stability. Furthermore, there are increasing differences among the members of the ruling coalition.

Moreover, there are growing tensions between the military and politicians in Israel. The military has participated actively in recent protests, siding with the demonstrators against the policies of the Netanyahu cabinet. As a result, Israel's prospects for achieving its goals are

bleak, and the attacks on southern Lebanon and the Gaza Strip represent the last-ditch efforts of the Netanyahu government to preserve its power and influence.

Many experts believe that the collapse of the coalition government ruling Israel is a distinct possibility. Netanyahu and his government are facing unprecedented challenges both domestically and regionally, and their desperation is palpable. It remains to be seen whether Israel will be able to weather these storms and emerge with its strategic interests intact — a possibility that seems to be remote.

Gunmen kill nearly 50 in Nigeria



AFP - Gunmen have attacked a rural village in northern central Nigeria, killing dozens of people, local government officials said on Friday. The attack happened on Wednesday in Umogidi community in Benue State, where tit-for-tat clashes are common between nomadic herders and settled farmers competing for land and resources.