

## Death toll in Israeli strikes on Syria climbs to 52

AFP, Beirut

The death toll in Israeli air strikes on Syria has risen to 52, including 38 government soldiers and seven members of Lebanon's Hezbollah movement, a war monitor said yesterday.

Friday's strikes fuelled concerns of a wider regional conflagration.

They targeted "a rocket depot belonging to Lebanon's Hezbollah" near the Aleppo airport in northern Syria, according to the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

It was the latest deadly raid on Iran-backed forces in Syria, where Hezbollah has been backing the government in its fight against opponents since the 2011 Syria civil war erupted.

Israeli strikes on targets in Syria have increased since Israel's war against the Hezbollah-allied Hamas group in the Gaza Strip broke out on October 7.

Israeli raids also regularly target Hezbollah in Lebanon in retaliation for cross-border fire.

Friday's strikes killed 38 Syrian soldiers, seven Hezbollah members and seven Syrian pro-Iran fighters, the Observatory said, up from a total of 44 according to an earlier toll.

The number of Syrian soldiers killed was the highest in Israeli strikes since the war with Hamas broke out, said the war monitor, which relies on a network of sources in Syria.

Israel rarely comments on individual strikes, and has neither confirmed nor denied the raids on Syria.



**A VESSEL OF HOPE:** A tugboat tows a barge loaded with 400 tonnes of humanitarian aid for Gaza, as seen from Larnaca, Cyprus, yesterday. It will be the second dispatch of aid via Cyprus, where Cypriot authorities have established, in cooperation with Israel, a maritime corridor to facilitate pre-screened cargoes arriving directly in the besieged Palestinian enclave.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## US agrees to send more bombs, warplanes to Israel

Say sources amid reports of rift in ties between two allies

REUTERS, Washington

The US in recent days authorised the transfer of billions of dollars worth of bombs and fighter jets to Israel, two sources familiar with the effort said on Friday, even as Washington publicly expresses concerns about an anticipated Israeli military offensive in Rafah.

The new arms packages include more than 1,800 MK84 2,000-pound bombs and 500 MK82 500-pound bombs, said the sources, who confirmed a report in the Washington Post.

Washington gives \$3.8 billion in annual military assistance to Israel, its longtime ally.

The package comes as Israel faces strong international criticism over

its continued bombing campaign and ground offensive in Gaza and as some members of President Joe Biden's party call for him to cut US military aid.

The United States has been rushing air defenses and munitions to Israel, but some Democrats and Arab American groups have criticized the Biden administration's steadfast support of Israel, which they say provides it with a sense of impunity.

Biden on Friday acknowledged "the pain being felt" by many Arab Americans over the war in Gaza and over US support for Israel and its military offensive.

Still, he has vowed continued support for Israel despite an increasingly public rift with

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

The White House declined comment on the weapons transfers.

The Israeli embassy in Washington did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The decision on weapons follows a visit to Washington by Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant this week when he discussed Israel's weapons needs with US counterparts.

Speaking to reporters on Tuesday, Gallant, apparently seeking to cool US-Israeli tensions, said he stressed the importance of US ties to his country's security and of maintaining Israel's "qualitative military edge" in the region, including its air capabilities.

## Shelling kills two in east Ukraine

AFP, Kyiv

Ukraine yesterday said that Russian shelling overnight and in the morning killed two elderly people in the eastern town of Krasnogradivka, and urged civilians still living there to evacuate.

Krasnogradivka lies directly on the frontline in the eastern Donetsk region, more than half of which is under the control of Russian forces and is an active combat zone.

"The town was under enemy fire during the night and morning. A 70-year-old woman and a 73-year-old man were killed," said Donetsk regional head Vadym Filashkin.

## UN: 4 peacekeepers hurt in Lebanon blast

AFP, Beirut

The United Nations said four of its military observers were wounded yesterday when a shell exploded near them in southern Lebanon, where Israel and the Hezbollah movement trade regular cross-border fire.

The United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) did not identify the source of the shelling but Lebanon's official National News Agency blamed Israel.

"This morning four UNTSO military observers on a foot patrol along the Blue Line (demarcating the border with Israel) were injured when a shell exploded near their location," UNTSO said.

"The targeting of peacekeepers is unacceptable," it said in a statement, adding that they were taken to hospital for treatment and an investigation launched into the origin of the explosion.

Israel has exchanged near-daily cross-border fire with Iran-backed Hezbollah since October when it launched an attack on Gaza.

### LUXURY WATCH PROBE

## Peru president's home raided

AFP, Lima



Peruvian authorities yesterday raided President Dina Boluarte's home as part of an ongoing corruption investigation related to undisclosed luxury watches.

According to a police document obtained by AFP, about 40 officials were involved in the raid, which was searching for Rolex watches that Boluarte had not publicly declared.

The raid "is for the purpose of search and seizure," police said.

The embattled president did not appear to be home at the time. Prime Minister Gustavo Adrianza slammed the raid as an "intolerable outrage" and "disproportionate and unconstitutional."

Authorities launched an investigation into Boluarte this month after a news outlet drew attention to pictures of her sporting luxury watches at public events.

The surprise, early-morning raid was requested by the public prosecutor and authorized by the Supreme Court of Preparatory Investigation.

## 3 Myanmar soldiers take refuge

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border of Whykong, Hnila, Sabrang and St Martin unions in Teknaf.

Locals frequently reported hearing explosions across the Naf River, but they had not heard any major gunfights in the last few days, he added.

On March 11, at least 179 members of Myanmar Border Guard Police took shelter in Bangladesh.

They are still under the custody of BGB in Naikhongchhari upazila.

Earlier, a total of 330 Myanmar nationals who crossed the border and

took shelter in Bangladesh to escape the fighting between the Myanmar junta and the Arakan Army were sent back to their country on February 15.

They included 302 BGP members, four BGP family members, two army personnel, 18 immigration members, and four civilians.

The Myanmar troops started fleeing to Bangladesh on February 4 as the fighting between the Myanmar junta and the Arakan Army escalated across the border at Bandarban and Cox's Bazar.

At least 68 -- of whom 15 were

bullet-hit -- took refuge in Bandarban on February 4. The rest entered Bangladesh in different dates till February 7.

The ongoing clashes between the Myanmar junta and the Arakan Army have caused tragic incidents on this side of the border as well.

A Bangladeshi woman and a Rohingya man were killed and a child was injured as a mortar shell from across the border in Myanmar exploded in Ghumdhum union of Bandarban's Naikhongchhari on February 5.

## 9,000 patients need emergency evacuation from Gaza: WHO

AFP, Geneva

Some 9,000 patients in the Gaza Strip require evacuation for emergency care, with the war-torn Palestinian territory down to just 10 barely functioning hospitals, the head of the WHO said Saturday.

"With only 10 hospitals minimally functional across the whole of #Gaza, thousands of patients continue to be deprived of health care," World Health Organization Director General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus wrote on X.

Before the war, Gaza had 36 hospitals, according to the WHO.

"Around 9,000 patients urgently need to be evacuated abroad for lifesaving health services, including treatment for cancer, injuries from bombardments, kidney dialysis and other chronic conditions," he said.

That is up from 8,000 in the WHO's previous assessment at the beginning of March.

Israel vowed to eliminate Hamas after the Islamist group's unprecedented October 7 attack on Israel, and has been bombing Gaza without respite, damaging many healthcare facilities.

Violent ground combat has also

been underway for weeks, sometimes around Gaza's hospitals, which are also providing refuge for thousands who have lost their homes or fled the fighting.

Gaza is subject to an almost complete blockade, and NGOs and the United Nations accuse Israel of preventing the delivery of humanitarian aid needed by the 2.4 million inhabitants who are mostly massed in Rafah at the territory's southern tip.

Israel has defended its policies as it pursues its stated goal of destroying Hamas, saying the UN should send more aid to Gaza, pushing back on reports by the UN and NGOs that cumbersome Israeli inspections are blocking food and other essentials.

The war began with Hamas's October 7 attack that resulted in about 1,160 deaths in Israel, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally of Israeli official figures.

Palestinian militants also seized about 250 hostages. Israel believes around 130 remain in Gaza, including 34 who are presumed dead.

Israel's retaliatory campaign has killed at least 32,705 people, mostly women and children, according to Gaza's Hamas-run health ministry.

### Shamsher Mobin

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Omar, Taimur Alam and Shamsher left the party under "tremendous pressure".

Asked to clarify what he meant by "pressure", Major Hafiz said everyone knew about it and that he would not talk about it.

Shamsher M Chowdhury, in a statement sent to The Daily Star, protested Major Hafiz's remark and said, "I left the BNP in 2015 and did so under my own volition."

"I want to make it clear that what Major Hafiz has said about me is a total lie, a complete fabrication and is farthest from the truth," said Shamsher.

### Hefazat seeks

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The meeting decided to wage a strong movement after Eid demanding the release of all its arrested activists and leaders, including Hefazat Joint General Secretary Mamunul Haque, and the withdrawal of cases against them.

Asked about the meeting decisions, Hefazat Joint General Secretary Azizul Haque Islamabad told The Daily Star, "Our grassroots leaders are frustrated and we have decided this [going for movement] under their pressure," he added.

The Qawmi madrasa-based organisation also decided to support the boycott Indian product movement. It, however, will not take part in any agitation over the matter but will conduct social-media campaigns and distribute leaflets to urge people to boycott Indian products.

### BSF shoots

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killing of Murali Chandra.

According to Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB), a patrolling team of 75 BSF Battalion BSF of Chitrakot camp under Sitai Police Station in Cooch Behar district of West Bengal opened fire when 10-12 Bangladeshis, including Murali Chandra, entered India to fetch Indian cattle.

After the two Bangladeshis were shot, the people who were accompanying them brought them to Bangladesh.

Murali Chandra died when he was being taken to Rangpur for treatment.

A relative of the victim, who wished not to be named, told The Daily Star that Murali Chandra was an active member of the cattle smuggling syndicate.

## Dozens of casualties in new Gaza aid chaos

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Eyewitnesses told AFP that Gazans overseeing the aid delivery shot in the air, but Israeli troops in the area also opened fire and some moving trucks hit people trying to get the food.

The Israeli military told AFP it "has no record of the incident described".

Fighting has not eased -- including around the territory's largest hospital -- and the latest toll from the health ministry in the Hamas-run Gaza Strip said at least 82 more people were killed in the previous 24 hours.

The Hamas press office reported more than 50 Israeli air strikes over the past day, with "civilian houses" targeted across the coastal territory, as well as tank fire in the Gaza City area and southern Gaza.

Since October 7, Israeli offensive has killed at least 32,705 people, mostly women and children, in Gaza. Netanyahu's office said new talks

on a Gaza ceasefire and hostage release will take place in Doha and Cairo "in the coming days... with guidelines for moving forward in the negotiations".

Talks had appeared deadlocked despite a push by the United States -- which provides billions of dollars in military aid to Israel -- and fellow mediators Egypt and Qatar to secure a truce for the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan, now more than halfway through.

Yesterday's aid delivery chaos is the latest incident of its kind in north Gaza, where a UN-backed report has projected famine by May unless urgent intervention occurs.

The report released on March 19 warned that half of Gazans are feeling "catastrophic" hunger.

The Israeli defence ministry body responsible for Palestinian civil affairs, COGAT, said the assessment contained inaccuracies and questionable sources.

Yesterday, Israel's military said it was continuing operations around Gaza's largest hospital Al-Shifa for the 13th day.

Most of the Palestinian territory's hospitals are not functioning and its health system is "barely surviving," the United Nations humanitarian agency, OCHA, said.

Yesterday, Hamas said that in addition to the ongoing Al-Shifa operation, Israeli troops continued "aggression" against Nasser Hospital and "besiege" Al-Amal Hospital in the same city.

Fears of a wider regional conflagration intensified on Friday as Israel struck targets of Lebanon's Hamas allied Hezbollah movement in Syria and Lebanon.

Both Hamas and Hezbollah are backed by Iran, Israel's arch-enemy.

The Israeli military said it killed the deputy commander of Hezbollah's rocket unit in south Lebanon in an air strike.