

Death toll from Israeli strike on Beirut suburb rises to 31

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Lebanese army soldiers and Red Cross rescuers gather at the barred area of the scene of an Israeli strike that targeted Beirut's southern suburbs a day earlier, as search and rescue operations continue on September 21, 2024. (Photo by AFP)

Beirut, September 21 (RHC)-- The death toll from an Israeli air attack in Beirut's southern suburbs has risen to 31 people, including three children and seven women, Lebanon's health minister says.

The strike, which wrecked two buildings in the Lebanese capital's Dahiya district during rush hour on Friday, also injured 68 people, Health Minister Firass Abiad told a news conference on Saturday.

The three children killed were aged four, six and 10, according to Abiad, who also said two people were in critical condition. Minister of Public Works and Transport Ali Hamieh told Al Jazeera Arabic that the bombing of a residential building constituted a "war crime" and that Israel was "dragging the region into a war." He said 23 people were still missing under the rubble.

Israel's military said it carried out a "targeted strike" against senior members of Hezbollah's elite Radwan Forces in the Beirut suburb. An Israeli military spokesperson said on Saturday that "at least 16 Hezbollah militants" were killed in the attack.

Hezbollah confirmed that two of its top commanders, Ibrahim Aqil and Ahmad Mahmoud Wahabi, along with 12 other members, were killed in the attack. In July, an Israeli air strike killed Fuad Shukr, the group's top military commander.

Interior Minister Bassam Mawlawi said Lebanon had entered a "decisive" phase after the attack on the residential suburb, telling a news conference on Saturday that everything must be done to prevent further violations of Lebanese territory and avoid further deterioration of the security situation.

Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said Israel is committing "shameless crimes" against children, not fighters. He also called for "inner strength" among Muslims to eliminate the "malignant cancerous tumour" from Palestine.

Meanwhile, the Israeli army reported it was "striking targets" belonging to Hezbollah in northern Lebanon, with Israeli media reporting the army was launching dozens of strikes on Saturday afternoon.

Israel's army radio said Hezbollah had launched 25 rockets towards northern Israel, causing several fires, with no injuries reported.

The air attack on the densely populated area followed explosions of thousands of pagers and walkie-talkies in Lebanon on Tuesday and Wednesday, which was also blamed on Israel and killed at least 39 people while wounding close to 3,000 others.

Reporting from Beirut, Al Jazeera's Imran Khan said the city is on edge after the latest attacks, which mark a new chapter in the confrontation between Israel and Hezbollah that had so far been confined to border regions.

"The big conversation across Lebanon is what's going to happen next. People here aren't really concerned about what Hezbollah does next. They are worried about what Israel is going to do next," he added.

The Israeli attacks in Lebanon over the past week have serious implications for international law, said Ibrahim Fraihat, professor of international conflict resolution at the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies.

"What we are seeing in Lebanon takes the disrespect of international humanitarian law to a [new] level," Fraihat told Al Jazeera. "These violations are being normalised by the silence of the West." He warned that the escalation of tensions in Lebanon was bound to divert attention from Gaza, allowing for more human rights violations to take place there.

Reporting from Amman, Jordan, Al Jazeera's Zein Basravi said of the Beirut strike that "Israel knew that there would be civilian casualties and it went ahead and did it anyway."

"And that's what the Lebanese are saying, that, once again, Israel is acting with absolute immunity."

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