

Massive explosions in Beirut as Israel claims it attacked Hezbollah HQ

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Beirut, September 28 (RHC)-- Israel has carried out several air raids in Lebanon's capital Beirut that it said targeted the headquarters of Lebanese armed group Hezbollah.

The series of massive explosions sent huge clouds of smoke soaring above the densely populated Haret Hreik neighbourhood in Dahiyeh, southern Beirut, around dusk on Friday.

The Israeli military claimed the attack targeted the group's "central headquarters," which it said were "embedded under residential buildings in the heart of the Dahiyeh in Beirut."

Several buildings in the Haret Hreik neighbourhood of Dahiyeh were reduced to rubble, Hezbollah's Al-Manar TV reported. The blast rattled windows and shook houses some 30 kilometres (18 miles) north of Beirut. Ambulances were seen heading to the scene, sirens wailing.

At least two people were killed and 76 others were wounded in the attack, Lebanon's Ministry of Public Health said, noting that this was a preliminary toll which would certainly rise.

"The attack in Beirut's Haret Hreik suburb has erased a complete block close to the international airport of Beirut, and around six to nine buildings were either completely or partially destroyed," said Al Jazeera's Ali Hashem, reporting from Tyre in southern Lebanon.

"Israel has been working deliberately for the past weeks on hitting the southern suburb of Beirut, targeting Hezbollah commanders in different areas to dismantle the command chain of the group," he added.

But Friday's attack was far more powerful, with multiple blasts shaking windows across the city, recalling Israeli air raids during the war it fought with Hezbollah in 2006.

The bombing came moments after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu concluded his address to UN General Assembly delegates in New York, in which he pledged to keep up attacks against Hezbollah and fight until "total victory" in Gaza.

Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati said the attack showed Israel did not care about global calls for a Lebanon ceasefire.

A spokesperson for the Pentagon said the United States had no advance warning of the strike and that U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin spoke with Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant as the operation was under way.

"The United States was not involved in this operation and we had no advanced warning," spokesperson Sabrina Singh told reporters.

It appeared to be the most powerful attack in almost a year of conflict between Israel and Hezbollah, which have traded near-daily cross-border fire since October, when the Lebanese group said it would carry out attacks on Israel in solidarity with Palestinians in Gaza amid Israel's war on the territory.

The fighting has sent tens of thousands of people fleeing their homes on both sides of the Israel-Lebanon border.

The Israeli military has escalated the conflict dramatically in recent days. At least 25 people were killed in Israeli attacks early on Friday, Health Minister Firass Abiad said, bringing the death toll in Lebanon this week to more than 720. He said the dead included dozens of women and children.

In his address to the UN General Assembly, Netanyahu said that operations against Hezbollah would "continue until we meet our objectives."



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