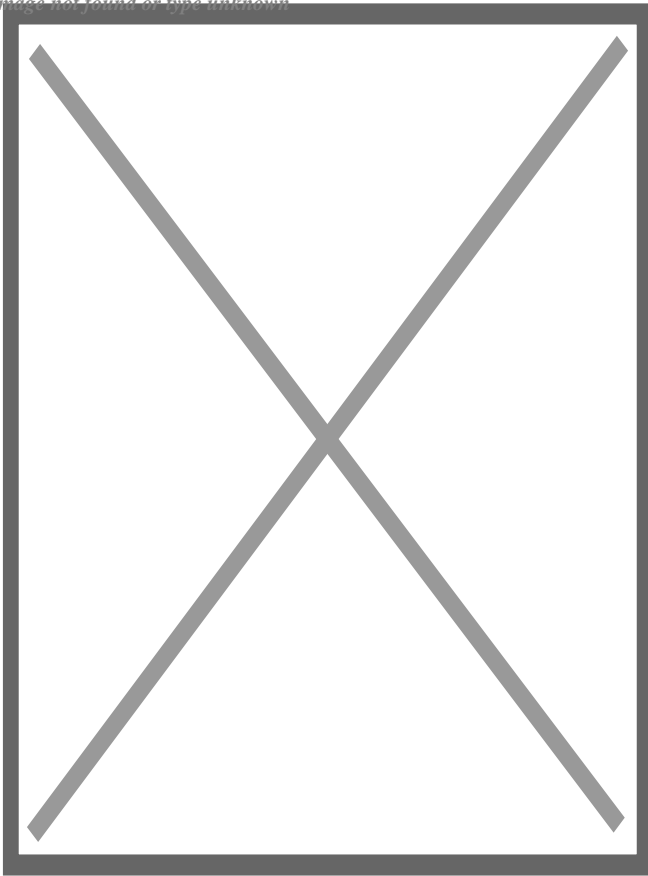


Israel rocks Beirut with huge attack and cuts off main Lebanon-Syria road

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Smoke and flames rise over Beirut's southern suburbs after a strike, amid the ongoing hostilities between Hezbollah and Israeli forces, as seen from Sin El Fil, Lebanon, October 3

Beirut, October 4 (RHC)-- Huge explosions rocked the Lebanese capital's southern suburbs overnight, shaking the ground and sending plumes of smoke into the skyline.

Residents in Beirut said the bombardment was so intense that car alarms went off and buildings shook as Israeli fighter jets pounded the densely populated outskirts, including the international airport's perimeter.

A source close to Lebanon's Hezbollah group told the AFP news agency that Israel conducted 11 consecutive raids in what has been described as its most violent attack so far on Beirut.

The Israeli military has not issued an official statement and Hezbollah has not commented.

Israeli media reported that Hezbollah's Hashem Safieddine – a possible successor to leader Hassan Nasrallah, who was killed in an Israeli attack last week – was the target of the air raids.

Israel's military said on Friday that it had eliminated the head of Hezbollah's communication networks, Mohammad Rashid Sakafi, by conducting a "precise, intelligence-based strike" in Beirut on Thursday. Hezbollah did not immediately comment on Safaki's fate.

The Israeli military also hit Lebanon's Masnaa border crossing with Syria in a separate attack, cutting off a road linking the two countries that was being used by hundreds of thousands of people to flee Israeli bombardments in recent days.

More than 300,000 people – mostly Syrian – crossed from Lebanon into Syria over the last 10 days to escape escalating Israeli bombardment, according to Lebanese government statistics.

Lebanon's Minister of Public Works and Transport Ali Hamieh told the Reuters news agency the attack hit inside Lebanese territory near the border crossing, creating a four-metre (12-foot) wide crater.

Israel accused Hezbollah on Thursday of using the crossing to transport military equipment into Lebanon. "The IDF (Israeli army) will not allow the smuggling of these weapons and will not hesitate to act if forced to do so, as it has done throughout this war," army spokesman Avichay Adraee said on X.

A United Nations refugee agency official said on Friday that most of Lebanon's nearly 900 shelters were full and that people fleeing Israeli attacks were increasingly sleeping out in the open.

"Most of the nearly 900 government established collective shelters in Lebanon have no more capacity," UNHCR's Rula Amin told a Geneva press briefing. "With the onset of winter, UNHCR is concerned that conditions for those affected by the escalating conflict in other will only worsen," she added.

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