

Israeli war machine continues to attack Lebanon, as Netanyahu says war is not over



Beirut, December 5 (RHC)-- An Israeli drone strike has killed one person in southern Lebanon, according to Lebanese health authorities, as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu promised to enforce the ceasefire with Hezbollah “with an iron fist.”

Lebanon's Ministry of Public Health and state media said Israeli forces carried out several new drone and artillery strikes in southern Lebanon on Tuesday, putting further strain on a tenuous 6-day-old ceasefire with Hezbollah.

"An Israeli enemy drone strike on the town of Shebaa killed one person," a Health Ministry statement said. The state-run National News Agency (NNA) described the man who was killed as a "shepherd."

The new attacks come as Israeli officials threatened to expand attacks on Lebanon if the ceasefire with the Lebanese armed group Hezbollah collapses.

Netanyahu promised to keep striking "with an iron fist" against perceived violations of the truce. "We are enforcing this ceasefire with an iron fist," he said before a cabinet meeting in the northern border city of Nahariya.

"We are currently in a ceasefire, I note, a ceasefire, not the end of the war," he added. Earlier, his defense minister warned that if the ceasefire collapses, Israel will target not just Hezbollah but the Lebanese state – an expansion of Israel's campaign.

"If we return to war we will act strongly, we will go deeper, and the most important thing they need to know: that there will be no longer be an exemption for the state of Lebanon," Defense Minister Israel Katz said.

"If until now we separated the state of Lebanon from Hezbollah ... it will no longer be [like this]," he said during a visit to the northern border area.

The US- and French-brokered ceasefire, which halted more than 13 months of fighting, has been flagrantly violated by near-daily Israeli attacks. Under the terms of the ceasefire, Hezbollah is supposed to withdraw its fighters, weapons and infrastructure from a broad swath of the south by the end of the initial 60-day phase, pulling them north of the Litani River. Israeli troops are also to withdraw to their side of the border.

Lebanese officials have accused Israel of violating the ceasefire dozens of times with strikes, overflights of drones and demolitions of homes. At least 11 people were killed in Israeli attacks on Lebanon on Monday, according to official figures.

Hezbollah said it fired a volley of projectiles as a warning over what it said were previous Israeli ceasefire violations.

Reporting from Beirut, Al Jazeera's Zeina Khodr said the hostilities on Monday were putting a strain on the truce. "The Israel-Hezbollah ceasefire did not collapse despite yesterday's alleged violations. It faced its biggest test with the flareup in hostilities on both sides," she said.

"The deal stands on a shaky ground. Israel is trying to create a new reality. It considers that under the terms of the ceasefire, it has the right to carry out attacks and strikes on what it considers to be threats by Hezbollah," she added.

Despite the violations, Lebanese officials are rallying behind the ceasefire. Lebanon's caretaker Prime Minister Najib Mikati and Speaker of Parliament Nabih Berri, a close Hezbollah ally who negotiated the deal on behalf of Lebanon, spoke to officials at the White House and French presidency late on Monday to urge them to press Israel to uphold the ceasefire, two senior Lebanese political sources told the Reuters news agency on Tuesday.

Mikati, quoted by NNA, meanwhile, said that diplomatic communications had intensified since Monday to stop Israeli violations of the ceasefire. He also said a recruitment drive was under way by the Lebanese army to strengthen its presence in the south.

U.S. Department of State spokesperson Matt Miller said earlier this week that the ceasefire was “holding” and that the US had “anticipated that there might be violations.”

A mission chaired by the US is tasked with monitoring, verifying and helping enforce the truce, but it has yet to begin work. Two sources familiar with the matter told Reuters that the committee would hold its first meeting on Thursday.

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