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Israel strikes deep inside Lebanon

HEZBOLLAH RETALIATES BY FIRING 60 ROCKETS, FUELLING CONCERN OF WIDER WAR IN REGION

BEIRUT/JERUSALEM

Israeli warplanes struck Lebanon's Bekaa Valley yesterday, killing at least two Hezbollah members in its deepest attack into Lebanese territory since hostilities erupted with the Iran-backed group last October.

The strikes come a day after Israel's Defence Minister Yoav Gallant vowed to step up attacks on Hezbollah even if a ceasefire is reached with Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

The attacks, which came shortly after Hezbollah said its air defences shot down an Israeli drone, are likely to increase tensions along the Lebanon-Israel border as talks for a ceasefire in Gaza are underway.

In the afternoon, Hezbollah said it retaliated for the air strikes near Baalbek by firing 60 Katyusha rockets toward an Israeli army division command in Syria's Israeli-occupied Golan Heights.

Spillover of Gaza war

The strikes marked an intensification of the worst violence between the heavily armed Hezbollah and Israel since their 2006 war, fuelling concern of the potential for further escalation and regional spillover of the Gaza war.

The Israeli army said its fighter jets had struck Hezbollah air defences in the Bekaa Valley in response to the downing of an Israeli drone, which Hezbollah said it had shot down with a surface-to-air missile



AFF

■ Lebanese soldiers and emergency service personnel inspect the rubble at the site of an Israeli air strike in the vicinity of Baalbek city in the central Bekaa plain yesterday.

earlier yesterday. The airstrikes hit part of the Bekaa Valley region near the Syrian border which is a political stronghold of the Hezbollah. The targeted area was some 18km from the city of Baalbek, which is known for its ancient ruins.

The sources said Israel had carried out simultaneous

strikes in the area. A Lebanese security source and a source familiar with the matter said two Hezbollah members had been killed.

Gallant indicated on Sunday that Israel planned to increase attacks on Hezbollah in the event of a possible ceasefire in the Gaza conflict.

"If a temporary pause is reached in Gaza, we will increase the fire in the north separately, and will continue until the full withdrawal of Hezbollah [from the border] and the return of Israeli citizens to their homes," he said.

—Agencies
SEE ALSO P8

RED SEA CRISIS

*Houthis target
US-flagged
tanker with
ballistic missile*

CAIRO

The US Central Command (Centcom) said yesterday that Yemen's Houthis launched one anti-ship ballistic missile targeting the MV Torm Thor, but missed the US-flagged, owned and operated oil tanker, in the Gulf of Aden on February 24.

The missile impacted the water causing no damage nor injuries, Centcom added in a post on X.

The Iran-aligned group said on Sunday that they targeted the tanker, as the militants continue to attack shipping lanes in solidarity with Palestinians in Gaza.

Meanwhile, Houthi rebels reported the first civilian death in US and British air strikes after the latest round of joint raids over the weekend.

One person was killed and eight wounded, a day after US and British forces said they fired on 18 targets across the country.

—AFP

How a blind man from India realised his cricket dream

Teacher, 43, recalls the odds he had to beat

DUBAI

BY SHARMILA DHAL
UAE Editor



It is the story of a diehard cricket fan, Rajanish Henry, who lost his eyesight at a tender age, but did not let it come in the way of his dream to be a cricketer.

Cricket lovers in the UAE are still cherishing a great weekend, what with the Friendship Triangular Cricket Series for the Blind between India and Pakistan at the ICC Cricket Academy Grounds in Dubai proving to be a veritable treat.

As the visually impaired teams on either side wowed fans — and others alike — *Gulf News* caught up with Rajanish Henry, Vice-President of the World Blind Cricket Council (WBCC), the international body that governs what is a hugely popular version of cricket — blind cricket.

Henry, who is 100 per cent visually impaired, was an active cricket player until a few years ago, after which he upped his game, began organising blind cricket matches and earned himself a place at WBCC.

The story of the 43-year-old Keralite from India is highly inspiring, echoing perhaps the tale of many

other blind cricketers. It is the story of a diehard cricket fan, who lost his eyesight at a tender age, but did not let it come in the way of his dream to be a cricketer.

"My whole world went blank when I was six, everything changed for me — my school, my friends, my entire life," he recalled, even as he shared his heartening journey thereafter, and explained how blind cricket is played.

FULL STORY ON PAGE 2

SPORT

**Is Dhruv Jurel
the next
M.S. Dhoni?**

23-year-old wicketkeeping batter shows traits of former India captain | P11

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