7 people killed in Hezbollah rocket attacks, marking deadliest day in months for north

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<https://www.timesofisrael.com/5-killed-one-seriously-wounded-in-direct-hezbollah-rocket-strike-near-metula/>

Hezbollah rocket attacks on northern Israel killed seven people in agricultural fields near Metula and Haifa Thursday, marking what appeared to be the deadliest day in months for civilians inside Israel.

The deaths, which raised the number of civilians killed in the last year of cross-border attacks on northern Israel to 39, were likely to loom large in meetings between Israeli officials and US mediators hoping to end over a month of fighting, as the military continued to expand its strikes on Hezbollah sites deep inside Lebanon.

Authorities said five people working in an apple orchard near the border town of Metula were killed when a rocket fired from Lebanon struck them late Thursday morning.

Another person was seriously wounded in the attack.

The victims were all agricultural laborers who had been working in the orchard at the time of the strike. One was an Israeli citizen, while the others were foreign nationals.

The Israeli was named by Kibbutz Dafna as Omer Weinstein, a member of the community.

Early Friday, Thailand’s foreign minister said the foreign nationals killed in the attack were Thai citizens. They were later identified as Akkaphon Wannasai, Prayad Pilasram, Thana Tichantuk and Kaweesak Papanang.

The Israel Defense Forces confirmed in a short statement that two rockets had been fired from Lebanon at the Metula area, and said the details of the incident were being examined.

Hours later, two more people were killed while in an olive grove outside the Haifa suburb of Kiryat Ata as Hezbollah fired dozens of rockets at the area, authorities said.

The two, described as a woman in her 60s and a man in his 30s, were killed by falling shrapnel, according to the Magen David Adom rescue service.

Hebrew media reports described the two as a mother and son who had been harvesting olives when the rocket hit. They were named in reports as Mina Hasson, 60, and Karmi Hasson, 21, from the Arab-majority city of Shfaram.

Rescuers found the pair in a field near Gilam junction, along with a man in his 70s, who was hospitalized with light injuries.

Buses and cars at the busy intersection were strafed by shrapnel, but no other major injuries were reported.

According to the IDF, Hezbollah fired some 25 rockets at the Haifa region and other parts of the north in the attack. “Some were shot down and some fell in the area,” the IDF said.

The death toll for a single day of cross-border fire was among the highest since Hezbollah began lobbing rockets and drones into northern Israel on October 8, 2023.

It appeared to mark the deadliest day for northern Israel since fighting intensified last month and since a July 27 Hezbollah rocket attack that killed 12 children at a park in the Druze town of Majdal Shams.

Following the attack on Metula, local council head David Azoulay lambasted the country’s leaders for “normalizing the situation” in the north.

It wasn’t long before rocket warning sirens blared once more, this time in Karmiel and other communities across the Galilee region, as Hezbollah launched a barrage of some 30 rockets toward northern Israel. No casualties were reported in that attack.

According to the military, some 60 rockets and drones were fired at northern Israel as of Thursday afternoon.

Some of the projectiles were intercepted by air defenses, the IDF said, while others struck open areas.

Meanwhile in Lebanon, the IDF issued warnings for a second day running to residents of northeast Lebanon’s Baalbek and surrounding suburbs to evacuate immediately ahead of airstrikes on Hezbollah sites.

“You are in a combat zone where the IDF intends to attack and target Hezbollah infrastructure, assets, installations and weapons, and does not intend to harm you,” Col. Avichay Adraee said on X, attaching a map of the areas that will be targeted.

Dozens of cars could be seen speeding out of the area after Thursday’s warning, with wafts of black smoke still visible emanating from the town of Douris, where an Israeli strike the previous day destroyed Hezbollah fuel stocks, according to the Israeli military and a Lebanese security source.

Lebanon’s state-run National News Agency reported a strike on a motorcycle rider in the Beqaa Valley, where Baalbek is located.

A Lebanese security source told AFP that one person was killed by an Israeli drone strike on the Araya-Kahhale road, which links the capital Beirut to the eastern Beqaa Valley.

The drone strike targeted a car, killing the driver, the source said, without identifying the victim.

Thousands fleeing the violence in Baalbek have sought shelter in the nearby Christian-majority town of Deir al-Ahmar, where local official Jean Fakhry said authorities were struggling to cover even a fraction of their needs and some people had to spend the night in their cars.

“We cannot continue this way,” Fakhry said.

The killing of six Lebanese health workers and wounding of four others in three separate strikes across south Lebanon on Thursday brought the total toll of health workers killed and wounded in over a year of Israeli strikes to 178 and 279 respectively, the Lebanese health ministry said.

The army also announced strikes on sites belonged to Hezbollah’s elite Radwan Force and the terror group’s armament unit in Syria’s al-Qusayr region, near Lebanon’s northern border.

The armament unit is responsible for storing weapons in Lebanon, and according to the IDF, it recently expanded its activities to Syria, where it stored weapons in al-Qusayr.

Elsewhere in Lebanon, an Israeli drone strike hit a motorbike near the coastal town of Naqoura, NNA reported.

The IDF said on Thursday that the commander of a Hezbollah anti-tank guided missile unit had been killed in a recent airstrike.

According to the IDF, a strike carried out by fighter jets this week in the southern Lebanon village of Burj Qallawiyah killed Muhammad Khalil Alian.

Alian was the commander of Hezbollah’s anti-tank array in the Hajjar regional unit, which is responsible for attacks on northern Israel’s Ramim Ridge region.

Meanwhile, the IDF said a Wednesday drone strike in Mazraat al-Yahoudiyeh, just north of Tyre, killed a cell of Hezbollah members who launched a missile at an Israeli Air Force unmanned aerial vehicle, adding that the UAV was not harmed in the incident.

The IAF released footage of the drone strike.

The strikes were carried out in tandem with the ongoing ground campaign in southern Lebanon, where the IDF’s 91st and 146th divisions are continuing to operate against Hezbollah.

The continued exchange of fire between Israel and the terror group in Lebanon came as senior US envoys Amos Hochstein and Brett McGurk were in Israel for meetings with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and other top officials to discuss a possible deal to end the fighting in Lebanon and secure Israel’s northern borders, allowing tens of thousands of displaced residents to return home.

Netanyahu’s office said he told the pair that the most important element of an agreement to end fighting between Israel and Hezbollah in Lebanon was not the piece of paper it’s written on, but “Israel’s determination and ability to enforce the agreement and to foil any threat to its security from Lebanon, in a manner that will return residents to their homes safely.”

Defense Minister Yoav Gallant and Strategic Affairs Minister Ron Dermer also met with McGurk and Hochstein to discuss “security arrangements” for the north and efforts to secure the release of hostages in Gaza, the Defense Ministry said.

Reports have indicated that israel is seeking a ceasefire agreement that would bolster UN Security Council Resolution 1701, but allow it to take action against Hezbollah if it is threatened.

The Kan public broadcaster on Wednesday published the details of what it said was [the draft agreement](https://www.timesofisrael.com/lebanese-pm-says-hoping-for-ceasefire-in-coming-days-us-drafted-truce-deal-leaks/) drawn up by the US for a ceasefire in Lebanon and the implementation of Resolution 1701, which forbids Hezbollah from maintaining a presence south of the Litani River.

If accurate, the draft agreement would allow Israel the freedom to operate against Hezbollah should it violate the agreement. Oversight in Lebanon would also be increased, with the establishment of a new International Monitoring and Enforcement Mechanism chaired by the US.

Since October 8, 2023, Hezbollah-led forces have attacked Israeli communities and military posts along the border on a near-daily basis, with the group saying it is doing so to support Gaza amid the war against the Hamas terror group there.

Some 60,000 residents were evacuated from northern towns on the Lebanon border shortly after Hamas’s October 7 onslaught in southern Israel, amid fears Hezbollah would carry out a similar attack, and increasing rocket fire by the terror group.

The attacks on northern Israel since October 2023 have resulted in the deaths of 39 civilians. In addition, 61 IDF soldiers and reservists have died in cross-border skirmishes and in the ensuing ground operation launched in southern Lebanon in late September.

Two soldiers have been killed in a drone attack from Iraq, and there have also been several attacks from Syria, without any injuries.

The IDF estimates that more than 2,000 Hezbollah operatives have been killed in the conflict. Around 100 members of other terror groups, along with hundreds of civilians, have also been reported killed in Lebanon.

Hezbollah has named 516 members who have been killed by Israel amid the fighting, mostly in Lebanon but some also in Syria. These numbers have not been consistently updated since Israel began a new offensive against Hezbollah in September.