

Celebration in Beirut suburbs as Israel, Hezbollah ceasefire holds

Netanyahu warns if Hezbollah violates agreement, it will respond

JERUSALEM

ISRAEL and Lebanon-based Hezbollah militants began a ceasefire Wednesday in a major step toward ending nearly 14 months of fighting as a region on edge wondered whether it will hold.



A displaced family celebrates on Wednesday as they return to their home in Lebanon along with a photo of dead Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah | AP

Some celebratory gunshots could be heard in parts of Beirut's southern suburbs, battered over the past two months, but no immediate violations of the ceasefire were reported.

Israel has said it will attack if Hezbollah breaks the agreement, and an Israeli military spokesman, in an Arabic-language X post in the first half-hour of the ceasefire, warned evacuated residents of southern Lebanon to not head home

yet, saying the military remained deployed there.

The ceasefire calls for an initial two-month halt to fighting and requires Hezbollah to end its armed presence in southern Lebanon, while Israeli troops

are to return to their side of the border. Thousands of additional Lebanese troops and UN peacekeepers would deploy in the south, and an international panel headed by the US would monitor compliance.

The ceasefire began at 4 am on Wednesday, a day after Israel carried out its most intense wave of airstrikes in Beirut since the start of the conflict that in recent weeks turned into all-out war. At least 42 people were killed in strikes across the country, according to local authorities.

There appeared to be lingering disagreement over whether Israel would have the right to strike Hezbollah if it believed the militants had violated the agreement, something Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu insisted was part of the deal but which Lebanese and Hezbollah officials have rejected.

Israel's security Cabinet approved the US-France-brokered ceasefire agreement after Netanyahu presented it, his office said.

Hamas says ready for Gaza ceasefire

Gaza City: Hamas is ready to reach a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip, a senior official said on Wednesday. "We have informed mediators in Egypt, Qatar and Turkey that Hamas is ready for a ceasefire agreement and a serious deal to exchange prisoners," the official said, however accusing Israel of obstructing a deal. In a statement released on Wednesday, Hamas said "the enemy's acceptance of the agreement with Lebanon without achieving its preconditions marks a significant milestone in shattering (Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin) Netanyahu's illusions of reshaping the Middle East through force"

Don picks Jay Bhattacharya as head of med research body

WASHINGTON

PRESIDENT-elect Donald Trump has chosen health economist Dr Jay Bhattacharya, a critic of pandemic lockdowns and vaccine mandates, to lead the National Institutes of Health, the nation's leading medical research agency.



Jay Bhattacharya

Trump said Bhattacharya, a 56-year-old physician and professor at Stanford University School of Medicine, will work in cooperation with Robert F Kennedy Jr, his

pick to lead the Department of Health and Human Services, "to direct the Nation's Medical Research, and to make important discoveries that will improve Health, and save lives."

"Together, Jay and RFK Jr will restore the NIH to a Gold Standard of Medical Research as they examine the underlying causes of, and solutions to, America's biggest health challenges, including our Crisis of Chronic Illness and Disease," he wrote.

IMRAN SUSPENDS PROTEST AFTER CRACKDOWN



A rally truck used by Bushra Bibi, the wife of Pakistan's former prime minister Imran Khan, burns in Islamabad on Wednesday | AP

ISLAMABAD

JAILED former prime minister Imran Khan's party on Wednesday formally suspended its protest here blaming the midnight crackdown by the authorities that left at least four dead and over 50 injured even as the PTI earlier claimed 'hundreds' were killed in the violent clashes with security personnel.

Amid concerns about the whereabouts of Khan's wife Bushra Bibi and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur, who were leading the march to Islamabad the

10 killed, 21 hurt in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Ten people have been killed and 21 others injured as clashes between Sunni and Shia tribes despite a ceasefire between them in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province

party said they were at Mansehra town, near Abbottabad, of the northwest Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

Authorities began reopening roads and cleaning all major thoroughfares vandalised during the three-day protest by Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf

(PTI) party. The midnight crackdown forced Khan's supporters to evacuate the D-Chowk and its adjacent main business district of the capital, ending their protest, which his party described as a 'massacre' under the 'fascist military regime' even as police sources said about 450 protesters were arrested in the crackdown.

"In view of the government's brutality and the government's plan to turn the capital into a slaughterhouse for unarmed citizens, (we) announce the suspension of the peaceful protest for the time being," PTI said on X.

Future plans would be announced "in light of directions" from Khan after the party's political and core committees presented their analyses of the state brutality to him.

The party statement also condemned the alleged 'killing' and 'terror and brutality against peaceful protesters in the name of an operation'. The PTI urged the chief justice to take suo motu notice of the alleged 'brutal murder of martyred (party) workers' and order legal action.

It's Chinese defence minister Dong Jun's turn to face graft probe heat

BEIJING

CHINESE Defence Minister Dong Jun has been placed under investigation for corruption, a report said on Wednesday, which would make him the latest official to fall in a sweeping crackdown on graft in the country's military.

Citing current and former US officials familiar with the situation, the Financial Times said the investigation into Dong was part of that broader probe into military corruption.

If confirmed, Dong would be the third Chinese defence minister in a row to fall under investigation for corruption.

Asked about the report at a regular briefing on Wednesday, Chinese foreign ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said it was just "chasing shadows" and did not offer further information. A former navy commander, he was appointed defence minister in December following the surprise removal of predecessor Li Shangfu just seven months into the job.

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