

**Tension high after Syria army kills four in Lebanon**  
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TRIPOLI, Lebanon: Lebanon's president and prime minister urged Syria Sunday to stop shelling Lebanese territory after four Lebanese were killed by gunfire from the Syrian side of the border, in incidents that heightened tensions on the two neighbors' frontier.

The renewal of deadly incidents on the Lebanese-Syrian border, which had claimed the lives of several Lebanese citizens last year, evoked fresh calls by the opposition March 14 parties for the deployment of the Lebanese Army and U.N. troops along the two countries' common boundaries.

President Michel Sleiman voiced regret over the death of Lebanese citizens by Syrian shelling in the northern Wadi Khaled region and the village of Heesha near the border with Syria, while Prime Minister Najib Mikati asked Foreign Minister Adnan Mansour to protest to Syrian authorities over these incidents.

"[Sleiman] stressed the need to remain committed to the neutral stance [of Lebanon] which calls for not interfering in the affairs of other countries, particularly Syria," according to a statement released by the president's office.

Sleiman also urged the Syrian side "to refrain from shooting or firing shells toward Lebanese territory," the statement said. It added that Sleiman made a series of contacts with concerned officials and asked the relevant security agencies to investigate the circumstances surrounding the incidents.

Mikati condemned the shelling of Lebanese border areas, notably Wadi Khaled, as a result of clashes between the Syrian army and rebel groups in Syrian territory close to the border and called on Damascus to prevent a recurrence of these incidents.

"We deplore the death of Lebanese victims as a result of incidents with which they have nothing to do. We call on the relevant Syrian authorities to take the appropriate measures to prevent a repetition of such acts," Mikati said in a statement released by his office.

He added that he had asked Mansour to officially inform the Syrian authorities of Lebanon's rejection of these incidents and its demand that they should not recur.

Heavy shelling and gunfire from the Syrian side of the border with Lebanon over the weekend claimed the lives of four Lebanese in the Wadi Khaled region, raising tensions in the northern area.

The shelling, described by residents of Wadi Khaled as unprecedented, targeted Heesha and villages in the northern region, where sporadic incidents linked to the nearly two-year conflict in Syria have occurred in the past. Ahmad Shihab, a member of Heesha Municipality Council, was killed in overnight shelling, residents of the area said, adding that his brother, Hani, also died from shrapnel wounds, villagers said.

Elsewhere in Wadi Khaled, residents said Hussein Ismail was also killed when a hail of bullets ripped through his vehicle while he was returning home with his brother Saturday. Heavy shelling on several border villages soon ensued, they added.

Ismail, 40, was the nephew of former MP Jamal Ismail and served as his uncle's personal driver, the state-run National News Agency reported.

Residents of Wadi Khaled, who say the attacks from the Syrian side of the border are selective, said the weekend violence was unjustified as there had been no gunmen or reason to provoke such a response.

AFP, quoting a Lebanese security source, said fierce fighting erupted Saturday night on the Syria-Lebanon border between Syrian troops and unknown gunmen, leaving a Lebanese man dead and four wounded. The Syrian army used artillery, mortars and automatic weapons fired from the Syrian village of Mcherfe as they clashed with the gunmen, the source said. He was unable to say whether the gunmen were Lebanese or Syrians opposed to the regime of President Bashar Assad.

The Lebanese Army said a man it identified as Hussein Mohammad Ezzo was shot in the head Saturday night in Bqaiya, which borders Syria. He was transported to a hospital but later died from his injuries, the military said in a statement, adding that troops were deployed to the area after the incident. The Army statement did not say how Ezzo was shot in the head.

However, Akkar MP Mouin Merhebi said Ezzo had been killed by sniper fire from the Syrian side of the border and appealed to Sleiman to order the Army deployment on the Lebanese-Syrian frontier. He also demanded that U.N. troops be deployed on the border in order to prevent Syrian attacks on Lebanese villages.

“We condemn the killing by Assad’s gangs of Akkar resident Hussein Ezzo in Wadi Khaled by sniper fire while he was moving in his village,” Merhebi said.

Merhebi, a member of former Prime Minister Saad Hariri’s parliamentary Future bloc, deplored what he called “negligence” by the Lebanese Army and the government to deploy troops on the border in to order to protect citizens from Syrian attacks.

“In the face of these attacks, I call on the president, who is the supreme commander in chief of the armed forces, to fulfill the oath he took to protect the country and people by issuing clear orders to our national Lebanese Army to deploy on the border and ask the United Nations to implement Security Council Resolution 1701 under Chapter Seven by seeking the assistance of U.N. troops to protect our exposed territory,” he said.

Future lawmakers and some March 14 MPs have called for the deployment of U.N. troops along the border to better monitor the poorly demarcated frontier as well as prevent Syrian incursions into Lebanese territory.

For his part, Progressive Socialist Party leader MP Walid Jumblatt said the government had failed to implement its policy to disassociate Lebanon from the developments in Syria, which led rival Lebanese factions to get involved in the bloody conflict there.

“Hezbollah is fighting inside Syria on Iran’s orders. ... The Lebanese government has failed to implement the disassociation policy, which prompted parties in the March 14 coalition to fight alongside the Syrian people,” Jumblatt said in an interview with Al-Jazeera television.

Meanwhile, hundreds of residents, as well as a group of Muslim scholars and preachers, gathered at the entrance of the Bekaa town of Deir Zannoun Saturday, holding Syrian rebel flags and vowing to block the road leading to the Masnaa border crossing in order to prevent the passage of 11 Syrian tanker trucks loaded with fuel from driving to Syria, security sources told The Daily Star.

Similar protests broke out earlier this month in north Lebanon as residents blocked the way of trucks heading to the Arida border crossing. Protesters say that they are against such trucks entering Syria because the fuel they load from Lebanon will go to the Syrian regime to aid its violent crackdown on a popular uprising.