



By: TA | AP Brief

Hezbollah leader refuses to disarm



Hezbollah leader Naim Kassem **reiterated** the militant group's refusal to lay down its **weapons** before Israel withdraws from all of southern Lebanon and stops its airstrikes. He spoke in a video address, as thousands gathered in Beirut's southern suburbs to mark the Shiite holy day of Ashoura.

Ashoura commemorates the 680 A.D. Battle of Karbala, in which the Prophet Muhammad's grandson, Imam Hussein, was killed after he refused to pledge allegiance to the Umayyad caliphate. For Shiites, the commemoration has come to symbolize resistance against tyranny and injustice.

This year's commemoration comes in the wake of a bruising **war** between Israel and Hezbollah, which nominally ended with a U.S.-brokered ceasefire in late November.

Israeli strikes killed much of Hezbollah's top leadership, **including** longtime Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah, and destroyed much of its arsenal.

Since the ceasefire, Israel has continued to occupy five strategic border points in southern Lebanon and to carry out near-daily airstrikes that it says aim to prevent Hezbollah from rebuilding its capabilities.

Those strikes have killed some 250 people since November, in addition to more than 4,000 killed during the war, according to Lebanon's Health Ministry.

We will not accept normalization with Israel - Naim Kassem

There has been increasing international and domestic pressure for Hezbollah to give up its remaining arsenal.

"How can you expect us not to stand firm while the Israeli enemy continues its aggression, continues to occupy the five points, and continues to enter our territories and kill?" Kassem said in his video address. "We will not be part of legitimizing the occupation in Lebanon and the region. We will

not accept normalization (with Israel)."

In response to those who ask why the group needs its missile arsenal, Kassem said: "How can we confront Israel when it attacks us if we didn't have them? Who is preventing Israel from entering villages and landing and killing young people, women and children inside their homes unless there is a resistance with certain capabilities capable of minimal defense?"

Visit by U.S. envoy Tom Barrack to Beirut

His comments come ahead of an expected visit by U.S. envoy Tom Barrack to Beirut to discuss a proposed plan for Hezbollah's disarmament and the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the rest of southern Lebanon.

Barrack posted Saturday on X that Lebanon is facing "a historic moment to supersede the strained confessionalism of the past and finally fulfill (its) true promise of the hope of 'One country, one people, one army'" and quoted U.S. President Donald Trump saying, "Let's make Lebanon Great again."

Later on Sunday, Lebanon's state-run National News Agency reported that the Israeli military launched a series of airstrikes on southern and eastern Lebanon, including in the area around the eastern city of Baalbek and in Apple Province, a mountainous region overlooking large parts of southern Lebanon.

The Israeli military said in a statement that it had struck "several Hezbollah military sites, strategic weapons production and storage sites, and a rocket launching site."