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Israel assassinates third top Iranian official in two days

Tehran confirms death of intelligence minister, as Abbas Araghchi rules out 'simple truce'

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Israel has assassinated Iranian intelligence minister Esmail Khatib, in the latest in a series of killings of high-level officials since the current war began late last month.

The Israeli military yesterday announced that Mr Khatib had been killed in a "targeted strike" on Tehran.

Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz said the military had been authorised to "thwart any senior Iranian who is cornered,

without the need for additional approval".

"Today, significant surprises are expected in all arenas that will escalate the war we are waging against Iran and Hezbollah in Lebanon. The intensity of attacks in Iran is increasing," Mr Katz added.

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian later confirmed Mr Khatib's death, which he said "left us in mourning".

Mr Khatib's ministry had sought to counter Israel's formidable intelligence gathering, announcing arrests of alleged spies and confiscating Starlink

internet terminals reportedly smuggled into Iran by the US.

The minister's assassination came hours after Tehran confirmed the death of its national security chief, Ali Larjani.

Gholamreza Soleimani, commander of Iran's Basij paramilitary force, was killed alongside Mr Larjani on Tuesday.

In a video posted on social media on Tuesday, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu pulled a small card out of his pocket and said: "Today I erased two names on the punch card and you see how many more to go on this batch."

The killings have occurred more than three weeks into the US-Israeli conflict with Iran, which has shown no signs of de-escalation.

Israel and the US began the conflict with strikes that killed Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and several military commanders.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said that he had no interest in a simple ceasefire, but wanted to end the war on "all fronts".

"We don't believe in a ceasefire. We believe in ending the war on all fronts ... and that we

witness peace throughout the region, in Lebanon, Yemen, Iraq, Iran and other countries of the region," he said in an interview broadcast yesterday.

Mr Araghchi said his country's political system is "solid" and does not rely on one person to operate.

"Of course, individuals are influential, and each person plays their role - some better, some worse, some less - but what matters is that the political system in Iran is a very solid structure," he said.

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Billions in housing benefits for UAE citizens

SARMAD KHAN

Abu Dhabi and Dubai have approved housing packages worth a total of Dh9.5 billion (\$2.5 billion) for Emiratis.

Under the directive of President Sheikh Mohamed in his capacity as Ruler of Abu Dhabi, Sheikh Khaled bin Mohamed, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, approved a housing benefits package worth Dh4.21 billion in the emirate.

The package, which is set to benefit 2,652 UAE citizens, includes housing loans worth a total of Dh2.1 billion, ready-built housing grants worth Dh1.8 billion, land grants worth Dh144 million and exemptions from housing loan repayments worth Dh142 million, state news agency Wam reported yesterday.

Also yesterday, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid, Vice President, Prime Minister and Ruler of Dubai, approved the allocation of 4,631 residential land plots valued at Dh5.3 billion for citizens in the emirate.

The plots span more than 659 hectares across Al Eyas, Latifa City and Mushrif and are part of the emirate's efforts to further bolster the living standards of citizens.

The residential plot allocation is to be conducted through the Emirati platform on the DubaiNow app.

Sheikh Mohammed said providing every Emirati family with suitable housing was a key priority of Dubai's development strategy.

"Our vision is consistent - Dubai's true capital is its people and their families. The UAE citizen will always remain at the top of our priorities," Sheikh Mohammed said. "Our goal is for Dubai to become the world's best city for family life by offering a leading urban ecosystem that combines an integrated social environment and advanced housing supported by state-of-the-art infrastructure and services."

Meanwhile, the Central Bank of the UAE has approved a resilience package to reinforce the stability of the banking sector amid the conflict in the region.

The move is intended to support the banking sector in "light of exceptional global and regional circumstances", the CBUAE board was quoted as saying by Wam.

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Plenty to go around



Abdulla bin Touq, Minister of Economy and Tourism and Chairman of the Higher Committee for Consumer Protection, tours a Carrefour distribution centre in Abu Dhabi. He said all retail outlets in the UAE have an abundance of goods in sufficient quantities to meet consumers' needs. Report, page 7 Wam

UAE criticises 'dangerous' strike on Iranian gasfield

JENNIFER GNANA

The world's largest natural gasfield was attacked yesterday in what the UAE called a "dangerous escalation" of the conflict in the region.

Installations linked to Iran's South Pars gasfield, which it shares with Qatar, were struck in what was widely reported to be an Israeli operation with US consent.

Israel's military did not

immediately confirm its involvement.

The UAE condemned the strike on South Pars. "Targeting energy infrastructure constitutes a direct threat to global energy security, as well as to the security and stability of the region and its people," the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said.

Qatar's Foreign Ministry joined the UAE in condemning the strike, which it called a "dangerous and irresponsible step".

Meanwhile, US Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard told a Senate hearing yesterday that the Iranian regime appeared to be intact, although "degraded", despite the deaths of several high-level figures.

Questions also emerged over Iran's nuclear activities yesterday, as the director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency said inspectors were unsure whether a new underground site at Isfahan

was ready to begin enriching uranium. IAEA inspectors had to cancel a visit to Isfahan, Rafael Grossi said, and so do not know whether centrifuges have started to be installed at the site - which would be Iran's fourth known enrichment plant - or if it is "simply an empty hall".

"There are many questions that we will only elucidate when we are able to go back," he added.

Ms Gabbard had been expected

to tell the Senate hearing that Iran had made no efforts to rebuild its uranium enrichment programme since last year's 12-day war. However, she omitted that statement from her remarks.

She said instead that Iran "was trying to recover from the severe damage to its nuclear infrastructure sustained during the 12-day war" when the US and Israel began their current offensive on February 28.