

Foreign News

Israel says Iran spy chief killed as tensions escalate

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BY AGENCIES

Israel's Defence Minister, Mr Israel Katz, has said the country's forces have killed Iran's intelligence minister Esmail Khatib in the latest escalation between the two rivals.

Tehran had not by press time commented on or confirmed the claim.

If verified, the development would mark the third reported assassination of a senior Iranian official in two days.

On Tuesday, Iran confirmed the deaths of Mr Ali Larjani, a senior security official, and Mr Gholamreza Soleimani, head of the Basij paramilitary force, following Israeli air strikes.

A funeral ceremony for the two officials was held in Tehran yesterday, according to State broadcaster Press TV, with leaders and mourners in attendance.

Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said the killing of Mr Larjani would not cripple the country's leadership.

In an interview with Al Jazeera aired after Tehran confirmed the death, Mr Araghchi said Iran's government does not depend on a single individual.

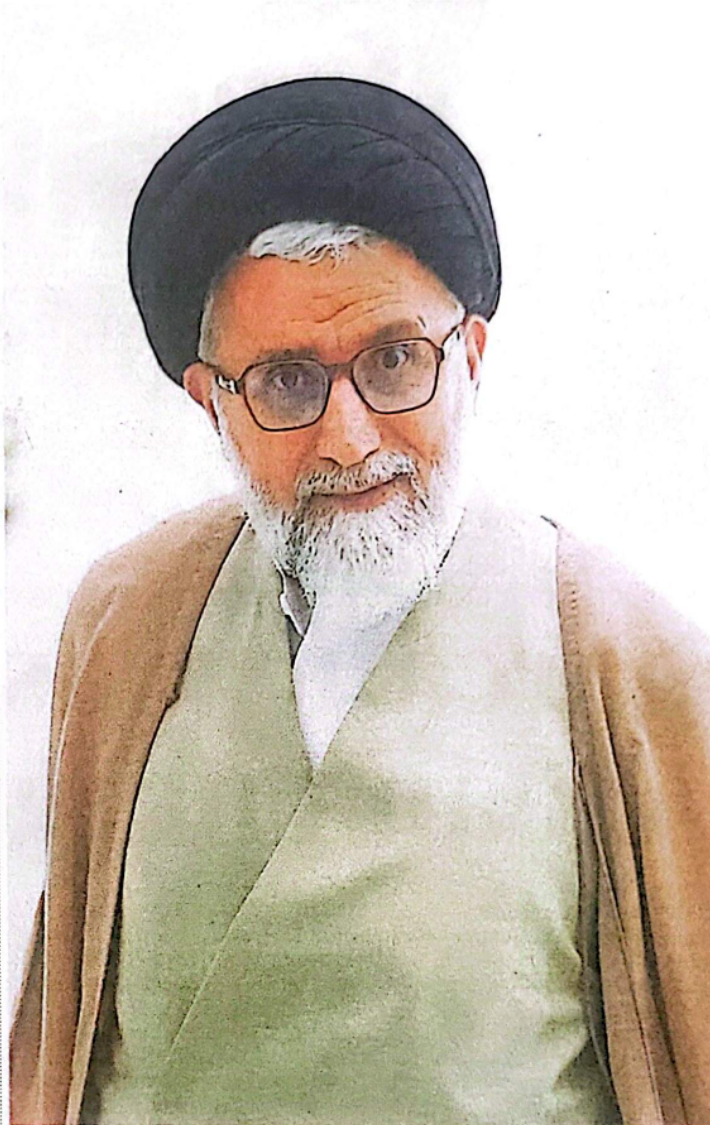
Israeli stance

Al Jazeera's Ms Nida Ibrahim, reporting from the occupied West Bank, said Israeli analysts described Mr Khatib as a trusted figure close to Iran's new Supreme Leader, Mr Mojtaba Khamenei.

"Israeli sources say intelligence gathered in the past 24 hours enabled them to announce the deaths of three senior Iranian officials," she reported.

Mr Katz also said he and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had granted the military standing authorisation to target other senior Iranian officials without case-by-case approval.

Analysts say the move signals an es-



Esmail Khatib, Iran's intelligence minister. PHOTO/AGENCIES

calation in Israel's strategy of targeting high-ranking figures within Iran's leadership.

The United States State Department last Friday announced a \$10 million (about Shs37 billion) reward for infor-

mation on Iran's new Supreme Leader and other senior officials, including Mr Khatib.

Mr Larjani was one of Iran's most influential political figures, having previously led nuclear negotiations with

BACKGROUND

Esmail Khatib is a Shia cleric and close ally of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. Born in Qaen, South Khorasan Province, Khatib studied in the Qom seminary and later joined the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) in the early 1980s. He held several senior intelligence roles, including heading intelligence offices in Qom and within the judiciary, before serving as security chief at Astan Quds Razavi. As intelligence minister, he oversaw efforts to counter foreign infiltration, particularly by Israel.

Western powers and served as speaker of parliament.

Mr Soleimani commanded the Basij, a key internal paramilitary force under the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.

Israel has for years carried out targeted killings of adversaries across the Middle East.

Several Hamas leaders have been killed in Gaza and abroad, including the group's political leader, Mr Yahya Sinwar; military commander Mr Mohammed Deif; and political chief Mr Ismail Haniyeh.

Past killings

Other regional figures killed in similar strikes include Hezbollah leader Mr Hassan Nasrallah in Lebanon and former Houthi prime minister Mr Ahmed Rahawi in Yemen.

Israeli officials have indicated such operations will continue as part of their broader security strategy.

Since the outbreak of direct confrontation between Israel and Iran on February 28, the conflict has intensified, with both sides reporting significant losses.

Israel and its allies say the strikes are aimed at weakening Iran's military and political leadership, although the full extent of the impact remains unclear.