

Two die of wounds from Israeli strike on Syria port

Author:

Thu, 2021-12-30 01:04

BEIRUT: At least two members of a pro-government militia were killed in an Israeli strike on the Syrian port of Latakia, a war monitor said on Wednesday.

The strike before dawn on Tuesday marked the second time that Israel has hit the key cargo hub since the outbreak of Syria's civil war in 2011.

The Israeli attack – one of nearly 30 that have hit Syria this year – caused significant damage with stacks of containers catching fire.

“Two members of a pro-regime militia were killed in the Israeli strike,” the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

“They had suffered serious wounds and succumbed to their injuries” in hospital in Latakia on Wednesday.

Three other militia fighters were also wounded.

Syrian state media said the containers hit in the strikes carried “engine oil and spare parts for cars and other vehicles.”

But the observatory said the cargo was “arms and munitions.”

Syrian government ally Iran condemned the airstrikes, describing them as “inhumane and immoral” and an example of Israel's “provocation of crisis in the region.”

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh accused Israel of “making a mockery of all international laws, regulations and norms by carrying out repeated attacks on Syrian territory on false pretexts.”

Since the start of the conflict, Israel has routinely carried out air strikes on its strife-torn neighbor, mostly targeting Syrian government troops as well as allied Iran-backed forces and Hezbollah fighters.

So far this year, Israel has targeted Syria nearly 30 times, killing 130 people including five civilians and 125 loyalist fighters, according to Observatory figures.



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Syrian port ablaze as Israeli airstrikes hit Iran arms cache
Life in ruins:
Ancient sites shelter Syria's displaced

[Iraq vote victor Moqtada Sadr meets pro-Iran rivals](#)

Author:

Thu, 2021-12-30 00:55

NAJAF: The winner of Iraq's October parliamentary election, Shiite cleric Moqtada Sadr, met on Wednesday with rivals from the pro-Iran Hashd Al-Shaabi former paramilitary alliance ahead of the opening of parliament.

The Oct. 10 vote was rejected by the Fatah Alliance, the political arm of the pro-Tehran Hashd, but Iraq's top court on Monday dismissed their allegations of voter fraud and ratified the results.

It paves the way for parliament to meet and elect a president – who will then name a prime minister tasked with forming a new government.

In multi-confessional and multi-ethnic Iraq, the formation of governments has involved complex negotiations ever since the 2003 US-led invasion toppled dictator Saddam Hussein.

On Wednesday, leaders including Fatah Alliance chief Hadi Al-Ameri, senior Hashd official Faleh Al-Fayyad and Qais Al-Khazali, head of the Asaib Ahl Al-Haq force – a key component of the Hashd – were hosted by Sadr at his home in the Iraqi shrine city of Najaf, according to state news agency INA.

The leaders discussed “the political situation” and the “formation of the next government,” INA reported.

Sadr, a political maverick and former anti-US militia leader who opposes all foreign interference, had already met leaders from pro-Iran parties earlier this month.

Iraq is trying to recover from years of war and jihadist violence but remains hobbled by political divisions, corruption and poverty.

Parties from Iraq’s Shiite majority have previously struck compromise deals to work together, but Sadr is insistent he wants to forge a coalition capable of forming a parliamentary majority.

Sadr’s movement won more than a fifth of the seats, 73 out of the assembly’s total of 329. The Fatah Alliance took 17 seats, sharply down from its 48 seats in the past assembly, and Hashed leaders rejected the result.

Sadr, a self-styled defender against all forms of corruption, has repeatedly said that the next prime minister will be chosen by his movement.

The scion of an influential clerical family who led a militia against the US-led occupation of Iraq, Sadr has distinguished himself from other Shiite factions by seeking to distance himself from both Iranian and US influences.



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Iraqi cleric Moqtada Sadr's bloc declared biggest election winner
Iraq Shiite leader Sadr cautions vote 'losers'

[Lebanon seizes Captagon shipment in fake oranges](#)

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Wed, 2021-12-29 19:00

BEIRUT: A shipment of fake oranges hid millions of Captagon pills intercepted by Lebanese authorities, the interior minister said Wednesday, in the latest regional seizure of the stimulant drug.

Customs officers seized "nearly nine million Captagon tablets" at Beirut's port, Bassam Mawlawi said at a press conference, noting that the cargo was heading for a Gulf country.

Captagon is an amphetamine-type stimulant manufactured mostly in Lebanon and Syria.

A customs officer confirmed to AFP that this cargo was en route to Kuwait. The Captagon tablets were placed in small bags hidden in fake oranges among a real fruit shipment.

An investigation has been opened to determine its source.

Lebanon – which is suffering political paralysis and economic crisis – has boosted efforts to thwart Captagon trafficking through its ports following criticism from Gulf countries over lack of cooperation.

This was the second regional seizure in a week of Captagon hidden in fruit.

On December 23, Dubai police said they arrested four men “of Arab nationality” for trying to smuggle millions of dollars worth of Captagon into the United Arab Emirates.

The more than one million pills were concealed in plastic lemons among a shipment of real lemons.

Saudi Arabia announced in April the suspension of fruit and vegetable imports from Lebanon after the seizure of more than five million Captagon pills hidden in fruit.

Captagon is a brand name for the amphetamine-type stimulant fenethylamine.

According to a European Union-funded report by the Center for Operational Analysis and Research, “Captagon exports from Syria reached a market value of at least \$3.46 billion” in 2020.

In November the Syrian army said it seized half a ton of Captagon concealed in a spaghetti shipment before it could be smuggled out of the country.





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Attempt to smuggle Captagon pills into Saudi Arabia thwarted Lebanon's drug trade booms with help from Hezbollah's Captagon connection

[Egypt working with China's Sinovac to boost vaccine production in region](#)

Wed, 2021-12-29 21:17

CAIRO: Egypt has held talks with Chinese company Sinovac on boosting local production and development of vaccines, and the transfer of manufacturing technology.

Egypt's acting health minister, Khaled Abdel Ghaffar, and Sinovac's director general, Zhao Quang, discussed ways to expand cooperation between Sinovac and the Egyptian Holding Co for Biological Products and Vaccines, also known as Vacsera.

The pair discussed the manufacture of vaccines for COVID-19, influenza and polio at Vacsera's factories, with a view to making Egypt a center for the production of such products in Africa.

They also discussed a timeline for transferring Sinovac's manufacturing technology to Vacsera's factories in 2022 and the training requirements for Egyptian workers.

Egypt's Health Minister Hala Zayed said earlier that the country planned to produce more than 1 billion doses of the Sinovac COVID-19 vaccine annually. She added that the move would make Egypt "the largest producer of vaccines in Africa and the Middle East."

Two factories in Cairo will handle vaccine production to cover local needs and exports to other African nations. Vacsera plans to expand its complex to include cold-storage facilities for 150 million doses of vaccines, and the handling of raw materials.

Zhao confirmed Sinovac's keenness to work with Egypt, stressing the need to accelerate the transfer of manufacturing technology and praising Vacsera's capabilities.



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After Sinovac, Egypt seeks to produce Moderna vaccine locally Egypt plans to make 1 billion Sinovac vaccines a year

[Sudan officials: 31 bodies retrieved from collapsed mine](#)

Author:

By SAMY MAGDY | AP

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1640801359417035000

Wed, 2021-12-29 21:11

CAIRO: Sudanese authorities said Wednesday rescue workers retrieved at least

31 bodies from a collapsed gold mine in West Kordofan province.

The country's state-run mining company said workers and villagers were still searching the Darsaya mine for more bodies or possible survivors. The mine is located in the Fuja village, around 700 kilometers (435 miles) south of the capital of Khartoum.

The defunct mine collapsed earlier this week, killing at least 38 people, the company said Tuesday. It posted images on Facebook showing villagers gathering at the site as at least two dredgers worked to find possible survivors and bodies.

The Sudanese Mineral Resources Limited Company said the mine was not functional but local miners returned to work there after security forces guarding the site left the area.

Collapses are common in Sudan's gold mines, where safety standards are not widely in effect.

Sudan is a major gold producer with numerous mines scattered across the country. The industry, however, suffered from years of mismanagement and corruption.

The transitional government has begun regulating the industry during the past two years.

In nearby North Darfur province, an unidentified armed group late Tuesday attacked and looted a warehouse for the World Food Program in the provincial capital of el-Fasher, said Khardiata Lo Ndiaye, UN humanitarian coordinator in Sudan. Local authorities in North Darfur imposed a curfew across the province starting Wednesday.

As many as 1,900 metric tons of food had been stored at the warehouse, meant to be distributed to people in need in the area, the WFP said.

"Such an attack severely impedes our ability to deliver to the people who need it the most," she said.

Sudan is one of the poorest countries in the world, with at least 14.3 million people in need humanitarian assistance, according to UN figures.

The attack on WFP's warehouse came after another one on a former base for the UN peacekeeping mission in el-Fasher last week. The base, handed over to Sudanese authorities on Dec. 21, was also looted, the UN said.



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Sudan officials say defunct mine collapses, kills 38 people