

Syrian army bombards rebels in birthplace of uprising

Author:

Reuters

ID:

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AMMAN: Syria's military bombarded the last rebel enclave in the southern city of Daraa on Sunday, killing at least six people in one of the deadliest attacks in its siege of the birthplace of the country's uprising, residents said.

The army declined to comment on the reports but said in a statement it was losing patience with what it called "armed groups and terrorists" in the neighborhood.

An elite division of the army, backed by Iranian militias, has been blocking food and fuel deliveries to Daraa al Balad to press rebels to surrender three years after government forces retook the rest of the area near the border with Jordan.

"They are using so-called elephant rockets indiscriminately," Abu Jihad al Horani, a local official told Reuters, referring to improvised missiles. Explosions could be heard in the background.

Residents said bodies of six people were pulled out of bombarded houses in the center of the Daraa neighborhood which saw the first peaceful protests against the rule of President Bashar Assad in 2011.

The Syrian military's pro-Iranian Fourth Division, the main force in the southern province, backed by Tehran-financed local militias, have encircled the bastion for two months.

Local officials, residents and some army officials, speaking on condition of anonymity, have said the offensive is an attempt to undermine Russian efforts to resolve the standoff without an all-out assault.

Russian generals holding talks with local figures and army commanders announced a plan on Aug. 14 that would allow the army to enter but giving guarantees to residents against reprisals and offering safe passage to former rebels to leave for other opposition areas in northwest Syria.

In 2018, the Syrian army, aided by Russian air power and Iranian militias, retook control of the southern province which also borders Israel's Golan Heights.

Moscow gave guarantees to Israel and Washington at the time that it would prevent Iranian-backed militias from expanding their influence in the area. That deal forced thousands of Western-backed rebels to hand over heavy weapons but kept the army from entering Daraa al Balad, whose administration remained in rebel hands.

"We hold Russia responsible for any child who gets injured This war is being imposed on us by Iran and the Russians are watching," Abu Yusef al Masalmeh, an elder said.

Washington and major Western powers have expressed concern about Assad forces' military campaign in Daraa, which they say tests Russia's pledges to

maintain stability and rein in Iranian-militias in the border area.



Main category:
[Middle-East](#)

[Egypt issues instructions to remove books on extremism from mosques](#)

Author:

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CAIRO: The Egyptian Ministry of Endowments has decided to prevent the entry of books on extremism and the Muslim Brotherhood to all mosques in Egypt and to remove those already there within the coming 15 days.

Mohammed Mokhtar Gomaa, minister of endowments, said that committees will be formed to re-examine mosque libraries and the books, magazines and publications in them and remove any publications that adopt extremist ideology or belong to any extremist group.

In an urgent statement, the minister directed the punishment of any official neglecting these orders.

There was also an urgent warning that all imams take a pledge to not allow any books to be included in mosque libraries without permission from the General Administration of Religious Guidance in the Ministry's general

office.

The minister also directed the removal of any violating posters inside or outside the mosque.

Hisham Abdel Aziz, who is in charge of running the work of the head of the religious sector at the Ministry of Endowments, issued a poster alerting all directorates to quickly form committees to re-examine any libraries, books, magazines or publications in mosques, and purify them of any publications that adopt an extremist ideology or belong to any extremist group or the Brotherhood.

Those negligent will be referred for investigation, he said.

The ministry called on imams to complete these tasks no later than 15 days from the date of this decision.

Violating of these directives was a severe negligence and a breach of duty that deserved disciplinary accountability, the ministry warned.



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[Brotherhood](#)

Facebook dismantles disinformation networks producing Muslim Brotherhood-related content in Sudan
Fossil of previously unknown 4-legged whale found in Egypt

Female Kurdish musician Aynur Dogan wins prestigious international award

Author:

Sun, 2021-08-29 23:14

ANKARA: A Kurdish singer-songwriter has won a prestigious international award for maintaining the “highest artistic integrity in the face of political pressure.”

Aynur Dogan received the WOMEX 21 Artist Award, which was introduced in 1999 to acknowledge the social and political importance of musical excellence at an international level. The prize also recognized Dogan’s “long-term dedication to the preservation and innovation” of Kurdish and Alevi culture.

The 46-year-old artist said she was honored that her “years-long efforts on this rocky path” was accepted and welcomed internationally.

“I know that it is hard to make it acknowledged (get acknowledgement for) a traditional music that is not familiar to everybody,” Dogan told Arab News. “It is also very challenging to make it with a language that is not recognized widely.”

She was born in the southeast Turkish province of Dersim (Tunceli) and left home in 1992 for Istanbul, where she was able to establish contact with the music world, attend music classes and learn to play instruments.

She released her first album in 2002 with Kurdish songs – a significant taboo at the time – and faced restrictions and bans on her songs and concert appearances.

A court banned her 2004 album “Kece Kurdan,” alleging its lyrics had inspired separatism. The ruling was later annulled.

One of her concerts during the Istanbul Jazz Festival in 2010 was interrupted by audience members who booed her for singing in Kurdish, causing her to leave the gig.



Her rise to stardom was not easy, but Aynur Dogan has become a cultural symbol for the Kurdish community. (Supplied)

But the restrictions were gradually lifted over the years, and her melancholic music and rich voice became popular among a wide Turkish audience.

She has become a cultural symbol for the Kurdish community, releasing several albums that focus on its folk music and oral traditions.

“This prize reminded me that I’m not alone and I have a point in promoting music in my mother tongue,” she said. “It also inspired a positive message to the community I belong to. Their happiness, their pride makes me so happy. I used my music as an instrument to overcome the challenges I face. My previous experience showed me that your determination and your self-awareness help yourself in breaking the national boundaries and making your music globally accepted.”

Her popularity goes beyond Turkey, with several international awards and appearances in national and international documentaries such as “Crossing the Bridge,” directed by Fatih Akin, and “The Music of Strangers,” directed by Morgan Neville.

She has collaborated with several artists and groups, including Yo-Yo Ma and the Silk Road Ensemble.

“To hear Aynur’s voice is to hear the transformation of all the layers of human joy and suffering into one sound,” the famous cellist said when speaking about Dogan. “It reaches so deep into our soul, tears into our hearts, and then we are for one moment, joined as one. It is unforgettable.”

Music critic Naim Dilmener said that Dogan’s musical style was one of the strongest examples of world music being performed beyond mainstream

languages.

“She performs in Kurdish and she is doing it in the best way,” he told Arab News, praising her “great interpersonal communication (skills) and social network” that had given her a broad audience on an international scale.

She was able to sing at the most famous musical festivals around the world and had “plentiful” followers, he added.

Dogan performs more often in Europe than in Turkey, with concerts planned for the coming months in Germany, the UK and Netherlands.



Her rise to stardom was not easy, but Aynur Dogan has become a cultural symbol for the Kurdish community. (Supplied)

She was awarded the Master of Mediterranean Music Award in 2017 from the Berklee College of Music in Boston, in the category of Mediterranean Women in Action, for her efforts to promote Kurdish folk oral traditions and blend it with modern Western styles.

“Another characteristic of Aynur Dogan is her ability to move us to tears in each of her songs. I don’t know how she can do it, but I think it is because of her superhuman skills,” Dilmener said.

She has also used her success to build her audience and connect the younger generation with the roots of Kurdish music.

Turkish people mostly know Dogan for her cameo in the blockbuster movie “Gonul Yarasi” (Heartbreak). She sang “Dar Hejiroke” (Fig Tree of the Mountain) and made the movie’s main character cry with the lyrics and her rich voice.

Her latest album “Hedur / Solace Of Time” has eight songs and was released in

Feb. 2020.

She will be on a European tour in the coming months to promote the album, and will receive the WOMEX award on Oct. 31 in Porto.





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Kurdish-Iranian journalists jailed, sentenced to 90 lashes
Kurdish artist Hiwa K discusses highlights from his Dubai exhibition

[Can fuel subsidy cuts halt Lebanon's descent into darkness?](#)

Author:

Sun, 2021-08-29 21:35

DUBAI: Time was when the streets of Beirut throbbed with life once dusk fell. But nowadays they become ghosts of their former selves as soon as the sun sets. The reason: There is no money in the state's coffers to buy fuel to operate Lebanon's power plants.

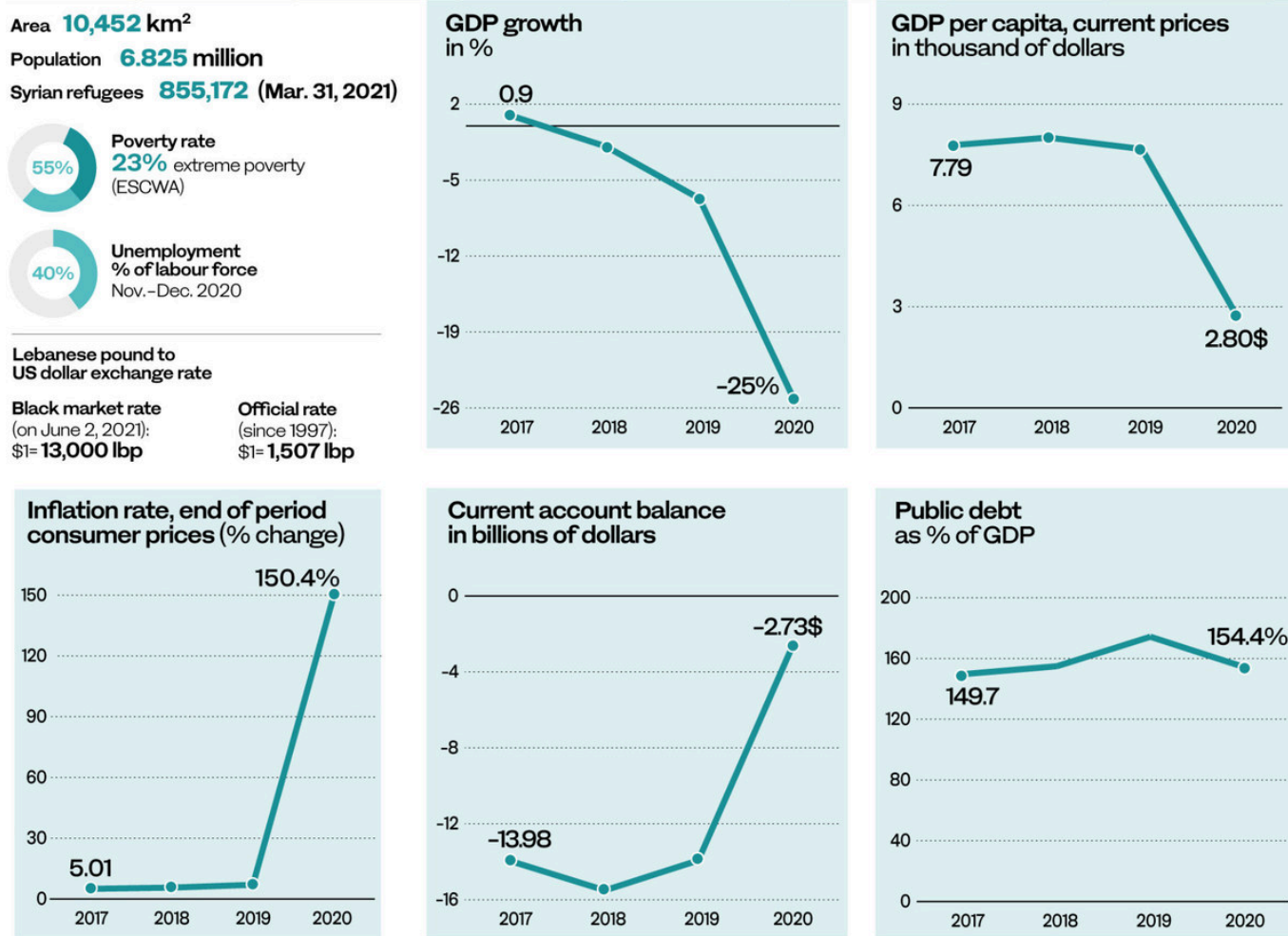
Private generators too have run out of supplies, with fuel becoming the latest casualty of a complex web of crises that have drained Lebanon's foreign currency reserves.

Last week, the price of fuel in Lebanon rose for the second time in less than two months. The government lifted subsidies for gasoline and diesel in an effort to ease shortages, which led to a nearly 66 percent spike in prices since the last hike in late June.

Lebanese people were already struggling to keep up with expenses given that the pound has lost nearly 90 percent of its value (since mass protests kicked off in late 2019) while salaries have stagnated.

LEBANESE ECONOMY

Nation trapped in worst economic crisis since 1975–1990 civil war



Source: IMF, UNHCR, Lebanese government

ARAB NEWS

Mustafa Naboulsi lives in Qalamoun, a town in the north of Lebanon, and has been working as a firefighter for 11 years. On Aug. 23, he sent his family to live in France owing to the country's worsening economic situation.

"Sometimes we have to even sleep in the car while waiting for the fuel so that we can wake up in the morning and fill up the tank. A lot of times we have spent two to three hours in queues, only to be told that the fuel was finished and that we should return tomorrow," Naboulsi told Arab News.

It has been over 10 days since Khaled Zakaria last filled his tank with gasoline. To do so, he had to travel for nearly 50 km from Tripoli to Byblos and stand in line for over an hour.

The high demand for gasoline coupled with its unavailability has predictably given rise to a black market, where the commodity can be bought for seven to 10 times more than its official price. Zakaria said he refuses to purchase gasoline this way as he does not want to encourage hoarding and corruption, which in his view can only make a bad situation worse.

Naboulsi, the firefighter, also treats fire burns, but the restrictions on his mobility have left him feeling helpless.

“Sometimes I get called into areas that are outside my town. These are people that are in pain and I would love to help them, but I can’t even reach them,” he told Arab News.



Fire devours a building close to where a fuel tank exploded in Lebanon’s northern region of Akkar on August 15, 2021. (AFP file photo)

“Especially after what happened in Akkar. I have no words to describe the pain. It’s a very hard feeling. You feel like you are not doing enough even though the situation is out of your control,” he said.

On the morning of Aug. 15, a gasoline-tanker explosion in Akkar left 28 people dead and nearly 80 injured. The incident prompted neighboring countries to step in to provide aid since Lebanon is also in the midst of a medical crisis.

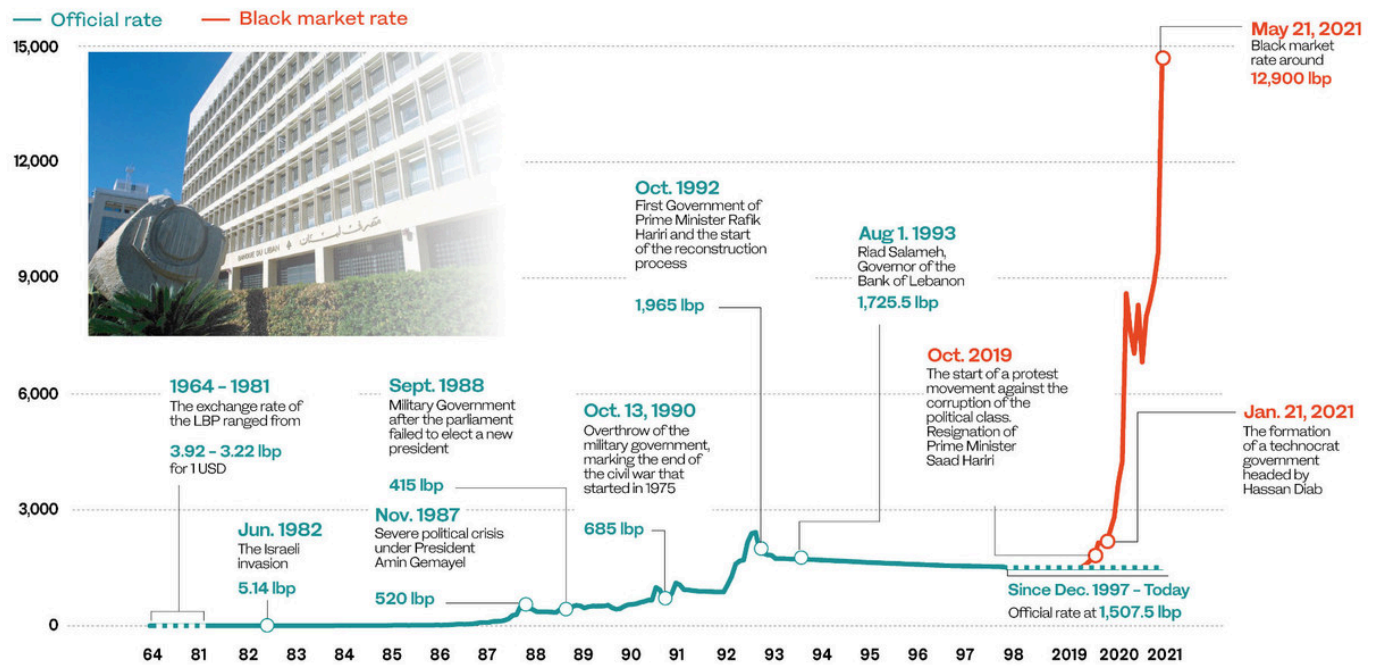
At the beginning of August, Riad Salameh, Lebanon’s Central Bank governor, blamed local traders for fuel shortages.

“It’s unacceptable that we import \$820 million worth of fuel and not get to

see diesel fuel, gasoline or electricity. This, not the positions adopted by us, is humiliation in itself against the Lebanese,” he told a local radio station.

THE TURBULENT HISTORY OF THE LEBANESE CURRENCY

Lebanese pound to US dollar exchange rate



Source: BDL/AFP

ARAB NEWS

The imported fuel was expected to cover the country’s needs for three months. Instead, it did not last for even one month.

Bachar Elhalabi, senior Middle East and North Africa analyst at ClipperData, says the Lebanese political system of “muhasasa,” or the sectarian division of ministerial spoils among 18 religious sects, has allowed each leader to grab “a piece of the pie” for themselves.

“Whether it is funding allocations, projects, contracts, etc. Unfortunately, the energy sector is part of that ‘muhasasa.’ In fact, it might be one of the biggest golden geese for sectarian leaders,” he said.

While the caretaker government struggles to keep mass hunger and a total economic collapse at bay, one political faction has found an opportunity to make a grandstand play.

The leader of the Iran-backed Hezbollah, Hassan Nasrallah, said on Friday that he had decided to arrange for a third shipment of Iranian oil.

“We have agreed to start loading a third vessel,” Reuters news agency quoted Nasrallah as saying. “The coming days will prove those doubtful about the shipments arriving with fuel wrong ... and our words will be clear when the first vessel reaches Lebanon.”



Hezbollah leader Massahn Nasrallah caused an uproar when he announced that his group has ordered oil from Iran, a move that could place Lebanon under US economic sanctions. (Reuters file photo)

Earlier last week, Nasrallah announced that the first vessel with Iranian oil had set sail to Lebanon.

Some analysts have warned that importation of Iranian fuel could expose Lebanon to something it cannot afford: US sanctions. Nevertheless, Elhalabi believes Nasrallah is serious because, regardless of whether the vessels make it to Lebanon, the move still serves Hezbollah's interests.

"The country and the various stakeholders are in a bind. And that includes opponents of Nasrallah. If the tanker arrives at a Lebanese port, the staff are going to look really bad" if they refuse to offload the fuel, Elhalabi said.

On the one hand, if Iranian oil ends up reaching Lebanon, Nasrallah will have succeeded in presenting himself as someone capable yet separate from the government. On the other hand, if the international community – more specifically the US – hits Lebanon with sanctions for importing Iranian oil, Nasrallah will reap the resultant political rewards, Elhalabi said.

Since Lebanon was gripped by economic and financial crises in late 2019, the government has continued to subsidize wheat, gas, fuel, food and other essential items at lower-than market rates.

"Fuel shortages can be traced back to the inefficiency of the decades-old subsidy program," Jean Tawile, an economist who has advised the government in the past, told Arab News.

"This paved the way for many cases of abuse such as hoarding, stockpiling and

smuggling.”



Lebanese pharmacy workers demonstrate in the Achrafieh district of Beirut on August 16, 2021, with their placards saying “no gasoline = no ambulance” and “no electricity = no hospital” and “no vaccine = no treatment”. (AFP)

Most of Lebanon’s subsidized goods are being smuggled into Syria “as prices have skyrocketed there since the outbreak of war,” he said.

Historical data shows that Lebanon imported 5.7 million tons of fuel in 2011, Tawile said. However, by the end of 2012, after the Syrian civil war broke out, the figure shot up to 7.6 million tons.

“So essentially, Lebanese depositors were subsidizing the fuel needs of Syria,” he said.

According to Tawile, the removal of subsidies will eliminate discrepancies in the two countries’ fuel prices and put an end to smuggling of the commodity.

Fuel hoarding will also decrease as distributors will have no reason to stockpile the commodity, something they regularly do in anticipation of price hikes.

Additionally, as Mohamed Ramady, a former senior banker and professor of finance and economics at King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals points out, Lebanon has been facing pressure from international lenders to lift subsidies.

“Lebanon is facing a difficult situation. This decision to reduce the

subsidies on fuel is not politically driven. It is economically driven,” Ramady told Arab News.



A demonstrator carries a national flag along a blocked road during a protest against the mounting economic hardships near the Central Bank building in Beirut on March 16, 2021. (REUTERS/File Photo)

Ramady said reducing subsidies is also a way for the government to achieve a measure of fiscal prudence.

“Custom duties are not there. The trade situation is fragile as Lebanon is not exporting vegetables and fruits like before. Tourism revenue has dropped drastically. In other words, Lebanon’s sources of income have narrowed,” he said.

Tawile says the government can cushion the impact of decreased subsidies on the people by implementing a social safety net mechanism, for instance by providing poorest with direct cash payments.

The caretaker government did propose in May to provide ration cards to the most vulnerable families as a replacement for subsidies. The \$556 million scheme was expected to benefit more than 500,000 needy families.

However, as with so many other programs in Lebanon, the absence of a clear funding source has kept the plan in the deep freeze since then.





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[Lebanon crisis](#)

[Abu Dhabi orders residents to take booster shot for Sinopharm vaccine](#)

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DUBAI: Abu Dhabi residents who received the second dose of the Sinopharm COVID-19 vaccine more than six months ago are required to get a booster shot by Sept. 20.

The booster dose must be taken to “enhance their immunity and comply with approved health protocol,” Abu Dhabi Media Office said on Sunday.

Those who don't receive the third jab will lose their green status on the UAE's Al-Hosn App, which allows people to access public venues like shopping malls, schools and gyms.

“After 20 September they will no longer be eligible for green status to enter

public places limited to those fully vaccinated,” the office said. The Chinese state-backed Sinopharm jab is an inactivated vaccine which triggers the production of antibodies that fight the coronavirus.



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