

New group of rebels quits Syria's Daraa under truce

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BEIRUT: A second group of rebel fighters left the southern Syrian city of Daraa Thursday under a Russian-brokered truce aimed at ending the region's worst fighting in years, a monitor said.

Daraa, seen as the birthplace of Syria's uprising in 2011 and held for years by opposition forces, was returned to government control in 2018 under a previous Moscow-backed ceasefire that had allowed rebels to stay in some areas of Daraa province.

But since late July local armed groups have exchanged artillery fire with government forces and the regime has imposed a crippling siege on the city's southern districts of Daraa al-Balad, seen as a hub for former rebels.

The clashes were the biggest challenge yet to the 2018 ceasefire, and Moscow-led talks have intensified in recent days as the government has stepped up its campaign to root out remaining rebels from Daraa al-Balad.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported Thursday that 53 people, mostly "fighters who rejected the reconciliation deal reached under Russian auspices", had been sent to northern Syria.

Syria's official SANA news agency said that "45 terrorists and some of their family members" had left Daraa in what it called a step "towards ending terrorist control over the district and towards the return of all state institutions and services".

It came two days after an initial group of opposition fighters boarded buses to take them to rebel-held territory in the north, according to the Britain-based Observatory.

It says the agreement would see around 100 rebel fighters leave Daraa al-Balad for northern Syria, with remaining fighters surrendering their arms, in exchange for a lifting of the siege which has seen some 40,000 people face water and power cuts as well as food and medical shortages.

The United Nations said Tuesday that the latest escalation had forced some 38,000 people to flee over the past month.

UN Special Envoy for Syria Geir Pedersen called Tuesday for humanitarian assistance and an immediate truce.

"Immediate, safe and unimpeded humanitarian access is needed to all affected areas and communities, including Daraa al-Balad," he told the Security Council.



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Fighting in Syria's Daraa displaces 38,000 UN's Syria envoy calls for immediate end to 'alarming' Daraa fighting

[U.N. chief calls on Lebanon leaders to form effective government](#)

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Thu, 2021-08-26 19:13

UNITED NATIONS: U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres expressed deep concern on Thursday about the deteriorating socio-economic situation in Lebanon and called on all "political leaders to urgently form an effective government of national unity," his spokesman said.

This is needed to “bring immediate relief, justice and accountability ... and drive an ambitious and meaningful course for reform to restore access to basic services, restore stability, promote sustainable development and inspire hope for a better future,” U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric said. A two-year-long financial meltdown hit a crunch point in Lebanon this month as fuel shortages paralysed much of the country, sparking chaos and numerous security incidents.

The crisis has sunk the currency by more than 90%, forced more than half of Lebanese into poverty and frozen depositors out of their accounts. The World Bank has called it one of the sharpest depressions in modern times.



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EU worried at Lebanon's fast deterioration, says time has run out
Lebanon raids discover hoarded fuel, medicine and baby formula

UN hails joint Libya force to protect water network

Author:

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Thu, 2021-08-26 18:40

TRIPOLI: The United Nations on Thursday welcomed the creation of a joint security force from rival sides in Libya to secure the country's water network amid sabotage threats.

"It is a very significant step forward towards the unification of the military institution and the country," the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) said in a statement.

Earlier this month, the water authority shut down a huge network of pipelines known as the Great Man-Made River for a week before restoring supplies. The water network was closed after loyalists of Abdullah al-Senussi, the jailed brother-in-law of slain dictator Moamer Kadhafi, threatened to sabotage it unless he was released.

Senussi, jailed in Tripoli, was sentenced to death in 2015 for his role in the attempted suppression of the 2011 uprising that toppled Kadhafi.

The Great Man-Made River was one of the major projects of Kadhafi during his four decades in power.

It brings water from underground aquifers deep in the Sahara desert in the south of Libya to settlements on the Mediterranean coast in the north.

Oil-rich Libya was gripped by violence after the 2011 uprising and split between the two rival camps, backed by foreign powers.

In October the rival sides signed a ceasefire in Geneva and an interim administration was set up in March to prepare for presidential and parliamentary elections in December.

The joint security force comprises combatants linked to the government based in Tripoli and fighters loyal to east-based military commander Khalifa Haftar, UNSMIL said.

UNSMIL head Jan Kubis said the creation of the new joint force "will not only ensure the security" of the water supply, but also "pave the way for further confidence-building measures" as Libya seeks to achieve reunification.



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The art of an exile: Libyan artist Hasan Dhaimish War-torn Libya needs 40% more oil output to ensure country's reconstruction

[Palestinian activist's family seeks international justice](#)

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Thu, 2021-08-26 18:31

JERUSALEM: The family of Palestinian activist Nizar Banat, who died in Palestinian custody in June, stepped up its quest for international justice on Thursday, turning to British police and the UN.

Banat – a leading critic of the Palestinian Authority and its 86-year old president Mahmud Abbas – died after security forces stormed his home in the flashpoint city of Hebron and dragged him away.

A post-mortem found he had been beaten on the head, chest, neck, legs and hands, with less than an hour elapsing between his arrest and his death.

Banat's family has said it has no confidence in the PA's capacity to deliver justice, and called for an international probe.

A statement from the family's lawyers, the British firm Stoke White, said they have asked Britain's Metropolitan Police to open an investigation under the principle of universal jurisdiction.

For a small number of serious offenses, Britain's courts can hear cases even if the alleged crimes were committed abroad.

Stoke White also said it had asked multiple branches of the United Nations human rights system to open investigation, including the Working Group on Arbitrary Detentions and four special rapporteurs.

Ghasan Khalil Banat said his brother's "murder" was a "tragedy for our family, but also a tragedy for the Palestinian people."

"The so-called investigation that was carried out into his murder is an embarrassment and the PA should feel ashamed of it," he said in the statement.

The head of international law and Stoke White, Hakan Camuz, said:

"Responsibility for the murder of Nizar Banat very clearly lies with the senior leadership of the Palestinian Authority including President Mahmud Abbas and Prime Minister Mohammed Shtayyeh."

Shtayyeh and the PA have promised accountability over Banat's death.

Camuz accused the PA of a long-standing bid to silence dissent.

"They cannot be allowed to get away with this and this is why we are submitting these complaints and petitions to the British police and the UN," he said in the statement.

The UN and the European Union this week raised alarm over a spate of arrests of activists by Palestinian security forces since Banat's death, warning the PA appeared to be cracking down on basic freedoms across the West Bank, a territory occupied by Israel since 1967.



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New protest in Gaza as Palestinians demand an end to Israel's blockade
Israel fires on protesting Palestinians in Gaza, 24 wounded

[**Egypt distributes 1 million doses of locally produced COVID-19 vaccine**](#)

Thu, 2021-08-26 16:40

CAIRO: The first batch of 1 million doses of the locally produced coronavirus disease (COVID-19) vaccine has been distributed among 657 vaccination centers throughout Egypt, according to Health Minister Hala Zayed.

The jabs have been produced following a cooperation agreement between Chinese company Sinovac and Egypt's Holding Company for Biological Products and Vaccines (Vacsera).

Vacsera manufactures and analyzes 15 million doses a month ahead of their distribution to vaccination centers nationwide.

Khaled Mujahid, assistant health minister, said the Vacsera-Sinovac vaccine obtained an emergency use license from the Egyptian Drug Authority on Aug. 23 following evaluation tests in accordance with the global standards and references followed by the World Health Organization to assess its safety, quality and effectiveness.

Mujahid said that an agreement was made to supply raw materials for the production of the vaccine in May. Vacsera medical teams and workers were trained by Chinese experts at a Sinovac facility, transferring vaccine manufacturing technology from China.

He added that the manufacture of the doses started on June 29, with three production cycles creating a total of 1 million doses.

Mujahid added that the vaccine was tested by the Vacsera control and quality laboratories, before being subjected to stability studies, noting that the samples were also analyzed in the laboratories of the Egyptian Drug Authority.



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[Egypt's Holding Company for Biological Products and Vaccines \(Vacsera\)](#)

[Hala Zayed](#)

Egypt vaccines ready for clinical trialsEgypt expects to produce nearly 18 million doses of Sinovac coronavirus vaccine a month