

# Fighting in Syria's Daraa displaces 38,000

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ID:

1629844522785587600

Wed, 2021-08-25 01:35

BEIRUT: Fighting between government forces and former rebels in the Syrian province of Daraa has displaced more than 38,000 people over the past month, the UN said on Tuesday, as truce talks falter.

Daraa, retaken by government forces in 2018, has emerged as a new flashpoint in recent weeks as government forces tightened control over Daraa Al-Balad, a southern district of the provincial capital, a hub for former rebel fighters. Clashes, including artillery exchanges, between the two sides since late July have marked the biggest challenge yet to the Russian-brokered deal that returned the southern province to government control but allowed rebels to stay on in some areas.

Russian-sponsored truce talks launched in the wake of the latest fighting have made little headway as the government has stepped up its campaign to root out remaining rebel fighters from Daraa Al-Balad.

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said that 38,600 internally displaced persons are registered in and around Daraa, with most having fled from Daraa Al-Balad. "This includes almost 15,000 women, over 3,200 men and elderly and over 20,400 children," OCHA said.

It warned of a critical situation in the volatile district, saying that access to goods and services, including food and power, is "extremely challenging."

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said that government forces are restricting the entry of goods into Daraa Al-Balad, where it says 40,000 people still live.

"They are living under siege with families facing shortages of food, medical services, potable water, power and internet," said the monitor, which relies on a network of sources inside Syria.

The Observatory said that many in Daraa Al-Balad reject the truce terms being set by the government and its Russian ally.



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## [Lebanese students face bleak return to classrooms amid energy crisis, currency collapse](#)

Author:

Tue, 2021-08-24 21:56

BEIRUT: Lebanon's energy crisis and collapsing currency are creating bleak circumstances for the start of the new academic year, according to a report from the crisis observatory at the American University of Beirut.

Students are due to return to the classroom in a few weeks time, following Monday's announcement by Education Minister Tarek Majzoub about the "return of in-person attendance" after two years of remote learning.

Majzoub said the 2021-2022 academic year would start on Sept. 27 at the kindergarten level followed by the rest of the classes, leaving private

schools the freedom to determine their own operating schedule, which normally starts early to late September.

But this year the outcry of parents unable to afford their children's transport costs and the increased tuition fees seems greater than previously.

And the outcry from educational institutions is worse.

Father Youssef Nasr, president of the General Secretariat of Catholic Schools, on Tuesday highlighted people's daily struggle to make ends meet.

One of the main issues posing a threat to the upcoming school year is fuel, which is required for heating, lighting and transport.

Its price soared after government subsidies were lifted and due to the continued implosion of the Lebanese pound.

The dollar exchange rate on the black market was around LBP19,000 on Tuesday. The figure changes on a daily basis.

According to the crisis observatory, student transport fees are double the tuition fees. The transport sector has threatened to increase the fee for one passenger to LBP25,000 (\$16.58, according to official rates).

The observatory calculated the prices of basic stationery – pens, notebooks and backpacks – at a minimum of LBP479,500 for each student, roughly 71 percent of the minimum wage.

Ghada, a 31-year-old mother who has three children at a private school in Beirut, asked: "Is it reasonable that I spend LBP1 million on each child every month to take them to school after the cost of fuel increased to LBP250,000, in the event that it is available? This means LBP3 million for transport fees from Hadath (in the suburbs of Beirut) to Msaytbeh (in Beirut), without taking into consideration the cost of food, water, electricity, generator fees, medicine and everything necessary to survive. This is insane!"

In a stationery shop in the Furn El-Chebbak neighborhood, 35-year-old Raymond, a father of two, was astonished to see the prices of notebooks, fountain pens and pencils.

He said: "The price of one notebook is LBP45,000, which equals the price of 2 kilos of yogurt, and both are Lebanese products. They are robbing us, and no one is held accountable. This is humiliation! I am very angry. My monthly salary does not exceed LBP2 million. I am an employee. I was able to send my children to a private school but, after today, I may not even be able to send them to a public school."

Activists have highlighted the skyrocketing prices of books that are printed and published in Lebanon. The price of the Arabic language book for fifth grade pupils is LBP500,000.

The crisis observatory's report said: "Seventy percent of families relied on

private schools, especially for the primary and middle level. Following the economic crisis, transfer to public schools has become the normal recourse, with more than half the Lebanese population living in poverty and the majority of families being unable to pay the tuition fees of private schools.”

Iman Alaywan, a professor at Beirut Arab University, said she was receiving daily calls from her desperately worried students about the next academic year and asking about the university’s solutions.

“The university’s administration is inclined to continue teaching remotely, in order to alleviate the burden of diesel and internet fees,” she told Arab News. “The university will allow recording the lectures that will be given on schedule for those who have electricity and internet at home. Those who do not have these services can review the lectures at a convenient time.”



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Tehran is ready to ship more fuel to Lebanon if needed, Iranian official says

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# Israel's new leader to present Iran plan in first White House visit

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1629827522234400100

Tue, 2021-08-24 20:57

JERUSALEM/WASHINGTON: New Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett plans to push for a new Iran strategy during his first White House visit. He is saying he will urge US President Joe Biden not to revive the 2015 nuclear deal with Tehran.

Biden's aides hope the talks will set a positive tone for his relationship with Bennett, a far-right politician and high-tech millionaire who ended Benjamin Netanyahu's record 12-year run as prime minister in June. This would stand in sharp contrast to years of tensions between the conservative Netanyahu, who was close to former President Donald Trump, and the last Democratic administration led by Barack Obama with Biden as his vice president.

The visit gives the US administration an opportunity to demonstrate business as usual with its closest Middle East ally while it contends with the chaotic situation in Afghanistan, Biden's biggest foreign policy crisis since taking office.

The talks will be relatively low-key. The two leaders are expected to speak briefly to a small pool of reporters during their Oval Office talks but will not hold a joint news conference.

Bennett is less dramatic but publicly just as adamant as Netanyahu in pledging not to allow Iran, which Israel views as an existential threat, to build a nuclear weapon, telling a cabinet meeting on Sunday the situation was at a critical point.

"Iran is advancing rapidly with uranium enrichment and has already significantly shortened the time it would take to accumulate the material required for a single nuclear bomb," he said.

Bennett said he would tell Biden: "This is the time to stop the Iranians, not to give them a lifeline in the form of re-entering an expired nuclear deal."

A US official said Bennett's expected entreaties for the Biden administration to drop its efforts to revive the agreement are not likely to bear fruit.

To Israeli acclaim, Trump in 2018 withdrew the United States from the deal between six world powers and Iran. He deemed it too advantageous for Tehran and reimposed US sanctions.

In a report seen last week by Reuters, the International Atomic Energy Agency said Iran had accelerated uranium enrichment to near weapons-grade.

Iran has consistently denied seeking a bomb, but the enrichment raised tensions with the West as both sides seek to resume talks on reviving their deal to curb Tehran's nuclear activities in return for the lifting of sanctions.

Bennett told his cabinet he would present Biden with “an orderly plan that we have formulated in the past two months to curb the Iranians, both in the nuclear sphere and vis-à-vis regional aggression.” He gave no further details.

Asked on Monday about any new Iran strategy proposal from Bennett, US State Department spokesman Ned Price said: “I will leave it to the Israeli prime minister to describe to the American president any thoughts that the Israeli government may have when it comes to Iran.”

Bennett, 49, is the son of American immigrants to Israel. A former head of Israel’s main West Bank settlers council, he heads an unlikely coalition of left-wing, right-wing, centrist and Arab parties.

With consensus on Palestinian statehood virtually impossible within the diverse Israeli government, Biden and his aides are not expected to press Bennett for any major concessions toward the Palestinians in his first foreign visit.

But even with little sign of US pressure to resume peace negotiations with the Palestinians that collapsed in 2014, Israel faces concern from Washington over its settlement activity in areas it captured in the 1967 Middle East war.

The Biden administration has already made clear it opposes further expansion of Jewish settlements on occupied land Palestinians seek for a state. Most countries consider such settlements illegal. Israel disputes this.

So far, Bennett, who has advocated annexation of parts of the West Bank, has moved cautiously on the settlement issue.

Scheduled approval last week of 2,200 new settler homes, along with 800 houses for Palestinians, was postponed, apparently to avoid dissonance with Washington ahead of his visit.

But rising tensions and violence along the Israel-Gaza border, three months after an 11-day war between Israeli forces and Palestinian militants, could cast a shadow over Bennett’s trip.



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## [Doctor in Lebanon needs two motorcycles and a car to dodge traffic, reach woman in labor](#)

Tue, 2021-08-24 20:03

BEIRUT: Lebanon's massive fuel crisis obliged a doctor to use two motorcycles and a car to dodge roadblocks caused by petrol station queues and attend his patient's urgent delivery operation. In less than an hour, Lebanese obstetrician-gynecologist Dr. Julien Lahoud was forced to take unusual commuting methods to reach his patient, who was in labor since 8 a.m. Monday morning.

"My patient was in her ninth month, and I had previously operated on her for a C-section," Lahoud told Arab News on Tuesday, recounting what had happened due to blocked roads.

He said the "patient was in pain, and it took her a few hours to reach the hospital" in Ghazir, eastern Beirut.

The doctor had left his Beirut clinic toward Jounieh (around 25 km away) but was stuck in heavy, bumper-to-bumper traffic caused by roadblocks and

kilometers-long queues of cars waiting at stations along the Beirut-Dawra-Dbayyeh-Jounieh highway.

"Recently, we've been seeing cars queueing at petrol stations. As a precautionary measure, I have been keeping a bicycle in my car trunk and have used it for short distances," said Lahoud, explaining that would not have been an option for Monday's incident.

Monday traffic was at a near standstill, and the first part of the doctor's route to Ghazir had to be on a motorcycle.

"I arranged for a car ride at some point where traffic had eased up near Dbayyeh. The car moved for some distance but traffic came at a complete halt after the Nahr Al-Kalb tunnel," he said.

Not thinking twice, he opened the car window and stopped the first motorcyclist he spotted. "Without even knowing the motorcyclist, I didn't hesitate to ask if he could give me a quick lift to the hospital. He instantly said yes," Lahoud said, calling the motorcyclist "gallant" and a "savior."

A public health professional, Lahoud explained that his patient's medical situation was critical, as she had already had a C-section, and time was a major factor.

"Mercifully, I arrived on time and she had a smooth delivery. Her husband arrived late due to traffic."

Lahoud took to social media to share his experience, saying that both mother and child fared well, though the same could not be said of his country.

"Lebanon is NOT fine," he wrote.

I was delivered to do an urgent delivery. Both Mom and baby are fine. However Lebanon is NOT fine [#لبنان\\_ليس\\_خير](#) [#لبنان\\_ينهار](#)  
[pic.twitter.com/jZ1W865jN8](https://pic.twitter.com/jZ1W865jN8)

– julien lahoud (@julienylahoud) [August 23, 2021](#)

Doctors have been acutely suffering the effects of the fuel crisis and blocked roads in the past few weeks, Lahoud said.

“There are some petrol station owners who used to refuel our tanks, but unfortunately we are hesitant to approach them anymore because they are constantly angered by this ongoing crisis,” he said, explaining that doctors have had to rely on each other up for support.

Lebanon’s fuel prices are expected to double after the state decided on Saturday to change the exchange rate used to price petroleum products in a bid to ease crippling shortages that have brought the country to a standstill.

Roads have been clogged across Lebanon as motorists have queued for the little gasoline left. Meanwhile, prices soar on the black market, and some confrontations over gasoline have turned deadly.



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Prices at pump soar in Lebanon after new subsidy cut

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# Algeria says cutting diplomatic ties with Morocco

Tue, 2021-08-24 19:22

ALGIERS: Algeria is cutting diplomatic relations with Morocco, Foreign Minister Ramdane Lamamra said on Tuesday at a news conference, accusing its neighbor of "hostile actions."

Morocco and Algeria have had strained relations for decades, mainly over the issue of Western Sahara, and the border between the two countries has been closed since 1994.

"The Moroccan kingdom has never stopped its hostile actions against Algeria," he said.

Morocco's Foreign Ministry could not be immediately reached for comment. King Mohammed VI has called for improved ties with Algeria.

The cutting of diplomatic relations is effective from Tuesday but consulates in each country will remain open, Lamamra said.

Algeria last week said lethal wildfires were the work of groups it has labelled terrorist, one of which it said was backed by Morocco.

Lamamra cited what he called Moroccan support for one of those groups, which seeks autonomy in Algeria's Kabylie region, and said Rabat had spied on Algerian officials and failed to meet bilateral obligations including over Western Sahara.

Algeria backs the Polisario movement that seeks independence for Western Sahara, which Morocco regards as part of its own territory.



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Algeria to review relations with Morocco after 'hostile acts'Algeria forest fires extinguished: emergency services