

Amid anger, sorrow, Lebanon buries victims of fuel tank blast

Author:

AFP

ID:

1629330879570732500

Thu, 2021-08-19 02:54

AL-DAOUSEH, Lebanon: Families on Wednesday laid to rest victims of a fuel tank blast that killed at least 28 people in northern Lebanon amid anger and sorrow over the crisis-hit country's latest tragedy.

The explosion on Sunday in Al-Tleil in the Akkar region scorched crowds clamoring for petrol that the army was distributing in light of severe fuel shortages that have paralyzed a country also beset by medicine, gas and bread shortages.

The victims included soldiers and Akkar residents who darted to Al-Tleil after midnight to fill gasoline in plastic containers straight from a fuel tank that exploded in circumstances that remain unclear.

The tank was among supplies confiscated by the military, which has lately wrested supplies from alleged fuel hoarders across the country.

The disaster came on top of an economic crisis branded by the World Bank as one of the world's worst in modern times and follows an explosion of poorly stored fertilizer at Beirut port last summer that killed more than 200 people.

Akkar, one of Lebanon's poorest regions, buried several blast victims on Wednesday, according to an AFP correspondent.

The village of Al-Daouseh held funerals for four of its dead, all of whom are from the Shraytih family.

"They died for petrol – if we had fuel this would have never happened," said Mouin Shraytih who was burying two sons – one 16 and the other 20.

"Political leaders and officials should consider what it is like to have two young boys and find them burned and charred in front of your own eyes," the man in his fifties told AFP at the funeral.

Corpses from the tanker blast had been identified in and transported from hospitals hit by power and telecom outages, with even landlines disrupted. Dozens had gathered at the family's home when a convoy of vehicles carrying the corpses arrived from a nearby hospital, an AFP correspondent said.

Shots were fired into the air as residents threw rice and flowers over the coffins.

Fawaz Shraytih, a relative of Mouin, was burying two brothers, both army soldiers.

"What happened is because of deprivation, Akkar is a deprived region," he said.

But "all we do is pay with our blood," he added, explaining that soldiers make up the bulk of Al-Daouseh's male population.

There are eight soldiers among his own immediate family, he said.

Nearly 80 people were injured in the blast, medics said, many with burns that further overwhelmed hospitals struggling to function without electricity.

Foreign countries and UN agencies have scrambled emergency aid to help exhausted health workers cope with the new influx of serious injuries and run DNA tests to identify charred remains. A plane was due to arrive in Lebanon to evacuate severe burns victims to Turkey.

Lebanon, a country of more than 6 million, is grappling with soaring poverty rates, with 78 percent of the population living below the poverty line, according to the United Nations.

The Lebanese pound has lost 90 percent of its black market value against the dollar while food prices have shot up by up to 400 percent.

The country braced for higher inflation rates after central bank governor Riad Salameh said last week that the lender can no longer afford fuel subsidies.

Despite the spiraling crisis, bitterly divided leaders have yet to agree on a new Cabinet a year after the previous one resigned in the wake of the Beirut blast.



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Mother and four daughters killed as they looked for fuel amid Lebanon's petrol shortage PM-elect Mikati optimistic about new Lebanon government

[US envoy to Yemen Lenderking calls on donor countries to 'step up' pledges](#)

Thu, 2021-08-19 01:15

LONDON: The US envoy to Yemen called on donor countries to "step up"

contributions at an upcoming pledging conference, hosted by the Biden administration in New York in September.

"The UN is in constant need of financial support to carry out any programs that it does that really make a difference inside Yemen, including feeding people who would otherwise starve, working on sanitation, improving distribution networks, rehabilitating ports, a lot of this is being done with international funding, so that funding has got to increase," Tim Lenderking said during an interview with Yemeni American News.

He said since the conflict began, the US has provided more than \$3.6 billion. USAID last week announced an additional \$165 million in humanitarian assistance.

"Compared to the needs, it's a small amount but this is going to be a collective effort and so we need other countries to step up," Lenderking said during a visit to Michigan where he also met with Yemeni-American community members.



US envoy to Yemen Tim Lenderking speaks during an interview with Yemeni American News in Michigan during a visit to meet members of the Yemeni-American community. (Screenshot/Twitter/@StateDept_NEA)

Most of the additional aid is going to the World Food Programme to bring immediate relief to Yemeni people, while some of it will also go toward COVID-19 relief.

"COVID is a serious problem in Yemen...it's under reported, it needs to be addressed by the authorities in Yemen, it's a serious problem, and it's only compounding the other humanitarian challenges that exist," Lenderking said. He also said most of their funding does not go to the Yemeni government or the Iran-backed Houthi militia, but does help support programs and NGO's operating in "hot areas of Yemen that are controlled by the Houthis," adding: "This should not be political, this is money that's going to help people who need it."

Lenderking said that the US is open to dialogue with any party in Yemen except those whom it has designated as terrorist organizations.

"Our interests as to ensure Al-Qaeda (and Daesh) do not regain a foothold inside Yemen" and expand their presence or have outsiders play a role in exacerbating or extending the civil war.

"I could also mention the very negative role that Iran plays in the conflict," he said. "This is a great opportunity for Iran to show a new face to the region and to the world by engaging in a constructive way in Yemen rather than fueling the conflict."

Listen to [#USEnvoyYemen](#) Lenderking share highlights of his trip to Michigan and answer questions about U.S. commitment to end the conflict in [#Yemen](#) during an interview with the Yemeni American Newspaper [@yamericannet](#) <https://t.co/W5DHoNkjXk>

– U.S. State Dept – Near Eastern Affairs (@StateDept_NEA) [August 18, 2021](#)

Lenderking said the main thing that the US administration is doing is to try to create “a sense that peace in Yemen is possible.” Besides from ending the war, which is their main objective, Washington is also focusing on humanitarian assistance, implementing a nationwide cease-fire, opening ports and airports and lifting the remaining restrictions to improve the lives of the Yemeni people, he added.

“We know that the situation is urgent, there are people dying on a daily basis, it’s a tragic situation,” he said, adding that his appointment as envoy by US President Joe Biden in February and his announcement that Yemen was a foreign policy priority was “a big deal.”

Since then, he said the Yemeni crisis has gained momentum and “there is an international consensus about the urgency of ending the war that did not exist before January.”

He said there has been significant development in the UN’s peace plan and that the [appointment of new UN envoy to Yemen Hans Grundberg](#) is going to add further momentum.

“We are trying to bring the influence we have and you will see more pressure exerted by us on the parties moving forward and it will drive an international resolution to the conflict,” he said.

The US wants to see Yemen back as a fully functioning part of the Arabian peninsula and a source of stability for the region, he said, expressing hope that the US can reopen its embassy in Sanaa in the near future. He also said that the US hopes people will come to appreciate Yemen for its rich culture and heritage and beauty and not associate it with war.





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Arab coalition reiterates support for Yemeni government as battle for Marib continues
Former US envoy Gerald Feierstein says original Saudi strategy in Yemen was right to end Houthi assaults

[Tunisia's President Saied appoints Sami El-Hichri as new director general of national security](#)

Wed, 2021-08-18 21:11

LONDON: Tunisian President Kais Saied appointed Sami El-Hichri as director

general of national security and Shukri Riahi as commander of the National Guard, state news agency said on Wednesday.

The announcement was made following a meeting between Saied and acting Interior Minister Ridha Gharsallaoui.

The president [appointed Ridha Gharsallaoui](#), a former national security adviser to the presidency, to run the Interior Ministry last Thursday, and pledged to protect rights and freedoms.

On Friday, Saied said in a statement: "There is no reason to worry about the subject of freedom, justice and democracy" in Tunisia."

The president said he took the "exceptional measures" in July in line with the constitution to "respond to the expectations of the people against a backdrop of political, economic and social crisis."

(With Reuters and AFP)



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Saied grapples with Tunisia's economic woes
Tunisian president receives official US delegation

Algeria to review relations with Morocco after 'hostile acts'

Author:

AFP

ID:

1629317469419571100

Wed, 2021-08-18 19:02

Algiers: Algeria will review its relations with neighboring Morocco, which it accuses of involvement in deadly fires that have ravaged the North African country, a presidency statement said Wednesday.

"The incessant hostile acts carried out by Morocco against Algeria have necessitated the review of relations between the two countries," the Algerian statement said.

There would also be an "intensification of security controls on the western borders" with Morocco, the statement added.

Algeria is reeling from the devastation caused by dozens of forest fires in multiple sites that broke out amid a blistering heatwave on August 9, leaving at least 90 people dead, including 33 soldiers.

President Abdelmadjid Tebboune has said most of the fires were of "criminal" origin.

The decision to review relations with Rabat was made during an extraordinary meeting of the country's security council, chaired by Tebboune.

The statement provided no further details about what the review might mean. Algerian authorities have appeared to point the finger for the fires at the independence movement of the mainly Berber region of Kabylie, which extends along the Mediterranean coast east of the capital Algiers.

As well as the Paris-based Movement for Self-determination of Kabylie (MAK), Algiers has accused the Islamist-inspired Rachad movement of involvement. Algiers classified both as a "terrorist organization" in May.

The authorities also accuse the groups of involvement in the lynching of a man falsely accused of arson, an incident that sparked outrage. The mob also set the victim on fire.

The blazes burned tens of thousands of hectares of forest, with emergency services on Wednesday declaring all the fires had been extinguished.

Relations between Algiers and Rabat have been fraught in past decades, especially over the flashpoint issue of the disputed Western Sahara.



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Algeria forest fires extinguished: emergency services
Heartbroken and homeless: Algerian villagers grapples with wildfire aftermath

[Arab coalition reiterates support for Yemeni government as battle for Marib continues](#)

Author:

Saeed Al-Batati

ID:

1629315199099430200

Wed, 2021-08-18 22:31

ALEXANDRIA: The Arab coalition on Wednesday pledged to provide continuous military support to the internationally recognized government in Yemen in its ongoing battle against the Iran-backed Houthis.

It came as Lt. Gen. Mutlaq Al-Azima, deputy chief of the general staff and acting commander of the joint forces, and Lt. Gen. Mohammed Ali Al-Maqdishi, Yemen's defense minister, met to discuss military operations in the country and coalition support for government troops, the Saudi Press Agency reported.

Dozens of Houthis were reportedly killed on Tuesday and Wednesday during intensive air raids by coalition warplanes targeting rebel locations and military reinforcements in Marib and Jouf provinces. Yemeni military officials said the airstrikes prevented the Houthis from advancing in those areas and helped government forces make limited gains.

Skirmishes between government forces and rebels broke out on the ground in several places in the two provinces as Houthi efforts to recapture Marib city continued. Yemen's Defense Ministry said the Houthis suffered heavy casualties, with at least 15 killed, during an ambush by government forces in Al-Mashjah, west of Marib.

Fighting in the central Marib province escalated in February when the Houthis resumed a major military offensive in an attempt to conquer Marib city, the government's last bastion in the north of the country.

Government forces on Wednesday made limited advances in the northern province of Jouf after driving the Houthis from the mountains and surrounding areas in the district of Bart Al-Anan.

On Tuesday, Yemeni Prime Minister Maeen Abdul Malik Saeed appealed to the UN and other international donors to help the war-torn country cope with the rapid devaluation of its currency and an economic meltdown.

During a meeting in Riyadh with Cathy Westley, charge d'affairs of the US embassy in Yemen, Saeed called on global powers and aid organizations to allocate urgent funds to help his government implement plans to address the economic crisis and its dangerous repercussions on an already devastating humanitarian crisis, official Yemeni state news agency SABA reported.

The PM said his government's current priorities are halting the depreciation of the nation's currency, the implementation of the Riyadh Agreement, and ending the Houthi coup.

After a brief recovery last week, the value of the Yemeni riyal slipped again on Wednesday on the black market, reaching a rate of 1040 to the dollar, compared with 950 during the rebound.

In an attempt to halt the slide in value and control a chaotic exchange market, the central bank in Aden recently shut down several unregulated exchange firms, told the others to follow monetary rules, and ordered commercial and Islamic banks based in Sanaa to move their operations to Aden.



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