



First Russian passports handed to Ukrainians

Iran convicts facing 'abhorrent' finger amputation

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DAMASCUS: The Syrian flag flies at Damascus International Airport outside Syria's capital. All flights to and from Syria's capital were halted on June 10, 2022 after the Zionist entity's air strikes wounded at least one civilian and reportedly caused damage to an airport runway. — AFP

Syria landmine explosion kills 11

Runways unusable after Zionists hit Damascus airport

BEIRUT: Eleven people were killed and dozens wounded when their pick-up truck ran over a landmine near Syria's southern city of Daraa, a war monitor said Saturday. "Eleven people, including five children under 16 and three women, were killed and around 34 people were injured" in the explosion, said the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, adding that some were in critical condition. Most of the victims were laborers harvesting wheat, Syria's official SANA news agency said.

The latest toll brings to 124 the total number of people killed by explosive remnants since the beginning of 2022, according to the Britain-based Observatory, which relies on a wide network of sources in Syria. Explosives left by all sides in fields, along roads or even in buildings in Syria's decade-long conflict have wounded thousands of civilians and killed hundreds of others. Across the country, about half the population is estimated to be living in areas contaminated by unexploded ordnance, according to the United Nations.

In 2020, Syria overtook Afghanistan as the country with the highest number of recorded casualties from landmines and explosive remnants of war, with 2,729 people killed or wounded, according to the Landmine Monitor. In 2021, 241 civilians were killed and 128 wounded by explosive remnants across Syria, the Observatory said. Syria's war is estimated to have killed nearly half a million people and displaced millions more since it began with a brutal crackdown of anti-government protests in 2011.

Meanwhile, Syria has confirmed major damage including to runways at Damascus International Airport, which was closed for a second day Saturday for repairs after Zionist air strikes. The transport ministry said in a statement that runways were out of service. Since civil war broke out in Syria in 2011, Zionists have carried out hundreds of air strikes against its neighbor, targeting government troops as well as allied Iran-backed forces and fighters from Lebanon's Shiite militant group Hezbollah.

But rarely have such attacks caused major flight disruptions. "Civil aviation and national companies are working... to repair the sizeable damage at the airport," the ministry said, adding a terminal building was also hit. The official SANA news agency said the Zionist bombardment wounded a civilian. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights war monitor said the missile strike before dawn on Friday hit one of the runways as well as three arms depots near the airport belonging to Hezbollah, and other Iran-backed groups.

The Observatory, which relies on a network of sources within Syria, said the strikes wounded an undetermined number of people. Satellite images posted on Twitter by the Zionist firm ISI showed three separate areas of what it said was "extensive damage to both military and civilian runways" caused by the strikes. According to the Observatory, the damaged runway was the only one still operational after a Zionist strike last year put another one out of service.

Russian condemnation

The 2021 bombardment had targeted weapons shipments and arms depots operated by Iran-backed groups, said the Observatory, a Britain-based monitor. The airport is in a region south of Damascus where Iran-backed groups, including Lebanon's Hezbollah, regularly operate. The vicinity of the facility is favorite target for Zionists which has launched 15 aerial attacks on Syria this year alone and regularly accuses Iran of using Damascus airport to send weapons shipments to its allies.

Syrian state media had reported that a volley of missiles was fired from the occupied Golan Heights at around 4:20 am on Friday. Syria's ally Russia strongly condemned "the provocative Zionist attack against essential civilian infrastructure". A spokesperson for Russia's foreign ministry called such attacks "an absolutely unacceptable violation of international norms."

Syrian Foreign Minister Faisal Mekdad and his Iranian counterpart Hossein Amir-Abdollahian spoke by phone and also condemned the attack, SANA reported. Syria "will defend itself by all legitimate means" against Zionist attacks, Mekdad said. While Zionists rarely comment on individual strikes, they have acknowledged carrying out hundreds in Syria, in what the Jewish state's military says is necessary to prevent its arch foe Iran from gaining a foothold on its doorstep.

The conflict in Syria started with the brutal repression of peaceful protests and escalated to



DAMASCUS: This handout satellite image shows damage to runways at Damascus International Airport on the southeastern outskirts of Syria's capital. — AFP

pull in foreign powers and global jihadists. The war has killed nearly half a million people and forced around half of the country's pre-war population from their homes. Russia's military intervention in 2015 helped turn the war in favor of Syria's President Bashar Al-Assad. Moscow maintains military bases in the country. — AFP

Militias battle in Libya capital

TRIPOLI: A night of clashes between militias in the heart of a residential district of the Libyan capital Tripoli raised fears on Saturday of escalating violence in the conflict-riven country. The intense fighting that erupted late Friday between two influential militias left at least one person dead and caused significant material damage, a security source told AFP. Gunfire and explosions rang out across Tripoli during the fighting, described by one resident as possibly the "heaviest" seen in the city for more than a decade.

It was the latest violence to rock the country as two rival prime ministers vie for power—the most recent episode of political infighting to fill the power vacuum left after the toppling of longtime dictator Muammar Gaddafi in 2011. Footage aired by Libyan media

showed civilians, including women pushing children in prams, fleeing on busy streets in a built-up area after being caught in the crossfire. The fighting broke out in Souk Talat neighborhood and pitted two militias, Al-Nawasi and the Stability Support Apparatus, against one another, said the security source.

It came amid tensions following the arrest of fighters from both militias, said the source, who spoke on condition of anonymity. "The clashes stopped after mediation by a neutral military force (Brigade 444), which deployed a number of its armoured vehicles" in the area of the fighting, he added. A video released overnight showed Libyan Prime Minister Abdulhamid Dbeibah ordering members of the force to intervene to secure the area and protect civilians. The source said there had been no civilian casualties, but cited "material damage".

By Saturday, normality had largely been restored to the area, but the violence sparked renewed outrage among residents. "This situation is unacceptable and it is unbearable for civilians to be caught in an ambush that puts their lives at risk because of the settling of

scores by criminal militias," 25-year-old student Maha Mokhtar told AFP.

"What is the fault of these families who fled their homes?" she added. Rida Said, another resident, said he had seen the fighting from his own balcony, describing the clashes as "perhaps the heaviest in our area since 2011". "It was clear that they were firing randomly at civilian areas with a lot of buildings," the 67-year-old said. "I was struck by panic and I feared for my children, who went out with their friends as they do every weekend... but thankfully they returned safely."

'Shocking & shameful'

The European Union's envoy to Libya, Jose Sabadell, on Saturday condemned the fighting as "shocking and shameful". "Arms were fired at a park where children run and play. Public spaces in Tripoli belong to families, not to men with guns," he wrote on Twitter. Last month, politician Fathi Bashagha attempted to seize power by force, sparking pre-dawn clashes between armed groups supporting him and those backing interim premier Abdulhamid Dbeibah. — AFP



TRIPOLI: Vehicles drive along a road at the Souk Al-Thalath (Tuesday market) district in the centre of Libya's capital Tripoli on June 11, 2022, after clashes between two influential militias had occurred there the previous night. — AFP

Australia agrees payout, ending submarine spat

SYDNEY: Australia unveiled a substantial compensation deal with French submarine maker Naval Group Saturday, ending a contract dispute that soured relations between Canberra and Paris for almost a year. Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said

the French firm had agreed to a "fair and an equitable settlement" of 555 million euros (US\$584 million) for Australia ending a decade-old multi-billion-dollar submarine contract.

The agreement drew a line under a spat that caused leader-level recriminations and threatened to torpedo talks on an EU-Australia trade agreement. "It permits us to turn a page in our bilateral relations with Australia and look to the future," said French Defense Minister Sebastien Lecornu. Albanese said he would travel to France soon to "reset" a relationship beset by "pretty obvious" tensions.

The tussle began in September 2021, when Australia's then-prime minister Scott Morrison

abruptly ripped up a long-standing contact with the French state-backed Naval to build a dozen diesel-powered submarines. He also stunned Paris by revealing secret talks to buy US or British nuclear-powered submarines, a major shift for a country with little domestic nuclear capability. The decision drew fury from French President Emmanuel Macron, who publicly accused Morrison of lying and recalled his ambassador from Australia in protest.

Relations were on ice until this May when Australia elected centre-left leader Albanese. Since coming to office, he has rushed to fix strained relations with France, New Zealand, and Pacific Island nations, who objected to the previous conservative

government's foot-dragging on climate change. "We are re-establishing a better relationship between Australia and France," Albanese said, after speaking to Macron about the settlement.

"I'm looking forward to taking up President Macron's invitation to me to visit Paris at the earliest opportunity." Speaking on the sidelines of the Shangri-La Dialogue security summit in Singapore, Lecornu said France valued its "friendship" with Australia. "Just because a government in the past did not keep its word, it does not mean we have to forget our strategic relationship," he said. "Australia has a new team in power, we are happy to be able to work with them." — AFP