

Turkey withdraws some observation posts from northern Syria

Author:

Tue, 2020-10-20 00:53

ANKARA: A Turkish military base in the Syrian town of Morek is being completely demolished by Sunday evening, according to Turkish sources who said that other observation points and military sites were also due to be dismantled.

Control towers and logistical equipment inside the base are being taken down and the walls are being removed. The Syrian Arab Army, which surrounded the post from all sides, is expected to take full control of the zone that became Turkey's weakest point against military attacks.

Turkey's presence in northwestern Syria has come under increasing pressure since mid-September, with a Turkish Red Crescent worker being killed and two others injured. Afrin Liberation Forces also targeted a Turkish observation point in the Al-Ghazawiyah area of Afrin city, northwestern Aleppo, in mid-September.

Attacks on a joint Russian-Turkish patrol on the international M4 highway that injured Russian soldiers have also been a source of concern.

Turkish forces are alleged to have been transferred from Morek to the Jabal Al-Zawiya region of neighboring Idlib governorate.

Ankara has yet to officially confirm its withdrawal. But Russian state-owned news agency Sputnik reported that Turkey had notified Russia of its withdrawal decision from the region.

The Turkish military still has more than 50 observation posts across northern Syria, creating a serious source of tension with Damascus because Ankara was only allowed to open 12 posts to the north and east of Idlib, according to the 2018 Sochi agreement.

Eight of these observation posts and five fortified positions are currently under siege by Syrian forces.

Navvar Saban, a military analyst at the Omran Center for Strategic Studies in Istanbul, said that Turkey did not want to take any risks in case of a military operation.

"As some Turkish observation points are besieged right now, Turkey has the lower hand that might affect negotiation terms," he told Arab News. "The Russians will have the upper hand because they control the fate of these besieged points."

Saban said that Turkey was planning to pull out from all of these points and redirect them to an area south of the M4.

Moscow has tried to convince Ankara to reduce its military presence in Idlib and remove some of its observation posts in the area.

But Turkish government officials have indicated that a withdrawal is out of the question because a regional presence is a bargaining chip in negotiations with Damascus and Moscow. On the other hand, holding Idlib under control is of key importance for Turkey to prevent any refugee wave toward its borders.

How Turkey will proceed against rising security threats against its military deployment in the area is a big question. A war in Idlib might be on the horizon in light of a recent military build-up by Turkey to Idlib's south.

Aydin Sezer, an expert on Turkey-Russia relations, said the Turkish military was getting ready for any upcoming military clashes in the region.

"Tensions between Turkey and Russia have escalated recently, especially after the engagement of both countries in the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan where the Kremlin criticized Ankara for pushing a military solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict," he told Arab News.

According to a March agreement between Turkey and Russia, Turkey pledged to wipe out terror zones in and around Idlib in six months.

"This withdrawal might have been triggered by Russian pressure on Turkey considering the local dynamics in Turkey," Sezer added. "Russian military police were trying to protect some observation points which were already under the siege of (President Bashar) Assad's troops to prevent any direct clash. The latest disagreements in the South Caucasus have also stimulated Russia in putting the Idlib issue on the top on its agenda."

But he thought that Turkey could not sustain a long-term presence in the south of the M4 because Russia expected total security along the highway to open it for road traffic, while a Turkish presence would introduce a source of tension with Assad forces.

Dr. Emre Ersen, an expert on Turkey-Russia relations from Marmara University in Istanbul, said the agreement reached between Turkey and Russia regarding the Idlib crisis in March was a temporary solution to prevent a possible military clash between Turkish forces and the Assad regime.

"Yet the COVID-19 outbreak, which became an urgent issue around the same period, forced both governments to focus on their domestic problems," he told Arab News. "Now, it seems that Russia is gradually returning to its pre-pandemic agenda in foreign policy and this is probably why it has been exerting more pressure on Ankara to withdraw from some of the military observation posts in Idlib."

But Ersen added that the timing of the pressure was interesting, especially considering the growing rift between Ankara and Moscow about other conflicts such as Nagorno-Karabakh and Libya.

"In this sense, Moscow will probably try to use the Idlib issue as part of a greater bargain with Ankara which also includes the settlement of other

disputes in the Caucasus and the Middle East.”



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[Lebanese economic bodies call for assistance amid government formation crisis](#)

Author:

Mon, 2020-10-19 23:57

BEIRUT: The new Lebanese prime minister to head the next government is expected to be named within two days. Meanwhile, questions are being raised regarding Thursday's parliamentary consultations, with President Michael Aoun rumored to be considering delaying them for a second time.

Former Prime Minister Saad Hariri is the only name proposed to form the new government, with the two Christian parties – the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) and the Lebanese Forces – objecting to his nomination.

Richard Kouyoumjian, former minister and serving member of the Lebanese Forces parliamentary bloc, said that his party's objection does not mean it is refusing to participate in the binding consultations.

"The mere participation of the bloc's representatives in the parliamentary consultations makes it legal as per the common agreed values and laws, whether or not the bloc names the person who will be assigned to head the new government," he said.

Kouyoumjian called for "the implementation of the constitution" and said: "Enough bidding in the name of the sect."

The stance of the Lebanese Forces means the FPM is the only bloc disrupting the parliamentary process.

The Lebanese Forces' decision not to propose anyone to head the government differed from its position in the two previous parliamentary consultations. In these consultations, the party proposed Ambassador Nawaf Salam.

Future parliamentary bloc member Mohammad Hajjar hoped that the consultations would not be postponed as "it will not be in the interest of the country and the people."

He told Arab News: "The first postponement was not justified. We said that the French initiative is an opportunity to rescue the country and that it should not be wasted. We said that postponement does not change anything, but rather will be an obstruction that does not benefit the country. We hope to have a prime minister assigned on Thursday by a parliamentary majority."

On whether he expects a postponement of consultations under new pretexts, Hajjar said: "Maronite Patriarch Bechara Al-Rahi called for the application of the law that does not refer to Christian or regional charters in the assignment process. We say that 22 Christian members of parliament will come to the next parliamentary consultations in the Baabda Palace, and some of them might name Hariri while others might not. Therefore, the consultations must be held so that we proceed to form the government."

Amid the political ruckus, The Lebanese economic bodies representing the various fields of the private sector have launched a new call for help to save the country.

In a meeting on Monday, the groups called for "the immediate formation of a government that can implement the French initiative."

The economic bodies warned that "we will reach a stage where there is zero liquidity in hard currencies, the dollar exchange rate will rise uncontrollably, the purchasing power will diminish, and the inflation rate will rise. This means an almost complete closure of institutions, mass unemployment, and societal poverty across all sects."

The experts highlighted that they had previously warned “of this tragic fate repeatedly, and here we are. On the ground, the structure of the country is collapsing, the economy – with all its components – is deteriorating at record speed, and institutions are breathing their last.”

In a position announced on Monday, the International Monetary Fund projected that “Lebanese economy will see one of the region’s sharpest economic contractions this year at 25 percent.”

The Crisis Observatory at the American University of Beirut estimated the cost of closing the poverty gap in Lebanon in 2020 for those below the minimum poverty line at \$838 million.

The group explained that this cost had increased three times since 2019, due to a spike in poverty from 8 percent to 23 percent.



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Lebanon’s biggest Christian party says won’t back Hariri for PM
Lebanon’s president postpones talks on nominating new prime minister

Egypt PM calls for agreement on Ethiopian dam

Author:

Mon, 2020-10-19 23:27

CAIRO: Egyptian Prime Minister Mostafa Madbouly stressed the necessity of reaching a binding legal agreement on the rules for filling and operating the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam in a manner that preserves common interests, noting Egypt's keenness to continue negotiations with Sudan and Ethiopia.

During the opening of Cairo Water Week 2020, the prime minister spoke of the importance of not taking any unilateral decisions that would negatively affect stability in the region.

Madbouly stressed that the water axis is one of the most important pillars of Egyptian national security. Comprehensive sustainable development plans in all fields are linked to the state's ability to provide the water resources for these plans.

He said that the state is striving to preserve water resources, maximizing the benefit from them and adopting an ambitious program to double the quantities of desalinated water used in the drinking water sector with investments amounting to EGP 135 billion (\$8.6 billion) up to 2030.

He also referred to the establishment of the Al Mahsama Water Reclamation Plant in Ismailia saying that it is the best work of the year.

"Now, there are many upstream countries trying to extend their hegemony over the water basins of many rivers in the Arab world. This is in order to control water flows and harm the riparian downstream countries and form a political geography of river basins through the national interests of upstream countries that are not dependent on the downstream countries," Madbouly said.

The Egyptian Minister of Water Resources and Irrigation, Mohamed Abdel-Aty, said that Ethiopia is still taking a firm stance regarding the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam.

He added that Ethiopia's intransigence in the negotiations will represent a major challenge due to the lack of agreement on the rules for filling and operating the dam, despite the support provided by Egypt for the concerns of the Ethiopian side.

Abdel-Aty said that Egypt sought, through the agreement of principles signed in Sudan in 2015, to reach a fair and balanced agreement that takes into account the interests of Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia, but Ethiopia had prevented that.

The dispute escalated, especially between Egypt and Ethiopia, months ago, with Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed announcing the start of filling the

dam reservoir before the agreed date.



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meetings held to bridge negotiation gap

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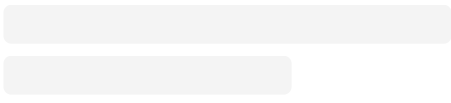
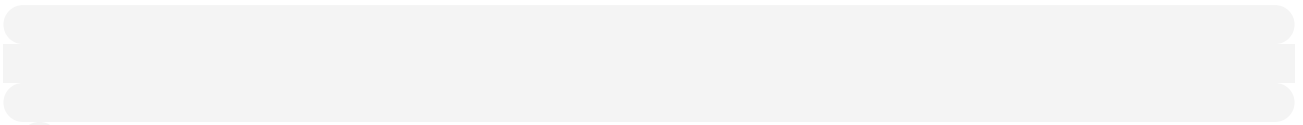
Mon, 2020-10-19 20:58

LONDON: A fitness influencer who branded the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) a hoax has died after contracting the virus during a trip to Turkey.

Father-of-three Dmitriy Stuzhuk had woken up with a swollen neck and breathing difficulties and was hospitalized on returning to his native Ukraine.



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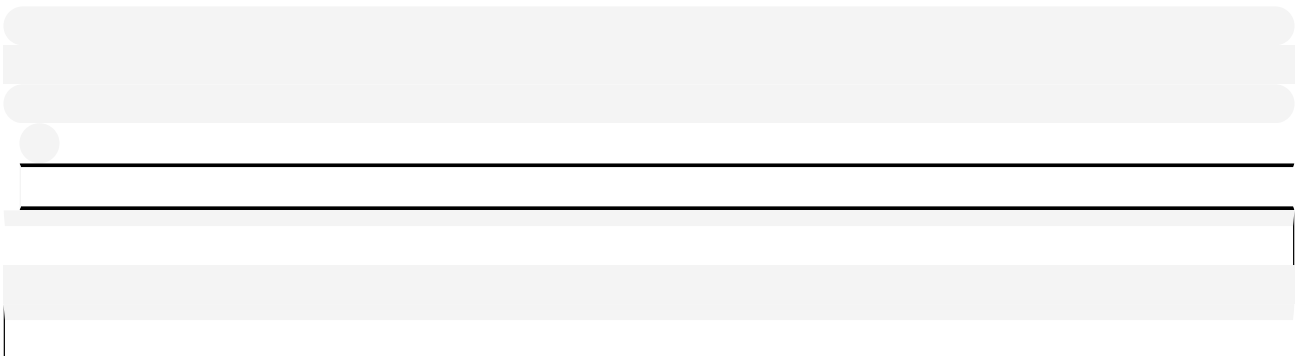
A post shared by Dima Stuzhuk (@stuzhuk_dmitriy) on Oct 14, 2020 at 11:22am PDT

His ex-wife, Sofia Stuzhuk, later announced that he had died from heart complications triggered by the infection.

Stuzhuk, 33, had more than 1 million followers on Instagram and had previously told them that COVID-19 did not exist.



[View this post on Instagram](#)





A post shared by Dima Stuzhuk (@stuzhuk_dmitriy) on Sep 6, 2020 at 8:48am PDT

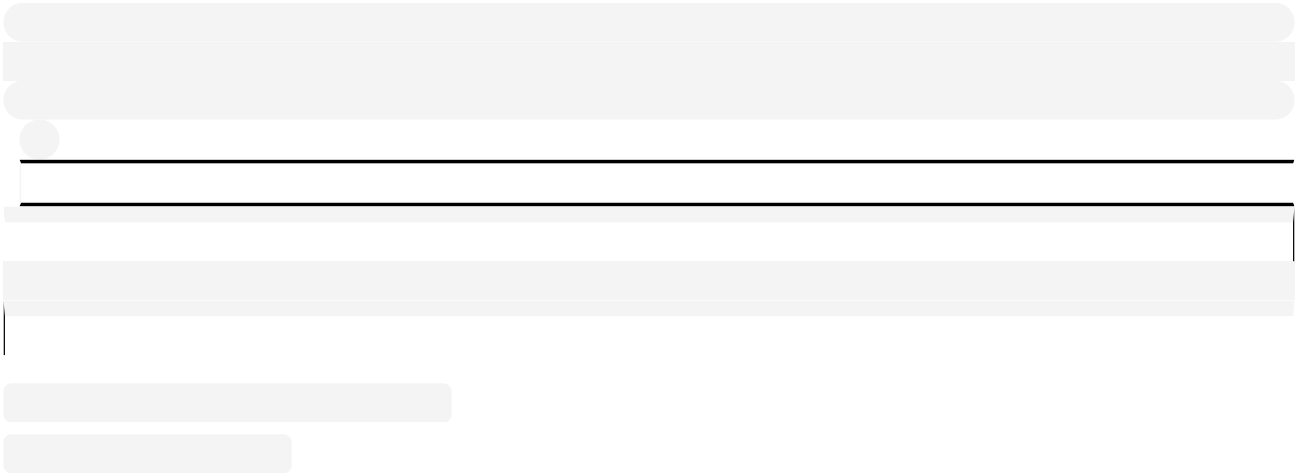
However, in a post to fans after being taken to hospital, he said: “I want to share how I got sick and to strongly warn everyone. I was one who thought that Covid does not exist ... until I got sick.

“COVID-19 is not a short-lived disease! And it is heavy,” he added.

Stuzhuk also posted a photograph of himself wearing an oxygen mask to help him breathe.



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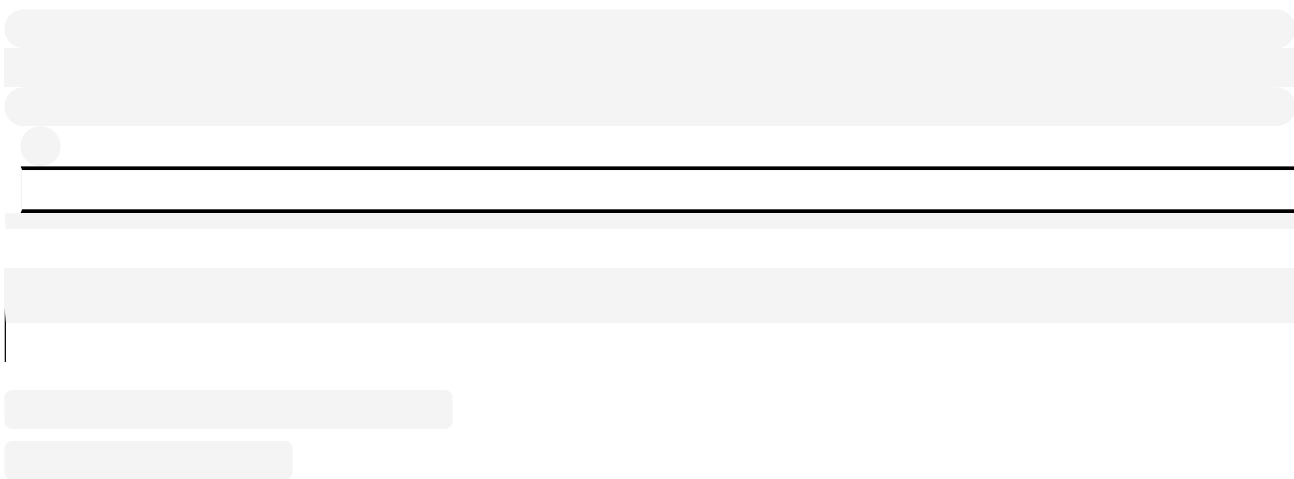
A post shared by Dima Stuzhuk (@stuzhuk_dmitriy) on Aug 4, 2020 at 10:21am PDT

He was initially released from an overcrowded hospital in the Ukrainian capital Kiev after spending eight days there but was rushed back in within hours after his condition deteriorated.

Stuzhuk leaves behind three children David, Lola, and Olivia, the youngest of which is 9 months old.



[View this post on Instagram](#)



A post shared by Dima Stuzhuk (@stuzhuk_dmitriy) on Jul 11, 2020 at 9:32am PDT

Turkey has recorded almost 350,000 COVID-19 cases, though the Turkish Medical Association believes the true figure to be far higher.



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Greece blames Turkey for holding foreign minister's plane

[**Hospital: Palestinian official Erekat in critical condition**](#)

Author:

Associated Press

ID:

1603120153637957500

Mon, 2020-10-19 14:12

JERUSALEM: Senior Palestinian official Saeb Erekat on Monday was in critical condition and breathing with a ventilator after his coronavirus infection worsened overnight, said the Israeli hospital treating him.

Hadassah Medical Center described Erekat's case as extremely challenging given his history of health problems, including a lung transplant performed in the United States three years ago. It said he suffered from a weak immune system and a bacterial infection in addition to COVID-19.

It said Erekat, 65, was sedated and that its most senior doctors were consulting with international experts on how best to manage such a complicated case.

Erekat has been one of the Palestinians' most recognizable faces over the past 30 years, serving as their senior negotiator during on-again off-again peace talks. He also was a top aide to the late Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and the current Palestinian president, Mahmoud Abbas. A fluent English speaker, the Western-educated Erekat also makes frequent appearances in the media.

Erekat was transferred to Hadassah on Sunday at the request of the Palestinian Authority, despite the Palestinians' decision this year to sever ties with Israel. The Palestinians cut off ties to protest Israel's pledge to begin annexing occupied West Bank land as part of President Donald Trump's Mideast plan.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has since frozen the annexation plan.



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Top Palestinian official Erekat 'critical' from virus
Palestinian official Saeb Erekat taken to Israeli hospital after COVID-19 condition worsens