

Hungary to appoint Syria diplomat in thawing of ties

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Wed, 2019-09-11 11:08

BUDAPEST: Hungary is planning to appoint a diplomat to carry out “consular duties” in Damascus next year, the first time an EU member state is to upgrade its diplomatic presence in Syria since the start of the war. “Starting next year, Hungary will delegate a diplomat who will occasionally visit Syria to make follow ups on humanitarian support and to conduct consular duties,” Hungary’s foreign ministry said in a statement to AFP on Wednesday.

The ministry said Budapest provides humanitarian aid for Christians in the Middle East, including in Syria, while a “considerable number” of Syrian students study in Hungary on scholarships.

Only the Czech Republic still has an embassy in Damascus, while other EU countries, the US and Canada are among those which have closed their missions, breaking off relations with the regime of President Bashar Assad. Romania technically still has an embassy in Syria, but the ambassador is based in Beirut. Bulgaria has a charge d’affaires.

EU countries have in the past sent envoys to Syria, but not for consular purposes, with their duties limited to talks on aid and policy.

Syria’s conflict flared in 2011 with anti-government demonstrations that sparked a brutal regime crackdown. Since then, 370,000 people have been killed and millions displaced.

A source close to the Hungarian government told AFP that Budapest was considering engaging Assad to better help Christians, as well as “be ahead of” other EU countries possibly re-opening ties for economic opportunities. “Many people in (the ruling party) Fidesz and in the government think that the question of engaging Assad is not a question of if, but when it is going to happen,” he said.

Led by nationalist Prime Minister Viktor Orban, Hungary has often been at loggerheads with other EU members and the EU itself on what Orban calls its pro-immigration stance and other issues.



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[Netanyahu quits Israel election rally as rocket alert sounds](#)

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AFP

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Tue, 2019-09-10 18:47

JERUSALEM: Sirens warning of rocket fire from Gaza cut short an election rally by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in the southern city of Ashkelon late Tuesday, public television reported.

KAN 11 broadcast footage of Netanyahu's security detail closing in around him as he was speaking from the podium.

One of them whispered in his ear before the premier raised a hand in farewell and was hustled from the building.

The Israel army said in a brief statement that sirens had sounded in Ashkelon and the port city of Ashdod, but it did not elaborate.

There were no immediate reports of rockets falling in any urban area.

The incident came less than three hours after Netanyahu pledged to annex the Jordan Valley in the occupied West Bank if re-elected in September 17 polls.



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Israeli PM Netanyahu sparks anger with vow to annex Jordan Valley
Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu makes controversial Hebron visit

[US announces fresh sanctions on Iranian guards, Daesh and Hamas](#)

Tue, 2019-09-10 20:34

WASHINGTON: The United States said it was imposing sanctions on a "wide range

of terrorists and their supporters,” including the Palestinian group Hamas and Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, on Tuesday, on the eve of the 18th anniversary of the Sept. 11 attacks.

The sanctions targeted 15 leaders, individuals and entities affiliated with groups including Hamas, Al-Qaeda, Daesh and Iran’s IRGC, the US Treasury Department said in a statement.

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Associated Press

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Tue, 2019-09-10 16:13

BAGHDAD: The US-led coalition says American warplanes have dropped 36,000 kilograms (40 tons) of bombs on an Island in the Tigris River “infested” with members of the Daesh group.

The coalition said F15 and F35 warplanes took part in the bombing on Qanus Island in the central province of Salaheddine, north of the capital Baghdad. Tuesday’s attack is part of operations carried out by Iraqi forces and the US-led coalition against Daesh, which was defeated in Iraq in 2017. Daesh sleeper cells have since carried out deadly bombings in Iraq. Daesh controlled large swathes of Syria and Iraq where they declared a caliphate in 2014.

A video released by the military showed massive explosions creating mushroom clouds billowing from the island that appeared to have been subjected to carpet bombing.



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Iraqi government in turmoil over PMC bid to form own air force

500 refugees trapped in Libya to be evacuated to Rwanda

Author:

By LORI HINNANT | AP

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Tue, 2019-09-10 16:25

PARIS: Rwanda agreed Tuesday to take in 500 refugees and asylum-seekers trapped in Libya under an agreement signed with the United Nations and African Union.

The deal comes after repeated allegations of dire conditions for migrants in Libya's detention centers, including beatings and other abuses, rape and a lack of both medical care and food. Many are intercepted in the Mediterranean by the EU-funded Libyan coast guard, which itself has been the repeated focus of abuse allegations.

The UN says its own center for migrants and refugees in Tripoli is becoming dangerously overcrowded as is its center for evacuees in Niger. The UN says around 4,700 people are being held in Libyan detention centers and around 1,000 in a separate UN facility in Tripoli.

Evacuation flights to Rwanda are expected to begin in the coming weeks. Under the deal, Rwanda would accept an initial group of 500 people who agreed to leave Libya, mostly from the Horn of Africa, and they would be housed in a center that has already been constructed 60 kilometers (37 miles) outside the capital, Kigali. They would be free to come and go from the center, according to Babar Beloch, a spokesman for the UN refugee agency.

Rwanda, however, has a troubled past with refugees. Amnesty International said that in 2018, Rwandan soldiers fired on protesting Congolese refugees, killing at least 11.

Baloch said the world body is asking members to contribute to the Rwanda evacuation, with hopes it can be expanded beyond the initial 500 people. He didn't say what the budget would be or where the money came from for the initial departures.

"You could say that anything is better than being stuck in a Libyan detention center," said Jeff Crisp, a migration researcher at Oxford University. "These are pretty desperate people and this is a potential opportunity to get somewhere else."

But he cautioned that the deal raises numerous questions, including what choices the evacuees would have once they arrive in Rwanda, especially if they are refused refugee status or they aren't given permanent placement in another country. In Niger, just a fraction of people have found spots in Europe or elsewhere and the camp has been full for months.



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Charity boat rescues 50 African migrants in sea off Libya