

Car bomb kills 8 in Turkey-controlled Syria town: ministry

Author:

AFP

ID:

1577125015324574300

Mon, 2019-12-23 15:41

ISTANBUL: A car bomb killed eight civilians including a woman and a child in a Turkish-held border town in northern Syria on Monday, the defense ministry said.

The bomb-laden car exploded in the village of Suluk about 20 kilometers (12 miles) southeast of the Syrian border town of Tal Abyad, the ministry said. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitoring group said the attack left five dead.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the bombing.

But the Turkish defense ministry put the blame on the Kurdish forces who controlled the town before Turkish troops and their Syrian proxies seized it during a military offensive in October.

Turkish forces and their proxies – former Syrian rebels hired as a ground force by Ankara – launched the deadly offensive against Kurdish forces in Syria on October 9.

The Turkish push was aimed at seizing a strip of land roughly 30 kilometers deep along the 440-kilometer border between the two countries.

The offensive saw Ankara's fighters seize a strip of land roughly 120 kilometers long and 30 kilometers deep on the Syrian side of the border.

Ankara says it wants to establish a "safe zone" there in which to resettle some of the 3.6 million Syrian refugees it hosts on its soil.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Syria](#)

[Turkey](#)

[Iran unveils development at Arak reactor in face of US pressure](#)

Author:

Reuters

ID:

1577104998373336400

Mon, 2019-12-23 12:26

GENEVA: Iran said it would unveil a redevelopment of part of its Arak heavy water reactor on Monday – a move that will not breach international restrictions on its nuclear work but show it is developing the sector in the face of US pressure.

Tehran said it would switch on a secondary circuit at Arak, a plant built to produce the heavy water used as a moderator to slow down reactions in the core of nuclear reactors.

"Today we are, in truth, starting a noteworthy section of the reactor," the head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI), Ali Akbar Salehi, said in remarks broadcast live on state TV.

Iran has been reactivating parts of its nuclear program in protest at the United States' withdrawal last year from an international deal meant to limit the Islamic Republic's ability to develop a nuclear bomb.

Washington says its withdrawal and decision to reimpose sanctions lifted under the 2015 deal will force Iran to agree a broader pact. Tehran – which has always said its nuclear work is for power generation, medical work and other peaceful purposes – says it will not negotiate until sanctions are lifted.

The secondary circuit would become operational as Iran worked on a modernization of the Arak plant, the semi-official Mehr news agency reported. "The Arak heavy water nuclear reactor ... consists of two circuits," it said.

"The first circuit is tasked with removing heat from the heart of the reactor, and the secondary circuit is responsible for transferring the heat from the first circuit to cooling towers and finally to the outside environment," Mehr added.

Iran agreed to shut down the reactor at Arak, – about 250 km southwest of Tehran – under the 2015 deal. The foreign powers that signed the pact said the plant could eventually have produced plutonium, which can also be used in atom bombs.

But Iran was allowed to produce a limited amount of heavy water and Tehran has been working on redesigning the reactor.

The control room of the reactor, named Khondab, will take about five to six months to build and the remaining systems would be completed in about one year, Salehi said at a press conference at Arak.

The reactor will be ready for initial tests in the Iranian calendar year which will begin in March 2021, Salehi said.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Iran](#)

[US](#)

Iranians set up new companies in Turkey to evade US sanctions

[Iraq protests resume as political paralysis deepens](#)

Author:

AFP

ID:

1577104985903335300

Mon, 2019-12-23 12:23

DIWANIYAH: Thousands of protesters blocked roads and bridges in southern Iraq on Monday, condemning Iranian influence and political leaders who have missed another deadline to agree on a new prime minister.

Anti-government demonstrators burned tires in major cities across the south, forcing the closure of schools and government buildings, AFP correspondents

reported as political paralysis deepened in Baghdad.

Negotiations over a candidate to replace premier Adel Abdel Mahdi, who quit in November in the face of protests against corruption and unemployment, remained stalemated as a midnight Sunday deadline expired.

While a pro-Iran camp has tried to impose a candidate, Iraqi President Barham Saleh has reportedly put up resistance.

On the street, protesters are mobilizing anew after weeks of relative calm in a movement that has seen hundreds die in clashes with security forces.

Demonstrators announced civil disobedience campaigns in the southern cities of Diwaniyah, Nasiriyah, Hilla, Kut and Amara, where schools and public buildings were closed Monday.

"We are upping our actions because we oppose any candidate from the political class that has been robbing us since 2003," said Ali Al-Diwani, a young protester in Diwaniyah.

For Iraqis protesting since October 1, the system installed by the United States after it led a coalition to overthrow dictator Saddam Hussein in 2003 has become dominated by Iran and is beyond reform.

An economic revival promised for 16 years never came, protesters say, while more than half of all oil revenues were syphoned off by crooked politicians and their cronies.

While renewed protests risk a resumption of the violence that has already caused 460 deaths and 25,000 injuries since October, the government remains paralyzed.

Officials say Iran wants to install Qusay Al-Suhail, who served as higher education minister in the government of Abdel Mahdi.

A former key member of Shiite cleric Moqtada Sadr's movement, Suhail rejoined the State of Law Alliance of former premier Nuri Al-Maliki, who is close to Iran and an enemy of Sadr.

While pro-Iran factions and parliament speaker Mohammed Al-Halbusi are pushing for Suhail, a source in the presidency says Saleh has vetoed his appointment.

Demonstrators also categorically reject his candidacy and that of anyone from the wider political establishment.

"What we want is simple: a prime minister who is competent and independent, who has never been involved with the ruling parties since 2003," said Mohammed Rahman, a protesting engineer in Diwaniyah.

Protesters say an overhaul of the political system must start with electoral reform.

Since 2003, elections have used a complicated mix of proportional representation and list voting that favors major parties and the heads of lists.

Protesters say they want a first-past-the-post system to "guarantee a new generation could enter politics to clean up everything the ruling parties have corrupted," Rahman told AFP.

Parliament has recently discussed electoral reform and was scheduled to resume talks Monday afternoon.

Lawmakers were also likely to continue negotiations to appoint a premier, the deadline for which has already been pushed back twice by Saleh.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Iraq](#)

Car bomb kills two soldiers in western Iraq
Thousands protest in Iraq as deadline for new PM looms

[Cyprus police bring in boat with 34 Syrian migrants aboard](#)

Author:

Associated Press

ID:

1577048361368934700

Sun, 2019-12-22 18:24

NICOSIA: Cyprus police officers rescued 34 Syrian migrants Sunday after spotting their boat off the Mediterranean island nation's northwestern coast. A police patrol vessel was dispatched to escort the boat to a harbor. Police said the boat had set sail from Alanya, Turkey.

The migrants were all male and included a 17-year-old. All 34 were taken to a migrant reception center outside the Cypriot capital of Nicosia.

Police arrested a 19 year-old man who was aboard the boat on suspicion of people trafficking and abetting the illegal entry of third-country nationals. Cyprus says it has reached its limit to accommodate an influx of migrants and has asked other European Union members to take at least 5,000 of those who reached the country.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Cyprus](#)

[Syria](#)

[migrants](#)

White gold: Cyprus' halloumi cheese entangled in politics

[Erdogan says Turkey cannot handle new migrant wave from Syria, warns Europe](#)

Sun, 2019-12-22 23:08

ANKARA: Turkey cannot handle a fresh wave of migrants from Syria, President Tayyip Erdogan said on Sunday, warning that European countries will feel the impact of such an influx if violence in Syria's northwest is not stopped.

Turkey currently hosts some 3.7 million Syrian refugees, the largest refugee population in the world, and fears another wave from the Idlib region, where up to 3 million Syrians live in the last significant rebel-held swathe of territory.

Syrian and Russian forces have intensified their bombardment of targets in Idlib, which Syria's President Bashar Assad has vowed to recapture, prompting a wave of refugees toward Turkey.

Speaking at an awards ceremony in Istanbul on Sunday night, Erdogan said more than 80,000 people were currently on the move from Idlib to Turkey.

"If the violence toward the people of Idlib does not stop, this number will increase even more. In that case, Turkey will not carry such a migrant burden on its own," Erdogan said.

"The negative impact of the pressure we will be subjected to will be something that all European nations, especially Greece, will also feel," he said, adding that a repeat of the 2015 migrant crisis would become inevitable.

He also said Turkey was doing everything possible to stop Russian bombardments in Idlib, adding that a Turkish delegation would go to Moscow to discuss Syria on Monday.

Erdogan has previously threatened to "open the gates" for migrants to Europe unless Turkey got more support in hosting the refugees.

"NOT ENOUGH"

Turkey is seeking international support for plans to settle one million Syrians in part of northeast Syria that its forces and their Syrian rebel allies seized from the Kurdish YPG militia in a cross-border incursion in October.

Ankara has received little public backing for the proposal and has repeatedly slammed its allies for not supporting its plans. Turkey's offensive was also met with condemnation from allies, including the United States and European countries.

"We call on European countries to use their energy to stop the massacre in Idlib, rather than trying to corner Turkey for the legitimate steps it took in Syria," Erdogan said on Sunday, referring to the three military operations Turkey has carried out in Syria.

After a global refugee forum in Geneva last week, the United Nations refugee agency said states pledged more than \$3 billion to support refugees and around 50,000 resettlement places. But, Erdogan, who attended the forum, said on Sunday that sum was not enough.

UN agencies say hundreds of people have been killed in Idlib this year after attacks on residential areas.

Russia and the Syrian army, which is loyal to President Bashar Assad, both deny allegations of indiscriminate bombing of civilian areas and say they are fighting Al-Qaeda-inspired extremist militants.

Rescue teams said six people were killed in Maarat al Numan and 11 more in nearby villages on Friday.

Earlier on Sunday, Turkey's state-run Anadolu news agency said some 205,000 people had been displaced from their homes in Idlib since November due to the attacks. It said the fleeing civilians were going toward areas in Syria that Turkey seized in its military operations, or to other parts of Idlib.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Recep Tayyip Erdogan](#)

[Turkey](#)

[Syria](#)

[Russia](#)

[syrian migrants](#)

[refugees](#)

[migrants](#)

Russian-backed forces gain ground in Syria's Idlib as violence uproots displaced
Russia, China have blood on their hands after veto on Syria cross-border aid: Pompeo