

# Russian air strikes kill 10 civilians in Syria's Idlib: monitor

Fri, 2019-04-26 19:10

BEIRUT: Air strikes by regime ally Russia killed 10 civilians in the rebel-held region of Idlib in northwestern Syria Friday, a war monitor said. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based monitor, said those killed included two children.

The raids took the lives of three civilians including a boy on the outskirts of the town of Kafranbel, and seven including a girl in the town of Tal Hawash, Observatory chief Rami Abdel Rahman said.

Russia and rebel-backer Turkey in September inked a buffer zone deal to prevent a massive regime offensive on the Idlib region, near the Turkish border.

But the region of some three million people has come under increasing bombardment since former Al-Qaeda affiliate Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham took full control of it in January.

The latest air raids came as two days of talks on ending the war in Syria - sponsored by Russia, fellow regime ally Iran, and rebel backer Turkey - concluded in Kazakhstan.

In a statement released by the three countries after the meeting, they expressed concern about HTS extending its influence in Idlib.

They stressed their "determination to continue cooperation in order to ultimately eliminate" HTS and Daesh, the statement said.

Syria's war has killed more than 370,000 people and displaced millions since the conflict began with the repression of anti-government protests in 2011.



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## [Saudi Arabia, the UAE, UK and US hold Yemen talks in London](#)

Fri, 2019-04-26 17:34

LONDON: Saudi Arabia and the UAE met in London on Friday to discuss with the UK and US the next steps in the Yemen peace process.

Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Adel Al-Jubeir took part in the meeting of the Yemen Quartet.

The UK Foreign Office said the meeting discussed how best to support the efforts of UN Special Envoy Martin Griffiths.

A ceasefire between Yemeni government troops and Houthi militants was agreed for the key port of Hodeidah in December during talks in Sweden. But the implementation of the truce has stalled and the Arab Coalition supporting Yemeni forces has accused the Iran-backed Houthis of dozens of violations. The coalition includes Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

“I called this meeting so that we keep doing everything we can to move forward on the hard road to peace in Yemen,” UK Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt said. “This is a horrendous conflict and it is taking too long to turn the ceasefire agreed in Stockholm into a durable path to peace.”

The meeting was also attended by the UAE Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al-Nayan, and David Satterfield, a US acting assistant secretary of state.



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# Sudan protesters hold prayers outside military headquarters in campaign for civilian rule

Author:

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Fri, 2019-04-26 12:37

KHARTOUM: Thousands of Sudanese protesters performed the weekly Muslim prayers outside army headquarters on Friday, a day after vast crowd of demonstrators flooded Khartoum to demand the military rulers cede power. Protesters have massed outside the army complex in central Khartoum since April 6, initially to demand the overthrow of longtime leader Omar Al-Bashir. But since his ouster by the army on April 11, the protesters have kept up their sit-in, demanding that the military council that took over hand power to a civilian administration.

Despite international support for the protesters, the 10-member council has so far resisted, although three of its members resigned on Wednesday under pressure from the street.

The resignations triggered jubilation among the protesters, who massed in their tens of thousands on Thursday in response to a call from their leaders for a "million-strong" march.

Despite the scorching heat, the protesters were back in numbers on Friday, an AFP correspondent reported.

"Freedom, freedom," they chanted as prayer leader Sheikh Matter Younis delivered the sermon.

"We will not retreat until we get our main demand of civilian rule," said Younis, an activist from Sudan's war-torn western region of Darfur.

He also called for the "symbols" of the old regime to be punished.

"They must face fair and transparent justice, they have to be held accountable," he said, as the protesters chanted "Blood for blood! We will not accept compensation!."

Another Darfuri, Harun Adam, said his family lived in Kalma, one of the sprawling camps that are still home to hundreds of thousands of people who were driven from their homes by the Bashir government's brutal response to the ethnic minority rebellion which erupted in 2003.

"I'm here since April 6," when the sit-in started, Adam told AFP.

"I'm ready to stay here for a year until we get our main demand, which is a civilian government and that all those who committed crimes be held accountable."

Behind him crowds chanted "One, two, three, four, we are all Darfur!"

The military council, led by General Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan, says it has assumed power for a two-year transitional period.

Protest leaders have held several rounds of talks with the council and the two sides have agreed to set up a joint committee to chart the way forward but there has so far been no breakthrough.

Washington has thrown its weight behind the protesters. State Department official Makila James said on Tuesday that Washington supports “the legitimate demand of the people of Sudan for a civilian-led government” and urged all parties to work together to that end. But at a summit hosted by Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi on Tuesday, African leaders conceded that more time was needed for a transition to civilian rule. Their statement angered the protesters who held a rally outside the Egyptian embassy on Thursday. The African Union had taken a strong line setting an end of April deadline for the military council to hand power to civilians or face suspension from the 55-nation bloc.



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# France urged to suspend boat delivery to Libya over migrant concerns

Author:

Thu, 2019-04-25 21:40

PARIS: Eight international NGOs including Amnesty International and Doctors Without Borders (MSF) demanded on Thursday that France suspend the delivery of boats to Libya's coast guard on concerns they would be used to intercept migrants.

French Armed Forces Minister Florence Parly had in February agreed to donate six boats to the Libyan navy, under which the coast guard operates, in a move she said was aimed at helping them "in the fight against illegal immigration."

But the offer angered rights groups who said they would be used to block migrant boats seeking to reach Europe, forcing those on board to return to war-torn Libya.

The demand was laid out in a legal challenge that was filed at the administrative court in Paris on Thursday morning.

In it, the groups demand "the suspension of the decision" until the court decides whether or not the donation is legal. The court has 48 hours to make a decision.

The NGOs believe forcing people to return to Libya would expose them to "serious human rights violations." Massimo Moratti, regional director for research at Amnesty International, said the pledge to deliver boats to the Libyan coast guard was "an unlawful and reckless decision."

He said it was all the more dangerous at a time when fighting has intensified after Eastern commander Khalifa Haftar launched an offensive on the capital Tripoli earlier this month.

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## HIGHLIGHT

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**The NGOs accused the Libyan coast guard of having a bad track record in respecting those in distress at sea, saying it should not be given the logistical means to step up such abuses.**

"Doing it now, as the armed conflict in Libya escalates, is even more callous and irresponsible," Moratti said in a statement, warning the donation would make France "complicit" in trapping people inside the country.

The NGOs accused the coast guard of having a bad track record in respecting those in distress at sea, saying it should not be given the logistical means to step up such abuses.

The statement accused the coast guard of abuses including pushing those in distress back into the water, threatening them with weapons and firing toward them.

The six vessels, which are to be delivered in the coming weeks, are 12-meter, semi-rigid boats made by French specialist Sillinger.

Besides Amnesty and MSF, the legal petition was joined by France's Human Rights League, immigrant support group GISTI, Lawyers Without Borders, migrant aid groups La Cimade and Migreurop and Italian research and aid group ASGI.



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[\*\*Russia firm to take over Syria port\*\*](#)

## for 49 years: Damascus

Thu, 2019-04-25 21:32

A Russian firm is to take over Syria's largest port for 49 years and invest \$500 million in expanding it, the transport minister in Damascus said Thursday.

A deal would be signed for the "management, expansion and operation" of port of Tartus with Russian company Stroytransgaz, Transport Minister Ali Hammoud was quoted as telling pro-government newspaper Al-Watan.

"The length of the contract – 49 years – was decided after a feasibility study" so both sides could reap benefits, it said.

Russia has been a key ally of President Bashar Assad's regime in Syria's eight-year civil war, providing it with crucial military backing.

The minister on Tuesday told Syrian state television that the port, which started operating in the 1960s, was not deep enough to allow heavy ships to dock.

"Tartus is an old port whose docks range between four and 13 meters deep," he said.

The current facilities are not suitable for ships heavier than 30-35 tons and "we needed to try to ensure very deep docks to accommodate cargoes of up to 100 tons."

### **BACKGROUND**

**Russia has been a key ally of President Bashar Assad's regime in Syria's eight-year civil war, providing it with crucial military backing.**

The expansion works are expected to increase the eastern Mediterranean port's capacity from 4 million to 38 million tons a year, Hammoud said.

He told Al-Watan that the project would help lessen the burden of international sanctions against the Damascus regime since the start of the war in 2011.

On Saturday, Russian media quoted the country's Deputy Prime Minister Yury Borisov as saying a deal for the port was in the works.

"We hope the deal will be signed within a week," Russian news agency RIA Novosti quoted him as saying after meeting Assad in Damascus.

Backed by Russian air power since 2015, Assad has made great military gains against rebels and jihadists, and the regime now holds up to 60 percent of the country.



Even during the war, Russian companies have invested in Syria's oil, gas and mining sectors and won contracts to build flour mills and water-pumping stations.



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