

Protesters stop output at Libya's El Sharara oilfield – field guards

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Sat, 2018-12-08 16:23

TRIPOLI: Libyan tribesmen protested at the giant El Sharara oilfield on Saturday and shut down production, the force guarding the facility and a spokesman for the protesters said.

State oil firm NOC had no immediate comment. Closing down an oilfield takes time. Engineers at the field had earlier given conflicting reports about whether oil was flowing or was being halted.

The tribesmen calling themselves the Fezzan Anger Movement were protesting to demand more development help for their community. Fezzan is the historic name of the southern region of Libya where El Sharara oilfield is located.

"We as the force securing the field inform you that the Fezzan Anger Movement entered the field and stopped the production in line with the demands of the movement," the local oil force guarding the facility said in a statement.

The group of tribesmen also said they had shut the field.

"El Sharara is closed. We had given authorities a deadline but we got no response," said the group's spokesman Mohammad Maighal.

The field, which usually pumps about 300,000 barrels per day, has been repeatedly threatened by tribesmen asking for better health and other state services for the poor, desert region.

The state oil firm NOC usually tries to avert such action through talks.



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Libyan election commission says has 'zero' budget for polls
Libyan wealth fund to hire auditors in push to unfreeze assets

[Egypt says police kill two gunmen behind November attack on Christians](#)

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Sat, 2018-12-08 14:38

CAIRO: Egyptian police killed two gunmen who carried out last month's attack on a bus carrying Christians in Minya governorate to the south of Cairo, the interior ministry said on Saturday.

Police, helped by the military, found the gunmen in Assiut governorate, which

lies to the south of Minya, it said in a statement. They were in possession of three automatic rifles, one shotgun and an unspecified amount of ammunition.

Security forces also found one of the vehicles used in the the Nov. 2 attack, which killed at least seven Christians who were returning from baptising a child at a Coptic monastery in central Egypt.

The mobile phone of one of the victims of the attack, Kamal Yousef Shehata, was also found, the ministry said.

On Nov. 3, a day after the attack near the Monastery of St. Samuel the Confessor in Minya, security forces killed 19 militants suspected of involvement.

Daesh claimed responsibility for last month's attack, which took place at exactly the same spot as a May 2017 attack that killed 28 Christians. Daesh also claimed responsibility for that attack.



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Suspect in Egypt church bombings arrestedSurvivors of Egypt Christian bus attack recount their horror

Israel soldiers fire at Hezbollah activists, Lebanon calls them army patrol as Netanyahu briefs Putin on tunnels

Author:

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Sat, 2018-12-08 14:43

(Adds Lebanese comment, background)

JERUSALEM: Israeli soldiers at the Lebanese border opened fire at suspected Hezbollah activists on Saturday, the military said, the first such incident since Israel launched a crackdown this week on cross-border tunnels into its territory.

Lebanon said Israeli soldiers had fired in the air when they were surprised by a Lebanese army patrol on the Lebanese side.

There were no immediate reports of casualties.

Israel said three people who were "apparently Hezbollah activists" approached its forces on the Israeli side as they carried out an operation to shut down tunnels that Israel has said were dug across the border by the Lebanese group.

"Troops fired toward the suspects in accordance with the standard operating procedures. The three fled. The work in the area continues as usual," the Israeli military said in a statement.

Lebanon's state-run National News Agency said the Israeli soldiers shot into the air when they saw a Lebanese army patrol near the border demarcation, known as the "Blue Line."

"Israeli enemy soldiers shot into the air following their deployment near the Blue Line in Kroum Al-Sharaq region to the east of Meis Al-Jabal village," NNA said.

The Israelis "were surprised, due to thick fog, by a routine Lebanese army patrol inside the Lebanese territories," it added.

Israel's military said on Tuesday it had found a number of passages dug across the Israel-Lebanon border to be used for carrying out attacks inside Israel. It sent mechanical diggers, troops and anti-tunneling equipment there to shut them down.

The situation has so far remained calm on both sides of the border. But the Israeli operation has brought renewed attention to a frontier across which Israel and Hezbollah fought a war in 2006.

The Israeli military has said its activity would, for now, stop on the Israeli side of the border. But an Israeli cabinet minister said on Friday that Israel was prepared to take action in Lebanon against cross-border tunnels if deemed necessary.

The United Nations peacekeeping Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), confirmed the existence of a tunnel near the "Blue Line" on Thursday, describing it as

a “serious occurrence.”

Meanwhile, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu briefed Russian President Vladimir Putin on Israel’s crackdown along its border with Lebanon on tunnels it said were dug by Hezbollah, the Kremlin said on Saturday. Netanyahu said this week that the tunnels were meant for use by Hezbollah fighters to infiltrate Israel from Lebanon and carry out attacks. The Israeli military sent mechanical diggers, troops and anti-tunneling equipment to the border to shut them down.

During their phone call, initiated by Netanyahu, “The President of Russia stressed the importance of ensuring stability in the region,” the Kremlin statement said.



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Rudderless Lebanon could miss out on aid, France warns
UN peacekeepers confirm Israeli report of tunnel at Lebanon border

Outgoing UN envoy makes new appeal to Syria's warring sides

Author:

Fri, 2018-12-07 23:02

GENEVA: The outgoing UN envoy for Syria is appealing on the country's warring sides to form a committee that would negotiate a new constitution as a way of bringing the Mideast nation out of its protracted civil war.

Staffan de Mistura says there are disagreements over a "few names" of those who would be on that committee.

He said "agreement, particularly on the side of" the regime of President Bashar Assad was needed.

De Mistura said on Friday that his Dec. 20 briefing to the UN Security Council could be his last. He had originally planned to leave in November.

De Mistura appeared alongside China's special envoy Xie Xiaoyan and said he was seeking Chinese help to convince Syria's regime that it's "worth it to make an effort."

Turkey and the US have agreed to speed up efforts to put in place an agreement on Manbij by the end of the year, said a working committee between the NATO allies.

Earlier this year, Turkey and the US reached a deal over Manbij, after months of disagreement, under which the Kurdish YPG militia is to completely withdraw from the town. Ankara, which considers the YPG a terrorist organization, says the withdrawal has yet to happen.

During Friday's meeting the two sides also agreed to continue to work on joint planning with regard to other areas, as mentioned in the Manbij roadmap.

Meanwhile, Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) have broken into an eastern holdout of Daesh on the Iraqi border.

A Kurdish-led alliance, backed by airstrikes of the US-led coalition, has been battling to oust Daesh from the pocket in the eastern province of Deir Ezzor since September.

Heavy clashes

But the SDF troops suffered a series of setbacks, including due to a vicious fightback by extremists and bad weather that impeded visibility.

On Thursday, an SDF commander said the alliance had managed to break into the pocket and wrest part of its main town from Daesh.

“Heavy clashes are ongoing inside the town of Hajin, after our forces advanced inside and started to control some of its neighborhoods,” said Redur Khalil.

The SDF opened up humanitarian corridors out of the beleaguered pocket, allowing more than 1,000 civilians – mostly woman and children – to flee from Hajin in the past few days.

Khalil accused Daesh of using civilians as human shields, and said the corridors would remain open.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based war monitor, said the SDF launched an attack on Tuesday and than dozens of families had managed to flee.

The attack was backed by the heaviest shelling and airstrikes by the US-led coalition since the start of the offensive on the Hajin pocket on Sept. 10, Observatory chief Rami Abdelrahman said.

Since Tuesday, 34 terrorists including three suicide bombers, and 17 SDF fighters have been killed in the fighting, the Observatory said.

In almost three months of battle, more than 820 terrorists and more than 480 US-backed fighters have been killed, the monitor says.

More than 300 civilians have been killed in that period, its says, though the coalition has repeatedly said it did not target non-combatants.

Daesh overran large parts of Syria and Iraq in 2014, declaring a “caliphate” across territories it controlled.

But various offensives in both countries have routed Daesh from most of that land, crushing its dreams of statehood.

In Syria, Daesh retains a presence in the vast Badia desert that stretches to the Iraqi border, as well as the pocket under attack around Hajin.

“The liberation of Hajin will not signify the end of Daesh,” Khalil said, warning it would retain sleeper cells. “Operations to expel them will still last a long time.”



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US accuses Russia of lying on Syria attack to undermine truceUN chief urges Syria to resolve gaps on chemical weapons

[US accuses Russia of lying on Syria attack to undermine truce](#)

Fri, 2018-12-07 21:59

WASHINGTON: The United States accused Russia on Friday of helping fabricate a story about chemical weapons use by Syrian rebels as a pretext to undermine a shaky truce.

Russia's defense ministry said rebels fired grenades containing chlorine on November 24 on the regime-held city of Aleppo, with Syrian state media reporting that around 100 Syrians were hospitalized for breathing difficulties.

The United States said it had "credible information" that the account was false and that Russian and Syrian forces instead had fired tear gas.

"The United States is deeply concerned that pro-regime officials have maintained control of the attack site in its immediate aftermath, allowing them to potentially fabricate samples and contaminate the site before a

proper investigation of it by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons,” State Department spokesman Robert Palladino said in a statement.

“We caution Russia and the regime against tampering with the suspected attack site and urge them to secure the safety of impartial, independent inspectors so that those responsible can be held accountable,” he said.

He said that Russia and Syria were “using it as an opportunity to undermine confidence in the ceasefire in Idlib,” the last stronghold of rebels and extremists fighting President Bashar Al-Assad.

Russia responded to the purported attack with air raids on Idlib, throwing into question a truce reached in mid-September.

The United States – along with other Western governments, the United Nations and human rights groups – have repeatedly pointed to chemical attacks by Assad’s forces.

A sarin gas attack in April 2017 in the town of Khan Sheikhun killed 83 people, according to the UN, leading the United States to strike a Syrian air base with cruise missiles as punishment.

Russia, the top international backer of Assad, and the Syrian government both denied the incident, saying footage of suffering victims including children was staged.



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UN chief urges Syria to resolve gaps on chemical weapons
Syria president announces \$9bn budget for 2019