

UN hails joint Libya force to protect water network

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Thu, 2021-08-26 18:40

TRIPOLI: The United Nations on Thursday welcomed the creation of a joint security force from rival sides in Libya to secure the country's water network amid sabotage threats.

"It is a very significant step forward towards the unification of the military institution and the country," the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) said in a statement.

Earlier this month, the water authority shut down a huge network of pipelines known as the Great Man-Made River for a week before restoring supplies. The water network was closed after loyalists of Abdullah al-Senussi, the jailed brother-in-law of slain dictator Moamer Kadhafi, threatened to sabotage it unless he was released.

Senussi, jailed in Tripoli, was sentenced to death in 2015 for his role in the attempted suppression of the 2011 uprising that toppled Kadhafi.

The Great Man-Made River was one of the major projects of Kadhafi during his four decades in power.

It brings water from underground aquifers deep in the Sahara desert in the south of Libya to settlements on the Mediterranean coast in the north.

Oil-rich Libya was gripped by violence after the 2011 uprising and split between the two rival camps, backed by foreign powers.

In October the rival sides signed a ceasefire in Geneva and an interim administration was set up in March to prepare for presidential and parliamentary elections in December.

The joint security force comprises combatants linked to the government based in Tripoli and fighters loyal to east-based military commander Khalifa Haftar, UNSMIL said.

UNSMIL head Jan Kubis said the creation of the new joint force "will not only ensure the security" of the water supply, but also "pave the way for further confidence-building measures" as Libya seeks to achieve reunification.



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The art of an exile: Libyan artist Hasan Dhaimish War-torn Libya needs 40% more oil output to ensure country's reconstruction

[Palestinian activist's family seeks international justice](#)

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Thu, 2021-08-26 18:31

JERUSALEM: The family of Palestinian activist Nizar Banat, who died in Palestinian custody in June, stepped up its quest for international justice on Thursday, turning to British police and the UN.

Banat – a leading critic of the Palestinian Authority and its 86-year old president Mahmud Abbas – died after security forces stormed his home in the flashpoint city of Hebron and dragged him away.

A post-mortem found he had been beaten on the head, chest, neck, legs and hands, with less than an hour elapsing between his arrest and his death.

Banat's family has said it has no confidence in the PA's capacity to deliver justice, and called for an international probe.

A statement from the family's lawyers, the British firm Stoke White, said they have asked Britain's Metropolitan Police to open an investigation under the principle of universal jurisdiction.

For a small number of serious offenses, Britain's courts can hear cases even if the alleged crimes were committed abroad.

Stoke White also said it had asked multiple branches of the United Nations human rights system to open investigation, including the Working Group on Arbitrary Detentions and four special rapporteurs.

Ghasan Khalil Banat said his brother's "murder" was a "tragedy for our family, but also a tragedy for the Palestinian people."

"The so-called investigation that was carried out into his murder is an embarrassment and the PA should feel ashamed of it," he said in the statement.

The head of international law and Stoke White, Hakan Camuz, said:

"Responsibility for the murder of Nizar Banat very clearly lies with the senior leadership of the Palestinian Authority including President Mahmud Abbas and Prime Minister Mohammed Shtayyeh."

Shtayyeh and the PA have promised accountability over Banat's death.

Camuz accused the PA of a long-standing bid to silence dissent.

"They cannot be allowed to get away with this and this is why we are submitting these complaints and petitions to the British police and the UN," he said in the statement.

The UN and the European Union this week raised alarm over a spate of arrests of activists by Palestinian security forces since Banat's death, warning the PA appeared to be cracking down on basic freedoms across the West Bank, a territory occupied by Israel since 1967.



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New protest in Gaza as Palestinians demand an end to Israel's blockade
Israel fires on protesting Palestinians in Gaza, 24 wounded

[**Egypt distributes 1 million doses of locally produced COVID-19 vaccine**](#)

Thu, 2021-08-26 16:40

CAIRO: The first batch of 1 million doses of the locally produced coronavirus disease (COVID-19) vaccine has been distributed among 657 vaccination centers throughout Egypt, according to Health Minister Hala Zayed.

The jabs have been produced following a cooperation agreement between Chinese company Sinovac and Egypt's Holding Company for Biological Products and Vaccines (Vacsera).

Vacsera manufactures and analyzes 15 million doses a month ahead of their distribution to vaccination centers nationwide.

Khaled Mujahid, assistant health minister, said the Vacsera-Sinovac vaccine obtained an emergency use license from the Egyptian Drug Authority on Aug. 23 following evaluation tests in accordance with the global standards and references followed by the World Health Organization to assess its safety, quality and effectiveness.

Mujahid said that an agreement was made to supply raw materials for the production of the vaccine in May. Vacsera medical teams and workers were trained by Chinese experts at a Sinovac facility, transferring vaccine manufacturing technology from China.

He added that the manufacture of the doses started on June 29, with three production cycles creating a total of 1 million doses.

Mujahid added that the vaccine was tested by the Vacsera control and quality laboratories, before being subjected to stability studies, noting that the samples were also analyzed in the laboratories of the Egyptian Drug Authority.



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[Egypt's Holding Company for Biological Products and Vaccines \(Vacsera\)](#)

[Hala Zayed](#)

Egypt vaccines ready for clinical trials
Egypt expects to produce nearly 18 million doses of Sinovac coronavirus vaccine a month

[Lebanon raids discover hoarded fuel, medicine and baby formula](#)

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Wed, 2021-08-25 23:06

BEIRUT: Raids carried out by Lebanon security forces discovered millions of liters of subsidized fuel hidden in underground tanks to be sold later on the black market at new prices. Some of the tanks were merely covered by sand.

“Monopolized” medicine and baby formula were seized, too.

News of the hoarding has only added to the anger of Lebanese citizens, who have been suffering through exhausting fuel and medicine shortages for months. Long queues outside gas stations and empty shelves at pharmacies are common across the country.

The largest quantities of hidden subsidized fuel were found in Hawsh Al-Omara in Zahle, Bekaa, where more than 1.5 million liters of gasoline were seized.

Scenes of Caretaker Health Minister Hamad Hassan raiding depots in the south of Lebanon and the Shouf area that contained medicine missing from pharmacies have also left citizens fuming.

The depots contained medicine that could treat patients with coronavirus (COVID-19), blood pressure, and respiratory problems. Antibiotics and thousands of infant formulas – all subsidized at the official rate (\$1=1,500 LBP) – were also discovered.

“The raids are based on an electronic tracking system of ‘monopolized’ medicine,” Hassan said. “The system is very precise and accurate.”

The raid operation revealed a partnership between Hussein Fneish, brother of Hezbollah minister Mohammed Fneish, and Issam Ahmed Khalifa, of the NewPharm Company in Lebanon.

However, the timing of Hassan’s raids were criticized. Lebanon’s Central Bank has not opened credit lines for imports for three months as laws were put in place to prohibit free imports.

"These security campaigns and raids should have been carried out earlier," Issam Araji, head of the Health Parliamentary Committee, told Arab News.

"Medicine and fuel should have never been hoarded. Following these raids, Lebanon seemed like a floating city in a sea of gasoline and diesel. The dangerous part is that the fuel was being stored in residential neighborhoods."

Araji, who is also a cardiologist, said he had warned authorities about the hoarding of medicine for more than a year.

"But they insisted that people were storing the medicine in their houses," Araji said. "People cannot afford their daily bread, how would they be able to store all of the medicine? I think that the health minister has finally decided to take action because he received information about companies hiding and storing the medicine. These campaigns will all be in vain unless offenders are punished to deter others."

Although the country has started to unload ships of imported fuel and distribute it to gas stations, queues outside the filling stations did not get any shorter on Wednesday. Most drivers parked throughout the night and slept in their cars, hoping to fill up their vehicles in the morning.

Adnan Naccouzi, 69, suffered a stroke while waiting in a long queue for gas in the hot weather and without drinking water. He has been recovering inside the intensive care unit at a Beirut hospital for the past 24 hours.

Authorities have said fuel will be sold according to new prices, amid a gradual reduction of fuel subsidies.

As of Wednesday, a 20-liter canister of gasoline was sold for 133,000 Lebanese pounds (\$88) and the same canister of diesel for 99,000 pounds. The cost of transportation has automatically increased, where the fare rose to 20,000 pounds for each passenger; more than double the price of the previous day.

Despite the public calls to arrest monopolists and put them in prison, hoarding is classified by the Lebanese penal code as a misdemeanor and sanctioned either by a fine or up to six months in prison.

Meanwhile, Judge Ghada Aoun issued a search and investigation warrant against Lebanon's Central Bank Gov. Riad Salameh. This comes five days after setting a date for an investigation session – that he did not attend – over accusations of money laundering and money transfers abroad.

Lebanon's State Prosecutor Ghassan Oueidat in April dismissed Judge Aoun from the case. But she has insisted on proceeding with her investigations and broke into a money exchange company with the help of activists from the Free Patriotic Movement.

In other developments, the country's caretaker premier Hassan Diab will not appear before Judge Tarek Bitar, who is investigating last year's Beirut blast. Diab was supposed to be questioned as a defendant in the case on

Thursday, but has insisted that he should be questioned by the Supreme Council for the Trial of Presidents and Ministers.

Judge Fadi Sawan, the investigating judge who preceded Bitar, listened to Diab's testimony in his capacity as a witness more than a year ago. In that testimony, Diab acknowledged the presence of the ammonium nitrate that was illegally stored at the port and explained why he changed his mind about visiting the site just days before the explosion.



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[Egypt steps up support for campaign against terror, crime groups in Sahel region](#)

Wed, 2021-08-25 21:39

CAIRO: Egypt wants to intensify bilateral and regional efforts to combat terrorist organizations and organized crime groups in the Sahel region in central Africa, with a focus on reconstruction and development in the post-armed conflict stage.

Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry made the announcement during a

meeting with his Sierra Leonean counterpart David Francis in Cairo on Tuesday, according to the Middle East News Agency.

The central Sahel region, which includes Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, is facing one of the fastest growing displacement crises in the world – yet one of the most forgotten. More than 2.7 million people have been forced to flee their homes and at least 13.4 million are in dire need of humanitarian assistance, according to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.

Ahmed Hafez, the spokesman for Egypt's Foreign Ministry, said the two ministers share a desire to enhance trade and improve political relations between the two countries.

Both ministers signed a bilateral agreement on cooperation in the field of political consultation. They also partnered on two memorandums of understanding to enhance cooperation in the fields of culture and youth. Their aim is to facilitate communication between officials from the two countries while promoting cultural dialogue.



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military presence in Africa's Sahel