

Sectarian Clashes in the North Enter Second day

Contributed by Naharnet
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6 Killed, 40 Wounded as Efforts Fail to End Tripoli Clashes

Heavy armed clashes between pro- and anti-government supporters raged in the northern city of Tripoli Monday despite stepped up efforts to end the fighting which killed six people and wounded 40 others.

News reports said a mortar shell fell in the heart of Tripoli, hitting the Grand Mansouri Mosque.

Intensified meetings that lasted well into Sunday night at the residence of Tripoli's Sunni Mufti Sheikh Malek al-Shaar failed to put an end to the fighting which broke out earlier in the day.

Shaar called on the security forces to deploy in the embattled districts in force and respond firmly to any security violation.

Fighting erupted around 6 am Sunday two hours after unidentified assailants in Baal Mohsen, a predominantly Alawite district loyal to the Hizbullah-led opposition, hurled hand grenades at Bab al-Tabbaneh, a mainly Sunni Muslim area that backs MP Saad Hariri's Mustaqbal Movement.

Families representing Bab al-Tabbaneh reportedly did not attend the meetings at Shaar's residence, arguing that their rivals possess unmatched arms power.

A gentleman's agreement arrived at the Tripoli meetings failed to halt the violence and forced postponement of official exams in the embattled areas.

The daily Al Hayat on Monday said Bab al-Tabbaneh families, who accused Syria of being behind the bloody fighting, demanded a halt to hostilities against their town.

Meanwhile, the pro-government ruling majority accused Hizbullah of seeking to take revenge against Tripoli.

"Hizbullah is seeking to shift its battle -- after invading Beirut -- to the Bekaa, and now Tripoli's turn has come," MP Mohammed Kabbara said.

The violence also came amid stalled efforts by Prime Minister-designate Fouad Saniora to form a new government following an agreement in Doha last month that ended an 18-month political crisis which nearly brought the country to civil war.

Fears have mounted in recent days that the security situation could deteriorate with clashes erupting in various parts of the country between supporters of the ruling majority and the opposition, which is backed by Syria and Iran.

Beirut, 23 Jun 08, 08:35

<http://www.naharnet.com/domino/tn/NewsDesk.nsf/getstory?openform&8542320013B5173CC2257471001E31CF>
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5:15pm Guns fall silent in Tripoli.

4:55pm Army and Security Forces deployed in Tripoli's Tebbaneh district and started moving into Baal Mohsen.

4:50pm Mustaqbal Movement leader Saad Hariri urged Tripoli citizens to avoid being lured into factional conflict.

4:15pm The Army Command said it would bolster its force in Tripoli and threatened to open fire on gunmen.

4:10pm Clashes rage in Tripoli after the 4:00pm deadline set by the army to move in.

1:15pm A joint army-police force will deploy at 4:00pm at Tripoli's embattled districts.

11:40am Fierce Clashes renewed after a brief stop in Bab al-Tabbaneh and Jabal Mohsen districts.

11:35am Tripoli Mufti Malek Chaar announced that army units are preparing to deploy in the regions where clashes took place.

11:30am Mediations are underway between the pro- and anti- government leaders in the North and the army command to reach a cease fire in Tripoli.

11:05am Residents of Syria street launched appeals to extinguish a huge fire that erupted in a gas station in the

neighborhood.

11:00am Rocket propelled grenades exploded in dozens of residential apartments in Jabal Mohsen and Bab al-Tabbaneh setting them ablaze.

10:50am Sporadic gunshots are heard in Syria street and Baqqal district.

10:40am Traffic stopped on Tripoli-Akkar highway amid reports that some motorists came under fire.

10:30am Heavy armed clashes between pro- and anti-government supporters renewed in the northern city of Tripoli Monday in Bab al-Tabbaneh and Jabal Mohsen districts.

8:15am Education Minister Khaled Qabbani has announced postponement of official exams in Bab al-Tabbaneh and Qobbeh districts of Tripoli due to ongoing armed clashes.