

## Gaddafi troops make a stand at Bin Jawad

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RAS LANUF, Aug 25: Libyan strongman Moammar Gaddafi has lost control of most of Libya and is nowhere to be found, but for his troops defending the road to his hometown Sirte the fight goes on. As rebel fighters were on Tuesday overrunning Gaddafi's Bab al-Aziziya headquarters in Tripoli, their comrades in the east of the country were pushing back his forces hundreds of kilometres (miles) towards Sirte.

But after retaking the oil hub of Ras Lanuf, the rebels were halted in their tracks when they came under heavy artillery fire at Bin Jawad, the next town along the road hugging the shores of the Gulf of Sirte.

The rebels say they went into Bin Jawad Tuesday night, but decided to retreat as a precautionary measure to put some distance between themselves and rocket attacks by regime forces.

The rebels now have their headquarters at Ras Lanuf, about 12 kilometres (7.5 miles) from Bin Jawad. Five rebels who got carried away with war fever and ventured beyond Bin Jawad were captured by loyalist soldiers, and two died in the crossfire when their own comrades shot back. "We have been betrayed twice by local people, and now we know how things are," said a rebel commander. During see-sawing fighting to push the eastern front since the beginning of the conflict more than six months ago, the rebels were never able to overpower Bin Jawad. On Thursday, rebel troops were encamped in Ras Lanouf, a tidy residential town by the sea, built for staff at the nearby refinery, which still remains intact.

In the town, which so far has also been spared the violence of war, clusters of tired fighters arrive in their 4x4s, seeking the cool shade of the rows of palm trees. AFP