

Turkey picks up the pieces after devastating quake

Author:

Sat, 2020-10-31 23:20

ANKARA: Canan Gullu was having coffee with her friends on her balcony when the quake struck. The head of the Ankara-based Women Associations of Turkey, she had decided to spend the weekend in her summer house in the coastal town of Seferihisar after sleepless nights spent helping victims of domestic violence in the capital.

The teacups fell on the ground, and they hid under a table until they feel safer.

"I felt the building shaking, then the house began moving toward the house next door. It was as if the ground was moving back and forth under our feet. We could barely stand," Gullu told Arab News.

It was followed by a mini-tsunami that hit the district where she was living.

"I am now focusing on providing essential goods for the women living on the streets or whose buildings collapsed. It is the other face of poverty in Turkey," Gullu said.

The powerful quake that hit Turkey's western province of Izmir on Oct. 30 revealed the weak infrastructure of the country's building stock. Although the local residents are used to living with frequent tremors, the 7.0 magnitude quake on Friday evening was the biggest they had experienced; it was as powerful as the 1999 earthquake near Istanbul when more than 17,000 people died.

The search and rescue operations continued on Saturday, with touching footages showing a mother and her three children as well as a cat and a dog being rescued 18 hours after being trapped under the debris of their building.

Turkish survivors continue to stay outside in the tents provided by the municipality for fear of aftershocks. Some hotel and restaurant owners offered free rooms and free dinners to the traumatized people.

To prevent traffic blocking rescue efforts, the authorities have banned vehicles entering the city center.

Friday's quake killed more than 30 people in Turkey and the neighbouring Greek islands, although that figure was expected to rise. Almost 900 people were injured, with 243 under treatment and eight in intensive care, officials said.

Despite their diplomatic row over energy drilling operations in the waters of the eastern Mediterranean, Turkish and Greek officials exchanged solidarity

messages on Twitter.

“Whatever our differences, these are times when our people need to stand together,” Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis tweeted.

Many people were still waiting for news of relatives trapped under the debris.

Izmir is crossed by 17 different fault lines and has been prone to frequent tremors in the past. The quake resilience of the buildings in the city and unplanned urbanization have come under the spotlight, sparking criticism of the authorities.

The Turkish government issued a controversial zoning amnesty ahead of the general elections of 2018, resulting in 10 million illegally constructed buildings throughout the country.

These were eligible for legitimate deeds, with disastrous consequences during the quakes. Izmir tops the list for the number of illegal buildings that were “forgiven” by a government move to garner more votes.

Several buildings that benefited from that amnesty have collapsed over the years, killing dozens of people. Estimates say that one-fifth of the buildings in Istanbul could be completely destroyed in a quake with a magnitude of 7 or above.

In a past interview, Turkey’s famous contractor Ali Agaoglu, who was proud of selling massive residences to Arab clients, confessed that his company used sand from the Marmara Sea during their construction work. “If there is an earthquake in Istanbul, (the number of the dead and collapsed buildings will be so high that) the army won’t even be able to enter the city,” he said.

Turkey’s earthquake tax was also the subject of intense debate earlier this year with the quakes in eastern provinces of Elazig and Malatya, after President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said: “We spent it where it was meant to be spent. And after this, we do not have time to provide accountability for matters like this.”

Special taxes were levied in Turkey after the 1999 earthquake and were later made permanent. However, there is widespread skepticism about whether these taxes were spent on quake resilience or whether they only helped the state budget at that time.



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Death toll reaches 37 in quake that hit Turkey, Greek island 22 dead, buildings collapse as major quake hits Turkey, Greece

[British-Iranian national Zaghari-Ratcliffe details first prison interrogation](#)

Sat, 2020-10-31 19:09

LONDON: Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, the British-Iranian dual national imprisoned in Iran on contested charges of espionage, has given an account of her first interrogation in 2016.

She said she was threatened with her daughter being taken away, and her interrogators claimed her husband was a spy and gave her false information regarding her release.

Her account of her first 40 days in custody appears in "White Torture," a recently published book of interviews with women imprisoned in Iran on political charges compiled by Narges Mohammadi, who is in prison for her human rights work.

Zaghari-Ratcliffe told Mohammadi that she spent the first 40 days in total isolation. In her early imprisonment, Zaghari-Ratcliffe said she endured days without sleep, panic attacks, fainting, and regular attempts by her interrogators to force a confession of espionage.

READ MORE: [British FM: Zaghari-Ratcliffe imprisonment will 'sabotage' UK-Iran ties](#)

She told the author that the ordeal was so distressing that she came to "doubt herself" and question whether the accusations were real.

"They tried to induce me to say something that didn't exist. They said they had top-secret evidence that I worked for the (British) parliament and against Iran," she said.

"I was sure that was not the case, but they repeated it so much that I doubted myself when I returned to the cell. I spent long hours in my cell wondering if the projects I had worked on had anything to do with Iran. Then I told myself that I was 100% sure that my projects had nothing to do with

Iran, but after each interrogation I would review these cases over and over again," she added.

"The interrogators threatened to send Gabriella (her daughter) to London if I did not cooperate. They kept telling me that I had lost my job and that if interrogation took too long my husband would leave me. They asked me to tell them about my friends and their work projects. I had not really slept for three weeks. I had not seen my child and I was under a lot of pressure."

After her initial arrest and interrogation, Zaghari-Ratcliffe was sent to the notorious Ervin Prison.

She said after she was transferred there, she was allowed to meet her family, but she hardly recognized her daughter.

During the visitations, she said she struggled when her daughter asked her to go to her parents' house.

"Every time she (Gabriella) cried goodbye I would break down," she said. "The interrogators were present in the meeting room. When saying goodbye, I wanted to go ahead and tie her shoes for her, but they wouldn't let me and I had to leave her."

Zaghari-Ratcliffe is set to return to court on Monday in Tehran. If she is returned to prison, as she expects, she will once again be separated from her husband and daughter.



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UK summons Iran envoy as Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe faces return to jailUK-Iranian 'hostage' Zaghari-Ratcliffe due back in Tehran jail

[Iran closes mosques, schools in deadly 'third wave' of coronavirus](#)

Author:

Reuters

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Sat, 2020-10-31 11:58

JEDDAH:: Mosques, schools, universities, beauty salons, cafes, gyms, museums, theaters and swimming pools in 25 of Iran's 31 provinces were ordered to close for 10 days from next Wednesday.

In Tehran, the closure of beauty salons, teahouses, cinemas, libraries and fitness clubs has been extended for a week.

Police will make unannounced visits to other high-risk businesses, and any found to be breaking health rules will be shut down. Weddings, funeral gatherings and conferences in the capital have been banned.

Authorities have blamed a sharp increase in coronavirus cases on people failing to follow restrictions, and President Hassan Rouhani said an operations headquarters would be set up to ensure compliance.

Iran was slow to respond to the pandemic when the first cases emerged there in February, and is now the worst-affected country in the Middle East. It recorded several recent daily fatality and infection highs, with figures on the rise since September.

Health Ministry spokeswoman Sima Sadat Lari said on Saturday there had been 7,820 new cases in the previous 24 hours, taking the total to 612,772, and the death toll rose by 386 to 34,864.

Most analysts believe the real figures are higher. "The disease's spread ... especially in the city of Tehran is worse than what the government has revealed so far," Etemad daily wrote on Saturday.

Calls are growing for a full national lockdown, which Rouhani has resisted because the Iranian economy, already collapsing under US sanctions, could not

cope.

One leading doctor said daily fatalities could reach 900 unless tougher measures were taken.

“The country, or high-risk cities, must be completely quarantined for two to three weeks,” said Alireza Naji, head of the virology department at Iran’s top respiratory disease hospital, Masih Daneshvari.

In Saudi Arabia, meanwhile, the virus remained largely under control. Health chiefs reported 403 new cases on Saturday, taking the total to 347,282, and the death toll rose by 19 to 5,402. Worldwide the virus has infected more than 46 million people and killed nearly 1.2 million.

Amid fears of a “second wave” of infection sweeping Europe, Austria’s government declared a second mass shutdown and a curfew from this week until the end of November, and British Prime Minister Boris Johnson imposed a new lockdown in England until Dec. 2.



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Iranian man arrested over deaths of family in English Channel
Virus sets Iran record again – this time infections

Over 3 million virus cases reported in Mideast

Author:

Sat, 2020-10-31 02:16

DUBAI: The number of reported coronavirus cases has gone over 3 million in the Middle East, an Associated Press count showed on Friday, with the true number likely even higher.

Across the Mideast, there have been over 75,000 deaths attributed to the virus by health authorities, the AP count relying on reported figures by individual countries shows.

There have been 2.5 million recoveries from the virus causing the COVID-19 illness.

In the Mideast, the hardest-hit nation remains Iran, which served as the initial epicenter of the virus in the region. In Iran alone, authorities say there have been over 600,000 confirmed coronavirus cases, with some 477,000 recoveries and 34,000 deaths. Yet even those numbers are believed to be low, Iranian officials say.

NUMBER

Deaths have been reported in the Middle East region due to the coronavirus, according to health authorities.

In some war-torn nations, it remains difficult to know the scope of the pandemic as well. In Yemen for instance, it's believed that the vast majority of the country's cases have gone undiagnosed and untreated, and health workers have said only those who are near death are usually brought to hospitals.



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Leader of banned charity seeks asylum from Turkey amid Macron-Erdogan row
Middle East leaders join world in condemnation of deadly France attack

[Tunisian family of alleged Nice knifeman in disbelief over attack](#)

Author:

Sat, 2020-10-31 02:07

SFAX/TUNISIA: The family of a man detained for killing three churchgoers in France weeks after leaving his home in Tunisia has told AFP they are struggling to believe he carried out the attack.

“It’s not normal,” said Brahim Issaoui’s brother Yassine, incredulous that his sibling was responsible for the attack, which came amid widespread anger among Muslims over comments by French President Emmanuel Macron.

Macron had strongly defended secular values and the right to mock religion after a French schoolteacher, who had shown his class cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad deemed offensive to Muslims, was murdered earlier this month in a Paris suburb.

Issaoui, 21, is in serious condition after being shot multiple times by police in the aftermath of Thursday’s brutal knife attack in the southern

city of Nice. Born to a family of modest means in the central Tunisian city of Sfax, Issaoui had turned to religion and isolated himself in the past two years, his relatives told AFP.

"He prayed ... (and) went from home to work and back, not mixing with others or leaving the house," said his mother, crying as she clutched a passport photo of the young man in a white hoodie.

But before that "he drank alcohol and used drugs. I used to tell him, 'we are poor and you're wasting money?' He would reply if God wills it, he will guide me to the right path, it's my business'," she added

Tunisia, where before a 2011 revolution, authorities controlled the practicing of religion and repressed dissent, saw a rise in radical Islam after the uprising and a wave of jihadist attacks in 2015.

While the security situation has greatly improved, sporadic attacks still take place, targeting security forces in particular.

One of 11 siblings, Issaoui lived with his parents in a modest house on a potholed road in a working class neighborhood near an industrial zone on the outskirts of Sfax.

His mother said her son had dropped out of high school and had worked as a motorcycle mechanic.

Having put some money aside, he opened an unlicensed petrol station, similar to those found across Tunisia, where most economic activity takes place on the margins of the official system.

"I told him to rent a small shop with the 1,100 to 1,200 dinars (around \$400 which he had saved) in order to be able to work," said his mother, who did not want to give her name.

"He told me he wanted to set up a stall to sell petrol."

Issaoui joined a wave of Tunisians departing for Italy that has grown in recent months due to the combined pressures of the Covid-19 crisis, which has exacerbated already soaring unemployment, and a political crisis.

The number of Tunisians emigrating illegally to Italy reached a record 20,000 after the 2011 revolution, before falling sharply. The number of arrivals has been on the rise again since 2017.

Issaoui had already tried once before to reach Europe, and did not tell his family he was making another attempt, according to his brother.

After successfully reaching Italy and finding work harvesting olives, his brother added, he made his way to France.

"He said he went to France because it was better for work and there were too many people in Italy," Yassine said.

The family said he called the evening of October 28, the day before the attack, telling them he had just arrived in the country.

Incredulous, they said they could not understand how he would be able to carry out the attack in Nice just a few hours after arriving in France.

While many Tunisians condemned Macron's statements on Islam, it sparked debate on freedom of speech – seen as one of the most solid achievements of the country's 2011 revolution.



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Tunisia bans internal travel to contain pandemic France back in coronavirus lockdown as US surges to daily record