

Protests against Libya's GNA erupt in Tripoli over living conditions

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TRIPOLI: Hundreds of Libyans marched in the capital Tripoli on Sunday evening to protest deteriorating living conditions and denounce corruption in the war-torn country, witnesses said.

Angry at extended cuts to power and water, and long lines at petrol stations, the mostly young people marched in the streets of the city center, chanting slogans including "No to corruption!"

Libya, which sits atop Africa's largest proven crude oil reserves, has endured almost a decade of violent chaos since the 2011 NATO-backed uprising that toppled and killed veteran dictator Muammar Qaddafi.

The war-weary country is plagued by water shortages and power blackouts that snuff out air-conditioners in the searing summer heat.

The deplorable situation has been compounded by the novel coronavirus pandemic, which has depressed global oil prices and spread in the country despite social distancing measures.

"We are tired of living without hope," Ayman Al-Wafi, a young man in his twenties, told AFP by telephone from the protest.

Ignoring restrictions in place to curb the spread of the virus, the protesters marched in front of the seat of Libya's Government of National Accord (GNA) before gathering in Martyrs' Square.

Police vehicles and security forces were present at the march, according to witnesses and videos shared on social media.

Al-Wafi later told AFP that protesters had left Martyrs' Square after "security forces started firing in the air."

The protest comes just two days after the country's warring rival administrations announced separately that they would cease all hostilities and hold nationwide elections.

The surprise announcement Friday was made by Fayez Al-Sarraj, head of the UN-recognized GNA, and Aguila Saleh, speaker of the eastern-based parliament backed by military strongman Khalifa Haftar, who launched an abortive offensive in April 2019 to seize Tripoli.

But the prospect of a let-up in violence came as coronavirus cases skyrocketed 15-fold in Libya since June, the ICRC said, warning this was further deepening a dire humanitarian crisis.

"Infrastructure all over the country is falling apart. People have little electricity, drinking water, sanitation, or medical care in the middle of a growing pandemic," International Committee of the Red Cross president Peter Maurer said in a statement.



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East Libyan forces dismiss cease-fire push by rivalsHaftar warns Erdogan: Stay out of Libya or you face our bullets

[UN warns of new Yemen disaster as flood death toll rises to 148](#)

Sun, 2020-08-23 22:46

MUKALLA: Yemen faces a new catastrophe from torrential rain and flooding that have devastated the country for the past three months, the UN warned on Sunday.

Flash floods have killed at least 148 people, left more than 300,000 homeless and destroyed property, crops and livestock.

The flooding has left thousands of Yemenis jobless and has hampered efforts to contain the spread of the coronavirus, said UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) spokesman Andrej Mahecic.

“UNHCR is deeply concerned that the displaced communities are extremely vulnerable to the COVID-19 pandemic, with many unable to practice social or physical distancing, access clean water for hand-washing or enact other measures to prevent transmission of the virus,” Mahecic said.

The provinces of Marib, Amran, Hajjah, Hodeidah, Lahj, Aden and Abyan are the worst affected, with thousands forced to flee their homes and seek shelter in mosques, health centers and schools.

“Many of the internally displaced people affected by the floods were already living in abject poverty, often in overcrowded, makeshift shelters made from plastic sheeting or mud, which have been washed away,” Mahecic said.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The provinces of Marib, Amran, Hajjah, Hodeidah, Lahj, Aden and Abyan are the worst affected.
- Thousands have been forced to flee their homes and seek shelter in mosques, health centers and schools.

Dams have collapsed and the biggest, at Marib, overflowed, flooding shelters and washing away farms. There are now fears that Marib dam may burst because it has not been properly maintained.

“It is highly vulnerable to bursting. This would destroy the downstream irrigated area, which hosts thousands of displaced people, as well as the lower parts of Marib town,” Mahecic said.

Ahmed Saeed Baamer’s family and three others sought shelter with relatives in the village of Radfan, west of the port city of Mukalla, when a rainstorm and floodwaters made their home uninhabitable. They have now gone back home to await help.

“We had no other option but to return to the house,” Baamer, a nurse, told Arab News. “Our relatives’ houses are overcrowded. The government has not helped us. A government engineer saw the damage in my house and left without saying when they would help. All we want is safer accommodation.”

Salem Al-Khanbashi, Yemen’s deputy prime minister and head of the supreme national emergency committee, told Arab News that the government had allocated 2.5 billion Yemeni riyals (\$9.9 million) for reconstruction and relief after floods in March and April. When the rain continued, the cash-strapped government turned to international donors for help.

“We could not allocate more funds as floods and rain became more destructive and caused huge damage across the country. The reconstruction bill is beyond the government’s abilities,” Al-Khanbashi said.



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Saudi aid agency provides medical supplies to Yemen
Saudi aid agency provides medical supplies to Yemen

[Egypt signs African anti-corruption pledge](#)

Sun, 2020-08-23 22:39

CAIRO: Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi has approved Egypt's accession to the African Union Convention for the Prevention and Combating of Corruption.

The 2003 agreement, signed in Maputo, Mozambique, aims to encourage and strengthen measures by African states to prevent, punish and eradicate corruption and related crimes in the public and private sectors.

It also seeks to strengthen, facilitate and regulate cooperation among states to ensure the effectiveness of measures for preventing corruption and related crimes in Africa, as well as and harmonizing and streamlining policy aimed at corruption on the continent.

The principles of the agreement include respect for democratic principles and institutions, citizen participation, the rule of law and good governance, respect for human rights in accordance with the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, transparency in public affairs and the promotion of social justice.

Ghada Wali, Director-General of the UN Office at Vienna, said that Egypt will host the largest anti-corruption conference in the world next year, and will increase efforts in fighting the crime.

FASTFACT

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She added in an interview on Al-Hayat TV that Egypt has a plan to combat drugs and terrorism.

Last December, Egypt submitted its voluntary report to the African Peer Review Mechanism, a voluntary mechanism for reviewing and evaluating the performance of member states.

The Administrative Control Authority received the review delegation for the mechanism and was briefed on the efforts of Egypt's National Anti-Corruption Academy of the Authority.



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[Egypt's Coptic Christians celebrate Assumption of Mary amid pandemic](#)

Author:

Sat, 2020-08-22 23:05

CAIRO: Coptic Christians in Egypt celebrated the Assumption of Mary on Saturday, amid health and security measures to control the spread of coronavirus.

The celebrations followed a 15-day fast that started on Aug. 7. Security services increased their presence outside churches and side streets were closed to prevent overcrowding and congestion.

Among the monasteries that opened their doors to visitors during the fasting period were the Dronka Monastery in Assiut and the Historical Church of the Virgin Mary in Mostorod.

The churches took health and safety measures, such as having visitors wear masks. But, despite the pandemic and preventative steps recommended to contain the spread of the virus, the monasteries welcomed a large number of visitors who failed to maintain social distancing.

While the pandemic meant that churches witnessed a spiritual revival online, there was still an event at the Monastery of Darnaka Mountain in Asyut. Thousands took part in it without following anti-coronavirus measures, coming into close contact with each other and not wearing masks.

A zaffa (procession), deacons, priests and monks came out of the church during the ceremony that was led by Anba Yu'annis, bishop of Assiut. They went out from the ancient church bearing images of the Virgin Mary and crosses.

"This gathering with such a large number of people can possibly lead to a health disaster," said journalist Muhammad Mustafa Shardi, adding that the disease could be transmitted to large numbers of participants.

Pastor Paul Halim, a spokesman for the Coptic Orthodox Church, said that it had been agreed within the church to change the nature of the celebrations this year due to the coronavirus outbreak.

The churches are largely avoiding occasions that include gatherings of worshippers.

Halim added that precautionary measures would be tightened up inside churches as they would only admit a certain number of worshippers. There would be one worshipper per pew and those not wearing a facemask would be stopped from entering.

Anba Baiman, bishop of Naqada and Qus Qena and rapporteur of the Public Relations Committee of the Holy Synod of the Church, explained that the second wave of coronavirus had started because of gatherings during celebrations between families and in public without the necessary precautions being taken.

He called upon all church members to take precautions during the celebrations in order to preserve public health.



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[Iraq appeals for US help in Turkey row](#)

Sat, 2020-08-22 22:19

ISTANBUL: Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhimi has described Turkish attacks on Iraqi soil as “unacceptable” and urged the US to resolve the dispute in a meeting with US President Donald Trump.

Ankara and Baghdad have been negotiating since mid-June to solve the dispute over Turkish offensives in Kurdistan and other disputed territories. However, alienating Turkey could pose an economic threat to Iraq as Ankara is a key trading partner.

The Iraqi constitution bans the use of its territory to attack neighboring countries.

“The only potential US card to play is the personal relationship between Trump and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. He could ask Ankara to

temporarily halt its cross-border activities,” Joe Macaron, a Middle East foreign policy analyst at the Arab Center, told Arab News.

Macaron doubts that the US will impose sanctions or threaten Erdogan to achieve this objective.

On Aug. 11 a Turkish drone strike in northeastern Iraq killed two Iraqi border guards and the driver of their vehicle. The Iraqi military called it “flagrant aggression”.

The drone attack coincided with alleged meetings of Iraqi high-ranking officials with members of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), who are based in northern Iraq.

Baghdad canceled a Turkish ministerial visit and summoned the Turkish ambassador in response to the strike.

The Kurdistan Regional Government Ministry of Interior also urged Turkey and the PKK to continue fighting outside Iraq.

Macaron said there is an informal between Turkey, Iran and the Kurdistan Regional Government against the PKK in northern Iraq. He added that there is little the US can do on an issue that is viewed as low-priority.

FASTFACT

Ankara and Baghdad have been negotiating since mid-June to solve the dispute over Turkish offensives in Kurdistan and other disputed territories.

“Turkey has military bases inside the Iraqi border and there are several pending challenges between Ankara and Baghdad, including the water quota in the Tigris and Euphrates rivers,” he said.

During the 1990s Turkey launched several military incursions into northern Iraq and established a dozen military bases in the region.

Macaron says the success of any mediation will require Arab pressure on the US to become involved.

Iraqi Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein also urged his Egyptian, Jordanian, Saudi and Kuwaiti counterparts, as well as the Arab League, for diplomatic backing to confront Ankara and force it to “pull out its troops who have infiltrated Iraq.”

France also criticized Turkey’s strikes in the region and emphasized Iraqi sovereignty in a statement.

However, Ankara has accused Iraq of “turning a blind eye to the presence of PKK terrorists on its soil.”

Aaron Stein, director of Research at the Foreign Policy Research Institute,

said the US supports Turkey's right to strike against PKK in northern Iraq and has a mechanism to deconflict the two countries' operations.

"That deconfliction doesn't always work well, but I don't see US policy changing. Turkish strikes are making US partner operations in the north more difficult, but I don't see how policy will change because of that fact," he told Arab News.



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