

Queues as far as the eye can see: new fuel shortage hits Yemen

Sun, 2019-09-29 14:23

SANAA: A fuel shortage is deepening Yemen's humanitarian crisis, forcing drivers to wait for days in queues that stretch back from some petrol stations as far as the eye can see.

The new shortage is just one of many problems causing suffering in the civil war being fought by the Iran-aligned Houthi movement and a Saudi-led coalition backed by the West.

But its consequences are far-reaching. Fuel is needed not just for cars but also for water pumps, hospital generators and to transport goods around a country where millions are on the brink of famine.

"It's affecting us and all the Yemeni people," said Nashwan Khaled, who had already been waiting for two days in a queue for petrol in Sanaa, the Houthi-controlled capital where many petrol stations have been forced to close.

"I put my job and my life on hold," he said.

Petrol on the black market is selling for almost three times the official price. Drivers can queue for two or three days.

"Fuel shortages in Yemen exacerbate the already dire humanitarian situation in the country and lead to unacceptable levels of suffering," said Sultana Begum, a representative of the Norwegian Refugee Council humanitarian organization.

Supplies can be held at ports and frontline borders for months because of bureaucracy on both sides, aid agencies say.

"Today we are in a very bad situation, there's a fuel crisis and they are stopping fuel ships from entering Yemen with the excuse of security," said Ahmed Nasser, standing at a petrol station. "We suffer shortages of fuel, goods, all commodities."

A Djibouti-based UN inspection mechanism was set up in 2015 after the coalition accused the Houthis of smuggling Iranian weapons through Yemeni ports under their control, a charge both the group and Tehran deny.

Ships also need permission from the internationally recognized Yemeni government and the Western-backed, Sunni Muslim coalition to enter ports. Last week, United Nations aid chief Mark Lowcock said he was concerned that imports were being further complicated by new Yemeni government regulations on commercial fuel.



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Yemen vows to end attempts by Iran-backed Houthi militia to divide country
Global efforts insufficient, says Yemen minister

[Syria demands withdrawal of US, Turkish forces, warns of countermeasures](#)

Author:

Reuters

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Sat, 2019-09-28 16:24

UNITED NATIONS: Syria's Foreign Minister Walid Al-Moualem on Saturday demanded an immediate withdrawal of all US and Turkish troops from his country and warned that Syrian government forces had the right to take countermeasures if they refused.

The United States has around 1,000 troops in Syria tackling Daesh militants. Turkey has also launched military incursions into northern Syria, targeting Daesh and Kurdish YPG fighters.

"Any foreign forces operating in our territories without our authorization are occupying forces and must withdraw immediately," Al-Moualem said during an address to the annual gathering of world leaders at the United Nations in New York.

"If they refuse, we have the right to take any and all countermeasures authorized under international law," he said.

US President Donald Trump last year ordered the complete withdrawal of US troops from Syria – only to later be convinced to leave some forces behind to ensure that Daesh militants cannot stage a comeback.

The US intervention in Syria began with air strikes in September 2014 under Trump's predecessor Barack Obama.

While Syria did not approve a US presence there, the Obama administration justified the military action under Article 51 of the UN Charter, which covers the individual or collective right of states to self-defense against armed attack.

"The United States and Turkey maintain an illegal military presence in northern Syria," Al-Moualem said, describing US and Turkish efforts to create a "safe zone" inside Syria as a violation of the UN Charter.

Turkey plans to build homes to settle 1 million Syrian refugees in the zone. The United States and Turkey have started joint land and air patrols along part of Syria's border with Turkey, but Ankara remains angry with Washington's support for the YPG, which has been a key US ally in fighting Islamic State in Syria.

A crackdown by Syrian President Bashar Assad on pro-democracy protesters in 2011 led to civil war, and Daesh militants used the chaos to seize territory in Syria and Iraq.

Assad's forces have been backed by Russian air power and have been waging an offensive in the Idlib region in the country's northwest, the last major chunk of territory still in rebel hands after more than eight years of war. Western states have accused Russian and Syrian forces of targeting civilians in northwest Syria, a charge they deny. They say they are targeting militants.

"We are determined to continue our war against terrorism in all its forms until rooting out the last remaining terrorist," Al-Moualem said.



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[Egypt court asks Grand Mufti for opinion on terror case sentences](#)

Author:

Sat, 2019-09-28 19:21

CAIRO: An Egyptian court has referred the case of seven defendants facing terrorism charges to the country's top religious authority, the Grand Mufti, for a non-binding opinion on whether they can be executed as the prosecution seeks.

The Cairo Criminal Court said Saturday the defendants are members of a local affiliate of the Daesh group spearheading an insurgency in northern Sinai. The men are part of 32 defendants accused of killing eight police, including an officer, when they ambushed a microbus in Cairo's southern suburb of

Helwan in May 2016.

The verdict is set for Nov. 12, and the presiding judge may rule independently of the Mufti.

Egypt has battled an insurgency for years in the Sinai Peninsula that has occasionally spilled over to the mainland.



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Egypt: At least 20 killed in airstrikes in northern Sinai

[Turkish women rally against rising violence targeting them](#)

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AFP

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Sat, 2019-09-28 13:40

ISTANBUL: Dozens of women protested in Istanbul on Saturday to denounce rising violence against women and the government's failure to stop brutal attacks across the country.

They gathered in the Kadikoy neighborhood on the Asian side of Istanbul, recounting harrowing stories of women recently murdered across the country, including Emine Bulut, whose killing by her ex-husband in August sparked outrage.

"Stop the murder of women!," "Stop male violence!" and "Do not watch violence, do something," they shouted.

Bulut's murder in front of her daughter sent shockwaves across Turkey after a video of the attack was published online.

The 38-year-old was stabbed to death in a cafe on August 18 by her former husband in the central Anatolian city of Kirikkale. Bulut, who had divorced him four years ago, died in hospital.

Her name was a worldwide trending topic on Twitter and "I don't want to die" (#olmekistemiyorum) was widely quoted on social media.

"The murder of Emine Bulut sparked frustration and resentment in society. Her last words are ringing in all women's ears: I don't want to die," Gamze Ozturk, one of the organizers, told AFP.

"There are increasing numbers of women being murdered and none of them wanted to die," she said.

A total of 294 women were murdered in the only first eight months of 2019 – 40 of them in August alone, while 440 women were killed last year, according to the women's rights group We Will Stop Femicide, which has been tracking gender-related deaths.

"We will be out on the streets to protect women's rights until no single woman is killed," protester Bircan Sahin told AFP.

Turkey has ratified the Council of Europe's 2011 Istanbul Convention on preventing domestic violence – but activists say more needs to be done to put the laws into practice.



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Turkey doctor gets 15 months for revealing pollution cancer risk
Bomb explodes injuring five in southern Turkey

[Morocco makes headway against HIV but stigma remains](#)

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Fri, 2019-09-27 04:34

CASABLANCA: In Morocco, the struggle against HIV has been so successful in recent years that campaigners worry about losing funding for combatting the virus, but for people living with the disease it remains a heavy stigma.

In Casablanca, a group therapy workshop offers HIV patients a rare opportunity to speak openly about their disease.

“Here I feel normal, I’m treated like a human being,” said Zineb, a 29-year-

old mother. Organized by the Association for the Fight Against AIDS (ALCS), on a recent Thursday the workshop brought 12 HIV patients together with a psychologist and a therapist.

The ALCS also organizes follow-up therapeutic care in hospital, and prevention and screening campaigns, with funding from the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.

These programs were developed shortly after the first HIV case was detected in Morocco in 1986. This early start is partly why UNAIDS, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, calls Morocco a “model country” for its HIV response.

Thanks to improved screening, access to treatment and monitoring, new HIV infections in Morocco declined by 42 percent between 2010 and 2016, compared to an average reduction of four percent across the rest of the Middle East and North Africa.

Morocco had 350 deaths from AIDS in 2018, from a population of about 35 million. But some groups remain vulnerable, with intravenous drug users, men who have sex with other men, and sex workers accounting for two thirds of Morocco’s 21,000 identified cases.

And the stigma attached to those infected remains high, even within the family. “My mother treated me like a murderer. For a long time I felt alone in the world,” said Youssef, a 28-year-old who has twice attempted suicide.

Like other HIV patients interviewed by AFP, he asked to be identified by a pseudonym. And all of them – save for a 40-year-old considered very lucky by the group – have either hidden their illness or been rejected by loved ones.

In this conservative Muslim society, where sex outside marriage and homosexuality are illegal, HIV patients seldom talk publicly about the virus.

“The subject is taboo, because the infection is linked to sex, itself a taboo subject in Morocco,” said Yakoub, a 25-year-old ALCS worker.

“The social rejection is such that some (HIV patients) lose everything: family, friends, work, home,” he said. Zineb, like many HIV patients, hides her medication to conceal her illness.

For 10 years, the former teen mother has told her family that she is being treated for diabetes. “My 17-year-old son knows nothing, I can’t bring myself to tell him, I’m too afraid,” she said with a sad smile.

“Once you’re sick, you’re no longer a person,” said Sakina, a mother who says she never speaks of her illness except with doctors, the ALCS staff and other HIV patients.

Like 70 percent of HIV positive women in Morocco, Sakina was infected by her husband. She cannot bring herself to tell her 15-year-old son that he is also infected.

She has always lied to him but she can “no longer sleep at night,” she told the group through tears. “My advice: above all, don’t tell him anything,” said a young man.

“For your sake, let him find out from someone else,” another group participant suggested. Then the psychologist interjected to say that private sessions are available to “reflect on these difficult questions.”

The shame of HIV is so entrenched, it even permeates the medical establishment. “For 30 years we’ve been talking about it, the virus is well known but the discrimination is still there,” said Dr. Kamal Marhoum El Filali, head of the infectious diseases department at Ibn Rochd Hospital in Casablanca, which hosts an ALCS branch.

“The stigmatization isn’t just from society but also from medical staff within the hospital environment.” Amina, another group therapy participant, experienced this first hand.

“When I went to the hospital to give birth, no one wanted to take care of me, no one wanted to touch me, I ended up in intensive care,” she recalled indignantly.

Others in the session though were grateful for the care they had received. “We are lucky to be under the care of the infectious diseases department: we are well cared for compared to others, considering the lack of funding and disrepair in Moroccan hospitals,” said another participant.

The emergency room at Ibn Rochd is sometimes overwhelmed with doctors each seeing up to 40 patients a day.

But the infectious diseases department is always spotlessly clean, providing personalized support as ALCS staff liaise with the medical teams.

But how much money Morocco will receive to continue its fight against HIV will be determined at a three-yearly conference for the Global Fund in October.

With funding declining globally and controversy surrounding the management of UNAIDS, ALCS president Mehdi Karkouri fears financial cuts.

“We are a victim of our own success: because our results are good, we risk losing funding,” he said.



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