

Indian warships sent to strategic Gulf waters

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NEW DELHI: India has sent warships and stepped up aerial surveillance in strategic Gulf waters, the Press Trust of India reported on Thursday. INS Chennai and INS Sunayna have been deployed in the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Gulf to “undertake maritime security operations,” the navy said, quoted by PTI.

The navy said it aims to reassure Indian-flagged vessels operating in the waters, “following the maritime security incidents in the region.”

Six tankers have been attacked with explosive devices in the last six weeks in the region in operations blamed on Iran.

Many Asian countries rely heavily on oil imports from the Gulf and the rise in tensions between Iran and the US and its allies has made many nervous that supplies will continue unaffected

US President Donald Trump on Thursday said Iran made a “big mistake” by shooting down a US spy drone over the Strait of Hormuz Thursday. The waterway links the Arabian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman, and is a conduit for a fifth of the world’s oil.

“Aerial surveillance by IN aircraft is also being undertaken in the area,” India’s navy said, according to PTI.

India’s ambassador to Washington said in May that his energy-hungry nation had ended all imports of oil from Iran, in response to threatened US sanctions.



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Trump warns Iran it 'made big mistake' shooting down US drone over Strait of Hormuz
US intelligence proves 'without question' Iran behind tanker attacks

[Opposition candidate frontrunner in Istanbul election re-run](#)

Thu, 2019-06-20 20:57

ANKARA: The Turkish opposition candidate for the Istanbul mayoralty election re-run has emerged as the clear frontrunner to take office, according to latest opinion polls.

Surveys of thousands of voters in the Turkish city suggest Ekrem Imamoglu is on course for victory over his political rival Binali Yildirim.

One of Turkey's leading polling companies, Konda, gave Imamoglu an 8-9

percent lead in the race to become mayor based on the results of 3,498 interviews it carried out in 157 districts of Istanbul.

Another poll by Sonar, published on June 16, also put Imamoglu ahead with 52.3 percent of the vote against Yildirim's 46.7 percent.

The country's ruling AKP (Justice and Development Party) requested a re-run of the vote after losing the Istanbul mayoral elections to the opposition on March 31.

Nezih Onur Kuru, a political analyst and a doctoral researcher on political psychology from Istanbul's Koc University, said economic conditions along with a rise in unemployment, were key factors in the polls' results.

"Imamoglu can increase support from AKP and its nationalistic ally MHP (Nationalist Movement Party) voters, who have been affected by economic developments since the last election, and from opposition voters who did not turn out in the last elections. The difference is at least 2.5 percent according to the economic voting model," Kuru told Arab News.

Re-run campaign

During his campaign for the re-run, Imamoglu, who comes from a pious and conservative family, succeeded in rallying further votes behind his charisma, energy, pro-secular credentials and persistence in keeping his hard-won mayoral post.

His recent comments regarding swimming pools and alcohol-free restaurants were also aimed toward capturing undecided right-wing voters, added Kuru.

During a televised debate with Yildirim, Imamoglu promised to open more women-only pools in Istanbul and not to allow alcoholic beverages in municipality-run restaurants.

Dr. Emre Erdogan, co-founder of Istanbul-based Infakto Research Workshop, said: "There is a common feeling that Imamoglu will be the winner, and the discussions are about the difference." He said the decision to re-run the election had created a negative reaction which had helped Imamoglu to attract new voters.

"Such a possible victory will have important symbolic and materialistic consequences, first about the belief of invincibility of Recep Tayyip Erdogan (Turkish president) and it will create a common hope among the opposition bloc members for the forthcoming elections expected to be held in June 2023," the researcher added.

Supporters of Turkey's pro-Kurdish HDP (Peoples' Democratic Party) are also expected to back Imamoglu at the vote June 23.

Imamoglu had been critical of what he described as waste and extravagance in the Istanbul metropolitan municipality. However, he faced a smear campaign in the pro-government media over his "Greek" roots.

Experts say a big election win for the opposition candidate would have serious political implications for the AKP, which has held the mayoralty of Istanbul for 25 years.

“A victory for Imamoglu will create an important wave within the AKP about responsibility for the defeat, and these discussions will be transformed to an intensified political conflict within the party. It will be crystallized in the formation of the new government,” Dr. Erdogan said.



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Erdogan's party fights to retake Istanbul in mayoral re-run vote
Deposed Istanbul mayor blasts 'lies' used to annul election

[**World Food Programme suspends Yemen**](#)

aid in Houthi-controlled Sanaa

Thu, 2019-06-20 23:08

LONDON: The World Food Programme has begun the partial suspension of aid in areas of Yemen under Houthi control.

The move announced Thursday comes after the UN agency warned this week that the Iran-backed militia was diverting food away from those most in need.

The suspension will start in Sanaa, affecting 850,000 people, WFP said. The city is the former capital of Yemen where the Houthis seized power from the internationally recognized government in 2014, sparking the conflict.

The organization said the decision was taken as a last resort after negotiations stalled to introduce controls to prevent food being diverted away from those who needed it by Houthi officials.

"As in any conflict zone, some individuals seek to profit by preying on the vulnerable and diverting food away from where it is most needed," the WFP said.

"WFP has been seeking the support of the Sana'a-based authorities to introduce a biometric registration system that would prevent diversion and protect the Yemeni families we serve, ensuring food reaches those who need it most.

"Unfortunately, we are yet to reach agreement."

The agency said it will maintain support in the city for malnourished children, pregnant women and nursing mothers.

David Beasley, the WFP's executive director, warned the Houthis Monday that aid would be suspended unless the militants immediately implement registration and monitoring agreements.

He said up to 60 percent of beneficiaries at seven centers in Sanaa "confirmed they had not received any assistance."

"Children are dying right now because of this", Beasley told the UN Security Council.

More than four years of conflict in Yemen have created what the UN describes as the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

The WFP feeds more than 10 million people a month across the country.



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UN food chief accuses Houthis of diverting Yemen aid for profit
Arab Parliament classifies Houthis as a terrorist group, calls on UN and Arab League to do the same

[Libyan commander marching on capital dismisses negotiations](#)

Author:

Thu, 2019-06-20 20:41

CAIRO: A Libyan commander, whose forces are fighting to take the country's capital of Tripoli from militias allied with a UN-backed government based there, has dismissed an initiative by its prime minister for negotiations to end the crisis.

Instead, Khalifa Haftar vowed in comments to a news website on Wednesday that his fighters would press on with the weeks-long offensive until Tripoli is rid of what he described as “terrorist militias.”

“Our military operations will not stop” until Tripoli is taken, Haftar told almarsad.co.

“The situation is excellent and I call on the Libyans to ignore rumors about our withdrawal,” Haftar said in interviews with Libyan news websites *The Address* and *The Observer* published overnight Wednesday to Thursday.

The offensive to seize the capital “will not stop before all its objectives are reached,” he said.

The campaign by Haftar’s Liberation National Army has raised fears of another bout of violence after the 2011 uprising that toppled and killed longtime ruler Muammar Qaddafi. Since then, the country has sunk into chaos, with rival administrations in the east and the west, and an array of forces and militias allied with either side.

On Monday, the World Health Organization reported the latest casualty tolls for the fighting in and around Tripoli, saying 691 people have been killed so far, including 41 civilians, and 4,012 wounded, 135 of them civilians.

The head of the Tripoli-based government, Prime Minister Fayez Al-Sarraj, told a news conference on Sunday he is proposing a “Libyan forum,” aimed at finding a peaceful solution to the conflict.

The talks would draw up a roadmap for parliamentary and presidential elections to be held before the end of 2019, Al-Sarraj said.

In his remarks to the news website, Haftar dismissed Al-Sarraj’s initiative and criticized him as an ineffective leader.

“Initiatives have no meaning unless they are brave and carry clear clauses that address the causes of the crisis and its very roots,” Haftar said.

Haftar has presented himself as someone able to restore stability. In recent years, his campaign against militants across Libya won him growing international support from world leaders who say they are concerned the North African country has turned into a haven for armed groups, and a major conduit for migrants bound for Europe.



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Libya's Haftar says to fight until Tripoli 'militias' defeated Haftar's rule brings security to eastern Libya, at a cost

[Migrants stranded at sea for three weeks face deportation](#)

Author:

Thu, 2019-06-20 00:49

TUNIS: Tunisia has allowed dozens of migrants, mostly from Bangladesh, to disembark after three weeks stranded in the Mediterranean, so that they can return to their home countries, the Red Crescent said on Wednesday.

An Egyptian boat rescued at least 75 migrants in Tunisian waters last month. But local authorities in the governorate of Medinine said its migrant centers were too overcrowded to let them ashore, leaving the vessel stranded 25 km off the coastal city of Zarzis.

"After they were stranded for three weeks at sea in difficult conditions,

Tunisia agreed to dock the ship, and migrants accepted to return to their countries in coming days," Red Crescent official Mongi Slim told Reuters.

After a visit by officials from Bangladesh Embassy, the migrants agreed to return home, according to Mongi Slim, a Red Crescent official.

Earlier, Red Crescent representatives welcomed to port 64 Bangladeshis, nine Egyptians, a Moroccan, a Sudanese citizen, who left Zuwara in Libya in late May.

The migrants, which include at least 32 children and unaccompanied minors, are to be transferred to a reception center in Sfax from where they are set to return home, Slim added.

Worried about creating a precedent, Tunisian authorities said they accepted the migrants as an exception and for "humanitarian" reasons.

"We thank Tunisia's renewed commitment to life and dignity," said Lorena Lando, the head of the International Organization for Migration in Tunisia.

She added that it is urgent to put in place a collaborative approach to helping migrants in the Mediterranean.

Neighboring Libya's west coast is a frequent departure point for African migrants hoping to reach Europe by paying human traffickers. But their numbers have dropped after an Italian-led effort to disrupt smuggling networks and support the Libyan coast guard.

At least 65 migrants drowned last month when their boat capsized off Tunisia after setting out from Libya.

In the first four months of 2019, 164 people are known to have died on the route, a smaller number but a higher death rate than in previous years, with one dying for every three who reach European shores, the UN refugee agency UNHCR said.



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Tunisia stops rescued migrants from coming ashore
Up to 70 migrants drown after their boat sinks off Tunisia