

Libya to boycott Arab summit in Beirut

Author:

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BEIRUT: Libya's Government of National Accord (GNA) has said it will boycott this Sunday's Arab Economic and Social Development Summit in Beirut.

The boycott is in response to "negative acts carried out by the host country, Lebanon," said Libyan Prime Minister Fayez Al-Sarraj.

The GNA "decided to boycott the summit after it was revealed that the host country did not provide the appropriate climate in accordance with the obligations, customs and traditions of such summits," he added.

Supporters of the Lebanese Amal Movement tore down the Libyan flag from between the other flags raised on poles on the road to the airport to welcome the delegations participating in the summit.

They replaced it with the Amal flag to protest the kidnapping in Libya of Imam Musa Al-Sadr, a Lebanese-Iranian philosopher and Shiite religious leader, and two companions in 1987.

Photos of Amal members tearing down and replacing the Libyan flag went viral on social media.

This prompted Libyan protesters to remove the sign of the Lebanese Embassy in the Libyan capital and raise their country's flag at the embassy's main iron gate, said Lebanon's ambassador to Libya, Mohammad Sukaina.

"Lebanon is convinced that what happened in Beirut and Tripoli is neither directed against the people of Libya nor against the Lebanese people," he told the Lebanese National News Agency (NNA).

"We believe that the right, fair, and perhaps the only approach to establishing a good relationship between the Lebanese and Libyan people is that the competent authorities in Libya help free Imam Musa Al-Sadr and his companions."

Lebanon's caretaker Foreign Minister Gebran Bassil sent a letter to his Libyan counterpart Mohamed Siala, expressing his regret that Libya will not participate in the summit.

Bassil also expressed his rejection of "the actions taken in Lebanon against Libya and its participation in the Beirut summit," saying they do not reflect his position or his country's.

Meanwhile, a debate in Lebanon over inviting Syria was settled by the supreme committee organizing the summit, which said: "Syria's invitation is related to the decision of the Council of the Arab League and is not a Lebanese decision."

In the halls of the summit's venue, the flags of all Arab League member states were raised, including those of Syria and Libya, on Monday.

"The countdown to the summit has started," said the summit's media spokesman Rafic Chlala.

"The reconstruction of Syria is not on the summit's agenda, but at the meeting of Arab leaders there may be decisions in this regard," he added. "So far, this topic will not be discussed."

The head of the committee, Antoine Choucair, said 24 items are on the agenda, and Lebanon wants to hold the event under the title "Prosperity for Peace."

He added that Lebanese President Michel Aoun is considering an initiative inspired by the title, and will launch it during the summit.

The commander of the Lebanese Republican Guard, Brig. Gen. Salim Feghali, said it will be in charge of the summit's security in cooperation with the rest of the security services.

He added that "500 officers and 7,000 soldiers will participate in securing the summit's location as well as the road to the airport and the delegations' accommodations."

Feghali told Arab News: "The security forces will address the protests scheduled for Sunday... in a manner that ensures the safety of the summit."

Brig. Gen. Joseph Al-Nahhas said: "The secure area will be closed starting Thursday midnight."

He added: "The supreme committee has proposed to the caretaker prime minister, Saad Hariri, to make Friday a day off." Al-Nahhas said Hariri had no objection to the proposal.

Meanwhile, the Civil Society Organizations Forum, hosted by the UN headquarters in Beirut, produced recommendations that will be submitted to the summit.

The forum's organizers said the recommendations aim to "strengthen cooperation between governments and civil society, and provide an independent platform for civil society to allow experts to participate in and contribute to the development process."

Manal Warde, Oxfam's policy and campaigns manager for the Middle East and North Africa, said the forum aimed to influence the summit at a time when many Arab countries face public demands for democracy and economic reforms.

The UN Economic and Social Commission for West Asia (ESCWA) said it expects the summit to "provide an opportunity to develop mechanisms for achieving the (UN) Sustainable Development Goals."



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Arab states snub Syria over summitLebanon resumes efforts to form government

[Sudan protests will not change government: Bashir](#)

Author:

Mon, 2019-01-14 22:51

KHARTOUM: Defiant Sudanese President Omar Bashir said on Monday that ongoing protests will not lead to a change in government, as he addressed a rally of cheering supporters in war-torn Darfur.

“Demonstrations will not change the government,” Bashir told crowds of supporters gathered in Niyala, the capital of South Darfur state, where just a day ago police had broken up an anti-government demonstration, state television reported.

"There's only one road to power and that is through the ballot box. The Sudanese people will decide in 2020 who will govern them," said Bashir, who is planning to run for the presidency for the third time in elections to be held next year.

Deadly protests have rocked Sudan since Dec. 19 when angry crowds took to the streets in towns and villages against a government decision to raise the price of bread.

At least 24 people have died in the protests, which swiftly turned into nationwide anti-government rallies, with protesters calling on Bashir to step down.

"Sudan has many enemies and those enemies have few people among us who don't want stability and security," said Bashir, with state television broadcasting footage showing him waving his trademark cane as supporters chanted "stay, stay."

"We will not allow anyone to destroy our homeland by looting and burning our properties," said Bashir.

In the initial days of protests, several buildings and offices of Bashir's ruling National Congress Party were set on fire in towns and villages. On Sunday, the first anti-government demonstrations were held in Niyala and El-Fasher, the capital of North Darfur.

Darfur, a region the size of France, has been torn by violence since 2003 when ethnic minority rebels took up arms against the government in Khartoum, accusing it of economic and political marginalization.

About 300,000 people have been killed in the conflict and another 2.5 million displaced, according to the UN. Most of those displaced still live in sprawling camps.

On Monday, he reiterated that Sudan faced "economic problems," but they could not be solved by looting and burning of properties.

Sudanese security agents, meanwhile, stopped a group of journalists in Khartoum from holding a sit in to protest the banning of a newspaper this week, witnesses said.

The journalists were planning a sit in after authorities banned Al-Jadida newspaper from publishing for several days this week, a witness told AFP without offering details.

Organizers of anti-government protests have so far staged hundreds of rallies across the country, including in Khartoum.

The Sudanese Professionals' Association that is spearheading the rallies have urged protesters to continue with their demonstrations this week, calling it as the "Week of Uprising."

On Sunday, protesters had taken to the streets in the capital's Bahari

district chanting “peace, peace” and “revolution is the people’s choice,” but they were quickly confronted by riot police with tear gas.

Rights groups say more than 1,000 people have been arrested since the protests began, including opposition leaders, activists and journalists as well as demonstrators.

Although the unrest was triggered by the rise in the price of bread, Sudan has faced a mounting economic crisis over the past year, led by an acute shortage of foreign currency.

Repeated shortages of food and fuel have been reported across cities, while the cost of food and medicine has more than doubled.



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Key powers stick with Bashir despite mounting protests in Sudan

Algeria's ancient pyramid tombs still shrouded in mystery

Mon, 2019-01-14 22:13

TIARET, Algeria: Dating back centuries, Algeria's pyramid tombs are unique relics of an ancient era but a dearth of research has left the Jeddars shrouded in mystery.

The 13 monuments, whose square stone bases are topped with angular mounds, are perched on a pair of hills near the city of Tiaret, some 250 km southwest of the capital Algiers.

Constructed between the 4th and 7th centuries, the tombs are believed by some scholars to have been built as final resting places for Berber royalty – although nobody knows who truly laid within.

But Algerian authorities and archaeologists are now pushing to get the Jeddars listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site, in the hope of assuring their preservation and study. Gaining such status is a lengthy process and the Culture Ministry said Algeria's application to the UN body "will be filed during the first quarter of 2020."

Experts from the National Center for Prehistoric, Anthropological and Historical Research have for more than a year been preparing their case for the Jeddars.

The goal is to "preserve this heritage, which is of immeasurable value and an ancestral legacy," said Mustapha Dorbane, a professor at Algiers 2 University's Archaeology Institute. When the Jeddars were built, Berber kings ruled the area in small fiefdoms whose history is poorly known and of which few traces were left.

It was a period of great unrest for the former Roman province of Numidia, as Rome's western empire collapsed, Vandal and Byzantine troops invaded, and Arab forces stormed across North Africa.

For centuries these far-flung monuments sat largely ignored, delivered to the ravages of time and looters. But more recently a group of around 20 archaeology students and their teachers has been working at the monuments.

Moving slowly, they noted vandalized spots and used water and brushes to gently clean stone-engraved symbols before measuring them. A meticulous task, each entry may take upward of two hours.

Algerian archaeologist Rachid Mahouz, who has spent five years on a doctoral thesis about the tombs, deplores the lack of research devoted to the country's "wonders."

"The French archives on the Jeddars are not available and the objects and bones found during the colonial era were taken to France," said Mahouz, who

was born and raised nearby.

Archaeology was not taught at Algerian universities until the early 1980s, and until now, no speciality on funerary monuments is offered.

The research team has been working on Jeddar A, which sits on Mount Lakhdar along with monuments B and C. The remaining Jeddars are on a hilltop some 6 km away, Mount Arouri, and are known by the letters D through M.

Each contains at least one room, with the largest mound giving way to a labyrinth of 20 compartments, including funerary chambers.

Some rooms are equipped with benches, areas researchers believe may have been used for worship. Inside the tombs, traditional Christian symbols as well as hunting scenes and animal figures are carved above the doors.

Traces of inscriptions believed to be Latin mark the walls, but time has rendered them unreadable.

Among the layers of history, researchers say they have also found Greek letters – although others dispute this.

The Jeddars were built several centuries after other imposing pre-Islamic funerary monuments, which are found in present day northern Algeria, making them the last of their kind to be erected before the arrival of Islam.

“The most distinctive feature of the Jeddars is by far the date of their construction,” said Mahouz, the archaeologist.

The monuments show the evolution of burial practices in the area. From simple mounds of earth and stone, known as tumuli, to stone-walled tombs called bazinas.

But with some reaching heights of 18 meters, some researchers say the size of the Jeddars put them in a category of their own.

The earliest known written description of the Jeddars was made by historian Ibn Rakik in the 11th century, according to famed Arab thinker Ibn Khaldoun.

It was not until the mid-19th century and the first modern archaeological explorations in Algeria, brought on by French colonialism, that the Jeddars began to draw attention.

French troops and colonial authorities began explorations in 1865 of nine of the tombs.

Understanding of the Jeddars was boosted in the late 1960s by Algerian archaeologist Fatima Kadra’s three-year study of Jeddars A, B and C – the oldest of the 13 and the only ones to be explored since Algeria’s independence.

But several of the structures have never been entered, as gravity and time have brought mounds of dirt and stone crashing down on the tombs within.

Looting and deterioration have worsened an already difficult task for modern-day researchers with little backing.



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Archaeologists in Egypt unearth 3000-year-old tombs

[Egypt's top cleric urges rethink over student expelled for hug](#)

Author:

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1547493054633377200

Mon, 2019-01-14 17:01

CAIRO: Egypt's top Muslim cleric Ahmed Al-Tayeb urged Al-Azhar university on Monday to reconsider the expulsion of a female student who was filmed hugging

a male colleague.

In a video widely circulated earlier this month, a man was seen carrying a bouquet of flowers kneeling before a woman and then hugging her in what appeared to be a marriage proposal.

Al-Azhar university had decided on Saturday to expel the young woman. Tayeb, the grand imam of Al-Azhar, Egypt's most prestigious seat of Sunni Islamic learning, called on the university's disciplinary board to "reconsider the punishment."

He cited the student's young age and her educational future, although said her conduct outside campus was "unacceptable" and unbecoming for "religious and oriental traditions."

The video was taken at Mansoura University in the country's north, where the man filmed is a student.

Hany Helal, spokesman for the university, said the disciplinary board "decided to expel the student for two years" although he can appeal the decision.

Egypt, a predominantly Muslim country, is a largely conservative society. Al-Azhar is touted as standing for Islamic moderation, but critics often accuse the institution of failing to modernize its teachings in order to counter extremism.



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Egypt deports another German for alleged Daesh connection

Author:

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BERLIN: Egypt has deported the second of two young German men who were arrested last month as suspected militants, the Foreign Ministry in Berlin said on Monday.

Eighteen-year-old Issa Ibrahim El-Sabagh landed at Frankfurt airport, reported Spiegel Online, following last week's repatriation of Mahmoud Abdel-Aziz, 23.

A ministry spokeswoman confirmed that "the person arrived back in Germany last night."

Both men had vanished in December in Egypt, where the government only reported their arrests following inquiries by Germany.

Their families had raised the alarm and have called the arrests cases of mistaken identity.

El-Sabagh, a German-Egyptian dual citizen and student in the city of Giessen, was arrested in mid-December after landing in the southern city of Luxor.

Egyptian security sources said the two men were suspected of having tried to join the Daesh group's affiliate in the troubled Sinai peninsula.

German prosecutors said last week they were looking into the Egyptian media reports on Abdel-Aziz to investigate whether there were "any indications of criminal offenses."

The 23-year-old has since posted a video on Facebook in which he denied he is an extremist militant who supports violence or has any Daesh links.

The student from the university town of Goettingen also said he had flown to Egypt to visit his grandparents and retracted anything he had said in Egypt "under duress and pressure."

Egypt has been battling insurgency in North Sinai, which spiked following the 2013 military ouster of President Muhammad Mursi.

In February, security forces launched a major Sina operation aimed at wiping out a Daesh affiliate accused of spearheading the insurgency.



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Egypt deports German citizen over alleged terror suspicions
Lebanese security forces arrest three Syrians with links to Daesh in Middle East, Europe