

# Tunisia navy rescues 78 migrants, one dead

Author:

Fri, 2021-12-17 00:22

BEN GUERDANE, Tunisia: Tunisia's navy rescued 78 migrants and retrieved the body of another after their boat sank off the country's coast during a bid to reach Europe, the Defense Ministry said.

The migrants, mostly Bangladeshis and Egyptians aged from 12-45, had set off the previous night from Abu Kammash just across the border in neighboring Libya near Zawara, it said. A decade of lawlessness in Libya has turned it into a major launchpad for migrants attempting to reach Europe by sea.

The latest rescue follows a string of similar Tunisian operations to thwart sea crossings or to save migrants in unseaworthy boats.

They had "intended to slip across the maritime border in the direction of Europe," but their boat ran into trouble 20 km off the coast south of Tunisia's second city of Sfax, the ministry said.

It said the migrants had been taken to the port of El-Ketef and handed to the national guard.

## **BACKGROUND**

A decade of lawlessness in Libya has turned it into a major launchpad for migrants attempting to reach Europe by sea.

The body of the dead migrant, an Egyptian, was handed to municipal authorities, it said.

The Tunisian Red Crescent told AFP another migrant was missing.

Tunisia is also a key departure point, just 140 km from the Italian island of Lampedusa.

According to the FTDES rights group, the Tunisian coast guard intercepted about 19,500 people attempting to cross the Mediterranean in the first nine months of this year.

It said the trend had accelerated since the establishment in June of a direct line of communication between Rome and Tunis to coordinate efforts against illegal immigration and share information.



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## [Iran-linked hackers attack Israeli targets](#)

Fri, 2021-12-17 00:37

JERUSALEM: An Iran-linked hacking group attacked seven Israeli targets over a 24-hour period this week, an Israeli cyber-security firm said, in the latest episode of cyber warfare between the rival states.

The targets of the attack by the group called “Charming Kitten” included the Israeli “government and business sector,” Tel Aviv-based Check Point said in a statement late Wednesday, without providing specifics.

“Check Point has blocked these attacks, as we witnessed communications between a server used by this group and the targets in Israel,” said the firm.

“Our reports of the last 48 hours prove that both criminal hacking groups and nation-state actors are engaged in the exploration of this vulnerability.”

Allegations of cyberwar between Iran and Israel have escalated in recent months.

Israel has been blamed for a series of cyberattacks on Iranian infrastructure, including the country’s fuel distribution system in October.

Another purportedly Iran-linked hacking group called “Black Shadow” claimed an October cyberattack on an Israeli internet service provider.

One of the targets in that incident was Israel’s largest LGBTQ dating site, with the hackers demanding ransom payments under threat of releasing sensitive private information, like the HIV status of the site’s users.

Israel, which bills itself as a leader in cybersecurity, last week held “an international cyber financial war game,” according to the finance ministry.

Participants included the US, Britain and the UAE, which established diplomatic ties with Israel last year.

Other participants were Germany, Switzerland and the International Monetary Fund, the ministry said in a statement.

The drill, which Israel described as the first of its kind, was designed to simulate an international cyber-financial attack.

Chief economist at the Israeli Finance Ministry, Shira Greenberg, said the exercise demonstrated “the importance of coordinated global action by governments together with central banks in the face of cyber-financial threats.”



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## [Libyans in the dark over election with seven days to go](#)

Author:

Fri, 2021-12-17 00:17

TRIPOLI: Seven days before Libyans were meant to cast presidential votes, there is utter confusion over the fate of an election that has not yet been formally delayed but that even an electoral official now says will be impossible to hold on time.

The planned Dec. 24 vote, along with a parallel election for a new parliament, was meant to help end Libya's past decade of chaos by installing a political leadership with national legitimacy after years of factional division.

However, the process has been dogged since the start by bitter disputes over the election's legal basis and fundamental rules, including over the eligibility of deeply divisive front-runners, that have never been resolved.

On Saturday, the electoral commission said it would not announce the final list of eligible candidates, drawn from the 98 who registered, until after legal discussions with the judiciary and parliament.

Amid continued arguments and fears for electoral integrity after major security incidents, a member of the elections commission said on Thursday that a Dec. 24 vote was no longer possible.

Few of the Libyans Reuters spoke to on Thursday believed the vote would happen on time, though many expected only a short delay.

"It will be postponed for a maximum of three months," said Ahmed Ali, 43, in Benghazi.

Rival candidates and political factions have been exchanging recriminations, accusing each other of trying to block or manipulate the electoral process for their own advantage.

International powers pushing for elections along with the UN have maintained their stance that polls must go ahead but this week stopped referring to the planned Dec. 24 date in public statements.

Over recent weeks very large numbers of Libyans have collected their ballot cards and thousands have registered to be parliamentary candidates, apparently signifying widespread popular support for an election.

Tim Eaton of Chatham House, the London think tank, said Libya's political bodies were not ready to publicly say the vote would not happen for fear of being blamed for its failure.

## **BACKGROUND**

The planned Dec. 24 vote, along with a parallel election for a new parliament, was meant to help end Libya's past decade of chaos by installing a political leadership with national legitimacy after years of factional division.

"It's pretty clear that the legal wranglings cannot be resolved in the current circumstances," he said.

"No one thinks this is happening on time, but nobody is saying it."

It left a choice between short delays to find fixes to push the elections over the line or longer delays to reshape the political road map, which could also include replacing the transitional government, he added.

Since the 2011 uprising that ousted Muammar Qaddafi, Libya has had no

political stability and in 2014 the country split between warring eastern and western factions.

Oil company employee Ali Saad, 66, said he wept for Libya's future.

“Even if the elections are postponed, I hope it will be with an agreement and rules that can be worked on, because otherwise things will be tense and the consequences will be dire.”

Analysts and diplomats say a return to direct warfare between eastern and western sides, both now well entrenched and with significant international military backing, appears unlikely for now.

However, they say there is a bigger risk of tensions erupting into internal factional warfare within either camp, particularly in Tripoli, where armed forces are more diverse and political divisions are more open.

On Wednesday night, an armed force surrounded government buildings in Tripoli, apparently in response to a decision to replace a senior military official, but there was no fighting and a security source said the situation was being resolved.

In the southern city of Sebha there were fierce clashes early this week between groups aligned with rival factions. Last month the electoral commission said fighters had raided voting centers, stealing ballot cards.



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## UN: A third of people in 420m-strong Arab world do not have enough to eat

Author:

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CAIRO: A third of the people in the 420-million-strong Arab world do not have enough to eat, the UN said on Thursday, highlighting that 69 million suffered from malnutrition last year.

In a report, the world body's Food and Agriculture Organization said that between 2019 and 2020, the number of malnourished in the Arab world rose by 4.8 million people to 69 million, nearly 16 percent of the population.

"The increase in the levels of undernourishment has occurred across all income levels, in conflict-affected as well as nonconflict countries," the FAO said.

"In addition, nearly 141 million people did not have access to adequate food in 2020 – an increase of more than 10 million people since 2019."

It said the COVID-19 pandemic "brought another major shock," with the number of undernourished people in the region increasing by 4.8 million compared with 2019.

Conflict-hit Somalia and Yemen remained the worst-affected countries last year, with nearly 60 percent of Somalis going hungry and more than 45 percent of Yemenis undernourished.

"Yemen had the highest prevalence of anemia in 2020, affecting 61.5 percent of women of reproductive age," it said.

The FAO said hunger has increased by 91.1 percent in the Arab world over the past two decades.

"Rates of stunting (20.5 percent) and overweight (10.7 percent) among children under five years of age were high in 2020," the FAO noted.

It said adult obesity, especially in the richer Arab states, was also on the rise.

"The latest year estimate for the Arab region shows that 28.8 percent of the adult population was obese, i.e. more than double the global average of 13.1 percent.

"High-income countries exhibited the highest prevalence of adult obesity in the region whereas the low-income countries had the lowest levels."



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## [Western coalition in Syria shoots down menacing drone](#)

Author:

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WASHINGTON: A drone that threatened a base with US and partner forces in southern Syria was shot down by a British fighter jet with the Western anti-Daesh coalition, the Pentagon said Thursday.

The US Central Command said that two "unmanned aerial systems" had flown toward the Al-Tanf desert garrison near the Syrian border with Iraq and Jordan late Tuesday.

"As one of the UAS continued its course deeper into the Al-Tanf Deconfliction Zone, it was assessed as demonstrating hostile intent and was shot down,"

said Bill Urban, spokesman for the US Central Command.

The second drone was not attacked and “likely left the area,” Urban said in a statement.

The British defense ministry said the drone was downed by a missile from a Royal Air Force Typhoon, the first-ever air-to-air engagement by one of the British fighter jets.

The small size of the drone made it a “very challenging target,” the ministry said.

But officials did not say if it was armed or not.

“This strike is an impressive demonstration of the RAF’s ability to take out hostile targets in the air which pose a threat to our forces,” said British Defense Secretary Ben Wallace.

Neither the United States nor the British would say who launched the drones toward the base.

The Pentagon has blamed drone attacks on US forces in Iraq over the past years on Iran-backed militia groups.

Iran-backed forces are deployed in close proximity to Al-Tanf, which sits on the strategically important Baghdad-Damascus highway.

In October the base came under attack by artillery fire and drones.

“We know that this is an increasingly used and increasingly potentially lethal threat that these Iran-backed militia groups are using, the use of drones,” Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said Thursday.



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Israeli missile strike kills soldier in Syria, state media says Arab coalition begins legal steps to revoke immunity after Houthi missiles target Riyadh