

Bodies of 61 migrants recovered from shipwreck off Tunisia

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ROME: The bodies of 61 African migrants have been recovered after a shipwreck occurred 10 days ago off the coast of Tunisia.

The Tunisian Coast Guard said at least 22 women, one of them pregnant, and four children were among the dead.

Tunisian authorities have launched an investigation, and believe that the death toll could be higher. The Coast Guard believes that the boat had left the city of Sfax, on Tunisia's coast, aiming to reach Italy.

"We believe that the boat was too full ... It has been a massacre," a Coast Guard spokesman told Italian news agency ANSA.

In April, Italy and Malta declared their seaports "unsafe" due to the coronavirus pandemic. Despite that, more boats and dinghies carrying migrants have been reported trying to reach Italy.

Vincent Cochetel, special envoy for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), said he fears that more migrants will try to make the crossing during the summer.

"Fifty-three percent of migrants and refugees lost their jobs during the COVID-19 restrictions in Tunisia," he added.

"It is not clear how many will manage to get a job back or will face tougher competition with locals. Despair drives people to risk their lives and smugglers keep lying to them."

As weather conditions improve, more boats have been departing from North Africa. Authorities in Lampedusa, an Italian island half way between Tunisia and Sicily, have reported more arrivals.

Many of those on board have been transferred by ferry to the Italian mainland to decrease pressure on the island.

According to the UNHCR, attempts to reach the Italian coast from Tunisia increased by 150 percent from January to April this year compared with the same period in 2019.

"We can't tolerate this massacre anymore. We must act now. Europe must act to stop tragedies like this," Leoluca Orlando, mayor of Sicily's capital Palermo, told Arab News.

"We can't just sit looking at what happens in the Mediterranean. We simply can't let those tragedies happen anymore."

Italy's government has repeatedly called for European cooperation in this regard. "Without a comprehensive European strategy on refugees and migrants, we will never stop this tragedy. Italy cannot be left alone," Interior Minister Lucia Lamorgese told Avvenire daily newspaper.



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More than 50 dead in migrant shipwreck off Tunisia
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[Turkey sees rise in daily COVID-19 cases](#)

Sun, 2020-06-14 21:44

ANKARA: The easing of lockdown conditions is being blamed for a recent rise in daily COVID-19 cases in Turkey.

The country recorded 1,459 new cases on Saturday, as opposed to 1,195 a day earlier. So far, 4,792 people in Turkey have died from the disease.

The country began a sudden normalization period about two weeks ago, at a time when it had the most cases in the Middle East and the second-highest number of deaths in the region.

Since then, the numbers of cases and fatalities have been on the rise, especially in several provinces.

Domestic flights have resumed, and tourism facilities, gyms, theaters, restaurants and cafes have reopened.

A curfew for people aged over 65 and under 18 has been lifted, as has

intercity travel restrictions to boost domestic tourism, with beaches along the Mediterranean and Aegean seas becoming overcrowded.

Dr. Derya Unutmaz, chief researcher at the Jackson Laboratory Institute in the US state of Connecticut, said there is a need to normalize much more carefully and slowly in Turkey in light of recent developments.

"I think implementing quarantine procedures is becoming more and more difficult, and they aren't sustainable in social and economic terms," he told Arab News, adding that those who refuse to wear face masks should be punished.

Associate Prof. Caghan Kizil, a specialist in neuroscience and genetics at Dresden University's Faculty of Medicine, said from the very start of the pandemic, scientists and epidemiologists knew that the road to normality would be arduous.

"We tried to show the risks, and ... were condemned for being negative or pessimistic. Being optimistic doesn't help in this case," he told Arab News. "We need to be prepared for adverse circumstances, and only then can we contain the spread of the pandemic, if we ever can."

He said the most effective prevention is to abide by scientific views and be vigilant, cautious and honest.

"In Turkey, since the beginning of the pandemic, the official discourse was always on the most optimistic side of the scenarios," Kizil said.

"We can understand that this was a psychological move not to inflict panic and to keep the workforce in place and get the economy moving, but it worked the other way around."

Referring to declarations from state authorities that the pandemic is under control or there will not be a second wave of infections, Kizil said this gave the public the impression that the crisis is over.

"Additionally, the government's call for 'expedited normalization,' which entailed a significant breach of social distancing, yielded an increase in case numbers per day," he added.

Experts also criticize the lack of epidemiological data and details of cases, which they say is preventing scientists from making accurate public warnings.

"In March and April, if Turkey issued a general lockdown for a few weeks, maybe there could be fewer cases and spread now. But it wouldn't change the need for social distancing and non-pharmaceutical measures," Kizil said.

"Since there isn't an effective drug or vaccine in sight, we largely rely on non-pharmaceutical interventions. We have to keep social distancing and wear masks if we need to get closer to people in workplaces, social life or transport."



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[Lebanon PM launches attack against his government's opponents](#)

Sun, 2020-06-14 00:38

BEIRUT: Prime Minister Hassan Diab responded to his government's political opponents in a tough speech addressing the Lebanese on Saturday night.

As the protests continued and clashes between demonstrators and security forces in the city of Tripoli caused injuries, Diab spoke of "a programmed campaign organized by parties known by name and method of thinking that are not deterred from using any method to shatter the image of others."
Diab said that his government "has a high percentage of citizens' confidence,

which has disturbed many of those who bet on its failure, and some have tried to invest without any national deterrent by pumping lies and rumors, to prevent the government from removing the rubble under which the secrets of corruption disappear.”

“Know that we have found many keys from that black structure. There is a lot to discover soon with documents and facts, and this structure will fall on those who hide in its corners,” he said.

Diab said that “the coup attempt fell and all secret and public meetings and orders of internal and joint operations to stop discovering of corruption failed too.”

“They revealed that people’s lives do not concern them and that their aim is to protect themselves.”

Diab said that “the state is not bankrupt, there is financial stumbling, but the country is rich in citizens and its resources.”

Addressing the people, he said: “Your rights are reserved with the banks and the Bank of Lebanon and the state is the guarantor.”

“There are those who want to go back to before Oct. 17 (the date of protests against the Saad Hariri government) and turn the clock back.”

Diab spoke of “political barriers that stand in the way of his government, but change is definitely coming.”

He said that “the state oppresses its children and youth and deprives them of their rights.”

“When the state weakens, the gangs are strengthened, and when the state retreats, small states appear, and when stability shakes, civil peace collapses, and when accountability stops, corruption prevails,” he said.

“The judiciary does not need to be instructed to move. We insist that the judiciary be independent and impartial. The confrontation is difficult, and I call on the Lebanese to be more patient because the battle with corruption is very fierce, because the corrupt will not give up so easily,” the prime minister said.

Diab said that “opening the airport on July 1 will allow us to restore part of the economic cycle, but what is happening today will increase suffering, and I call on the Lebanese to refrain from distorting the protests in order to cross the ordeal and protect Lebanon.”

The prime minister’s remarks came as the anger of groups of protesters who took to the squares of Beirut and Tripoli turned into deliberate sabotage of public and private property without indicating clear slogans for their movement. The riots led to angry reactions in the two cities.

This prompted former Prime Minister Saad Hariri to warn that “Beirut should not be targeted by anyone. Do not force people to protect their own properties and livelihoods. We will not stand by as spectators while the capital is destroyed.”

Both Amal Movement and Hezbollah later denied any relationship with the saboteurs.

Beirut awoke to painful scenes left by the riots, during which young men who arrived on motorbikes smashed and burned shops, pulled stones off buildings and threw them at security forces, and uprooted traffic signs. Stones and glass fragments covered the squares and the content of the shops were ruined. The security forces responded to the rioters with tear gas and rubber bullets.

Anger was reignited mid-week with news circulating on social media that the

exchange rate of the dollar on the black market had reached 7,000 Lebanese pounds.

On Friday, the government said that the news was incorrect. It took measures to curb the rise of the exchange rate, which exceeded 5,000 Lebanese pounds to the dollar, by requesting the central bank to pump dollars into the market to money changers, starting on Monday, to gradually reduce the exchange rate to 3,200 Lebanese pounds.

Despite the government's move to stop the collapse of the Lebanese pound, the protests continued in downtown Beirut in the absence of coordination between civil movement groups. Each protesting group seemed to have its own agenda.

The goal of these attacks is to turn public opinion against popular movements, so beware of infiltrators who climb over your demands.

Saad Hariri, Former prime minister of Lebanon

The Lebanese army and internal security forces accompanied the demonstrators, and Prime Minister Diab asked the leaders of the two security establishments to "take appropriate measures to prevent suspicious attacks on public and private property in downtown Beirut."

In a statement, he said that what had happened in Beirut on Friday night was "unacceptable by all standards."

Interior Minister Mohammed Fahmi described what happened as a "reprehensible, disgraceful and unacceptable attack."

The scene of devastation in the heart of Beirut provoked the people and activists of the capital.

Hariri visited the damaged shops and spoke to their owners, one of whom raised a Lebanese flag over his burned shop and wrote under it: "Despite your madness, we love you, Lebanon."

Hariri said that "those who organized and carried out sabotage and burning attacks in Beirut do not have an iota of the goals and values of the revolution. They are misguided groups drifting behind a cursed plot that seeks sedition and further collapse. The goal of these attacks is to turn public opinion against popular movements, so beware of infiltrators who climb over your demands."

Hariri accused the Lebanese administration and "its government of ignoring the independence of the judiciary and watching the sabotage of Beirut's markets, burning its heart and assaulting its role and dignity."

The Grand Mufti, Sheikh Abdul Latif Derian, blamed the state for what had happened.

He warned: "If the state does not carry out its tasks, the jungle law that is not acceptable to any sane person will prevail, and we will no longer be silent about such actions that violate human morals and threaten security." Shop owners in the capital and other cities were busy fortifying the fronts of their shops, fearing that riots in the coming days could reach their stores.

Tony Eid, head of the Beirut Traders Association, told Arab News: "What happened, regardless of its causes, will harm traders and business owners. The commercial flow is built on trust, which has been lost, and people will be afraid to continue their declining business."

"During the last three months, the percentage of business closure in the Beirut's Achrafieh district alone reached between 50 percent to 70 percent, so everyone is obsessed with material damage as a result of riots that may take place and they no longer have hopes for the country," he said.

Eid said: "Merchants are not the ones who stole the country, but rather those who are in power. Merchants put their savings, borrowed and risked to establish their businesses, so what is their fault?"

He said that merchants were now asking the association to help them find solutions "to close their businesses with the least possible harm."

Riot scenes were repeated in the northern city of Tripoli, and the Al-Nour Square turned into a battlefield.

Some rioters arrived on motorbikes and clashed with soldiers, throwing stones and firecrackers at them. The army responded with rubber bullets and tear gas.

The riots caused 36 injuries in Tripoli and one injury in Beirut.

Tripoli MP Mohammed Kabbara said: "We will not be silent on sabotaging Tripoli, nor will we be silent on the increasing poverty in our city, and we will not be silent on some suspected mercenaries from outside Tripoli who target its reputation, image and economy."

Hezbollah MP Hassan Fadlallah denounced "violence and attacks on public and private property in Beirut and Tripoli."

"The true cry of hunger is not to attack others. Rather, it should be directed against the corrupt who looted public money and against the policy of American sabotage of our national economy," he said.

Hezbollah MP Anwar Jumaa said: "Hezbollah is the only party in Lebanon now that pumps millions of dollars a month into the market, and this contributes to preventing the collapse of Lebanon now and moving the economic cycle."

Amal Movement MP Ali Bazzi said: "The right of citizens to peacefully demonstrate and express their opinion is constitutionally guaranteed, but attacking public and private property is not different from the damage caused by those who looted and corrupted the country."





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Egypt repatriates citizens stuck in Qatar

Sun, 2020-06-14 00:34

CAIRO: The Egyptian Ministry of Civil Aviation has started operating special flights via the Omani capital Muscat to bring back Egyptian citizens stranded in Qatar.

The ministry said in a statement that Egyptians stuck in Qatar would be repatriated via a company from Doha to Muscat, from whence they would be flown to Cairo International Airport by EgyptAir and Air Cairo.

The move came amid pressure to help citizens stranded in the Gulf state, over fears raised by its handling of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. The ministry affirmed in its statement that it would include Egyptians whose visas had expired, and those who wished to return to Egypt due to COVID-19. According to the statement, 18 flights will be operated by EgyptAir and Air Cairo to bring back around 3,000 Egyptians.

Egypt's Minister of Immigration and Expatriates Affairs Nabila Makram said in a press statement that Egypt would treat all its citizens equally in repatriating them.

"That's why we are dealing with the issue of Egyptian expats stranded in Qatar with full seriousness and consideration," Makram said.

"There is a plan currently in action to repatriate Egyptians stranded there in cooperation with some friendly countries, which will receive the Egyptian expats, and then they will return to Egypt via Egyptian airliners. All the details will be announced as soon as such procedures are complete," said Makram.

EgyptAir Holding Chairman and CEO Roshdy Zakaria said in a statement that EgyptAir carriers had been awaiting an official decision to evacuate Egyptians stuck in Qatar, with questions previously over whether it would be via Oman, Jordan, or Kuwait.

"We previously evacuated a number of expats who were stuck in Oman. The Egyptian flag carrier air fleet is ready to repatriate any Egyptian citizen from anywhere in the world," Zakaria said.

The situation in Qatar is catastrophic. Every day we read in the international press about the coronavirus outbreak there.

Hussein Nagah, Translator and writer

"Discounts on local or international flight tickets are still being studied. All details will be announced soon after the studies are complete," he added, stressing that the national flag carrier fleet was ready to resume flights immediately upon state approval.

Videos had been circulating on social media sites of hundreds of Egyptian workers in Qatar, calling on the authorities to allow them to return.

The videos were posted following allegations that Cairo had refused to bring them back.

Translator and writer Hussein Nagah told Arab News: "The situation in Qatar is catastrophic. Every day we read in the international press about the coronavirus outbreak there. Newspapers have reported that thousands of Indians in Qatar want to leave due to the outbreak of the coronavirus among Asian workers, resulting from the government's negligence at the beginning of the crisis."

Nagah added: "A report by the US TV network CBS News revealed weeks ago that Qatar had become the epicenter of the pandemic in workers' camps (in the region)."

He also suggested that the Qatari authorities "hide many details and do not reveal the locations of infections."

Civil aviation authorities in Egypt announced a halt in civil flights to and from Egyptian airports on March 19.

The decision exempted certain cases from suspension, including air freight, medical flights, domestic flights and charter flights to allow tourists to return to their countries of origin.



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[Egypt confirms highest daily rise of new COVID-19 cases and deaths](#)

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Sat, 2020-06-13 19:41

CAIRO: Egypt on Saturday confirmed 1,677 new coronavirus cases and 62 deaths, the health ministry said, the highest daily increase for both counts. In total, the Arab world's most populous country has registered 42,980 cases including 1,484 deaths, the ministry said in a statement.



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