

Greece blocks 35,000 migrants, plans to deport arrivals after March 1

Author:

Fri, 2020-03-06 02:33

KASTANIES, Greece: Greece has repulsed nearly 35,000 migrants trying to cross onto its territory illegally since Turkey opened its border nearly a week ago, government sources said on Thursday, as it prepares to deport hundreds of others who made it through.

Thousands of migrants have made for Greece since Ankara said on Feb. 28 that it would let migrants cross its borders into Europe, reneging on a commitment to hold them on its territory under a 2016 deal with the EU.

Hundreds have made it into Greece, many by sea to Lesbos and other Greek islands. Ankara and Athens are accusing each other of using excessive force in the border area, where migrants have clashed with security forces in recent days.

The situation at the Kastanies border crossing, where Greek and Turkish riot police both used tear gas on Wednesday, was calm on Thursday morning.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Greece says will deport recently arrived migrants.
- Migrants huddled in tents and makeshift camps on the Turkish side of the border.
- Turkey accuses Greece of rights abuses, prepares lawsuit.

Migrants huddled in tents and makeshift camps on the Turkish side of the border.

Greek border guards rebuffed nearly 7,000 attempts in the last 24 hours alone, taking the total since Feb. 29 to 34,778 and the number of arrests of those who got through to 244, the Greek government sources said.

Migrants who arrived in Greece illegally after March 1 will be transferred to the northern city of Serres and deported back to their own countries, Greek Migration Minister Notis Mitarachi said late on Wednesday.

“Our aim is to return them to their countries,” he told the Athens News Agency.

Criticism

Mitarachi also said migrants who entered the country prior to Jan. 1, 2019

and living on the islands would be transferred to the mainland in the coming days.

Greece announced on March 1 that it would not accept any new asylum applications for a month following the buildup of migrants at the border. This has triggered criticism from human rights agencies.

Turkey accused Greek forces of shooting dead one migrant and wounding five others, a charge strongly denied by Greece, which said Turkish police were using tear gas to help the migrants illegally cross onto its territory.

Turkish Interior Minister Suleyman Soylu, who visited the land border with Greece on Thursday, said late on Wednesday that Ankara was preparing a case in the European Court of Human Rights over Greece's treatment of migrants.

Turkey's change in policy toward the migrants on its soil came after at least 33 Turkish soldiers were killed by Russian-backed Syrian government forces in an airstrike in Syria.

The Aegean Sea separating Greece and Turkey remained choppy on Thursday and there were no further sightings of dinghies carrying migrants to Lesbos and other Greek islands from the nearby Turkish coast.

Lesbos already hosts more than 20,000 asylum seekers, many of them living in filthy conditions in overcrowded camps.

Greece and the EU accuse Turkey of deliberately goading the migrants to cross the border as a way of pressuring Brussels into offering more money or supporting Ankara's geopolitical aims in the Syrian conflict.

Turkey, which already hosts 3.6 million Syrian refugees and faces another influx from an upsurge in fighting in northwest Syria, says it cannot take in any more and complains that EU aid falls well short of what is needed for the refugees.



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Erdogan denies blackmail over Syria migrants EU rejects Turkey's 'blackmail', borders to stay closed to migrants: France

[Pompeo says Iran must be held accountable on nuclear commitments](#)

Author:

Fri, 2020-03-06 02:34

WASHINGTON: US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on Thursday called on all nations to hold Iran accountable for its nuclear commitments and said Tehran's failure to report nuclear material was a clear violation of safeguard agreements.

The International Atomic Energy Agency, which is policing Iran's troubled nuclear deal with major powers, sounded an alarm on Tuesday over a lack of Iranian cooperation in clearing up what the IAEA suspects are undeclared activities and materials dating back to the early 2000s.

Iran on Thursday stood by its decision to deny UN nuclear inspectors access to sites where they have questions about past activities, arguing that the agency's case is based on "fabricated" Israeli intelligence.

Pompeo told a State Department news conference that all nations must hold

Iran accountable under the global nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which has been the foundation of global nuclear arms control since the Cold War.

“Iran’s intentional failure to declare such nuclear material, as reported by the IAEA this week, would constitute a clear violation of its safeguards agreements required by the NPT,” Pompeo said.

“The regime must immediately cooperate with the IAEA and fully comply with its IAEA safeguards obligations. All nations must hold Iran accountable to its commitments, otherwise, the NPT isn’t worth the paper that is written on.”

Iran warned in January it would withdraw from the NPT if European nations referred Iran to the UN Security Council over its alleged violations of a 2015 nuclear deal with world powers.

Under that deal, Tehran agreed to curb its nuclear activities in exchange for the lifting of most international sanctions, but the United States withdrew from the deal in 2018 and reimposed economic sanctions on Iran.



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Egypt reopens its oldest pyramid after 14-year restoration

Author:

Fri, 2020-03-06 00:46

CAIRO: Egypt on Thursday reopened Djoser's Step Pyramid, the first pyramid ever built, after a 14-year restoration costing nearly \$6.6 million.

The pyramid, a UNESCO world heritage site, was constructed 4700 years ago during the era of Pharaoh Djoser, one of Ancient Egypt's Third Dynasty kings.

After decades of neglect and the risk of collapse, the Egyptian government started an ambitious project to restore it to splendour in 2006.

"Today we celebrate the completion of the project of warding off the danger and maintaining and restoring the first and oldest remaining pyramid in Egypt," said tourism and antiquities minister Khaled Al-Anani.

The structure was designed by Imhotep, described by some as the world's first architect.

"We are in awe as to how he was able to create this structure, which has remained standing for 4,700 years," said Anani.

Restoration work stopped in 2011 after Egypt's popular uprising that toppled longtime President Hosni Mubark, but resumed at the end of 2013.

Djoser's Step Pyramid, the first large-scale stone construction in history and the largest pyramidal funerary complex, is located at Saqqara archaeological site, west of Cairo.

The 60-meter-high pyramid consists of six stacked steps over a burial shaft tomb which is 28 meters deep and seven meters wide.

Speaking alongside the pyramid, Egyptian Prime Minister Mostafa Madbouly said Egypt was engaged in many large-scale projects, and the restoration of its heritage was one of them.

"Although of course we are very proud that this is an Egyptian legacy, we also know very well it is world and global heritage that we are very keen to maintain," he added.

The project saw efforts to prevent the pyramid from collapsing, and external and internal restoration work, including of the paths leading to the pyramid and the internal corridors leading to the burial chamber.

Experts also restored the sarcophagus of King Djoser within the pyramid and the walls of the burial shaft tomb.



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Thu, 2020-03-05 22:52

ANKARA: Amid the ongoing bloodshed in Syria's last rebel-held stronghold of Idlib, Turkey and Russia finally agreed a new ceasefire following a meeting in Moscow on March 5.

The meeting lasted almost six hours, signaling a tense negotiation process between powers supporting different sides in the Syrian conflict, now approaching its ninth year.

In a joint statement, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Russian President Vladimir Putin announced the establishment of a security corridor of 12 kilometers (km) in width, straddling the M4 highway running through the province.

No mention was made about the other strategic M5 highway, or whether regime forces would retreat behind the current Turkish observation post line.

Turkey would retaliate with full force if it came under Syrian attack, Erdogan added.

Ryan Bohl, Middle East and North Africa analyst at geopolitical intelligence platform Stratfor, said the announcement would mean that Turkey accepted Syria's territorial gains in Idlib as permanent.

"Ankara is accepting a smaller zone of influence in Idlib overall so that it can get on track with a de-escalation process with Russia, Syria, and Iran," he told Arab News.

According to the deal, joint patrols between Russia and Turkey will also start by March 15, along the M4 from the settlement of Trumba, 2 km west of Saraqib, to Ain-Al-Havr.

Bohl thinks that the deal was as good as Turkey could manage in current circumstances.

"Further military escalations put Turkish troops at risk of a fight with Russia. It has managed to successfully punish the Syrian army, so from that standpoint it has a victory to take home to Turkish citizens. But it hasn't really reversed many of the key territorial gains Assad has made especially around Saraqib," he said.

Data from Turkish polling firm Metropoll shortly before Turkey launched a military operation into Idlib revealed that the Turkish government didn't have the majority of the public on side: Only 48.8 percent of people thought Turkish Armed Forces should not have been sent to northern Syria.

Danny Makki, an independent Syria analyst, doesn't expect a serious offensive in Idlib for now, because Russia and Turkey would focus on maintaining this deal.

"But in the long term it will be hard to stop the fighting," he told Arab News. This will be the 14th ceasefire that has been declared in Idlib since 2018.

"The M5 is not part of the agreement seemingly and that is the first major Turkish concession. While stopping the day-to-day fighting is a hard ask, both sides have put considerable consideration into this agreement, so it's a priority to be held up," he said.

Nicholas Danforth, senior visiting fellow at the German Marshall Fund of the United States, thinks that Turkey's escalation in Idlib has partially checked the regime's advance, but had not fundamentally changed the dynamics of the conflict.

"In the new deal that was brokered between Turkey and Russia, Damascus kept the territory it gained, while Ankara prevented it from gaining any more for now. Moscow still has its mediation role to play," he told Arab News.



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Turkey's migrant policy turns into a hot potato for Europe
Russian, Turkish presidents announce Syria cease-fire

[Palestinians resigned to status quo in Gaza after latest Israeli election](#)

Author:

Thu, 2020-03-05 03:08

GAZA CITY: Palestinians were on Wednesday resigned to more of the same in the Gaza Strip following the results of Israel's third parliamentary election within the space of a year.

With further deadlock leaving Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu struggling to form a government and the prospect of a possible fourth ballot in the pipeline, Palestinian factions in Gaza expected to see little if any change to the status quo.

Hamas spokesman Fawzi Barhoum said: "We are not counting on any variables within Israeli society, as they are all the product of an occupation Zionist

project aimed at stabilizing the pillars of the Zionist entity at the expense of the Palestinian right.”

Islamic Jihad official Daoud Shehab said: “The election results will not change anything from reality, as there is ongoing occupation and aggression, and it is natural and self-evident that we face this occupation and its aggression.”

Spokesman for the Fatah movement, Hussein Hamayel, said: “These results are clear evidence that whoever rules Israel and directs public opinion is the behavior of settlers based on repression, killing and attacks on the Palestinian people.”

For two years the Gaza Strip witnessed protests demanding Israel lift its 14-year blockade. Hamas, with Egyptian mediation, agreed to de-escalate tensions along the borders a year ago, in exchange for the provision of facilities at crossings, an increased fishing zone, and an allowance for some materials that Israel considered of dual use.

The deal was divided into two phases, the first before the Israeli elections and the second after the formation of a government. Both sides could not proceed to the second phase as the government has yet to be formed in Israel.

Ibrahim Zaid, 29, did not see much difference between Israeli candidates and thinks that the right-wing domination of the Israeli government will have a negative impact on Gaza.

“All the successive Israeli governments are trying to keep the Gaza Strip away from the scene, trying to facilitate the entry of aid, but not trying to make a real change. I do not think that there will be a complete lifting of the blockade,” he told Arab News.

Columnist, Fathi Sabbah, told Arab News: “The Israeli government, whether Netanyahu or an exchange between Netanyahu and (opposition leader Benny) Gantz, will not offer anything to the Gaza Strip except for some simple facilities that will not affect the Gaza Strip significantly or make any fundamental change.

“The reality in the Gaza Strip will remain as it is, neither complete calm nor extensive war, as long as Netanyahu or Gantz are unable to form a government, and the Palestinian factions don’t have many options but will accept additional Israeli facilities.”

Nawal Siksik, 24, said: “I live in the Gaza Strip and have not participated in any elections. The Israelis voted in three elections within one year.

“We need elections (in Palestine) in order for someone to represent us democratically, and to restore unity between the West Bank and Gaza Strip. In this way we can confront any Israeli government, whether from the right or otherwise.”

The last Palestinian elections were held in 2006, in which Hamas won a majority of seats. Since then, no elections have taken place despite promises

made by Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas more than once as a result of the political division.



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Cease-fire by militants in Gaza after 7 die