

Cyprus police bring in boat with 34 Syrian migrants aboard

Author:

Associated Press

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NICOSIA: Cyprus police officers rescued 34 Syrian migrants Sunday after spotting their boat off the Mediterranean island nation's northwestern coast. A police patrol vessel was dispatched to escort the boat to a harbor. Police said the boat had set sail from Alanya, Turkey.

The migrants were all male and included a 17-year-old. All 34 were taken to a migrant reception center outside the Cypriot capital of Nicosia.

Police arrested a 19 year-old man who was aboard the boat on suspicion of people trafficking and abetting the illegal entry of third-country nationals. Cyprus says it has reached its limit to accommodate an influx of migrants and has asked other European Union members to take at least 5,000 of those who reached the country.



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White gold: Cyprus' halloumi cheese entangled in politics

[Erdogan says Turkey cannot handle new migrant wave from Syria, warns Europe](#)

Sun, 2019-12-22 23:08

ANKARA: Turkey cannot handle a fresh wave of migrants from Syria, President Tayyip Erdogan said on Sunday, warning that European countries will feel the impact of such an influx if violence in Syria's northwest is not stopped. Turkey currently hosts some 3.7 million Syrian refugees, the largest refugee population in the world, and fears another wave from the Idlib region, where up to 3 million Syrians live in the last significant rebel-held swathe of territory.

Syrian and Russian forces have intensified their bombardment of targets in Idlib, which Syria's President Bashar Assad has vowed to recapture, prompting a wave of refugees toward Turkey.

Speaking at an awards ceremony in Istanbul on Sunday night, Erdogan said more than 80,000 people were currently on the move from Idlib to Turkey.

"If the violence toward the people of Idlib does not stop, this number will increase even more. In that case, Turkey will not carry such a migrant burden on its own," Erdogan said.

"The negative impact of the pressure we will be subjected to will be something that all European nations, especially Greece, will also feel," he said, adding that a repeat of the 2015 migrant crisis would become inevitable.

He also said Turkey was doing everything possible to stop Russian bombardments in Idlib, adding that a Turkish delegation would go to Moscow to discuss Syria on Monday.

Erdogan has previously threatened to "open the gates" for migrants to Europe unless Turkey got more support in hosting the refugees.

"NOT ENOUGH"

Turkey is seeking international support for plans to settle one million Syrians in part of northeast Syria that its forces and their Syrian rebel allies seized from the Kurdish YPG militia in a cross-border incursion in October.

Ankara has received little public backing for the proposal and has repeatedly slammed its allies for not supporting its plans. Turkey's offensive was also met with condemnation from allies, including the United States and European countries.

"We call on European countries to use their energy to stop the massacre in Idlib, rather than trying to corner Turkey for the legitimate steps it took in Syria," Erdogan said on Sunday, referring to the three military operations Turkey has carried out in Syria.

After a global refugee forum in Geneva last week, the United Nations refugee agency said states pledged more than \$3 billion to support refugees and around 50,000 resettlement places. But, Erdogan, who attended the forum, said on Sunday that sum was not enough.

UN agencies say hundreds of people have been killed in Idlib this year after attacks on residential areas.

Russia and the Syrian army, which is loyal to President Bashar Assad, both deny allegations of indiscriminate bombing of civilian areas and say they are fighting Al-Qaeda-inspired extremist militants.

Rescue teams said six people were killed in Maarat al Numan and 11 more in nearby villages on Friday.

Earlier on Sunday, Turkey's state-run Anadolu news agency said some 205,000 people had been displaced from their homes in Idlib since November due to the attacks. It said the fleeing civilians were going toward areas in Syria that Turkey seized in its military operations, or to other parts of Idlib.



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Russian-backed forces gain ground in Syria's Idlib as violence uproots

displaced Russia, China have blood on their hands after veto on Syria cross-border aid: Pompeo

[Egypt, Ethiopia, Sudan views come closer on giant Nile dam: Sudanese irrigation minister](#)

Author:

Reuters

ID:

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Sun, 2019-12-22 17:53

KHARTOUM: Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan have come closer to aligning their views on filling the reservoir of and operating the giant hydroelectric dam that Ethiopia is building on the Blue Nile, the Sudanese irrigation minister said on Sunday.

Egypt is worried the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), under construction near Ethiopia's border with Sudan, will restrict supplies of already scarce Nile waters on which it is almost entirely dependent.

"Proposals were submitted by the three countries regarding filling the reservoir and operating the dam and a convergence (of views) occurred," Sudanese Irrigation and Water Resources Minister Yasser Abbas told reporters after he met with his Egyptian and Ethiopian counterparts in Khartoum.

"It was agreed to take the new positions separately to be discussed at the meetings in Addis Ababa," he said. The three sides will meet in the Ethiopian capital on Jan. 9-10.

They also agreed to define droughts and the operating conditions during droughts, Abbas said.

"There is a convergence (of views) in general, and there are differences of views in some circumstances. Sudan proposed a specified time for filling the reservoir and added definitions for drought and continuous drought," Abbas said.



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Sudan opens Darfur crimes probe against Bashir regime figures
Sudan government off of US religious freedom blacklist

Baghdad's 'Tahrir Beach' where the revolution takes a break

Author:

Hervé BAR | AFP

ID:

1577032787107967200

Sun, 2019-12-22 13:02

BAGHDAD: Close to Baghdad's protest hotspot of Tahrir Square, a sandy Tigris River bank offers some relief from the revolution: youths kick around footballs and smoke shisha pipes to booming hiphop music.

It is on this half-kilometre (500-yard) stretch where the post-Saddam generation celebrates its uprising on the beach, escaping the teargas and bullets for a fun and festive atmosphere.

"Our leaders have deprived us of everything – our rights, our money, our dignity," says Ammar Saleh, 20. "Here we simply discover the taste of freedom."

Unemployed and penniless, another man here, Ali, is intoxicated by the wind of revolt that has swept through Iraq since early October in the biggest wave of street rallies since the 2003 US-led invasion.

"We have nothing left to lose, we will not move as long as the thieves in power don't leave office!" he says with fervour, then returns to his football game.

"Tahrir Beach", as its occupants call it, has maintained the carnival-like atmosphere of the protests before they were marred by bloodshed and fear.

"This is where you find the magic of the early days of the movement," says journalist Ali, a regular visitor.

In the almost three months since the rallies started, about 460 people have been killed and 25,000 wounded. The initially self-managed camps at Tahrir Square have become more strictly organised and the carefree spirit has gone.

"There is less mobilisation, leaders have changed, militiamen and spies have infiltrated the demonstrators," said Ali, who pointed also to the growing influence of supporters of Shiite populist leader Moqtada Sadr.

Tahrir Beach lies on the east bank of the Tigris, between the Al-Sinek and al-Jumhuryiah bridges, where security forces guard access routes into the locked-down "Green Zone" government and embassies district.

Along Rashid Street, centuries-old brick houses with elaborate wooden

balconies, now mostly dilapidated, tell the story of the capital city's past glory.

Bland modern buildings now mar the cityscape as do the concrete blast walls, covered with protest graffiti.

Red and yellow tuk-tuks – the three-wheeled taxis that have become a revolutionary emblem – pour their smiling passengers onto the stretch of river-front, to be greeted by rows of shisha water pipes.

Everywhere there are reminders of the “martyrs” who fell on the barricades: improvised mausoleums adorned with now wilted flowers, a construction helmet, a bloodied t-shirt.

Black, red and white Iraqi flags flutter in the breeze, alongside the inevitable FC Barcelona logo.

“Dumping garbage is forbidden,” reads a sign suggesting the civic-minded spirit of the “new Iraq”, even if litter on the ground suggests not everyone is on board yet.

Under Saddam Hussein and the civil war that followed it was unthinkable to wander around here, so close to the dictator's palaces and then the headquarters of the US occupation.

“It was too dangerous! There were no people, just dogs at night,” recalls Ayman, a former resident of the area.

Now a new generation is reappropriating the river bank, as expressed in a slogan daubed on a wall: “We have cried so much, now we want joy.”

Indeed, even though it's a short walk to Tahrir Square, the violence seems far away.

Three teenagers try to free a scooter stuck in the beach, the rear wheel spraying up sand. Youths with pulled-up pants play volleyball.

A temperamental sound system spits out Iraqi techno and the rap hit “I Got Love”, while a piece of linoleum serves as the stage for a hip-hop dance contest.

Bandanas wrapped around their heads, two guys pumped up with testosterone twirl and spin to the crowd's applause.

The day before, a yoga class here produced photos of bulked-up and bearded men performing the one-legged downward-facing dog pose, sparking delight on social media.

The crowd remains predominantly young and male – and poor.

One young man, 26-year-old Sofiane, his arm deformed by polio, says he has “never received the slightest allowance” but expresses hope the demonstrations will “change everything”.

A group of girls stroll past, their long black hair blowing in the wind. They receive discreet glances but no one bothers them.

The young ladies sip soft-drinks while squinting at guys with slicked-up hairstyles who are shaking their hips to the rhythm of a song that decries the “rotten politicians”.

As teenagers splash in the brackish river water and toddlers build sand castles, some incredulously film the relaxed scene with their smartphones.

“These scenes were unimaginable just a few months ago,” Ali marvels. His voice darkening slightly, he adds that he is “not sure it will last”.







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Iraq protests take toll on economy, vulnerable suffer most Iraq's top cleric calls for quick formation of government

[Sudan opens Darfur crimes probe against Bashir regime figures](#)

Author:

AFP

ID:

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Sun, 2019-12-22 16:08

KHARTOUM: Sudan said Sunday it had opened an investigation into crimes committed in the Darfur region by members of the regime of ousted president Omar Al-Bashir.

Prosecutor general Tagelsir Al-Heber said “we started an investigation about the crimes that have been committed in Darfur from 2003”, speaking on his arrival in Khartoum from a visit to the United Arab Emirates.

The investigation – the first launched since Bashir was ousted by the army in April amid mass protests after 30 years in power – focuses on “cases against former regime leaders”, Heber said without giving names.

Bashir himself, who is behind bars for corruption and awaiting trial on other charges, is wanted by the International Criminal Court in The Hague for his role in the bloody conflict.

The ICC issued warrants for Bashir’s arrest in 2009 and 2010 on charges of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity in the conflict that left around 300,000 people dead and 2.5 million displaced, according to the United Nations.

The Darfur fighting broke out in 2003 when ethnic minority rebels took up arms against Bashir’s Arab-dominated government, which they accused of marginalising the region.

Human rights groups say Khartoum targeted suspected pro-rebel ethnic groups with a scorched earth policy, raping, killing, looting and burning villages. Despite numerous calls for his extradition, the ex-dictator has not been sent to The Hague, the seat of the ICC.

Brought to power by a 1989 coup, Bashir was deposed on April 11 by the army, after months of a mass protest movement against his regime that left dozens dead.

Following a deal reached in August between the military and protesters, Sudan is now led by a transitional government tasked with paving the way for civilian rule.

The investigation was announced on Sunday as the new government has vowed to establish peace in the country’s conflict-hit regions, including Darfur.

On December 14, Bashir was sentenced by a court in Khartoum to two years’ detention in a correctional centre for corruption in the first of several cases against him.

Bashir is also being investigated for his role in the 1989 coup that brought him to power.

On Sunday, Heber also said that proceedings had been launched against Salah Gosh, former intelligence chief under Bashir.

“There four cases against Salah Gosh and we started a procedure to bring him (back to Sudan) by Interpol.”

Gosh, head of the feared National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS), resigned in April two days after the ouster of Bashir, and is now outside of Sudan.



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