

Libya's Tripoli airport closed due to unidentified drone

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Sat, 2019-03-09 18:30

TRIPOLI: The airport in the Libyan capital Tripoli was closed on Saturday due to an unidentified drone flying in the area, the airport's director said. Residents have repeatedly spotted drones flying over Tripoli in the past few days but the reason is not clear.

Flights from Tripoli's Matiga airport have been halted until further notice, said its director Lutfi Al-Tayeb.

People in the capital have been on edge due to rumors that the eastern-based Libya National Army (LNA) loyal to Khalifa Haftar might seek to take it after gaining control of much of the south.

Haftar has not said he wants to march on Tripoli but a LNA website carried an unsourced report this week saying it could happen, adding that the LNA was working with people inside the city.

The United Nations, alarmed about the possibility of a military escalation, is mediating between Haftar, who is allied to a parallel government in the east, and Tripoli premier Fayez Al-Serraj who heads the UN-backed administration.

The UN has been trying for years to pull the oil producer out of conflict but made little progress.



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Libya's national oil company to reopen major oil field

[Low visibility, rough seas warning for UAE residents due to high winds](#)

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Sat, 2019-03-09 22:01

ABU DHABI: UAE's National Centre of Meteorology (NCM) issued a statement on Saturday warning seafarers to exercise caution in the Arabian Gulf and drivers to take extra precautions due to poor visibility caused by sandstorms and high winds.

According to the NCM, winds with speeds reaching 55kph per hour will cause rough seas and wave heights could reach up eight feet by 10am on Sunday.

In the statement, the center expected visibility to drop to less than 2,000 meters, urging drivers to properly follow the traffic rules.



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UAE ministry sends out weather warning ahead of papal visit
Severe weather sweeps across Saudi Arabia

[Daesh attack on US-led coalition wounds Syria fighters](#)

Author:

AFP

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1552147350262317400

Sat, 2019-03-09 15:52

BEIRUT: A suicide car bomb targeting US forces in northern Syria wounded at

least two allied fighters Saturday, a monitor said, with Daesh claiming the attack.

A terrorist "driving a car bomb" hit a convoy that included a US armored vehicle from the international anti-Daesh coalition and Kurdish fighters in the city of Manbij, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

The two wounded fighters were from the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), the Britain-based monitor said.

"No US soldiers were injured or killed today," coalition spokesman Sean Ryan told AFP.

Daesh claimed the attack by an "explosive-laden vehicle" via its Amaq propaganda arm.

The attack is the third in the past two months targeting the US-led coalition and its allies in northern Syria.

On January 16, four Americans were among 19 people killed in a suicide attack in the city claimed by Daesh.

Manbij is a former Daesh stronghold that is now held by a military council affiliated to the SDF.

The city constitutes a major point of contention between Syria's Kurdish minority, which maintains de facto autonomy in parts of northern and northeastern Syria, and neighboring Turkey.

The extremist attacks followed US President Donald Trump's announcement in December that he would withdraw American troops from Syria, as he declared Daesh had been defeated.

The White House later said around 200 American "peacekeeping" soldiers would remain in northern Syria.

The SDF is currently battling to wipe out the final scrap of Daesh territory close to Syria's border with Iraq.

After a lightning offensive that saw it seize large swathes of Iraq and Syria in 2014, Daesh's self-declared "caliphate" has crumbled under pressure from multiple offensives, but the terrorists remain able to launch deadly attacks. Syria's multi-fronted war has killed more than 360,000 people since it began in 2011 with President Bashar Assad's regime bloodily suppressing protests.



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[Manbij](#)

Citizenship stripping of Daesh teenager 'stain' on UK government conscience:
Labour MP official: Baby of British Daesh bride dies in Syria

[Algeria orders early university holiday as students spur protests](#)

Author:

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Sat, 2019-03-09 13:07

ALGIERS: Algerian authorities on Saturday ordered an early start to the spring university holiday, an apparent attempt to weaken two weeks of student-led protests against President Abdelaziz Bouteflika. The Higher Education Ministry's decision came a day after tens of thousands

of demonstrators packed central Algiers to challenge the veteran leader's 20-year-old rule in the biggest protests in the capital in 28 years.

Without giving a reason for the move, the Ministry said in a decree that the spring break would be brought forward by 10 days, starting on Sunday instead of March 20.

Algerians desperate for jobs and angry at unemployment, corruption and an elderly elite seen as out of touch with the young have taken to the streets since Feb. 22 to protest the 82-year-old's plans to seek a fifth term in an April 18 election.

Many of the demonstrations – the largest since 1991 when the army canceled elections Islamists were poised to win – started at university premises before spilling out onto the streets.

The ailing Bouteflika is in hospital in Geneva and has rarely been seen in public since suffering a stroke in 2013.

On Thursday he issued his first warning to protesters, saying the unrest, now entering its third week, could create chaos in the oil- and natural gas-producing North African country.

Bouteflika has offered to limit his term after the election and has vowed to change the "system" that runs the country, but the protest movement has galvanized discontent among different sectors, particularly students and young families.

Some long-time allies of Bouteflika, including members of the ruling party, have expressed support for the protesters, revealing cracks within a ruling elite long seen as invincible.

Friday's protests were largely peaceful but some clashes between youths and police broke out in the evening and state media said 110 protesters and 112 policemen had been hurt in the unrest.



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Algeria's Bouteflika warns against infiltration of protests
Social media breaks 'wall of fear' for Algeria protesters

[Defeated Daesh militants, women still defiant](#)

Author:

Fri, 2019-03-08 23:06

NEAR BAGHOUZ, Syria: Defeated but unrepentant, some militants limping out of their besieged final bastion in eastern Syria still praise Daesh and promise bloody vengeance against its enemies.

The skeletal and dishevelled figures shuffling out of the smoldering ashes of the proto-state may look like a procession of zombies, but their devotion seems intact.

At an outpost for US-backed forces outside the besieged village of Baghouz, 10 women stand in front of journalists, pointing their index fingers to the sky in a gesture used by Daesh supporters to proclaim the oneness of God.

Most refuse to disclose their names or nationalities.

Indistinguishable under their identical black robes, a group of women arriving at the screening point manned by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) swarm around reporters like hornets.

Some throw rocks at the cameras of those trying to film them, while one screams at a photographer and calls him a pig.

A woman snarks at the way the reporter is dressed: "God curses women who resemble men."

The SDF are closing in on diehard militants and their relatives holed up in a makeshift encampment inside the village of Baghouz.

More than 7,000 people have fled the bombed-out bastion over the past three days, escaping shelling by the SDF and airstrikes by the US-led coalition against Daesh.

But for Umm Mohammed, a 47-year-old woman from Iraq's Anbar province, the men who have fled are "the cowards and the meek."

As for the women, "we left because we are a heavy burden on the men," she

says.

“We are waiting for the (next) conquest, God willing.”

Nearby, a little boy hums a militant anthem as he walks beside his mother, his jacket covered with dust.

The boys raised under Daesh rule and trained to fight from a young age – are the reason the group will survive, another Iraqi woman says.

“The caliphate will not end, because it has been ingrained in the hearts and brains of the newborns and the little ones,” says the 60-year-old, refusing to give her name.

Many women tell AFP that they want to raise their children on the ideology of the caliphate, even as its territorial presence fizzles out.

Abdul Monhem Najiyya is more ambivalent about the group.

“There was an implementation of God’s law, but there was injustice,” he says, claiming he worked as an accountant for Daesh.

“The leaders stole money... and fled,” he says. “We stayed until the bullets flew over our heads.”

But he says many senior Daesh figures have fled to the northwestern province of Idlib or crossed into Turkey and Iraq.

Najiyya’s harshest words are for the group’s elusive leader, Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, whom he says he never saw once.

“He left us in the hands of people who let us down and left,” he says. “He bears responsibility, because, in our view, he is our guide.”

When asked why it took him so long to quit the redoubt, Najiyya said he was afraid of being detained by the SDF because his cousins are Daesh militants.

He also says that rumors the militants would be granted safe passage to Idlib, largely controlled by a rival militant group, encouraged some to stay.

Nearby, a bearded man with a leg wound cursed the coalition, whose warplanes have pummeled the last militant redoubt.

“I only surrendered because of my injury,” he says, adding that he had been with Daesh “since the beginning.”

One woman, who says she is from Damascus, tells AFP: “We have left, but there will be new conquests in the future.”

Speaking from behind a veil that covers her face, she says: “We will seek vengeance, there will be blood up your knees.”



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In Syrian riverside camp, Daesh clings to last scrap of 'caliphate' Syria force braces for new outflux from last Daesh village