

Couple's suicide highlights rising Turkish poverty levels

Sun, 2021-02-14 00:11

ANKARA: The suicide of a young Istanbul couple who faced serious financial struggles caused by coronavirus restrictions has raised fears about growing poverty levels in Turkey.

The pair committed suicide on Feb. 9 after leaving their 1-year-old child with a neighbor. It is believed they were struggling with financial hardships as a result of anti-coronavirus policies that have caused growing disillusionment across the country.

The incident has become a symbol of the country's new economic reality and growing income inequality. The same day, Turkey controversially announced the launch of a new space program to land on the moon by 2023.

"Those who say there is no poverty and hunger – should we be upset for that little child, or those young people who died suddenly?" Canan Kaftancioglu, the Republican People's Party Istanbul chair, said.

A recent report by the Public Services Employees Union found that seven in 10 Turkish people hold significant personal debts, with poverty rates higher among women and one in two children facing a life of poverty.

A fifth of Turkey's 81 million people is believed to live below the poverty line.

The Gini coefficient, a commonly used measure of income inequality, among EU member states is 0.307. In Turkey, however, the figure stands at 0.417, according to Eurostat data that also showed that the country's wealthiest people earned more than eight times the average wage in 2019.

A recent study by Turkish academics found that the number of impoverished Turks could double this year, rising to 20 million people.

Another report by the World Bank revealed that the coronavirus pandemic could force 1.6 million more people below the poverty line.

FASTFACT

A report by the World Bank has revealed that the coronavirus pandemic could force 1.6 million new people under the poverty line in Turkey.

"In Turkey, the poor and the vulnerable (those above the poverty line, but with high levels of economic insecurity), representing the bottom 40 percent of the income distribution, account for six out of 10 jobs that vanished

during the crisis,” the report said.

Experts have warned that government efforts to alleviate economic hardship caused by the pandemic, such as unemployment insurance benefits, have not been proportional to the scale of growing poverty in the country, because the aid scheme included only registered employees, ignoring the millions of “informal” workers who make up one-third of the labor market.

“Although Turkey has never been a perfect democracy or used rule of law in the past, the recent deterioration of checks and balances in the country and the wrong economic policies have had immediate repercussions on economic dynamics and hit the most vulnerable households on an unprecedented scale,” Serkan Ozcan, an economist and founding member of the breakaway Future Party, told Arab News.

Ozcan said that a “significant share” of society lives below the poverty line, despite working normal jobs.

According to the latest income survey by the state-run statistics agency TUIK, one-third of the population cannot afford to buy meat regularly, while 37 percent of respondents said they could not afford to heat their homes.

“Every time there is acute poverty in the country, the government brings about similar plans, like landing on the moon or initiating infrastructure megaprojects, to distract people from their immediate needs. It is a recurrent pattern,” Ozcan said.

On top of the economic damage caused by the pandemic, a government ban on layoffs is expected to be lifted later this year, likely resulting in a sharp increase in unemployment.

Large crowds of restaurant owners and staff have staged protests around the country in recent weeks to raise awareness of their financial struggles.

A new survey from Bahcesehir University revealed that the pay of one-third of the country decreased in the pandemic, while half of the Turkish population expects a sharp decline in their income in the coming period.

The same survey showed that one-third of people face difficulty in buying food amid Turkey’s double-digit inflation rate.

Employment figures among young people in the country also show an alarming 40 percent jobless rate.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Turkey](#)

[poverty](#)

12.4 m people food insecure in war-torn Syria: WFPLebanon launches urgent vaccine rollout

[Egypt, Cyprus and Greece demand respect for maritime sovereignty](#)

Author:

Sat, 2021-02-13 23:37

CAIRO: Egypt, Cyprus and Greece have demanded respect for the sovereignty and sovereign rights of states in their maritime areas in the eastern Mediterranean.

The demand came in a joint statement from the three countries' foreign ministers during their meeting in Athens, where they discussed cooperation to deepen their political and economic commitment, regional challenges and delivering a clear message that the region had the potential to be peaceful and stable.

They said this cooperation system was in the interest of promoting regional

prosperity, which laid the basis for a positive agenda, and they expressed their commitment to intensifying coordination and cooperation opportunities.

They welcomed the preparations for the establishment of a Tripartite Secretariat, based in Nicosia, Cyprus, that launches later this year, and for the founding charter of the EastMed Gas Forum that enters into force on March 1.

The charter establishes the forum as a regional organization based in Cairo. The forum is open to all countries that share the same values and goals and have the desire to cooperate for regional security and prosperity.

The joint statement reaffirmed the three countries' commitment to international law, including the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea and the UN Charter, as well as the principles stipulated as foundations for peace and security, neighborly relations and the peaceful resolution of disputes.

They stressed the importance of respecting the sovereignty, sovereign rights and jurisdiction of each state over its maritime areas in accordance with international law, while condemning any activities that violated international law.

The joint statement said that resolving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict on the basis of the two-state solution was an indispensable requirement for comprehensive peace and stability in the region, in addition to the importance of ensuring the establishment of an independent and viable Palestinian state on the lines of June 4, 1967 agreement, which has Palestinians living side-by-side with Israel.

It also said it was important to preserve the composition, character and status of the Palestinian territories occupied in 1967, including East Jerusalem, and the renewed implementation of UN Security Council resolutions that provided for a complete and immediate cessation of all settlement activities, including those in East Jerusalem.

The ministers welcomed the agreement by the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum to choose a unified transitional executive authority for Libya, considering it a major achievement in the political process and an important step toward ensuring the holding of fair and inclusive elections this December.

They said there was a need for the effective implementation of the cease-fire agreement, respect for the UN arms embargo and the complete withdrawal of all foreign forces and mercenaries from the country.

The ministers stressed the importance of the full implementation of the outputs of the Joint Military Committee (5+5), especially the exit of all foreign fighters and mercenaries from Libyan territory.

They affirmed their strong support for a wholly Libyan political solution to the crisis, considering any foreign intervention as unacceptable, and said all agreements concluded in violation of international law were null.

They called on the new Libyan government to consider the memoranda of

understanding signed by Turkey and Fayed Al-Sarraj in Nov. 2019 as null.

The joint statement reaffirmed the three countries' commitment to the unity, independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria, and their support for a permanent political settlement of the Syrian crisis in full accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 2254.

They reaffirmed the urgent necessity for the withdrawal of all foreign and mercenary forces from the country.



Main category:
[Middle-East](#)

[Egyptian foreign minister on new US administration: No grounds for concern or optimism](#)

Author:
Sat, 2021-02-13 22:18

CAIRO: Egyptian-US relations have been close and strategic for four decades and display many aspects of cooperation, according to Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry.

"Egypt is in constant contact with the American administration through consulates and at the ministerial level," Shoukry said.

In televised statements, Shoukry said that the new US administration had not clarified its position on many regional issues.

"When they address their positions, we can evaluate them and work together to achieve common interests, and I do not see any room for any concern or any optimism," Shoukry said.

The foreign minister said that the relationship between Egypt and the US continued whether an administration was Democrat or Republican, and the two countries would always have different views on some issues.

This did not mean that there was complete divergence as there was always a point of agreement.

Shoukry confirmed that contacts at the level of the Egyptian Embassy in Washington or the US Embassy in Cairo were continuing and communication was made with officials, whether in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or the National Security Council.

He said that there was constant discussion of the bilateral relationship and the development of mechanisms for the future, as there were talks about all regional issues that were in Egypt and the US's interest.

Shoukry said that Egypt never compromised on the rights of its people, and was working to prevent harm to Egyptians from the issue of the Renaissance Dam.

He said that Egypt was looking for a legal and binding agreement on filling and operating the Renaissance Dam that took into account the interests of the three countries concerned – Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia – on an equal basis.

"We seek to achieve reconciliation in generating electricity, as long as water conservation is taken into account. We are open and we do not have any problem, and we see that the Egyptian position bears development since the beginning of the negotiations, as long as there is consideration for common interests," he said.

Shoukry said that the Egyptian side had presented an objective and fair proposal, and had shown flexibility to reach a result at the beginning of the negotiations. Egypt had confirmed its determination and commitment to reach an agreement in this issue, he said.

Egypt adhered to and respected any document it signed. "Egypt has restored diplomatic relations with Qatar and canceled the flight ban," he said.

"We sought to hold bilateral committees with Qatar to discuss specific steps to activate the commitments made in the Al-Ula Summit and conference in Saudi Arabia."

Shoukry said that Egypt was in the process of setting a date for the meetings

of the bilateral committees to review all the commitments of both parties, as well as making an assessment of the extent to which there was a commitment to the pledges and their implementation.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Egypt](#)

Egypt, Greece talks on eastern Mediterranean before Athens summit
Saudi Arabia keen to strengthen strategic cooperation with Egypt – King Salman

[Haftar offers support to Libya's peace process](#)

Sat, 2021-02-13 02:01

BENGAZI: Libya's eastern strongman Khalifa Haftar has offered his backing for a peace process that seeks to end a decade of chaos, after meeting the head of a new transitional presidential council.

The military commander met with Mohammed Younes Menfi, a former diplomat who also comes from eastern Libya, and who was selected last week in a UN-backed process to head the three-member presidency council.

Haftar offered “the support of the armed forces for the peace process, to defend democracy and the peaceful transfer of power,” a statement from his office read.

The meeting took place as President Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s spokesperson Ibrahim Kalin said Turkish troops stationed in Libya will remain there as long as a bilateral military agreement between Ankara and Tripoli is active and Libya’s government requests it.

Libya has been torn by civil war since a NATO-backed uprising led to the toppling and killing of Muammar Qaddafi in 2011.

The country has in recent years been split between a Government of National Accord (GNA) in Tripoli, and an eastern-based administration, backed by Haftar.

Erdogan said on Tuesday that Turkey would discuss withdrawing its troops, who Ankara says are providing military training to GNA if other foreign powers are withdrawn first.

FASTFACT

Turkish troops stationed in Libya will remain there as long as a bilateral military agreement between Ankara and Tripoli is active and Libya’s government requests it, presidential spokesman Ibrahim Kalin said.

In an interview with state broadcaster TRT Haber, Kalin said Turkish companies would also play an active role in the efforts to rebuild Libya, adding that Ankara would provide support to the newly elected interim government.

Menfi landed at Benina airport in the eastern Libyan port city Benghazi from Greece on Thursday and went straight to meet Haftar at his headquarters at Rajma, some 25 km outside town.

A new interim executive was chosen on Feb. 5 by the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum in Switzerland, comprising 75 participants selected by the UN to represent a broad cross-section of society.

Haftar reiterated a recent pledge of support for the leaders of this new executive authority, who were chosen “so that they can reunite the institutions and lead the country to elections,” Thursday’s statement read. Haftar’s spokesman Ahmad Al-Mesmari had on Saturday congratulated Menfi and Abdul Hamid Dbeibah, who was selected as interim prime minister, alongside “the Libyan people,” on the outcome of the selection process.

The prime minister of the outgoing GNA, Fayez Al-Sarraj, has wished the new executive “success in their mission.”

The interim authority is mandated to lead Libya through to elections scheduled for December.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Libya](#)

[Khalifa Haftar](#)

Libya's interim leader arrives in key eastern city
New UN envoy holds talks with Libyan officials

[Fresh Tunisia protests break out in southern region](#)

Sat, 2021-02-13 01:36

TATAOUINE: Dozens of Tunisian youths on Friday blocked roads in the long-marginalized southern Tataouine region in anger over unkept government promises to provide work and investment.

In November last year, the administration of Prime Minister Hichem Mechichi pledged to create hundreds of jobs and a fund to launch economic projects in Tataouine after talks with union leaders and protesters after a months-long blockade of an oil installation.

Three months later, the protest movement launched further demonstrations, saying concrete measures had not materialized.

On Friday, some protesters burned tires and chanted slogans while others made businesses and institutions shut and take part in the demonstration, which has been criticized by some residents, an AFP correspondent said.

FASTFACT

Some protesters burned tires and chanted slogans while others made businesses and institutions to shut and take part in the demonstration, which has been criticized by some residents.

On Thursday, the army intervened to stop a dozen protesters from accessing the El-Kamour oil production site and blockading a pipeline, the protest movement said on its Facebook page.

The pipeline carries half of the crude produced by Tunisia's modest oil sector and has been blocked several times, notably in 2017 by sit-ins that devolved into clashes with security forces.

Tataouine already suffered over 30 percent unemployment, one of the highest rates in the country, while poverty is around 17.8 percent.

The coronavirus pandemic has wiped out thousands of informal jobs and strangled illicit cross-border trading networks with Libya and Algeria that bring vital income to many of the region's households.

The latest protests come as Mechichi is at odds with President Kais Saied over a proposed Cabinet reshuffle.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Tunis](#)

Tunisian film pioneer Moufida Tlatli dies aged 73
Tunisian film pioneer
Moufida Tlatli dies aged 73