

'Hundreds' of homes destroyed after Sudan dam collapse

Author:

Sun, 2020-08-02 23:48

KHARTOUM: Hundreds of homes were destroyed or flooded this week as a dam burst after heavy rain in Sudan's Blue Nile state, a local official said. The dam collapsed on Thursday in the district of Bout in the southeastern state, "destroying more than 600 homes and flooding others," Nousseiba Farouk told AFP by phone. Residents successfully evacuated their homes, she said. Local media said the dam held 5 million cubic meters of water, used for both agriculture and drinking.

"We don't yet have an exact idea of the damage because we have not been able to reach the flooded area," Farouk added.

Torrential rains often hit Sudan between June and October, resulting in significant flooding.

Terror listing

Sudan's government has welcomed remarks from US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo this week that he would like to delist Sudan as a state sponsor of terrorism, local media reported.

Pompeo has repeatedly indicated that the State Department hopes to remove the designation, which severely impedes investment in Sudan, but disputes have arisen on a compensation package over the 1998 bombings of two US embassies. The US top diplomat told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on Thursday that legislation on a settlement should come before Congress "in the very, very near term."

According to an English-language report by official news agency SUNA, the Sudanese transitional government on Saturday welcomed Pompeo's statement and "promised to do its level best to meet the requirements that would help the (American) administration" take "positive action."

Independent online news site Sudan Tribune reported the government had said in a statement that it "is ready to continue working with the US administration to remove Sudan from the list of state sponsors of terrorism and enter into a partnership relationship that benefits both countries."

Pompeo said that the fall of longtime dictator Omar Al-Bashir following mass protests and the nearly year-old government of a civilian prime minister, Abdalla Hamdok, marked "an opportunity that doesn't come along often."

HIGHLIGHTS

- **More than 600 homes were destroyed.**
- **Authorities are yet to assess the extent of damage.**
- **Residents were evacuated successfully from the flooded areas.**

"There's a chance not only for a democracy to begin to be built out, but perhaps regional opportunities that could flow from that as well," he said. "I think lifting the state sponsor of terrorism designation there if we can ... take care of the victims of those tragedies would be a good thing for American foreign policy," Pompeo said.

According to SUNA, Hamdok reaffirmed "his commitment to continue exerting efforts with all friends in the United States and abroad" to bring the issue to a close and for Sudan to fully return to "be part of the international community."

Bashir had welcomed Al-Qaeda chief Osama bin Laden and Sudan was accused of aiding militants who blew up the embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, killing 224 people and injuring around 5,000 others.

Sudan's new government has agreed to a compensation package but a dispute has arisen over higher payments to Americans than to Africans, who accounted for the vast majority of the casualties.



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Armed group attacks village in Sudan's Darfur: tribal chief
Families seek justice for Sudan's slain anti-Bashir coup plotters

COVID-19 spreads in Lebanon despite lockdown

Sun, 2020-08-02 22:15

BEIRUT: Lebanon's confirmed cases of coronavirus have reached 5,000 despite a five-day government lockdown that started last Thursday, as one doctor warned that the health system was "beyond its capacity."

The Ministry of Health recorded 175 cases on Saturday evening, 155 of whom are residents while 20 were people who had returned from abroad. Two deaths were recorded, raising the death toll to 61. No new recoveries have been recorded, and the total number of people who have recovered from coronavirus remains at 1,761.

The disease spread during Eid Al-Adha at the weekend, reaching villages and towns where no cases had been previously recorded. The Internal Security Forces announced in a communiqué that, on July 31 and Aug. 1, they drew up 555 reports against violators of social distancing and preventive measures. A fresh five-day lockdown is due to start this Thursday.

"Intensive care rooms at Rafik Hariri University Hospital are now full and, if the situation remains the same during the coming days, the hospital will not be able to accommodate the cases requiring intensive care," Dr. Osman Itani, a pulmonologist and intensive care specialist, told Arab News.

He described the situation as "difficult," adding: "The number of cases currently exceeds 100 per day, and this is a big problem that cannot be addressed by the health system as it is beyond its capacity. There is a need to restructure hospitals, bearing in mind that hospitals are currently not receiving positive cases, but rather patients just showing symptoms."

Electricite du Liban (EDL) announced that a number of its staff had contracted COVID-19, and that these employees had come into direct contact with customers at the company's headquarters. Imad Kreidieh, general director of Ogero Telecom, announced that 17 of Ogero's staff had tested positive for COVID-19 and that 600 workers had taken a polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test.

Al-Makassed Islamic Charitable Society Hospital is facing an employee shortage due to COVID-19 infections. Those who have contracted the virus have also transmitted the infection to several others, according to one of the hospital's doctors. Those with the virus have been asked to self-isolate at home.

FASTFACT

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Itani said it was difficult to distinguish between people who had coronavirus and those who had other diseases, relaying a recent personal experience at the clinic.

He described how an asthma patient he had been treating for 15 years visited the clinic complaining of shortness of breath, even though she did not leave the house and was committed to anti-coronavirus measures. He said that, upon examining this patient, he learned that she had COVID-19 and that she had contracted it from her children who had visited her at home.

Dr. Firas Abiad is director-general of Rafik Hariri Hospital, which has a section especially for COVID-19 patients. "We are experiencing a health emergency," he told Arab News. "The problem is not the number, but who needs hospitalization. Of every 100 COVID-19 patients there are 15 who need hospitalization, five of whom will later on need intensive care."

Itani said that the state of "healthcare confusion" may affect patients who might need hospitalization for a specific symptom but hesitated going to hospital for fear of contracting coronavirus.

"We have seen deaths resulting from heart attacks or strokes, (people) who could have been saved had they come early to the emergency departments," he added.



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Former 'Miss Lebanon' Valerie Abou Chakra weds in DiorLebanon hit by Eid virus surge

[Iraq to hold next parliamentary elections on June 6, 2021 – a year early](#)

Author:

Sun, 2020-08-02 00:49

BAGHDAD: Iraq will hold its next parliamentary elections nearly a year early, the premier has announced, as he seeks to make good on promises he offered when he came to power.

"June 6, 2021, has been fixed as the date for the next legislative elections," said Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhimi, who took the reins in May after months of protests forced his predecessor to resign.

"Everything will be done to protect and ensure the success of these polls," Kadhimi said in a televised speech. Elections in Iraq are sometimes marred by violence and often by fraud. The next parliamentary elections had originally been due to take place in May 2022.

But months of protests began in October, with thousands taking to the streets of Baghdad and across the south.

Demonstrators demanded that the political system be dismantled, pointing to endemic corruption and what many see as the malign influence of sectarian interests.

Kadhimi was nominated in April, months after Adel Abdul Mahdi stepped down – the first time a premier has resigned before the end of his term since the US-led invasion of 2003. Kadhimi's government on Thursday said a total of 560 people had died in protests since October.

Nearly all were demonstrators killed at the hands of the security forces, according to an adviser to the premier.

Abdul Mahdi's government proposed to parliament a new electoral law that was quickly passed late last year. But the section detailing voting procedures and constituency boundaries has not been finalized, according to diplomats and experts. It was not clear what role Iraq's election commission – regularly accused of bias – would have in organizing the polls. The UN mission in Iraq welcomed Kadhimi's announcement. "Early elections fulfil a key popular demand on the road to greater stability and democracy in Iraq," it said in a statement.

"Everything will be done to protect and ensure the success of these polls."

Mustafa Al-Kadhimi, Iraq's premier

"The United Nations is ready to provide support and technical advice as requested by Iraq to ensure free, fair and credible elections that win the public's trust."

The 2018 election was marred by a record low turnout of 44.5 percent, according to official figures. Independent observers believe the true turnout was much lower.

Voters abandoned major political parties in favor of Shiite leader and former militia chief Moqtada Sadr, who allied with communists on an anti-corruption platform.

Iraq was earlier this year at the center of heightened tensions between Washington and Tehran, after the US killed top Iranian general Qasem Soleimani – alongside Iraqi commander Abu Mahdi Al-Muhandis – in a January drone strike in Baghdad.

Together with months of political crisis, Iraq is also grappling with a major economic downturn due to the impact of the novel coronavirus pandemic on the demand for oil, the lifeblood of the country's economy.



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Iraqi policemen killed protesters with hunting rifles: Minister
Iraq's oil exports average 2.76 mln bpd in July, says ministry

How will Ankara react to oil deal with Syrian Kurds?

Sat, 2020-08-01 23:59

ANKARA: A surprise deal between American Delta Crescent Energy LLC oil company and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) on the development of oil fields in northeastern Syria has sparked concerns about the reaction from Ankara.

One of the key disagreements between Turkey and the US on Syria has been about the latter's local cooperation with the SDF.

But Ankara has reportedly kept silent about this deal and not reacted negatively, according to the Al-Monitor news portal, despite the SDF being considered a terror group and a political extension of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) by Ankara.

The deal was reportedly made "with the acknowledgement and encouragement of the White House" with Republican Senator Lindsey Graham having engaged in talks with SDF leader Mazlum Kobani for the development of oil fields in the region by the American company.

Syria's oil supply is concentrated on the northeastern part of the country, especially in Qamishli and Deir ez Zor, which are controlled by the Kurdish-led autonomous administration.

The Kurdish-led SDF began withdrawing from Turkish-Syrian border zones last October in accordance with a deal brokered by Russia and Turkey. They were then redeployed to new positions about 30 km from the border in northeast Syria.

On July 10, Kobani met the top commander of US forces in the Middle East, Gen. Frank McKenzie, in northeast Syria to discuss regional issues.

Joe Macaron, a Middle East foreign policy analyst at the Washington-based Arab Center, said that Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan will not jeopardize his good relationship with US President Donald Trump – in arenas from Syria to Libya – for an inevitable US oil contract in SDF-controlled areas in Syria when he knows how important oil is for Trump.

FASTFACT

Syria's oil supply is concentrated on the northeastern part of the country, especially in Qamishli and Deir ez Zor, which are controlled by the Kurdish-led autonomous administration.

"Ankara has made clear strategic gains in Syria and Libya thanks to US support and has managed to push Kurdish forces away from its border while altering the dynamics in Libya and the Eastern Mediterranean," he told Arab News.

However, Macaron thinks that Erdogan can always bring up the issue at a later stage if the Trump administration shifts policy in Syria or if Trump loses the election. Not reacting now does not mean that Ankara will not make an issue of it in the future.

"This is an official deal between the company and the SDF. The Americans have a plan for this area but we don't know any detail about the contract. It is the reason why Ankara did not react strongly as the deal is not clear," Navvar Saban, a military analyst from the Istanbul-based Omran Center for Strategic Studies, told Arab News.

According to Saban, the vision of the US about the region and on the oil issue had changed in favor of long-term investments.

Nicholas A. Heras, Middle East security program manager at the Washington-based Institute for the Study of War, thinks the deal is more important to the SDF than it is to the Americans, which is probably why Ankara has not reacted strongly.

"The SDF needs to continue to build ties with the United States, and this oil deal strengthens the ties between the SDF and the US," he told Arab News.

According to Heras, Ankara seems to be calculating that because Syrian oil reserves are not large, and this deal is relatively small, if the Turks wanted to pursue further military action in northeast Syria this deal would not cause Washington to stop them.

Ruwan Al-Rejoleh, an independent analyst in Washington, DC, relates this deal with attempts by the US to facilitate intra Kurdish talks and Kurdish-Turkish indirect talks on the Syrian front to reach a settlement for groups in northeast Syria before the US withdrawal.

"President Erdogan offered Russia and US a proposal to use the oil revenues in Syria for reconstruction purposes that can be overseen through an international body but not in any way accepting or allowing the oil revenues to strengthen the local authority of SDF in northeastern Syria," she told Arab News.

Noting that James Jeffery, special US representative for Syria engagement, had reportedly informed Turkey about the oil deal and that Ankara had not reacted negatively, Al-Rejoleh thinks that there is a certain level of understanding between Washington and Ankara about the deal.

"The devil is in the detail; it is important to look at the fields that are included in the deal as well as Russia's position. Russia didn't express a position yet, however. Moscow is keen on the balancing act in a way to ensure that Syrians who live outside the SDF-led area will get their share from the oil revenue," she said.

But, according to Al-Rejoleh, this deal doesn't seem designed to empower the local governance authority of the SDF but rather to create an international understanding and platform, where a political deal can be reached through a shared economic platform of the oil revenues among local and international actors.



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[Armed group attacks village in Sudan's Darfur: tribal chief](#)

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Sat, 2020-08-01 16:48

KHARTOUM: Armed men attacked a village in Sudan's South Darfur province

causing an unknown number of casualties, a tribal chief said Saturday, in the latest violence to strike the remote region.

"Armed men on Friday attacked the village of Oringa, south of Nyala, the capital of South Darfur state," Yaakoub Mohammad told AFP.

"They set fire to and looted homes and fired upon residents, but we don't know the exact number of casualties," he said.

He added that three days earlier the group's leader had come to the village with armed men to demand that residents leave.

The villagers in turn called the police who arrested the group leader and imprisoned him in Kass district, where he remains in custody.

Sudan's Darfur provinces – which cover an area similar to that of France, much of it desert – have been plagued by years of violence.

The regime of Omar Al-Bashir, who was toppled in April last year, carried out counter-insurgency operations there from 2003 that resulted in the ex-president being indicted for genocide by the International Criminal Court. Alongside the devastating civil conflict in Darfur, which dragged on for years, there has long been localized clashes over land and access to water, mainly pitting nomadic Arab pastoralists against crop-growing farmers from long marginalized ethnic groups.

A week ago, 500 armed men attacked the district of Masteri, killing over 60 people, the majority from the Masalit community, according to the UN. Eighty-eight were wounded.

That attack triggered panic among residents of Masteri and nearby villages.

Around 2,000 families, comprising around 10,000 people, fled toward El Geneina, the capital of West Darfur state, around 50 kilometers from Masteri. Some 200 more families, comprising a further 1,000 people, crossed the border to Chad.

Sudan's Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok announced on July 26 that security forces would be deployed to Darfur to protect "citizens and the agricultural season."

There has as yet been no subsequent indication that any deployment has gone ahead.



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Sudan to deploy troops to Darfur after killings
Gunmen kill at least 20 farmers in Sudan's Darfur, says tribal chief