

Iraqi policemen killed protesters with hunting rifles: Minister

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BAGHDAD: Iraqi policemen using their own hunting rifles killed protesters in the capital Baghdad this week, the government said, adding that the perpetrators had been suspended.

"According to eyewitnesses and forensic data, hunting rifles killed" two protesters, Interior Minister Othman Al-Ghanemi told reporters on Thursday. The minister gave the names of three policemen and displayed the arms and ammunition they had purportedly used.

Hunting rifles were in the personal possession of the three, "who decided on their own account to make use of them," he told reporters.

They have confessed to using the weapons and have been suspended from their duties, Ghanemi said, adding that judicial proceedings were underway.

The account of the killings, which took place earlier this week, differed from that given previously by medics.

Medical sources said three protesters died but authorities mentioned only two deaths on Thursday.

Medics also said the three dead protesters had been hit by tear gas canisters, rather than live rounds, a version of events the government has denied.

Ghanemi said an investigation had been opened because the federal police had deployed "to fire live rounds in the air," contravening orders not to use live fire by the prime minister, who heads the armed forces.

Mustafa Al-Kadhemi came to power in early May, replacing Adel Abdel Mahdi, whose position became untenable amid months of protests stretching back to October last year.

The new premier has been keen to distance himself from his predecessor, who accused an unnamed third force of being behind the deaths of security personnel and hundreds of protesters.

The government announced on Thursday that 560 people had been killed in protests since October, a tally it said included those slain early this week. Nearly all the dead were demonstrators killed at the hands of security forces, said Hosham Dawod, an adviser to the premier handling an investigation into the protests.

The families of each of the 560 victims will each be compensated with 10 million Iraqi dinars (around \$8,400), Dawod said.



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[Iran's prisons 'catastrophically unequipped' to deal with COVID-19: Amnesty](#)

Sat, 2020-08-01 16:17

LONDON: Leaked letters from Iranian officials obtained by Amnesty International have revealed Tehran's complacency in the face of the coronavirus crisis and the country's overstretched prison system.

The [rights group said in a statement](#) Friday that Iran's prisons remained "catastrophically unequipped for outbreaks," after reviewing letters from

prison officials to the Ministry of Health that raised the alarm over a serious shortage of essential medical supplies.

Prison officials' requests for millions of masks and gloves, hundreds of thousands of litres of hand sanitizer and disinfectant, and other equipment essential for preventing the spread of the virus received no response from the Ministry of Health.

Diana Eltahawy, Amnesty's deputy regional director for the Middle East and North Africa, said: "These official letters provide damning evidence of the government's appalling failure to protect prisoners. Requests for urgently needed disinfectant products, protective equipment and medical devices have been ignored for months."

The leaked letters, sent by officials from Iran's Prisons Organization, singled out the presence of "older (people), pregnant women, nursing mothers and their infants who suffer from a weak immune system" throughout the country's prisons, and warned that government inaction would result in "security hazards" and "irreparable harm."

These vulnerable populations made the lack of protective equipment "particularly alarming," Eltahawy said.

"Overcrowding, poor ventilation, lack of basic sanitation and medical equipment, and deliberate neglect of prisoners' health problems, are making Iranian prisons a perfect breeding ground for COVID-19. The Iranian authorities must stop denying the health crisis in Iran's prisons and take urgent steps to protect prisoners' health and lives."

Tehran claimed in April that there had not been a single COVID-19 related death in Iranian prisons, but the documents obtained by Amnesty, as well as investigation by other rights groups, paint a far grimmer picture.

Prisoners with coronavirus symptoms are said to be neglected and ignored for days, before being put in solitary confinement – without medical care – when their symptoms worsen.

Amnesty's statement claimed that at least 20 have died in Iranian prisons from the virus, and at least one female prisoner who tested positive for the virus had been forcibly disappeared.

The outbreak within Iran's prison system is aggravated by chronic overcrowding.

Despite the official capacity of 85,000 detainees, Iran's prison population in July last year was around 240,000.

Tehran introduced a prison furlough scheme to prevent the spread of COVID-19, but only 29,000 prisoners were released. This leaves the number of prisoners still nearly three times higher than official capacity.

Amnesty said the overcrowding had contributed to "filthy and insufficient bathroom facilities," "widespread insect infestations," and "a severe

shortage of beds, meaning many prisoners have to sleep on the floor.”

“We once again call on Iranian authorities to urgently address overcrowding in prisons, including by immediately and unconditionally releasing all those detained for the peaceful exercise of their rights,” Eltahawy said.

The Amnesty report also urged Tehran to “ensure access to adequate food, water, health care, hygiene and bedding for all prisoners” and to “allow international monitors, including the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran, to conduct independent, unannounced inspections of prisons.”



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Iran's Khamenei says sanctions failed, no talks with Trump
Number of coronavirus cases in Iran passes 300,000

'Turkish government is keeping key COVID-19 patient figures under wraps'

Author:

Sat, 2020-08-01 01:55

ANKARA: Turkey's top medical body has warned that the government is keeping key COVID-19 patient figures under wraps in order to gloss over the public health challenges facing the country, saying that the official statistics being given out are the "tip of the iceberg."

The government has not disclosed the number of critical care or intubated patients since July 29, sparking fear and concern about the underlying reason for the confidentiality.

Prof. Sinan Adiyaman, chairman of the Turkish Medical Association (TBB), said that the pandemic statistics were being presented in a way that suited the Ministry of Health.

"They should however open more data for society's access and be more transparent about the numbers," he told Arab News. "Turkey still has weak pandemic management and officials in Ankara unfortunately prioritize economic and political concerns over public health measures."

The TBB is expecting an increase in infections during Eid Al-Adha if public precautions are not taken in Turkey, where around 5,674 people have died due to the disease.

"Unfortunately due to the premature and uncontrolled moves of the government, the pandemic cannot be put under control and the figures about coronavirus-related deaths keep increasing since June 1," Adiyaman added. "The local data we directly receive from our local agents show that there is a reality far beyond than the one which is officially announced by the Health Ministry."

Officials in Ankara unfortunately prioritize economic and political concerns over public health measures.

Prof. Sinan Adiyaman, Chairman of the Turkish Medical Association

TBB claims that the center of Turkey's pandemic is Istanbul, followed by the southeastern province of Diyarbakir.

According to Adiyaman, keeping the figures secret is likely to push people into becoming careless and ignoring the seriousness of the health crisis. The latest official figures showed that there was a decrease in the number of daily coronavirus cases, dropping below the critical threshold of 1,000. But the TBB rejected the number, saying that the daily rates reached about 4,000 and that the figures provided by the government were "the tip of the iceberg."

"We keep warning the governmental officials about taking measures to restrict social mobility in the country, but in vain. They adopted normalization measures very quickly by June 1. The number of infected active cases in Turkey are fivefold compared to the world standards, which shows the presence

of patients whose COVID tests went negative, but who are in fact patients in clinical and radiological terms,” Adiyaman said.

The TBB has expressed its concerns since the start of the pandemic. It said that only giving statistics for patients testing positive, without including patients who tested negative but showed all the coronavirus symptoms, would undermine countrywide efforts to stop the pandemic. The information is considered important to stop the pandemic because it gives a fuller picture, as people assume that relatives, neighbors or friends who test negative but have COVID-19 symptoms do not need to respect social distancing or quarantine rules.

The World Health Organization (WHO) uses two key codes for identifying COVID-19 cases. One is for confirmed cases with laboratory testing and the other is for clinical or epidemiological diagnosis. Contrary to WHO guidelines, Turkey, which remains a COVID-19 hotspot in the Middle East, does not use the second code thereby keeping the number of infected people artificially low.

Turkey suspended flights to Iran and Afghanistan as part of its anti-coronavirus measures shortly after Turkish Airlines restarted international flights on June 11.

On Tuesday Germany extended its travel warning to Turkey over pandemic concerns, putting it on its list of high-risk countries.



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Gloomy mood in war-torn Libya on the occasion of Eid Al-Adha

Author:

Sat, 2020-08-01 01:47

TAJOURA, LIBYA: Worn down by conflict, poverty and the pandemic, many Libyans are gloomy this year on the occasion of Eid Al-Adha.

A usually bustling annual sheep market on the outskirts of the capital Tripoli lies largely deserted, lambs bleating in their wire-mesh pens with few customers in sight.

A handful of potential buyers eye the sacrificial animals, their makeshift enclosures partially shaded against the blazing summer sun, in the suburb of Tajoura.

Breeder Suleiman Ertel got up long before dawn to bring his livestock from his hometown of Zliten, about 140 km away, to the biggest animal market in western Libya.

For Muslims, the festival honors Prophet Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son as an act of obedience to God, who then intervened and provided a sacrificial lamb instead.

The faithful commemorate this by ritually sacrificing an animal – a sheep, goat, cow or even a camel – and dividing it into three parts; for the poor, for relatives and for the home.

"Usually, in the days before the festival, people rush to buy their sheep," Ertel said, his eyes scanning the dusty three-square-kilometer expanse.

But this year high livestock prices, a pandemic-driven fear of crowded markets, a financial crisis and heightened insecurity in Libya itself have all kept customers away.

For livestock farmers like him, Ertel said, "everything is more expensive. Fodder has doubled in price, but also transport costs between towns, because of insecurity on some routes.

"It's discouraging," he said. The country is also plagued by water shortages and power blackouts that hobble air-conditioners and also make it impossible to store meat in freezers.

The deplorable situation is compounded by the COVID-19 crisis, which has depressed global oil prices. The virus itself has flared again in Libya despite curfews, the closure of schools and mosques, and a travel ban.

In recent weeks, new infections have surged above 100 a day for the first time since the virus was detected in the North African country in late March. There have been 3,017 confirmed cases and 67 deaths in Libya from the respiratory disease, deemed by many as underestimates in a divided country with a shattered public health system.

SPEEDREAD

- For livestock farmers, everything is more expensive. Fodder has doubled in price and also transport costs between towns, because of insecurity on some routes.
- The country is plagued by water shortages and power blackouts that hobble air-conditioners and also make it impossible to store meat in freezers.

At Tajoura's market, Ahmed Al-Fallah spent his third day searching for a sheep he could afford, in a desperate bid to try to maintain the crucial religious and family tradition.

"I ask about prices without being able to buy anything," he told AFP, keeping an eye on one of his three sons posing for a photo next to a sheep.

"I don't have enough money. I think I'm going to have to borrow some."

An average-sized sheep costs 1,200 to 1,400 dinars – too much for many Libyans who, even if they have the means, cannot withdraw enough cash from their bank accounts.

"Most banks have capped withdrawals at 1,000 dinars in the days leading up to the festival," said Mohammed Kecher, another frustrated customer at the market.

"So we hesitate," he said. "Should we spend it all on the sacrificial sheep or keep the money for the family's expenses for a month?"



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Turkey 'dreaming of empire in Libya,' says Egyptian strategist Saudi Arabia backs Egyptian position in Libya, foreign minister says after talks with El-

Turkey 'dreaming of empire in Libya,' says Egyptian strategist

Sat, 2020-08-01 01:22

CAIRO: Egypt will not be dragged into a Libyan war designed to break the Egyptian army, a leading Cairo-based military strategist told Arab News. Maj. Gen. Nagy Shohood, a strategic expert and adviser at the Nasser Military Academy, accused Turkey of intervening in Libya to further its dreams of a restored Ottoman empire.

Ankara is seeking to establish its presence in Libya by creating naval and air bases, and is not working alone but also with the US and Russia, he added.

"Turkey has established a base in Somalia, then Qatar, and then moved to Libya. Erdogan is still dreaming of the Ottoman empire."

Shohood said that the region "is to be divided in one way or another," as Europe and the US approved plans announced by former US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice in 2005.

"Turkey is a means of implementing this plan in both Syria and Iraq. Turkey is operating in the region where sabotage is taking place and Syria has been divided by ideology and tribalism through Turkey, which has not come to fight in Libya but to coordinate and agree with other parties," he said.

Shohood said that Turkey is unlikely to take military action in Libya since it is difficult to fight hundreds of miles away from its own territory.

"They are achieving what they want with tenants who are working with Turkish expertise and capabilities. A semi-permanent Turkish presence in Libyan air and naval bases is required."

Shohood said: "The Libyan people will destroy these rules that are being established, but it is up to them if they accept being slaves to the Ottoman empire once again."

He said that Egypt will not be dragged into making a decision that is not in the interest of its people and the Egyptian armed forces.

"Egypt will not be dragged into a war in the south or west, except after studying the situation fully and making sure it is in the interests of Egyptian citizens," he said.

Shohood said that "caution and anticipation" are needed in dealing with the situation in Libya.

The Egyptian military must strike first and not wait to react in order to avoid a clash in the region, he added.

"Some people are hoping for a military clash between Egypt and Turkey,"



Shohood said.

Turkey's expansionary aims have taken an ominous turn, moving beyond cultural and economic projects and into the military arena, with an Ottoman troop presence resurfacing in the Arab world after almost a 100 years.

"It is up to the Libyan people if they accept being slaves to the Ottoman empire once again."

Maj. Gen. Nagy Shohood

The recently opened Al-Rayyan military base in Qatar – the first military presence in the Gulf region since the end of the Ottoman presence – is a springboard for these ambitions.

On the other side of the Arabian Peninsula, Turkey opened a military base on the Somali coast, overlooking the strategic Gulf of Aden, in July 2016, at a cost of about \$50 million.

The Gulf of Aden is the main gateway to the global oil trade. Construction of the base coincided with an escalation in hostilities between Turkey and Egypt. The Gulf of Aden and the Bab Al-Mandab Strait are the strategic entrance to Egypt's Suez Canal, so Turkey's presence could put pressure on Egypt in future.

In addition, the Turkish presence in the Horn of Africa represents the beginning of a possible wider expansion on the continent, which possesses promising markets and an abundance of investments.

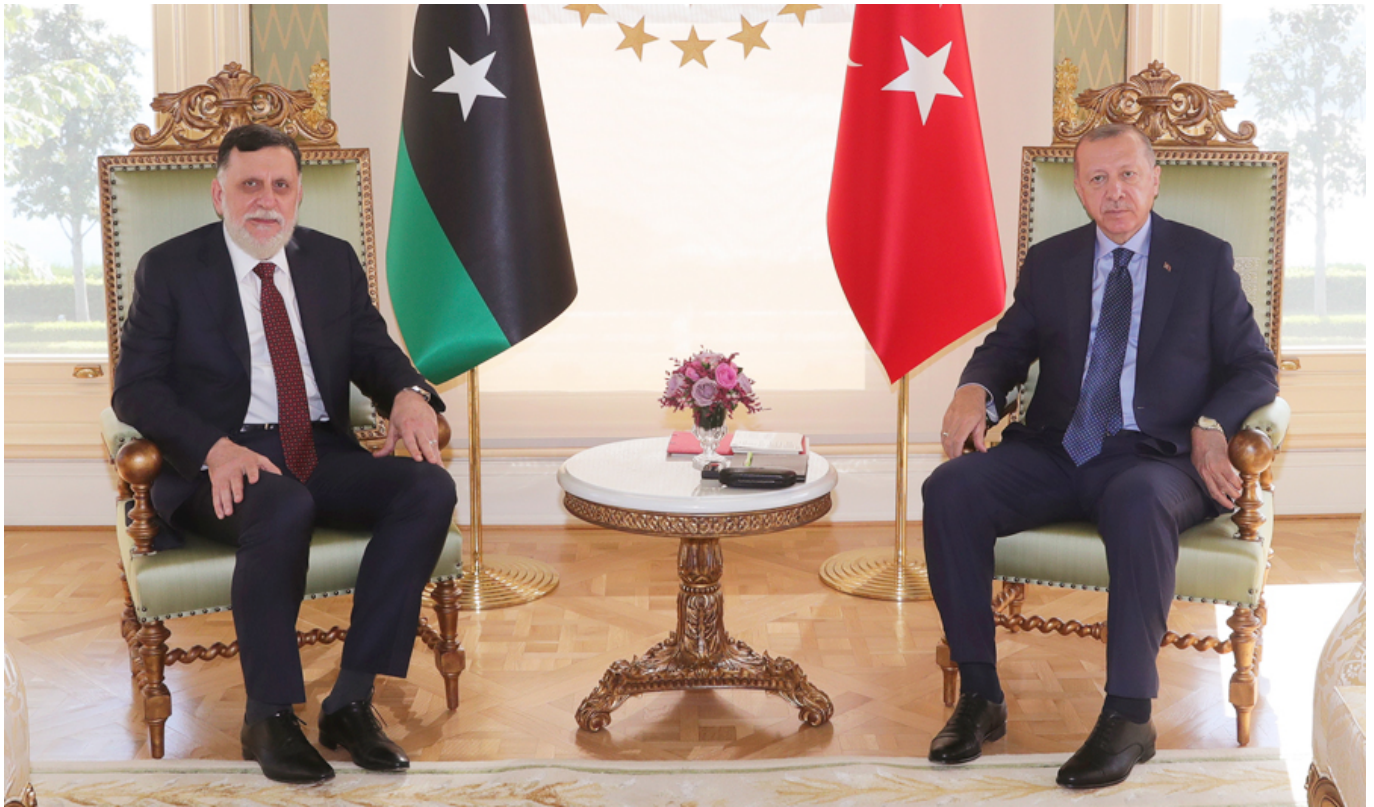
Turkey's military activity has reached the north of the Arab world, with the Bashqa camp in the Kurdistan region of northern Iraq.

Construction of the first Turkish military base in Syria – on top of the Sheikh Barakat mountain near Aleppo – was completed last November.

Turkey's entry into the Libyan dispute, with a military intervention and armed militias from Syria, confirms Ankara's desire to restore the Ottoman empire.

The intervention started with the Turkish parliament's decision on Jan. 2 authorizing a Turkish army deployment in Libyan territory.

Ankara began to interfere using intelligence elements until it applied full force alongside the Government of National Accord, headed by Fayez Al-Sarraj, in the face of the Libyan National Army led by Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar. The Turkish intervention has upset the balance, as the Al-Wefaq government, with Turkish support, managed to drive the national army out of the city to Sirte.



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El-Sisi, Ramaphosa discuss Libyan developments
Saudi Arabia backs Egyptian position in Libya, foreign minister says after talks with El-Sisi