

Libyan figures welcome El-Sisi support

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1592764228246820300

Sun, 2020-06-21 21:47

CAIRO: Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah El-Sisi has stressed Egypt's readiness to support the citizens of Libya.

"In Egypt, we have great respect and appreciation and have not interfered in your affairs and are always prepared to provide support, to help with the stability of the country," El-Sisi said on Saturday in a televised speech. "We are solely interested in Libyan security and stability. Sirte and Al-Jafra crossed a red line. We are ready to help and aid in the protection of Libya," he added.

"Libya is a great country and its people are fighters. The line that the current forces have reached, whether from the eastern region or western region, are all Libyan citizens and we are talking to the Libyan people and not one party against another," El-Sisi said.

The Libyan city of Sirte is 1,000 kilometers (km) from the Egyptian border, and is halfway between Tripoli and Benghazi on the Libyan coast. It is located 450 km from the capital Tripoli and 600 km from Benghazi. It opens the way for controlling oil ports in Libya's "Oil Crescent" in eastern Libya, which includes the largest oil reserves in the country.

Opinion

This section contains relevant reference points, placed in (Opinion field)

Sirte is the main operations room for the Libyan National Army (LNA) and a link between the regions of eastern and western Libya. The city's airport and seaport is one of the most important gateways in Libya.

Al-Jafra also has major significance because it is located in the center of the country which is 650 km southeast of Tripoli. It is the link between the east, west and south. Controlling Al-Jafra's base means controlling the entire center of the country.

"Our goals will be to protect the western borders, and support the restoration of security and stability in Libya, as it is part of Egyptian national security," El-Sisi added.

His address was met with widespread Arab support. Saudi Arabia stressed that Egypt's security was an integral part of the security of the Kingdom and the entire Arab nation, noting that Riyadh stood alongside Cairo in its right to defend its borders and people from extremism.

The UAE also supported the statements made by the Egyptian president and reiterated its position calling for an immediate cease-fire in Libya and a commitment to a political solution, stressing that it was the only acceptable way to end the conflict.

In a statement, the UAE's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation affirmed its solidarity and support for Egypt to protect its security and stability.

The head of the Diwan of the Supreme Council of Sheikhs and Dignitaries of Libya, Muhammad Al-Misbahi, said that the Libyan people were calling for the joint Arab defense agreement to be enacted, praising the words of El-Sisi. He pointed out that the Libyan people felt "that Arab dignity has begun to recover from Egypt's June 30 revolution," calling for an urgent move by the Egyptian government to resolve the conflict.

He pointed to the military intervention of Turkey in Libya as a key strategic issue, and warned that it could attract mercenaries and escalate the situation in the country if Turkey was permitted to continue its operations. The council of sheikhs and dignitaries declared that Egypt's intervention in Libyan affairs was a legitimate intervention according to the Joint Arab Defense Treaty. "Egyptian-Libyan history has proven the significance of joining forces in standing together against the foreign enemy throughout history, either in the Libyan jihad against the Italians, or the strong support Libya provided to Egypt in the 1973 October War," it said in a statement.

"President El-Sisi raised morale and sent a strong message that Egypt is present," Khaled Al-Mahjoub, director of the Department of Moral Guidance in the Libyan Army, said.

"The situation with Turkey is about looting of wealth and the deployment of mercenaries, which is what constitutes a threat to the region. Today Turkey has a clear-cut message from El-Sisi," Al-Mahjoub added.

"The Egyptian state is capable of facing any threats to national security regarding the Libyan crisis," assistant secretary of the Future Party of the Egyptian Homeland, Essam Hilal, said.

He pointed out that Libya "is living a critical stage in its history in light of (Turkey's President Recep Tayyip) Erdogan's ambitions about Libyan oil, his possession of many terrorist militias in Libya, and his attempt to impose a fait accompli policy on Egypt."

Hours after the Egyptian president's speech, Erdogan made a phone call to Emir of Qatar Tamim bin Hamad. The Qatar News Agency stated that the call discussed strategic relations between the two countries and ways to support and develop them, in addition to discussing a number of regional and international issues of common concern.

The mobilization of LNA forces continues in Sirte, and the eastern city of Misrata. The Government of National Accord, led by Fayez Al-Sarraj, rejected the Egyptian invitation to hold an emergency meeting of the Arab League to discuss the latest developments.



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Saudi Arabia, UAE support El-Sisi's 'right to self-defense' in Libya war
MWL stands with Egypt to protect its borders, preserve security

[UN denounces recent escalation in Yemen, says threatens cease-fire](#)

Sun, 2020-06-21 21:09

RIYADH: The UN on Sunday denounced a military escalation in Yemen, which it said jeopardizes a cease-fire.

UN Special Envoy to Yemen, Martin Griffiths, called on all sides to reduce tensions, particularly "the recent increasing hostilities in the governorates of Ma'rib and Al Jawf."

"I once again urge the parties to take serious measures to de-escalate, give peace a chance, and continue to engage constructively with the UN efforts to reach an agreement," Griffiths said. "I hope they will refrain from the misguided quest for territorial gain by force, which can only bring more violence and suffering to Yemen."

Griffiths denounces the military escalation across [#Yemen](#)

particularly in Marib&Al Jawf that goes against the spirit of the UN-facilitated negotiations. He urges the parties to de-escalate &engage constructively with the UN efforts to reach an agreement<https://t.co/VpgCmfY2uo>

– @OSE_Yemen (@OSE_Yemen) [June 21, 2020](#)

According to the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen, hundreds of thousands of displaced Yemenis are based in Marib, an area that has been relatively calm over the past five years.

The surge in clashes between the Iran-backed Houthis and forces loyal to the internationally recognized government come as the country is battered by COVID-19.

Griffiths said increased fighting “impeded efforts to respond to the COVID-19 outbreak devastating the country.”



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Tunisians protesting over jobs clash with police after arrest of activist

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1592762321676675800

Sun, 2020-06-21 16:57

TATAOUINE: Protesters demanding jobs in Tunisia's energy sector blocked roads with blazing tyres on Sunday after the arrest of an activist, as security forces responded with tear gas.

For weeks, demonstrators have erected a protest camp in the southern Tataouine region demanding authorities make good on a 2017 promise to provide jobs in the gas and oil sectors to thousands of unemployed.

They have blocked roads around the El-Kamour pumping station to prevent tanker trucks from entering the facility but so far the protest had been largely peaceful.

On Sunday, however, it turned violent after the arrest of an activist "wanted" by the authorities, the governor of Tataouine, Adel Werghi, told a local radio.

The activist, arrested the night before, was identified as Tarek Haddad, the spokesman for the protesters.

An AFP correspondent said demonstrators set tyres ablaze in Tataouine and pelted security forces with stones demanding his release.

Security forces responded with tear gas and the situation remained tense in the afternoon, with intermittent clashes taking place.

The governor said it was "illegal" for protesters, who have been demonstrating for more than a month, to block roads with tents "which they have set up in the middle of streets".

In 2017, protesters had blockaded the El-Kamour pumping station for three months demanding jobs.

The sit-in ended after the employment minister signed a deal with representatives of the protesters, brokered by the powerful Tunisian trade union confederation UGTT, pledging to invest 80 million Tunisian dinars a year (almost \$28 million) in Tataouine.

The UGTT said the promise was never kept.



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Post-virus recovery goes up in flames for Tunisian vendors

[Egyptian high-school pupils, masked and gloved, head into exams](#)

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Reuters

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1592760340756547900

Sun, 2020-06-21 16:10

CAIRO: Hundreds of thousands of Egyptian high-school pupils armed with masks, gloves and hand sanitizers started their final exams on Sunday, despite objections from some parents worried about spreading the coronavirus.

The health ministry was laying on 2,500 ambulances and providing a doctor for each school. Any student with a high temperature is meant to have their exam postponed or sit it in isolation.

The students had their temperatures taken in the morning, before being seated

at desks spaced apart from one another.

Nearly 670,000 pupils from state and private schools, and 128,000 from religious schools, were due to sit the exams. They come at a time when Egypt has seen an acceleration of coronavirus cases, with confirmed infections surging to 53,758, including 2,106 deaths.

Authorities have been gradually easing restrictions on movement, though schools and universities have remained shut since March.

The head of Egypt's doctors' syndicate had called for the exams to be postponed, private newspaper Al-Youm Al-Sabaa reported, and some parents expressed concern about their children's safety.

"Honestly I was worried, and am still worried, because someone in the class might have something (be infected) without having informed the administration on the way in," said Ayman Mahmoud, whose two sons were taking exams in Cairo.

Authorities said they had taken all necessary precautions and the education ministry offered students an option to postpone to the next academic year without any penalty.

End-of-year exams were canceled for younger pupils, who submitted online research papers instead.

As in other countries, many coronavirus cases in Egypt are believed to go unreported. The higher education minister cited a study on June 1 estimating that the actual number of cases could be up to five times higher than the reported figure.





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Egypt is committed to a diplomatic solution to Ethiopia's dam crisis: El-

SisiEgypt's El-Sisi orders army to be ready for missions abroad amid tensions over Libya

Long-dreaded virus increase hits Iraq as new cases soar

Author:

By SAMYA KULLAB and QASSIM ABDUL-ZAHRA | AP

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1592758147056404400

Sun, 2020-06-21 15:19

BAGHDAD: In Baghdad's vast exhibition grounds, masked workers lugged hospital beds into rows for makeshift coronavirus wards, as doctors and officials sounded the alarm Sunday over a surge in virus cases in the capital. The long-dreaded scenario is gripping the country amid a severe economic crisis brought on by plummeting oil prices. But with a widening budget deficit, doctors are running low on medical equipment, including key protective gear. A cap on new hires is also expected to strain the already over-stretched system.

As hospitals overflowed with patients, the Iraqi government announced temporary field hospitals will open throughout Baghdad, where infections are highest, to cope with the exponentially rising number of virus patients. Iraq's health system was already battered by years of conflict as well as poor infrastructure and lack of funds.

Work to erect the field hospital in the fair grounds began Saturday, and it will eventually provide beds for 400 men and 100 women. When the supply of hospital cots ran out, workers brought in metal-framed single beds.

"God willing, there will be future plans to increase the number of beds and field hospitals," said Mouhamed Bander, an engineer with the Al-Aqiq institution for charity. His organization set up the wards in tandem with the ministries of health and trade.

Virus cases began rising after the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, when families and friends typically get together to break the daylong fast. In less than a month, infections spiked seven-fold to over 29,000 as of Saturday, up from less than 4,000 at the end of May. Deaths also spiked, with over 1,013 killed among the confirmed cases, according to Health Ministry figures.

Among the recent dead was beloved Iraqi soccer star Ahmed Radhi, 56, who died Sunday due to virus complications.

The troubling increase in cases was due to more testing, but also a lack of public adherence to government measures, said Health Ministry spokesman Saif Al-Badr. Testing increased from nearly 4,000 a day last month to over 13,000 in recent days. By next week, he said 20,000 samples will be examined daily. Iraq took drastic measures to stem the virus's spread, including closing schools, restaurants, public gatherings and international borders.

Despite the additional field hospitals in place, doctors on the front lines fear these measures won't be enough to absorb the rising number of infections.

Doctors said the Health Ministry relies heavily on rapid blood tests to identify the first signs of infection. If these are positive, swabs are taken to confirm whether it's coronavirus using specialized testing kits. But blood tests are known to produce false positives.

"Its overcrowding hospitals," said a doctor in Baghdad. "It's chaos."

The Iraqi health care workers and health officials all spoke on condition of anonymity because of recent measures by the ministry prohibiting them from talking to reporters.

The manager of a hospital in the southern city of Karbala, which reached capacity this week, ordered staff not to conduct tests if symptoms weren't present because "there are no more beds to admit people," a doctor there said. Still, many with no apparent symptoms do have the virus.

All of the health workers interviewed said they'd purchased their own protective equipment because hospital supplies were running low.

"We are in a fog, we don't know what is going on," said the doctor in Karbala, who said they'd asked their hospital for gloves, masks and protective suits, but were told these had run out.

Doctors in Basra and Baghdad cited similar issues.

"The numbers concern us," said a doctor in a major Baghdad hospital dealing with virus patients. "And we are already overstretched."

A senior official said the Health Ministry is in dire need of funds. But a budget hasn't been approved by the government, which is grappling with severe shortfalls in the wake of falling oil prices. Iraq depends on crude exports to fund nearly 90% of state revenue. Allocations to the ministry are made on a month-to-month basis.

"We need a budget twice the size of the previous budget," said the official. But officials from the prime minister's office said funds allocated to the Health Ministry also weren't being spent efficiently.

"The problem is logistics management, the network is weak," the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity in line with regulations. The official said multiple layers of central purchasing committees within the Health Ministry and in directorates across provinces are responsible for making purchases, instead of allowing hospitals to source materials directly. The ministry is also unable to make new hires, which are essential to cope with the rising number of cases. Recent graduates have been asked to volunteer their services until a state budget is approved.

The move has sparked young doctors to lash out on social media.

"I graduated in 2019 and the Iraqi government has prevented me and more than 2,200 newly graduated Iraqi doctors from practicing medicine," said Dua'a Al-Jarjees.

Meanwhile, case numbers continue to rise.



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Saudi Arabia records 37 new deaths as life returns to normal under coronavirus