

# Sudan's women pursue soccer dream, challenging conservatives

Author:

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OMDURMAN, SUDAN: All her life, Elham Balatone wanted to play soccer – like her brothers, like the boys on her street. But in the Sudan where she grew up, women could be flogged for wearing pants, let alone soccer shorts. She heard all the reasons why she had to give up her dream. It's a Muslim country; the uniform is inappropriate; the sport was meant for men. She played anyway, wearing pants or putting on leggings underneath shorts. "There's nothing in this world that I love more than soccer. Please let me play," she says she told her family. For years, she and other women played largely in the shadows, sometimes on dirt pitches they cleaned themselves, often bouncing from one spot to another. The women finally took center stage when the world watched them play at a Khartoum stadium as the youth and sports minister and others celebrated Sudan's new, officially recognized women's soccer league. Balatone even had her family's blessings. But it is more than just a game. The women's league became a field of contention as Sudan grapples with the transition from three decades of authoritarian rule that disenfranchised women in particular.

Transitional authorities have taken some steps to roll back the legacy of ousted President Omar Bashir. In November, they overturned a notorious "public order" law that the prime minister said had been used as a "tool of exploitation, humiliation," resulting in "atrocities" against women and youth. Rights defenders call it a step in the right direction, but say the fight is far from over.

Some ultraconservatives, however, have been pushing back. Preacher AbdulHay Yousif and others have painted soccer as part of a battle for Sudan's identity.

"What religion, what Shariah, what manhood would allow a Muslim woman to appear before men ... with her arms, legs and some of her thighs exposed and then run before them," Yousif told worshippers in October, shortly after the league, made up of 20 teams, started.

"By God, these people have not come ... for economic development or social prosperity or scientific elevation. They have come to destroy religion and morals."

He also denounced the youth and sports minister, a woman, saying she "doesn't believe in what we believe in" and is a follower of "an apostate" – comments that sparked a legal battle between him and the minister.

Critics argue some conservatives are using an old playbook in Sudan: Weaponizing stringent religious views to target political opponents, control women and thwart change.

"Clearly this is part of an effort by Yousif to undermine the new government by stimulating a 'moral panic' regarding the subversion of gender roles. Partly it's about his religious views, but it is predominantly a patriarchal form of gender politics," said Willow Berridge, a lecturer in history at Newcastle University who has written about Sudanese extremists. Yousif and

his supporters “tend to occupy the most uncompromising end of the religious spectrum in Sudan.”



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More than 20 dead, many displaced after violence in Sudan's West Darfur

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## [What now awaits Turkey on the Libyan front?](#)

Author:

Sat, 2020-01-04 00:30

ANKARA: Turkish troops are expected to be sent to Libya to support the Tripoli-based Government of National Accord (GNA) against Libyan military strongman Khalifa Haftar, after Turkey's Parliament approved the motion for military deployment on Thursday evening. Insiders suggest some 200 Turkish marines will arrive in advisory, training and support roles. However, beyond grabbing international headlines, the deployment has security risks, logistical constraints and geographic limitations compared to Turkey's previous cross-border interventions in neighboring war zones such as Syria or Iraq.

For Karol Wasilewski, an analyst at the Warsaw-based Polish Institute of

International Affairs, Turkey will have to find a way to reconcile its interests and those of Russia in Libya.

"To be successful, it should probably gain broader support, because for now Turkey is isolated in its support for Faye Al-Serraj's GNA. I also think that securing manpower for this operation may be a challenge – Turkey may send its own troops for training, but I find it unlikely that it will send soldiers for combat missions," he told Arab News.

"Thus, it will have to continue sending Syrian rebels, and it seems they are unwilling to go, especially during (Syrian President Bashar) Assad's assault on Idlib," Wasilewski added.

Experts also caution against an influx of irregular troops and mercenaries into Libya which could escalate the situation in the ground.

Overt support for the GNA could also strain Turkish relations with other regional powers supporting Haftar.

Wasilewski anticipates that a proxy war is about to accelerate across the region. Egypt has already criticized Ankara's decision to deploy troops, and called on the international community to react.

"Technically speaking, Egypt has the capacity to complicate Turkey's operation in the sea, so there is one possible source of escalation," he said.

Cairo is not the only party Ankara must contend with – Russia, too, has taken an interest in Libya. Dmitry Novikov, a Russian lawmaker, told Interfax news agency that a Turkish military presence in Libya would "only deteriorate the situation," and Russian private military contractors have allegedly been drafted in to support Haftar's forces.

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**Karol Wasilewski**, a foreign affairs expert

All eyes are now on Russian President Vladimir Putin's expected visit to Ankara on Jan. 8, with Libya ranking on the top of the bilateral agenda. Galip Dalay, a visiting scholar at the University of Oxford, expects a sort of Astana-style deal around Tripoli after Putin's visit.

"But in return, Russia may expect some compromises from Turkey in Syria's opposition-held Idlib province, and try to get some advantages for the Assad regime in that zone," he told Arab News.

Ozgur Unluhisarcikli, Ankara office director of the German Marshall Fund of the United States, agrees.

"A significant deployment by Turkey to Libya would be contingent on tacit Russian approval based on an Astana-like process. This would not only increase Russian leverage over Turkey, but would probably come with a price tag. The price could be a new arms deal, concessions in Syria or anything that would benefit Russia," he told Arab News.

Turkish opposition members who voted against the motion have suggested Turkey should persuade the UN to deploy a peacekeeping mission to the country.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his US counterpart Donald Trump discussed the unfolding events in Libya in a phone call on Jan. 2. According to the readout issued by the White House: "President Trump pointed out that

foreign interference is complicating the situation in Libya,” with no details added about which countries Trump was referring to.



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## [Libya will confront and expel foreign forces, says Khalifa Haftar](#)

Sat, 2020-01-04 00:10

TRIPOLI: The leader of the Libyan National Army (LNA) Khalifa Haftar said on Friday his forces would “confront and expel” any foreign troops sent to the country.

His comments came after Turkey recently approved a parliamentary motion to deploy troops in Libya.

Haftar used his televised address to accuse Turkey, without naming it, of trying to “colonize” Libya, and said: “The friendly Turkish people must rise up against the adventurer who is pushing his army to death.”

The LNA leader also accused Turkey's president Recep Tayyip Erdogan of trying to ignite a conflict to target Middle East security and of attempts to "revive the Ottoman legacy in Libya and the region."



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Turkey parliament approves Libya military deployment

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## [The AI-powered app that reminds you to eat your veggies](#)

Fri, 2020-01-03 01:48

DUBAI: Doctors can diagnose nutritional deficiencies in several ways, going by symptoms such as pale skin, brittle nails, muscle weakness and fatigue.

Now a team of engineering students from Ajman University in the UAE has made it possible for anyone to discover what vitamins their body lacks and take corrective action simply by using a smartphone app.

Vita-Cam employs a combination of artificial intelligence (AI) models to evaluate a person's vitamin profile from photos of their eyes, lips, tongue and nails.

It then points out nutritional deficiencies and suggests corrective dietary changes and supplements. The app will not only tell you to eat your vegetables (and fruit) but explain why and what they can do for you.

Pending approval from the UAE Ministry of Health, it is expected to hit Google Play and iOS stores in early 2020.

"With recent advancements in research, the scientific community has become more aware of the relationship between vitamin deficiencies and many unfortunate health complications," said Ahmed Saif Eldeen Khalil, an electrical engineering graduate student who created the app with a team of colleagues.

"But costly and skin-invasive detection methods may discourage individuals from seeking medical checkups, which provides an opportunity for technology to fill the gap and formulate alternative methods."

His collaborators include fellow students Saif O.S. Alghlyayini and Mohamed Ait Gacem, and teaching assistant Wessam Shehieb.

Dubbed by Khalil a "portable doctor," the app has snatched a number of awards since its inaugural presentation earlier this year.

In March, the team behind Vita-Cam won the UAE hackathon, and in October, it was selected as the UAE's entry for the James Dyson Award, an international student design competition organized in 25 countries.

The winning team will receive 140,000 dirhams (\$38,114) in cash. The UAE is the only Middle Eastern country to be represented, with the winner to be announced this month.

At present, the app tests for a broad spectrum of B vitamins, vitamins C and A, iron, zinc, calcium and magnesium levels, Alghlyayini said, adding that the team hopes to expand the detection range by integrating more body parts.

As is common with AI solutions, the app will broaden its coverage of vitamins and diseases with increased use.

"Our solution is not a replacement for medical consultation, but it is a tool designed to boost the community's awareness of their nutritional needs and prevent health complications caused by untreated deficiencies," Shehieb said.

UN data points to micronutrient deficiencies affecting some two billion people worldwide, many of whom suffer acute and chronic illnesses as a result.

In the Middle East and North Africa, malnutrition affects the most vulnerable communities in the least developed countries, as well as in advanced nations where overweight individuals do not get enough of the right nutrients.

Aggravating the problem is the shortage of medical professionals – the World Health Organization says the regional average of 2.3 healthcare workers per 1,000 people is insufficient to achieve even primary healthcare coverage.

Technological solutions such as Vita-Cam could go a long way towards bridging the gap by giving patients easy access to diagnostic tools. Several apps for diagnosing different conditions are in development around the world, but only a couple target similar conditions.

Vita-Cam is among the most innovative solutions and certainly the least expensive one so far.

The prototype, which was developed in three stages over six months, is compatible with most contemporary smartphones, whose cameras meet the minimum resolution requirements for a successful health analysis, even in variable light, says Gacem.

“We also included a set of instructions for the user to remove any obstacles that may interfere with the analysis, such as nail polish and eyewear, as well as an explanation of the minimum light intensity required.”

The launch version of Vita-Cam will be free, but feature advertisements from dietary supplements brands.

Future versions could be sold to medical institutions, and the team is working to establish cooperation with hospitals and research facilities, including the college of medicine and pharmacology at Ajman University.

Prof. Mustahsan Mir, executive director of Ajman University, believes the app will be a game-changer and perhaps even save lives.

“Unlike many other healthcare gadgets, Vita-Cam will be accessible to audiences all over the world for a free diagnosis of vitamin deficiency,” Mir said.

“Early diagnosis is the key to better public health.”

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*This report is being published by Arab News as a partner of the Middle East Exchange, which was launched by the Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Global Initiatives and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to reflect the vision of the UAE prime minister and ruler of Dubai to explore the possibility of changing the status of the Arab region.*



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## [Lebanon bank staff body threatens strike over assaults, insults](#)

Author:

Fri, 2020-01-03 01:43

BEIRUT: A Lebanese body representing bank workers has threatened to go on strike over the insults and assaults branch staff are being subjected to as the country's financial woes continue.

A liquidity crunch has hit the Middle East country, where months of protests and a political impasse have deepened its economic crisis.

Banks have cracked down on the amount of dollars that can be taken out or transferred abroad. The Association of Banks in Lebanon calls these measures



“exceptional and temporary to ensure the continuity of the banking sector’s work and preserve the rights of depositors.”

But citizens are furious and there has even been violence in bank branches, leading the Council of the Federation of Syndicates of Bank Employees to threaten industrial action.

“The attacks are organized by people who claim to represent the civil movement (that started on Oct. 17) with the aim to distort the image of the banking sector, which is a clear violation of the reputation of the Lebanese state that is responsible for protecting all citizens from any threat against their safety and security.”

Some protesters stormed a bank in the city of Sidon to claim people’s money. They clashed with security forces and a number of people were injured. The Red Cross took them to hospital for treatment. There was a similar scene in a bank in the city of Nabatieh, where a bank employee tried to shut the door but protesters broke in and there was a fistfight.

Some protestors also organized a sit-in outside the Port of Beirut, considering it one of the “main sources of waste and corruption” in the country. Others rallied in front of the Port of Tripoli and chanted slogans demanding to “stop corruption and cleanse the port from those who are corrupt.”

The crisis is still awaiting a political solution for confidence to be restored, notably the formation of a new government.

On Wednesday night, activists on social media called for civil disobedience and road closures, in protest at what they considered “adopting the traditional quotas to form the government and naming ministers who belong to political parties.”

Moustafa Allouch, a member of the Future Movement’s political bureau, said there were several obstacles hindering the formation of the government and not just the issue of Sunni representation.

“The Sunni issue lies in the fact that the prime minister-designate was named without the approval of prominent political figures,” he told Arab News. “The Future Movement is not concerned with invitations to close roads and can no longer influence the decisions of people in the streets.”



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