

Hundreds of Sudanese women march against violence

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1574716069458202100

Mon, 2019-11-25 20:43

KHARTOUM: Hundreds of Sudanese women Monday marched in Khartoum to mark International Day for Eliminating Violence against Women, in the first such rally held in the northeast African country in decades.

Chanting "Freedom, peace, justice," the catchcry of the protest movement that led to autocrat Omar Al-Bashir's ouster in April, the demonstrators took to the streets in the Burri district, a site of regular anti-Bashir protests earlier this year.

Many women, dressed in orange, carried banners that read: "Women's revolution continues" and "We are the revolution, we are the change."

Many also carried banners such as "Stop rape of Darfuri Women," as they called for justice for female victims of the war in the western Sudan region. "There is an atmosphere of freedom now," said 21-year-old university student Fatima, as others behind her whistled, clapped and ululated, an AFP correspondent reported.

"There is less violence now, but we still need to change the laws that are against us."

Bashir seized power in an Islamist-backed coup in 1989 and since then the role of women had been severely restricted in Sudan.

During his 30-year-old rule, authorities implemented a strict moral code that activists said primarily targeted women, using harsh interpretations of Islamic sharia law.

Thousands of women were flogged and handed hefty fines under a controversial public order law for "indecent dressing" or consuming alcohol, which is banned in the country.

During the protests that rocked Bashir's regime, women were at the forefront, demanding his ouster and an end to violence against them.

The army deposed him on April 11, and his overthrow has triggered hope that laws encouraging violence against women be scrapped.

"I came to demand an end to violence against women," said, Adila Farouk as she marched in the capital's streets.

"I have been subjected to sexual harassment, but it is nothing compared to what other women have faced."



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Sudan's top Islamist politician sent to prison holding Bashir

[Libyan officials say US drone shot down by mistake](#)

Author:

Mon, 2019-11-25 21:45

CAIRO: Libyan forces trying to seize Tripoli shot down a US military drone over the capital by mistake last week, officials said Monday.

The US military said it lost the drone Thursday while it was assessing the security situation and monitoring extremist activity. US Africa Command declined to elaborate Monday, saying only that the incident was under investigation.

The self-styled Libyan National Army, led by Gen. Khalifa Haftar, launched an offensive to capture Tripoli in April after seizing much of eastern Libya from Islamic militants and other rivals in recent years. The country was

plunged into chaos when a NATO-backed uprising toppled longtime dictator Muammar Qaddafi in 2011.

The country is now split between a government in the east allied with Haftar and one in Tripoli, in the West, that is supported by the United Nations. The LNA is backed by Egypt and UAE, while the Tripoli-allied militias receive aid from Turkey and Qatar. The fighting has stalled in recent weeks, with both sides dug in and shelling one another along Tripoli's southern reaches. They have also carried out airstrikes and drone attacks.

A senior official in the LNA's general command said they mistook the US drone for a Turkish-made drone used by the Tripoli-allied militias. The LNA also downed an Italian drone southeast of Tripoli in recent days.

The official said the LNA apologized for shooting down the American drone and has "agreed with the Americans to coordinate their operations over Tripoli and its surrounding areas to avoid similar incidents in the future."

The LNA fighters did not share photographs of the US drone online as they usually do when they shoot down drones, including the Italian one last week, another official said.

The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to brief the media.

On Saturday, the LNA imposed a "no-fly zone" over Tripoli, saying that all flights over the capital city and nearby towns are "prohibited without prior coordination."

The Tripoli fighting forced the US military to pull out a small contingent of American troops who were in Libya in recent years, helping local forces combat the Daesh group and Al-Qaeda militants, as well as protecting diplomatic facilities.

In September, the US military said it carried out several airstrikes against IS, killing more than 40 militants in the first American strikes in the North African country in over a year.



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Libyan force imposes 'no-fly zone' amid fight for Tripoli
Libyan officials: Airstrike kills 7 workers in Tripoli

[Syria constitutional talks stuck on first day of new round](#)

Author:

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Mon, 2019-11-25 16:30

GENEVA: Damascus government delegates to a Syrian Constitutional Committee left the second UN-sponsored round before it began on Monday, in what opposition members said was a stalling tactic, and it was unclear whether talks would take place on Tuesday.

The talks are meant to be a step forward in what the United Nations says will be a long road to political rapprochement, followed by elections.

But experts question whether President Bashar Assad will be willing to cede much in any negotiations after his Russian- and Iranian-back forces recaptured large areas of the country in offensives against rebels and militants since 2015.

Syrian television reported that the government delegation left the United Nations in Geneva on Monday because they did not get answers to their proposal to specify a work schedule.

UN Special Envoy Geir Pedersen met the two co-chairs from the government and opposition sides and was continuing his consultations with a view to the panel's resumption, a UN spokeswoman said.

"The situation is clearly blocked," a Western diplomat said.

The opening round of the first Syrian peace talks in more than a year went "better than most people would have expected," Pedersen told reporters on Nov. 8 after an opening 10-day round.

Forty-five delegates who form the committee's drafting group arrived at the UN European headquarters on Monday. The group is made up of 15 members each from the government, opposition and civil society but they did not meet together.

"The Constitutional Committee of today was not held. And the reason is there is no agreement on the program or the schedule to be discussed for the meeting," Yahya Al-Aridi, a Syrian opposition spokesman, told reporters upon leaving.

“The joint head of the Constitutional Committee from the regime side presented an item which is considered by him to be a schedule, namely it included fighting terrorism, it included lifting of sanctions and the condemnation of what he called the Turkish invasion,” Aridi said, describing the government demands as “political.”

Opposition delegate Bassma Kodmani said her side had proposed an agenda last week for a structured discussion but had had no reply.

“Now the government delegate comes with an agenda saying they want to discuss ‘basic patriotic principles’ as a set of pre-conditions to the constitutional discussion,” Kodmani told Reuters.

The opposition was willing to discuss such principles as part of the constitutional work but not outside it, she said.

“The approach they (the government) suggest is designed to buy time,” Kodmani said.



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Chemical warfare watchdog hits back at Syria report doubts

Demonstrators target US Embassy near Beirut

Author:

Mon, 2019-11-25 01:11

BEIRUT: A group of pro-Hezbollah protesters marched on Sunday to the US Embassy in Awkar, 11 km from Beirut, to protest "the US meddling in Lebanon's affairs."

The Lebanese Army prevented the protesters from advancing to the road leading to the embassy after setting up a security cordon. Young men from the Communist Party, the Syrian Social Nationalist Party and some Palestinian refugees participated in the demonstration. They said that they are "with the resistance and against the US meddling expressed by former US Ambassador Jeffrey Feltman."

The demonstrators burned US and Israeli flags. Some tried to cut the barbed wire to break through the security cordon, which led to riots and was dispersed by internal security forces with tear gas.

The demonstration coincided with a social media campaign accusing the civil movement in Lebanon of "receiving US funding and directives." A Twitter user replied: "Would you allow us to demonstrate outside the Iranian Embassy?"

Another Twitter user said: "We support demonstrating outside every embassy that meddles in Lebanese affairs and outside the Iranian Embassy, which finances Hezbollah and provides them with arms in Lebanon and all Arab countries. Down with all embassies, and the decision remains for the free and honorable revolutionists."

Peaceful protests were active on Sunday in Beirut, Tripoli and Sidon to "reject the confiscation of maritime property." On Saturday night, A peaceful protest took place for the first time in Beirut's inner neighborhoods. A number of residents from pro-Hariri neighborhoods were present.

The protesters, who raised the Lebanese flag and balloons, chanted slogans condemning the difficult living and economic conditions. They demanded the speedy formation of a government that responds to the demands of the civil movement.

The civil movement continued to infiltrate trade union elections. Civil society candidates won the elections of the Lebanese Dental Association and the Order of Physiotherapists. This development reflects the mood of the voters, who used to vote for party candidates according to completed regulations. The first independent association election victory was achieved last Sunday when civil activist Melhem Khalaf was elected as president of the Beirut Bar Association, a position that was previously limited to those loyal to parties in power.

Two boys, aged 12 and 19, were arrested by security services in the mountainous town of Hammama for taking down the Free Patriotic Movement banner. This act sparked widespread condemnation, forcing security forces to release them hours after their arrest.

Caretaker Minister May Chidiac denounced the arrest of the children and said: "Unbelievable! What is happening? Are some of the allies of Bashar's regime reproducing what he did in Daraa? Doesn't the example of the children of Daraa, which sparked the war in Syria, mean anything to them? Fear God and be humble."

While the bodies involved in the civil movement called for a general strike on Monday to step up the pressure on the government to speed up meeting the movement's demands, the social and economic pressure on the Lebanese people continues in the presence of two US dollar exchange rates and measures taken by banks to prevent overseas transfers.

The president of the General Confederation of Trade Unions, Maroun Al-Khouli, warned against the arbitrary lay-offs affecting workers in the absence of any protection from the Ministry of Labor. He said: "Employers are now taking advantage of the financial and economic situation as well as the developments in the country and deducting 50 percent of the salaries of workers who have not been laid off."

Al-Khouli called on Caretaker Prime Minister Saad Hariri to have the cabinet intervene to "rehire all of those who have been laid off since Oct. 17, the start of the protests, in their jobs."

He added: "The caretaker government can decide on all issues that are not of a crucial critical nature, such as international agreements and treaties and comprehensive and long-term development plans. It must take responsibility for making decisions to stop the social massacre of thousands of laid-off workers."



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Hezbollah MPs step up attacks on US over Lebanon 'meddling' Order Benjamin Netanyahu to step aside after indictment, watchdog asks Israel's top court

[Will Turkey's drilling activities trigger EU sanctions?](#)

Author:

Mon, 2019-11-25 00:57

ANKARA: Amid a serious confrontation between Brussels and Ankara about the country's drilling program in the Eastern Mediterranean, Turkey kicked off the fourth round of drilling in the region on Nov. 23.

"We will keep drilling until we find oil," the country's energy minister, Fatih Donmez, said.

But the zone, which is believed to have rich hydrocarbon reserves, mostly clashes with the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) declared by Turkish Cyprus.

Turkey's presence in waters off the south of Cyprus with its own drilling vessels has irked Brussels and is deemed "illegal" by Washington.

Whether these renewed activities in waters off northeastern Cyprus may result in a wave of sanctions against Turkish companies is now the big question.

The sanctions consist of a travel ban to the EU and asset freezes on people and entities.

In early November, EU foreign ministers adopted a mechanism to sanction individuals or entities involved in "unauthorized drilling activities" in the Eastern Mediterranean.

In a bid to open five new deep-sea wells by next year, Turkey is currently conducting hydrocarbon exploration activities in the area with two drilling vessels, while Greek Cyprus recently allowed international energy companies, like France's Total and Italy's Eni, to extract gas in the same area with the full support of the EU and US.

As for the sanctions discussed by the EU in November, Gallia Lindenstrauss, research fellow at the Institute for National Security Studies in Tel Aviv, said they were to target specific individuals and legal entities related to Turkish violations of the Cypriot EEZ.

"Such sanctions are not what you would call 'biting' sanctions, and I do not expect them to cause a reverse in the Turkish position," she told Arab News.

However, Nicolò Sartori, an energy and defense analyst at Rome's Institute for International Affairs, doesn't believe EU sanctions on drilling players – i.e. ship companies and owners – are likely to discourage Turkish activities, which are more politics-based rather than business and economic-based.

"I think that the only way to solve the issue is to find a political compromise on Cyprus, even though I am afraid that in these conditions a solution as such is quite unrealistic," he told Arab News.

The simmering Cypriot conflict is still a hot topic for any drilling attempt from the Turkish side.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres is also trying to use his leverage. Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot leaders will meet on Monday to restart reunification talks, and energy is set to be high on the table. Ankara does not support the talks.

Turkish Cypriots claim that the offshore hydrocarbon and oil resources of the island should be jointly owned by Greek and Turkish Cypriots, which will provide both communities with economic benefits.

For Lindenstrauss, "resolving the Cyprus issue has long been on the agenda of the international community, and there have been numerous unsuccessful attempts to resolve it. The good thing about these past attempts is that many of the parameters of resolving the conflict have been determined."

“Also, the more aggressive stance of Turkey might push the Greek Cypriots to compromise on the issue of the continued presence of small Turkish forces on the island – if Turkey is circling the island with its forces, and clearly the Turkish navy is ready to act at any time, the presence of Turkish forces on the island seems mainly symbolic. This will be a hard compromise for the Greek Cypriots, but this is an area in which the Turks have been very adamant,” she said.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan recently threatened to send captured Daesh suspects to Europe if Brussels adopted sanctions over drilling activities.

“You should reevaluate your approach toward Turkey, which has so many Daesh members in its prisons and also in Syria. These doors can be opened and Daesh people can be sent to you. Don’t try to intimidate Turkey about the developments in Cyprus,” he said.

There are believed to be 1,180 Daesh members in Turkish prisons.

Mona Sukkarieh, a political risk consultant and co-founder of Middle East Strategic Perspectives, said no designations have been made so far about potential sanctions, but the legal framework made adopting such measures possible in future.

Sukkarieh thinks the EU decision did not come suddenly, and some Europeans are indeed conflicted between protecting the rights of an EU member state and European interests in general, and their position vis-à-vis Turkey, which, despite everything, remains a NATO partner and an important player in the Levant.

“The EU has repeatedly warned Turkey over the past two years to stop exploratory activities offshore Cyprus, but Turkey is defiant and considers that it is acting within its rights,” she told Arab News.

Turkey’s measures do not come as a surprise for Sukkarieh, who underlined that Turkish authorities usually announce their intentions in advance.

“Since 2008, these measures have been gradual in nature and consistent with their announced objectives: Ankara started by sending warships to monitor, sometimes even harass, surveyors, then they moved to conducting seismic surveys.

“In 2018, the Turks prevented an Eni-commissioned drillship from reaching its drilling destination. And, more recently, they initiated drilling operations in areas that are either claimed by Turkey as being part of its continental shelf or in blocs awarded to Turkey’s main oil exploration company, Turkish Petroleum, by the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, some of which overlap with blocs delineated by the Republic of Cyprus.”



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Turkey, EU find common ground in counterterrorism Turkey to repatriate most of 287 Daesh detainees by the year-end