

Harassed Moroccan women shun beach for new Rabat pool

Author:

Thu, 2019-08-15 21:44

RABAT: Moroccan women seeking to escape harassment at the beach are flocking to Rabat's vast new public swimming pool instead, but many still eschew swimsuits for fear of voyeurs and disapproving glances.

"Here, there is no harassment and even swearing is forbidden," said Sanae, a 36-year-old mother who traveled 150 km to take advantage of the new "Grande Piscine" complex, opened on July 4.

"Bathing at the beach is no longer fun for a woman," she said.

"I was harassed just because I was wearing a bathing suit. Fortunately my husband was there."

Amal, an 18-year-old student, came to cool off by the pool with her girlfriends. "The beaches have become unpleasant," she said

Thousands of people are thronging the expansive artificial pools carved into the rocky outcropping of the urban corniche in the Moroccan capital, part of a vast development project dubbed "Rabat, City of Light."

The aquatic space of 17,000 sq. meters recorded an average of 5,000 visitors per day since its opening, according to an official on the project.

Entrance costs 10 dirhams (\$1) – an affordable rate even for less advantaged families that spend summer in the city.

In an increasingly rare sight in Morocco, both young men and women swim and play in the water, while speakers blare out popular music.

It is mainly the sense of security that attracts women in particular: Some 60 security guards and plainclothes police patrol the site, ensuring decorum.

Yet even with the oversight, women are not completely at ease.

Sanae opted to wear shorts and a tank top "because there are a lot of voyeurs."

She reserves her one-piece swimsuit "for the wild beaches in Morocco or for abroad."

Like her, many feel "more free" at the pool than at the beach, but prefer to stay clothed and on the deck chairs while their children play in the water under the supervision of lifeguards.

Considered a key tourist asset in Morocco, the numerous beaches on the North

African country's Mediterranean and Atlantic coasts are less inviting for women.

Bathing suits, regardless of their coverage, are considered by some to be offensive, even a sign of "debauchery".

To swim without the risk of harassment, one must get up early, seek out isolated spots or pay for access to private areas.

"The phenomenon appeared on certain Casablanca beaches in the 90s... Public opinion did not take it seriously and did not react," sociologist Soumaya Naamane Guessous said.

For her, "it's a regression mainly related to the spread of Salafist ideas imported from abroad".

Last summer, a Facebook page called on men to ban women "from going out in indecent attire".

A campaign was launched on social media to hit back, with women posting photos in bathing suits and using the hashtag #beafreewoman.

"All the men look. It's annoying. We're not comfortable", said Leila, 36, who came with her friend Khadija, 50, on vacation from France.

They too had eschewed bathing suits while by the pool.

Anouar, 32, came from Tangier with his wife – who wears a veil – and his daughter.

In his opinion, it is women wearing "disrespectful attire that harass men and families".

"The trend has become so conservative and so commonplace that women in bathing suits are subject to critical looks or even degrading comments from other women", Guessous said.

"It's a mentality that has to change", the feminist activist said, adding that it's an attitude that "affects public space in general" in Morocco.

Despite having a reputation for tolerance compared with the rest of the Arab-Muslim world, a study by UN Women in 2017 showed that, for Moroccans, "women who dress provocatively deserve to be harassed".

The number of women professing this opinion – 78 percent – surpassed that of men, at 72 percent.

A law on violence against women adopted in February 2018 included penalties for harassment for the first time, but implementation remains rare.

In early August, a schoolteacher was arrested after he called on social media for three young Belgian women volunteers to be beheaded for wearing shorts while working in the south of the country. Turkey has repeatedly threatened to

launch an assault east of the Euphrates river against the YPG, which it says is a “terrorist” offshoot of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), which has waged an insurgency inside Turkey since 1984.

But Washington has worked closely with the YPG in the fight against Daesh.

Little is known about the size of the safe zone and how it will work, but Cavusoglu said there would be observation posts and joint patrols.

He said US President Donald Trump had previously promised it would be 32-km wide.

Turkey previously conducted two offensives into Syria, against Daesh and the YPG, in 2016 and 2018.



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“Bittersweet victory” for Moroccan women facing domestic violence, activists
Social media rescue Morocco’s last woman potters

Israeli police say officers kill Palestinian teenager

Author:

Associated Press

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Thu, 2019-08-15 17:21

JERUSALEM: Israeli police say officers shot dead a Palestinian teen and seriously wounded another after they allegedly stabbed a policeman outside a flashpoint Jerusalem holy site.

Police Spokesman Micky Rosenfeld said Thursday the officer was moderately wounded in the stabbing in Jerusalem's Old City. He said the two assailants, both minors, were shot by police officers at the scene.

The Palestinian Red Crescent said a guard from the Islamic Waqf, which manages the nearby compound, also suffered a gunshot wound and was hospitalized.

Thursday's stabbing took place just days after Israeli police clashed with Muslim worshippers at the contested site, known to Jews as the Temple Mount and to Muslims as the Noble Sanctuary. The compound is the holiest site for Jews and the third holiest in Islam, after Makkah and Madinah.



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Israeli police say officers kill Palestinian teenager
Impoverished Gazans lament stagnant livestock market

[Turkish drones start operating in northern Syria, says ministry](#)

Author:

Wed, 2019-08-14 23:03

ISTANBUL: Turkish drones have started operating in northern Syria where Washington and Ankara have agreed to create a safe zone, Turkey's Defense Ministry said on Wednesday.

Turkey and the US agreed last week to set up a joint operations center regarding the safe zone to be established in northern Syria. No agreement has been announced on key details such as the size of the zone and the command structure of joint patrols that would be conducted there.

FASTFACT

Turkey and the US agreed last week to set up a joint operations center regarding the safe zone to be established in northern Syria.

A six-person US delegation arrived in the southern Turkish province of Sanliurfa on Monday to work on the establishment of the operations center. The Defense Ministry said in a statement on Wednesday that work was continuing to make the joint operations center in Sanliurfa operational. Turkish drones had started carrying out work in the area where the safe zone will be created, but did not provide further information on the drones' operations, it added.

Washington and Ankara have been at odds over plans for northeastern Syria, where US allies on the ground in the battle against Daesh militants.



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Regime forces advance toward key town in northwest Syria
Assad regime forces gain ground in deadly Idlib push

[Regime forces advance toward key town in northwest Syria](#)

Author:

Wed, 2019-08-14 22:47

NEAR SARMADA/SYRIA: Syrian regime forces pushed further into an opposition-held bastion in the country's northwest region on Wednesday, inching toward a key town following months of deadly bombardment, a monitor said.

After eight years of civil war the Idlib region, controlled by Syria's opposition, is the last major stronghold of opposition to Bashar Assad's regime.

Airstrikes and rocket fire by the regime and its ally Russia have pounded Idlib for more than three months, killing hundreds and displacing tens of thousands.

In the south of the stronghold, almost all residents of Khan Sheikun – which lies on a key highway coveted by the regime – have left the town.

The road in question runs through Idlib, connecting regime-held Damascus with the northern city of Aleppo, which was retaken by loyalists from opposition in December 2016.

After a week of ground advances, Assad's forces were just a few kilometers away from the town on Wednesday, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

"Regime forces are now 4 km from Khan Sheikun to the west, with nothing between them and it but fields," Observatory chief Rami Abdel Rahman said.

HIGHLIGHT

- Airstrikes and rocket fire by the regime and its ally Russia have pounded Idlib for more than three months, killing hundreds and displacing tens of thousands.
- Assad's forces were just a few kilometers away from the town on Wednesday.

To the east, pro-Assad forces are battling to control a hill just 6 km from the town, the head of the Britain-based Observatory said.

Airstrikes pounded the area, with a Russian warplane killing a civilian in the area of Maaret Hurma in Idlib province, said the Observatory, which relies on sources inside Syria for its information.

Clashes on Wednesday killed 14 members of the regime forces, as well as 20 opposition fighters, it said.

State news agency SANA on Wednesday said army troops had taken several villages from the opposition in the area west of Khan Sheikun.

AFP correspondents have reported seeing dozens of families flee fighting over the past few days, heading north in trucks stacked high with belongings.

On the highway not far from the Turkish border on Wednesday, a family was driving north in their pickup truck.

"We want to save ourselves," said Abu Ahmad, 55, behind the wheel on the road near the town of Sarmada.

"We left our sheep, we left our homes, and we fled," he said, dressed in a long white robe.

Sitting beside him, his wife Umm Ahmad said they had left almost everything behind.

"Our land is spilling with grapes and figs," she said of the family farm near

the town of Maaret Al-Noman.

A buffer zone deal brokered by Russia and Turkey last year was supposed to protect the Idlib region's 3 million inhabitants from an all-out regime offensive, but it was never fully implemented.

An alliance led by fighters from Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS) took full control of the anti-Assad stronghold in May.

Regime and Russian airstrikes and shelling since late April have killed 820 civilians, according to the Observatory.

The UN says dozens of health centers as well as schools have been targeted.

Humanitarian workers have warned that any full-blown ground attack on Idlib would cause one of the worst humanitarian disasters of Syria's war.

The conflict has killed more than 370,000 people and displaced millions at home and abroad since starting with the brutal repression of anti-regime protests in 2011.

Regime forces have taken back large parts of the country from opposition fighters and militants with Russian military backing since 2015.

But Idlib, nearby areas controlled by the Turkey-backed opposition, and a large swathe of the northeast held by Kurds remain beyond its reach.

Analyst Nawar Oliver said that, with the ongoing airstrikes and ground advances, regime forces aimed not only to retake the road running through Idlib, but also pile pressure on HTS and allied fighters.

Regime forces "won't hesitate to bite off or control everything they can," said Oliver, an expert at the Turkey-based Omran Center for Strategic Studies.

They want to "impose a new reality on the region, the rebels, and their Turkish ally, and to use it as a tool or weapon in any current or future negotiations," he said.



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Syrian rebels shoot down government warplane in northwest
Clashes kill nearly 60 fighters in northwest Syria

[How to tackle Basra's water problems](#)

Wed, 2019-08-14 21:42

DUBAI: It was dubbed the "Venice of the Middle East" for its network of waterways that invited comparisons to the Italian city. But Basra is today emblematic of almost everything that is wrong with Iraq. Few maladies, though, reflect the depth of the rot in the country's system like the port city's acute water crisis.

Situated where the Euphrates and Tigris rivers merge near the Gulf at Iraq's southern tip, Basra is home to 2.5 million people but lacks an effective water treatment system. Be it the Shatt Al-Arab River or the canals, Basra's water resources have fallen victim to "decades of pollution, mismanagement and corruption," according to a recent report by the Human Rights Watch (HRW).

The study was prompted by a creeping sense over the past two decades that the concept of human rights is not relevant to the average citizen of fragile

states such as Iraq. Belkis Wille, a senior Iraq researcher in the HRW's Middle East and North Africa division, said a desire to counter that impression inspired her to conduct the investigation.

"I wanted to emphasize to Iraqis that the issues they care about on a daily basis are human rights issues, so I was waiting to come across the right opportunity to drive home that point," Wille said.

In Basra's water crisis, which has blighted large expanses of southern Iraq, she found a direct connection between human rights violations and corruption. "In Iraq, no matter what their religion or ethnic identity, everyone agrees that corruption is one of the biggest problems facing the country, with deeply damaging consequences," she said. "So I wanted to look at it from a rights perspective."

In the 1960s, Basra had an advanced sanitary infrastructure, but for almost 30 years, governments have failed to provide safe, drinkable water to much of the population. Tempers flared in the summer of last year when water-borne disease outbreaks led to the hospitalization of tens of thousands of residents. Protests erupted in the city once against this summer as anger over deteriorating services and economic hardship boiled over.



A decrease in the amount of water flowing to the Shatt Al-Arab and its canals resulted in higher levels of sewage, industrial pollution and water salinity.
(AFP)

Wille says what lies at the root of Basra's chronic water crisis is not one but a number of different factors: Reduced water flow, seawater intrusion, pollution and mismanagement of waterways.

“It rained and snowed a lot over Christmas and early this January, so that means the water situation across Iraq this year is theoretically better, with more water flowing through the waterways.

“This means Iraq should not have as much seawater intrusion as before, so water pollution should therefore also be reduced,” she said.

The reality of the situation is another matter.

“We know in terms of global trends of low rainfall and increasing temperatures, this means that when there is another year of low rainfall, then the crisis will be worse,” Wille said.

Until the early 1980s, Basra was a magnet for Middle Eastern tourists, but these days an estimated 338,400 residents of the city live in informal housing spread throughout the oil-rich governorate. These homes are excluded from the formal water and sanitation networks, making them water-insecure.

According to the UN, almost 4,000 individuals in the Basra governorate had to leave their homes in August 2018. This was most likely due to poor access to adequate supplies of potable water, although a causal link between the two has not been proven.

What is known is that last year, there was a decrease in the amount of water flowing to the Shatt Al-Arab and its canals from rivers upstream, which resulted in higher levels of sewage, agricultural, industrial pollution and salinity in the water.

Prior to 2018, Basra had experienced water-related health emergencies in 2009 and 2015, but, according to the HRW report, local and federal authorities failed to properly address the underlying causes or establish procedures to protect residents before a new crisis arose. For example, during the 2018 crisis, authorities did not adequately alert residents to the dangers posed by poor water quality.

Iraqi ministries did cooperate with Wille’s investigation, but the report also said that the results of tests of water samples from the Shatt Al-Arab and treatment plants after the protests of 2018 summer were not made public. HRW was told by all federal and local authorities that the results and reports were confidential.

With the help of satellite imagery, Wille’s research found that two major spills had occurred in 2018 that leaked oil into the Shatt Al-Arab in central

Basra.

INNUMBERS

118,000

People hospitalized in the summer months of 2018 and 2019 because of water contamination.

4,000

People who left their homes in August 2018 over suspected water issues.

2009

Year that saw water-related health emergencies in Basra.

2015

Had the most health crises from water contamination.

2

Major undeclared oil spills that fouled waters of Shatt Al-Arab River in 2018.

Again, the government did not apprise the public of the oil spills, even though many residents had complained about a gasoline smell in their tap water and some were even able to set the water aflame.

In the process, the HRW report was able to identify a glaring drawback of Iraq's regulatory regime: The absence of a public health advisory to inform residents when drinking water is contaminated, how to reduce harm and protocols for government officials to respond to advisories and lift them.

"Basra residents now apparently risk illness from just using the water to wash their food or themselves, and the authorities have not enforced standards even for water for these purposes," Wille said.

"The lack of sufficient freshwater has also cost Basra its title as the country's biggest producer of dates. Farmers have been irrigating their farmland with the saline water from the Shatt Al-Arab for many years now, killing off most of their crops and livestock as a result."

Her next step will be to meet officials in Baghdad in September and push for the adoption of the three pages of recommendations from the HRW report. Later in the month, she intends to hold meetings with officials of European countries that may want to contribute to the amelioration of Iraq's water situation.

"Our primary recommendation is for the establishment of an inter-ministerial body that includes local authorities," Wille said, adding that the current arrangement "allows the federal government (in Baghdad) to blame the authorities in Basra for everything." Although she is not sure about the political will to implement the primary recommendation, Wille is not giving up hope. "The creation of such a body would be the first step towards implementing the report's recommendations," she said. "At the moment, even if the government adopts them, it does not have the buy-in to implement them."

After years of occupation, sectarian strife, misrule and underinvestment, few expect Basra to regain its fabled beauty any time soon. But some tentative steps towards a resolution of the ongoing water crisis do not seem like an unreasonable demand.



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Quarter of world's population facing extreme water stress
How Saudi Arabia plans to meet the water needs of holy sites