

Millions hungry as drought grips Somalia

Author:

Mon, 2019-05-06 20:54

NAIROBI: Drought has left nearly two million Somalis in desperate need of food, a humanitarian agency warned Monday, as poor rainfall pushes communities to the brink across East Africa.

The Norwegian Refugee Council said hundreds of thousands of children were already suffering malnutrition in Somalia and millions had abandoned their homes in search of food in the arid, conflict-torn nation.

"The humanitarian situation has deteriorated at an alarming rate as a result of the drought," Victor Moses, the council's country director in Somalia, said in a statement.

The failure of the so-called long rains that usually sweep East Africa between March and May has caused widespread crop failures and heaped immense pressure on livestock-dependent communities in the greater region.

Somalia is enduring its third-driest long rains season since 1981.

The UN estimates that 1.7 million people are going hungry, with that figure expected to grow by another half a million come July.

Last week, the UN said 44,000 Somalis had left their homes in rural areas for urban centers just this year – joining the estimated 2.6 million internally-displaced people across the country.

Close to a million children will need treatment for malnutrition in 2019.

"The deterioration has come much earlier than seen over the last decades and before affected communities could recover from the most recent drought," the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs said.

But the hunger crisis could extend well beyond Somalia, with the entire Horn of Africa region at risk from drought and extreme weather exacerbated by climate change.

Almost 80 percent of the population in the Horn depend on farming for a living, said the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization.

The Famine Early Warning Systems Network said in April that if rains did not materialize in May "the season will have failed and the impact on food security outcomes would be more severe than currently anticipated."

The US-funded network warned more than 42 million people in Ethiopia, South Sudan, Somalia, Sudan, Kenya, Uganda and nearby Yemen were currently facing crisis levels of food insecurity.

In Kenya, considered the most dynamic economy in the region, the World Bank in April cited the impact of drought when trimming its growth forecast for the country in 2019.



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5 million in Somalia don't get enough food, UN report says
US military, aid group at odds over Somalia civilian deaths

[Fighting kills 43 in Syria's northwest: monitor](#)

Mon, 2019-05-06 19:27

BEIRUT: Clashes between Syrian government forces and militants on Monday killed 43 fighters in the country's northwest, where the regime and its Russian ally have stepped up bombardment in the past few days, a monitor said.

Militants also fired rockets at a Russian air base in the region but were

repelled with the attack causing no casualties or damage, the Russian defense ministry said in a statement.

Twenty-two pro-government fighters were among those killed in fierce fighting in the northern countryside of Hama province, said the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

Twenty-one militants, including members of Al-Qaeda's former Syrian branch, Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS), and its ally the Turkistan Islamic Party, were also killed, the war monitor said.

The fighting came as regime forces advanced on two villages and a strategic hilltop in the region, it said.

State news agency SANA said Syrian troops launched "intensive operations," targeting supply lines and areas where armed groups operate in northern Hama and neighboring Idlib.

The region held by HTS has faced intensifying bombardment in the past month, prompting a new wave of displacement.

Earlier Monday, five civilians were killed in shelling and air strikes on Idlib and neighboring areas by Syrian government forces and their Russian allies, said the Observatory.

An AFP photographer in Idlib saw several houses completely destroyed by recent attacks.

One man who lost his wife, his daughter-in-law, and his two grandchildren during shelling overnight prepared a pickup truck to relocate surviving members of his family.

"I don't know where I'm going," he told AFP.

More than 140,000 civilians have been forced to flee attacks since February, Refugees International said on Monday.

"It is difficult to overstate the urgency of this looming humanitarian disaster if nothing is done to protect these people," the non-governmental organization said in a statement.

Escalated attacks have hit schools and medical facilities, according to the UN.

Since 28 April, at least seven health care facilities have reportedly been struck, including four in Hama and three in Idlib, said David Swanson of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

Russia and rebel-backer Turkey in September inked a buffer zone deal to prevent a massive regime offensive on the Idlib region, near the Turkish border.

But the region of some three million people has come under increasing bombardment since HTS took full control of it in January.

A statement by the Russian defense ministry said that the Hmeimim air base in Latakia province neighboring Idlib was the target Monday of rocket fire.

"Altogether there were 36 rockets fired," during two separate attacks which were "repelled by air defense systems," it said.

The civil war in Syria has killed more than 370,000 people and displaced millions since it began with the bloody repression of anti-government protests in 2011.



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Warplanes strike hospital in Syria's rebel-held Idlib
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[Turkey's high election board rules in favor of re-run of Istanbul election](#)

Mon, 2019-05-06 19:31

ANKARA: Turkey's High Election Board on Monday scrapped Istanbul election results showing a painful defeat for President Tayyip Erdogan, responding to his AK Party's calls for a re-run of the vote in a decision that hit the lira and raised charges of conflicts of interest.

While the board, known as YSK, had not yet made a statement, the decision was announced by state-run Anadolu agency and a representative of the ruling AK Party (AKP), Recep Ozel, who said a second vote would take place on June 23. Turkey's main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP), which in the

initial vote on March 31 narrowly won the mayoralty in the country's largest city, called the ruling a "plain dictatorship."

The AKP had appealed for an election re-run after initial results and a series of recounts showed it had lost control of Istanbul for the first time in 25 years.

It was a shock loss for Erdogan who in the 1990s served as the city's mayor and had campaigned hard ahead of the nationwide local vote, his first electoral test since last year's sharp currency crisis tipped the Turkish economy into recession.

The Turkish lira weakened after Ozel, the AKP's representative on the YSK, tweeted the decision, and it was at 6.1075 against the dollar at 1730 GMT and on track for its worst day in more than a month.

The lira has tumbled some 10 percent since a week before the initial election. Suspense over the ruling had left investors worried that weeks of additional campaigning would divert funds and attention from addressing economic reforms.

It was unclear how the CHP and its supporters would respond to a re-run given suspicions over the YSK's political independence from the AKP, which in recent years has centralized power in the presidency away from the central bank, courts and other institutions.

"It is illegal to win against the AK Party," CHP Deputy Chairman Onursal Adiguzel said on Twitter. "This system that overrules the will of the people and disregards the law is neither democratic, nor legitimate. This is plain dictatorship."

The AKP also lost the mayor's office in the capital Ankara. With its nationalist MHP allies, it wanted the Istanbul results annulled and cited irregularities that affected the outcome, which put it some 13,000 votes behind CHP.

On Saturday Erdogan said "it's clear" the vote was marred by controversy and urged the YSK to "clear its name" with a re-run.

Istanbul's new CHP mayor, Ekrem Imamoglu, officially took office last month after a smattering of partial and full recounts were completed across the city. Since then, prosecutors launched probes into the alleged irregularities and called 100 polling station workers in for questioning as suspects.



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Turkey's Erdogan calls for Istanbul vote to be re-run
Erdogan's AKP challenges Istanbul results in Turkey election

[Mesaharati: An ancient career fights extinction in digital age](#)

Author:

Sun, 2019-05-05 23:02

CAIRO: A mesaharati is a person who wakes others up before dawn in order to eat before their fast during Ramadan.

The job has been around for generations, and despite the technological revolution, it is an honored tradition that continues to this day.

The Al-Jabarti family, for instance – from which the great historian Abdul Rahman Al-Jabarti is descended – is famous for having members perform the task.

Its origins, though, are disputed. Historian Abdelmajid Abdul Aziz said mesaharati first appeared in Egypt during the Fatimid dynasty, arguably the most decorated period for Ramadan celebrations.

According to 15th century Egyptian historian Mohammed bin Iyas, the profession began in the days of the Caliph Bi'amr Allah, who commanded citizens to sleep immediately after the Taraweeh prayer.

He would then send out his soldiers in the early hours, knocking on doors and shouting before dawn prayers began, to wake people for suhoor.

Abdul Aziz said that the Egyptian Governor Ibn Ishaq was the first to individually perform the task professionally in 832 AH (1432 CE). He would walk from the city of Fustat to the mosque at Amr ibn Al-Aas, and call out "O worshipers of Allah, eat. Suhoor is a blessing."

That tradition has continued until modern times, lasting almost 600 years.

But now, it is facing extinction as fewer people are drawn to take up the role, and technology supplants it. 'Am Magdy, a 59-year-old mesaharati, told Arab News that his work begins from the last day of the month of Shaaban all the way until after Eid Al-Fitr.

He has performed the task annually for more than 40 years, having inherited the role from his father, and knows the names of all his neighbors so as to call each one personally before dawn.

Magdy said that he thought of leaving the profession, though, because of the spread of television and the extension of programs into the early hours of the morning, but his neighbors and children asked him to continue.

Sometimes he is accompanied by a group of children as he roams the streets, echoing phrases that have been recalled over centuries such as: "Wake up sleeping person, there is only one God, it is time for suhoor fasting people."

He also rhythmically bangs a drum called a "baza," which according to him is loud enough to wake up a whole neighborhood. After Eid Al-Fitr prayers, he then passes through the areas he walks one last time to collect money for his efforts throughout Ramadan.

But he is unsure whether his sons will inherit the task as he did. "My children are not interested in the profession. I used to take them with me when they were young, and they would be so happy to see their friends responding to our calls. But over time they lost this joy and became preoccupied with their work, and some even advised me to stop practicing it myself," he said.



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Fasting under the northern light: How Muslims in Scandinavia cope with long Ramadan days
King Salman addresses Saudi Arabia to mark the start of Ramadan

[UN calls for a week-long humanitarian truce in Libya](#)

Sun, 2019-05-05 19:43

TRIPOLI: The United Nations called on Sunday for a week-long humanitarian truce in Libya where forces loyal to the eastern-based military commander Khalifa Haftar have been waging an offensive to take control of Tripoli for four weeks.

In a statement the UN Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) urged the warring sides to

implement a a truce starting Monday morning at 4 a.m. local time to coincide with the beginning of the Muslim holy fasting month of Ramadan. "UNSMIL calls on all parties to deliver of humanitarian aid to those in need and to ensure the freedom of movement for civilians during this truce," UNSMIL said in a statement. There was no immediate comment from Hafta's Libyan National Army (LNA) force nor from the internationally recognized government in the capital. Artillery shelling could be heard on Sunday coming from southern outskirts where the LNA has been trying to breach defenses by Tripoli forces. The fighting has displaced around 50,000 people, the UN has said.



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Daesh attack on Haftar camp in south Libya kills 9 soldiers Fighting rages overnight in Libyan capital