

Unprecedented flooding hits Iran, forces evacuations

Tue, 2019-03-26 22:30

GENEVA/LONDON: Heavy flooding continued in Iran on Tuesday as many provinces geared up for days of waterlogged misery and authorities warned of possible floods in the capital Tehran as well the oil-rich south. President Hassan Rouhani promised compensation for all financial losses and called for the armed forces to help in flooded areas. "I ask the army and the Revolutionary Guards to help with removing the water and with engineering work in which they have significant capabilities and tools," Rouhani was quoted as saying on Tuesday at a meeting of a government crisis group.

Rouhani's hardline rivals have accused the government of doing too little, too late.

In a meeting broadcast on state television, the president said: "When a city goes under water because of a flood and neighbourhoods face this problem, removing the water is a difficult, heavy task."

The head of the judiciary, Ebrahim Raisi, said that officials who mishandled the disaster and caused the death of civilians could face prosecution, Fars news agency reported.

At least 23 people have been confirmed dead, officials said, and more than 200 sustained injuries.

The flood has blocked a highway in eastern Tehran, state media said.

Videos posted on social media showed cars driving in flooded roads in southeast districts of the capital. Reuters could not verify the authenticity of the videos.

Other horrific footage of [#FlashFloods](#) in Iran

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pic.twitter.com/JzhhS602LY

– Windy (@windyforecast) [March 26, 2019](#)

Iran is celebrating the Nowrouz new year holidays, a time when many families travel around the country, but police asked people to avoid unnecessary journeys.

State television said several villages near rivers and dams in different provinces had been evacuated.

Tens of thousands of people have been displaced, and thousands put in emergency shelters provided by the government, state media said.

The country's crude oil pipelines have avoided damage from flooding and the transfer of oil is taking place normally, Iranian Oil Pipeline and Telecommunication Co director Abbasali Jafarinasab was quoted as saying by the oil ministry's SHANA news website.

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said in a statement that it was ready to offer help to Iran, but “challenges caused by unilateral sanctions will affect the UN response and the accountability of UN to deliver the appropriate support”. U.S. President Donald Trump last year abandoned a 2015 nuclear agreement between Iran and six world powers, and reimposed sanctions on Tehran.



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Flash floods in southern Iran kill at least 17, injure 74
Tehran claims 'successful test' of new 1,350km cruise missile

[Film cameras start to roll again in Damascus studios](#)

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1553611591374515100

Tue, 2019-03-26 13:00

DAMASCUS: On a long-disused film set outside Damascus featuring mud houses, palm trees, alleyways and camels, actors in flowing robes are making a television series that the producers say is part of a gradual revival of their industry.

Like most other sectors of the economy in Syria, the film and television business has been hit hard by a war that has killed half a million people, forced millions from their homes and laid waste to swathes of the country since 2011.

Any films or TV series made by Syrian production houses during the war were rarely bought by the customers in the Gulf and elsewhere that once made up an important part of their market. Actors and directors moved abroad. Studios lay silent.

However, fighting around Damascus ended last year after a series of massive government offensives, reflecting a wider increase in state control around the country, and Syrian studios are starting to work again.

Ziad Al-Rayes, head of the television producers' association in Syria, said it was again possible to film comfortably and effectively.

"Here you can find four seasons. Here you have mountains, desert, valleys and snow," he said. It is cheaper to film in Syria than elsewhere, he added.

The television series being produced outside Damascus is about a Sufi cleric called Muhiy Al-Din bin Arabi, and is set in historic Makkah, the holiest city of Islam located in modern-day Saudi Arabia.

It is being made to air in the United Arab Emirates, the producers said.

Television series are also being made for broadcast in Lebanon and in Syria's two closest allies Russia and Iran, the producers' association said.

The film set was part of a large studio lot that was unused for most of the war and shows signs of disrepair. A nearby set in the same studio is made up like an ancient Roman city.

During the war many famous Syrian actors left the country to work in other Arab states. One well-known actor, 41-year-old Qays Al-Sheikh Najib, is now filming for the first time in Syria for eight years, playing a photographer in a new series called A Safe Distance, which looks at how the Syrian war affected people.

"Syrian actors always tried to keep up their good level and they could maintain their level in the Arab world," he said.



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[Egypt puts 145 people on terrorism list: judicial source](#)

Author:

AFP

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1553618249915115600

Tue, 2019-03-26 13:47

CAIRO: An Egyptian court upheld Tuesday a decision to put 145 people, including staunch Muslim Brotherhood supporters, on the country's "terrorism list," a judicial source said.

The Court of Cassation rejected appeals against a ruling passed by a lower court in June last year.

The defendants were accused of training militants and plotting violence in the country, the source said.

The list includes senior Brotherhood figures, many of whom fled Egypt following the military ouster of Islamist president Muhammad Mursi in 2013. The Brotherhood was designated a “terrorist organization” months after Mursi’s overthrow.

Turkey-based TV hosts Moataz Matar and Mohamed Nasser, who both work for pro-Muslim Brotherhood channels, are among those on the list.

Matar has recently been in the crosshairs of the state after initiating online calls for protests against President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi.

Hundreds have been added to Egypt’s terrorism list in recent years including Mursi himself.



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[Egypt](#)

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[Muslim Brotherhood](#)

[Arab anger over ‘theft of occupied](#)

Golan Heights'

Author:

Tue, 2019-03-26 02:13

JEDDAH: Arab states on Monday condemned US President Donald Trump's recognition of the occupied Golan Heights as Israeli territory.

The decision "does not change the area's status" as illegally occupied territory, Arab League Secretary-General Ahmed Aboul Gheit said.

Breaking decades of international consensus, Trump signed a proclamation at the White House on Monday recognizing Israeli sovereignty over the border area that Israel seized from Syria in 1967.

Syria said the decision was a blatant attack on its sovereignty.

"Trump does not have the right or the legal authority to legitimize the occupation," a Foreign Ministry spokesman said.

Opposition chief Nasr Al-Hariri said Trump's decision would "lead to more violence and instability, and it will have negative effects on efforts to engineer peace in the region."

Lebanon said the move "violates all the rules of international law" and "undermines any effort to reach a just peace."

"The Golan Heights are Syrian Arab land, no decision can change this, and no country can revisit history by transferring ownership of land from one country to another," the Foreign Ministry said.



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President Donald Trump officially recognizes Israeli sovereignty of Golan HeightsGCC 'regrets' Trump's call to recognize Israeli sovereignty over Golan Heights

US approves \$3.8 billion F-16 sale to Morocco

Author:

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1553551620839422100

Tue, 2019-03-26 00:47

WASHINGTON: The United States on Monday approved the sale of 25 F-16 fighter aircraft to Morocco for \$3.8 billion, the State Department announced.

Besides the new Block 70/72 F-16s, equipped with state of the art electronic systems and weaponry, Washington also approved the modernization of 23 F-16s already in the Moroccan air force fleet, for \$983 million.

The State Department said the sale would not affect the balance of forces in the region.

It can still be blocked by the US Congress, which has 30 days to raise any objections.

More than 4,500 of the Lockheed Martin-built F-16s have been delivered since 1978.

It is gradually being replaced by the stealth F-35 fighters but more than 3,000 of F-16s are still in use in 25 countries, thanks to constant upgrades.

The Moroccan military ordered 24 F-16s in 2008. It lost one aircraft in action in 2015 during Saudi-led air operations in Yemen.



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