

Heavy rainfall and flooding sparks chaos in Amman

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AMMAN: Heavy rainfall and flooding sparked chaos in Amman's streets on Thursday.

Cars were washed away and people rescued after a deluge filled the Jordanian capital's roads with water.

Several vehicles broke down in the streets, causing traffic to stop, Ammon News reported.







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[Brazil's far-right leader to visit Israel in potential boost for Netanyahu](#)

Author:

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Thu, 2019-02-28 13:44

JERUSALEM: Brazil's nationalist President Jair Bolsonaro will visit Israel days before its April 9 election, the Israeli government said on Thursday, in a potential boost for fellow right-winger Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Installed in January, Bolsonaro has played up his pro-Israel ties, hosting Netanyahu and signalling a desire to move Brazil's embassy to Jerusalem, though no date has been given.

The prospect of relocating the embassy – after President Donald Trump moved the US mission – has worried Brazilian exporters who fear losing access to major Arab markets for halal meats, which comply with Muslim dietary rules. The Foreign Ministry in Jerusalem said Bolsonaro would visit Israel between March 31 and April 4. It gave no more details.

Netanyahu has emphasised international statecraft in his campaign for a fifth term. But his prospects looked clouded on Thursday by a widely-expected announcement that Israel's attorney-general wanted him prosecuted on corruption charges.

Bolsonaro, a far-right former army captain, swept into power promising to crack down on crime and corruption, but has struggled to consolidate his coalition as graft scandals and infighting by allies dogged his first month in office.



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Israel attorney general confirms intention to indict Netanyahu for bribery
Top Netanyahu challengers unite for Israeli elections

[Libya rivals agree to hold polls: UN](#)

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Thu, 2019-02-28 10:21

TRIPOLI: The head of Libya's internationally recognized government and a military strongman who backs a rival administration in the country's east have met and agreed to hold elections, the United Nations said Thursday. Unity government leader Fayez Al-Sarraj met Khalifa Haftar on Wednesday in Abu Dhabi, where they agreed "on the need to end the transitional phase through general elections and on ways to preserve the stability of #Libya and unify its institutions," the UN's Libya mission UNSMIL tweeted. Libya has been torn between rival administrations and a myriad of militias since the NATO-backed overthrow and killing of dictator Muammar Qaddafi in 2011.

Chief among them are Sarraj's Government of National Accord, based in Tripoli, and an administration based in the east and backed by Haftar's self-styled Libyan National Army.

The leaders had agreed to a Paris-brokered deal in May 2018 to hold a nationwide election by the end of the year.

But instability, territorial disputes and divisions in the oil-rich country delayed those plans.

Talks in Italy in November laid bare deep divisions between the key power brokers, with some delegates refusing to sit side by side and Haftar snubbing the main conference to organize separate talks with international leaders. United Nations envoy Ghassan Salame told the UN Security Council last month that he was planning to organize a national conference inside Libya within weeks to pave the way for elections.

But analysts have warned that the UN's efforts could be threatened after Haftar's forces launched an offensive into the south in mid-January, aimed at rooting out "terrorists" and foreign fighters.

The LNA already controls vital oil installations in Libya's east.

Powerful Tripoli-based militias have condemned Haftar's operation as a power grab, although the GNA itself has not been as explicit in its opposition.



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Libya's recognized government agrees with state oil firm to reopen El Sharara oilfield
Libya's NOC chairman in UAE to discuss Sharara oilfield crisis

US-backed forces evacuate families before final assault on militants

Author:

Wed, 2019-02-27 21:47

NEAR BAGHOUZ, SYRIA: US-backed forces in eastern Syria scrambled on Wednesday to extract more families from the last sliver of Daesh's proto-state before delivering a final blow to holdout militants.

Several thousand people – fighters and their relatives – are believed to be holed up in the last pocket of territory controlled by Daesh, barely half-a-square kilometer near the Iraqi border.

The so-called Daesh is only days away from dying in a tiny village few Syrians had ever heard of until recently.

Thousands of its last denizens, many of them women and children, have been pouring out of the riverside hamlet of Baghouz in recent days, posing a huge humanitarian challenge for the Kurdish fighters leading the operation.

Survivors of the months-old siege spilling out of the double-trailer trucks that transported them out of Baghouz tell harrowing tales of starvation and many of the evacuees require immediate medical attention. Lines of black-veiled women holding scruffy children and carrying their scant belongings in bags can be seen walking across the plain.

Save the Children said many of the surviving children have witnessed devastating events in recent months and are “showing signs of psychological distress.”

The men are carefully screened by the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), who have spearheaded the battle against Daesh in Syria, with support from a US-led coalition.

According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, about 10 percent of the estimated 50,000 people who fled the last militant bastions since December were Daesh members trying to slip back into civilian life.

The diehard militants, among them many foreigners, still clinging to the last patch of the proto-state in Baghouz have also been using civilians as human shields.

Footage captured by the BBC from positions held by Iraqi paramilitary forces across the Euphrates River shows an improvised camp, where what appears to be a militant can be seen running among makeshift tents.

As warplanes fly overhead, a woman is seen collecting water from the river in

a plastic jerry can while black men move stealthily among the jumble of minivans and civilian shelters that make any direct airstrike impossible.

The SDF launched its final offensive against Daesh territorial control in September 2018.

The operation has been deadly and slow, with one top French officer even publishing stinging criticism of the coalition's reluctance to fully involve its ground forces.

US President Donald Trump announced late last year he was ordering a complete troop pullout from Syria, leaving the SDF exposed to Turkish military threats.

A security vacuum could also see a quick resurgence of Daesh, which has lost all its bastions in Syria and Iraq but remains a potent guerrilla force.

Even the US military warned that Daesh could potentially re-establish territorial control in some areas with six months "absent sustained counterterrorism pressure."

Almost eight years into a conflict that has killed more than 360,000 people, the humanitarian emergency showed no sign of relenting.

With aid agencies struggling to provide basic relief to famished civilians evacuated from the remote Baghouz area, Save the Children highlighted the trauma the youngest among them had suffered.

The children who fled Daesh-held areas were "likely to have witnessed acts of brutality and lived under intense bombardment and deprivation in the last enclave held by the group," the British charity said.

One of the children cited in the report was an 11-year-old named Mai.

"I always tried not to look when there were beheadings. I would hide behind my mum," she was quoted as saying.

The charity stressed much more needed to be done to help these children.

"That includes funding and access for case management and protective services, and for foreign children repatriation to their countries of origin," said Save the Children's Syria response director, Sonia Khush.

The local Kurdish administration is struggling to cope with the humanitarian burden and has repeatedly urged the world to step up its aid effort.

The countries of origin of detained militants are reluctant to repatriate them, fearful of the impact such returns could have on security and on public opinion.



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Russia, Syria call on US troops to leave Syria Hundreds more leave Syria Daesh holdout: AFP reporter

[Israeli PM vows to bar Iran from securing presence in Syria](#)

Author:

By VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV | AP

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MOSCOW: Israel's prime minister vowed Wednesday to prevent Iran from securing a lasting presence in Syria as he visited Moscow for talks focusing on regional security.

For Benjamin Netanyahu, it's the first trip to Moscow since September's

downing of a Russian warplane by Syrian forces that were responding to an Israeli air strike. The incident left 15 Russian crew dead and threatened to derail close security ties between Russia and Israel.

Russian President Vladimir Putin said at the start of Wednesday's talks that "it's very important to discuss the situation in the region and security issues."

He added that the high-level consultations are essential in view of the evolving situation.

Netanyahu began the talks by reaffirming Israel's strong determination to block attempts by Iran to establish a foothold in Syria.

"The greatest threat to stability and security in the region comes from Iran and its satellites," he said. "We are determined to continue with our aggressive action against the efforts of Iran, which calls for our destruction, and against its attempts to entrench militarily in Syria."

Moscow has played a delicate diplomatic game of maintaining friendly ties with both Israel and Iran. Last summer, Moscow struck a deal with Tehran to keep its fighters away from the Golan Heights to accommodate Israeli concerns about the Iranian presence in Syria.

Netanyahu noted that he and Putin have had 11 meetings since September 2015 and hailed "the direct, open and true way in which we maintain the relationship between Russia and Israel."

"The direct connection between us has been an essential element that has prevented risks and conflicts between our militaries, and that has contributed to regional security and stability," the Israeli leader said.

Netanyahu congratulated Putin on the military holiday Russia marked last weekend and invited him to visit Israel to attend the opening of a monument to the Nazi siege of Leningrad during World War II.

"We will never forget the role of Russia and the Red Army in the victory over the Nazis," he said.

Putin, a native of the city, accepted the offer.

Netanyahu praised "excellent bilateral relations," noting "more than one million Russian speakers who have made a great contribution to Israel, have turned into a part of us, and have made Russian culture a part of Israeli culture."



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