

Anger and apprehension haunt ruined Sinjar

Author:

Tue, 2019-02-26 22:27

SINJAR: It is dawn in Sinjar and the only sounds are the footsteps of guards patrolling a golden-domed shrine on a hill overlooking a vista of collapsed rooftops.

More than three years after Daesh was driven out of this city in northern Iraq, all that remains in the once bustling market are the bomb-scarred facades of shops. Dozens of streets are blocked by metal barrels – a sign of unexploded ordnance that has yet to be cleared.

In a city whose former occupiers slaughtered thousands of minority Yazidis, water is scarce and power intermittent. The closest hospital to reopen is a 45-minute drive away. There are only two schools.

The physical devastation is extreme, but it is not the city's only challenge. Caught in a power tussle between Iraq's central government and the semi-autonomous Kurdistan Regional Government, the city also struggles with a political impasse.

"It is in ruins. There has been no progress at all," said Ibrahim Mahmoud Ezzo, 55, the Yazidi owner of about a dozen shops, all of which are damaged.

Overrun by Daesh in 2014 and liberated by an array of forces the following year, little has been rebuilt and only a fraction of the population has returned. Residents say both the Kurdish regional government and the central government have made no effort at construction.

Sinjar lies in a sensitive area straddling the borders of Iraq's Kurdistan region and neighboring Syria, Iran and Turkey.

"The PKK are here, the police are here, the Popular Mobilization Units are here, the army is here," Ezzo said, listing the names of various units of the Iraqi government forces and militias that are in the city and around it.

"We don't understand what the situation is," Ezzo said.

The KRG had controlled the region without much objection from Baghdad since the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003 until 2017 when, in retaliation for an independence bid, the central government pushed out the KRG, its Peshmerga forces and allies, and brought in their own.

These included a Shiite paramilitary force, the Popular Mobilization Units known as PMU, as well as the national army and the police.

Dindar Zebari, the KRG coordinator for international advocacy, said: "In Sinjar today, there is no legitimate authority, there are no official and

decisive security forces.”

“The KRG is not ignoring the problem in Sinjar,” he said, urging Baghdad to share responsibility for this area with Peshmerga and ensure the removal of militias including the PMU.

A central government spokesperson could not immediately be reached for comment. Officials privately attribute the slow pace of rebuilding to security problems in the area and red tape in approving a reconstruction budget for Nineveh province.



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Iraqi-backed Yazidi group takes over Sinjar after Kurdish pullout - residents
Iraq Kurd chief announces 'liberation' of Sinjar from Daesh

[**Tunisian attacks suspect assaults**](#)

[judge at hearing](#)

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Tue, 2019-02-26 18:45

TUNIS: Tunisian authorities say a man suspected of several extremist attacks has assaulted a judge with his gavel during his trial at a Tunis military court.

The 33-year-old Adel Ghandri was brought to court Tuesday alongside several other suspects accused of attacking a military station in Ben Guerdane, near the border with Libya, where assailants allegedly tried to create an emirate on behalf of the Daesh group two years ago.

According to a statement from Tunisia's military justice system, Ghandri managed to seize the judge's gavel and hit him on the head. It was not clear if the judge was injured in the incident.

Ghandri is suspected of involvement in the Ben Guerdane attack and of playing a role in two other attacks in Tunisia that killed 60 people, mainly tourists, in 2015.



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Algeria students demonstrate against 5th term for Bouteflika

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Tue, 2019-02-26 16:18

ALGIERS: Thousands of students on Tuesday joined a growing protest movement in Algeria against ailing President Abdelaziz Bouteflika's bid for a fifth term, with rallies in and around the capital and other cities.

Bouteflika, who uses a wheelchair and has rarely been seen in public since suffering a stroke in 2013, announced on February 10 that he would seek re-election in the April 18 vote.

His decision has sparked angry protests in the North African country, with tens of thousands of people taking to the streets on Friday in Algiers where demonstrations are banned.

The scale of those protests took many in Algeria by surprise, and they were followed by more rallies on Sunday and Monday.

On Tuesday it was the turn of university students to vent their anger at Bouteflika's bid to extend his 20 years in power.

Around 500 students demonstrated at the University of Algiers, many of them waving Algerian flags and shouting "No to a fifth term" and "Bouteflika get out."

University guards locked the gates of the main city center campus to prevent students from spilling onto the streets.

Security forces, including riot police, deployed outside the campus and elsewhere in central Algiers while police vehicles were parked on roads leading to the university.

Between 100 and 200 students gathered outside the university gates and later marched in the city center where they were joined by hundreds of others, an AFP reporter said.

Police at first observed them before firing tear gas grenades when some students pelted them with stones, but the confrontation was short-lived, the reporter said.

Local media and websites reported protests around Algiers and in other cities across the country.

At the faculty of journalism some 500 students protested on campus, while another demonstration took place at the school of medicine, also in Algiers, with police blocking them inside the university grounds.

"In order to avoid any confrontation with the police, the students of several faculties (of the University of Algiers) decided to rally on campus," said Raouf, a journalism student who declined to give his surname.

He noted that police officers are not allowed to enter universities in Algeria.

Protests were also reported in the cities of Annaba, Constantine, Ouargla and

Tizi Ouzou, all east of Algiers, according to the TSA news website, but it was unclear how many students were taking part.

Tuesday's protest – staged under the banner “not in my name” – came in response to calls to demonstrate posted online after 11 student unions expressed their support for Bouteflika.

“We're organizing a demonstration to show that these 11 unions do not represent us,” 23-year-old civil engineering student Hakim, who also declined to give his full name, told AFP at another campus near Algiers.

According to the World Bank, one third of Algeria's population of 15 million are young people under the age of 20 and are those worst hit by unemployment. University professors have urged colleagues to back the students in a statement stressing the “duty to emulate the voice of the people who are rising against a real threat for our future and the stability of the country.”

Despite days of protest, Bouteflika's campaign director said the president's candidacy would be formally submitted on Sunday.

Dozens of people were detained in Friday's protests for “public disorder” and other acts of alleged violence.

Two days later hundreds of protesters rallied in Algiers, but they were met by a heavy police deployment and tear gas.

On Monday, around 100 lawyers demonstrated in court against a fifth term for Bouteflika.

Meanwhile press watchdog Reporters Without Borders on Tuesday accused Algerian authorities of seeking to “muzzle” media since the start of the protests.

Bouteflika, 81, who has clung to power since 1991 despite his ill health, flew to Switzerland on Sunday for what the presidency called “routine medical checks” ahead of the election.



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[Libya's NOC chairman in UAE to discuss Sharara oilfield crisis](#)

Author:

Tue, 2019-02-26 00:37

CAIRO: Libya's state-run National Oil Corp. said on Monday its chairman Mustafa Sanalla had arrived in United Arab Emirates to meet with a number of Libyan and international parties to discuss the Sharara oilfield crisis. They would "discuss security measures necessary to find a solution to the Sharara crisis, that guarantee staff safety, and pave the way for the lifting of force majeure at the field," the statement said.



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Libya's largest oilfield remains closed
Libya's NOC to assess security at El Sharara oilfield before resuming production

[Kuwait marks 58th national day](#)

Tue, 2019-02-26 00:25

CAIRO: Kuwait celebrated on Monday its national day, marking the anniversary of its 58th Independence and its 28th Liberation Days.

The National Day commemorates the creation of Kuwait as a nation in 1961, while Liberation Day marks the end of the Iraqi occupation in 1991 during the Gulf War.

Nation-wide festivities including firework displays and epic public entertainment activities.

The day also marks the 13th anniversary of Emir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's assumption to power, as he he took to the throne in 2006.

Since independence, Kuwait adopted balanced national and foreign policies

aimed at maintaining the wellbeing of its people and bolstering ties of cooperation with its regional neighbors.

Its Gulf neighbor, the UAE, celebrated the occasion by presenting a giant sand portrait of the Kuwaiti emir that could be visible from space.

The portrait titled 'Prince of Humanity' covers an area of more than 170,000 square feet, and has been registered to enter the Guinness Book of World Records.

It was captured in a video shared on Twitter by Dubai Ruler Sheikh Mohammad Bin Rashid Al-Maktoum, Vice-President and Prime Minister of the UAE.

حب الكويت وأهل الكويت محفور في أرضنا .. ومحفور في قلوبنا .. ومحفور
في تاريخنا... كل عام وكويت المحبة .. وأميرها أمير الإنسانية في عزة
ورفعة وسلام pic.twitter.com/BeFLvjx6sI

– HH Sheikh Mohammed (@HHSkhMohd) [February 21, 2019](#)

Saudi Arabia's General Authority of Civil Aviation also marked the occasion, by holding a series of events at its various airport terminals.

Upon arrival to the Kingdom, passengers coming from Kuwait were greeted with roses, national flags of the two countries, and souvenirs in honor of the celebration.

A welcome statement was displayed on large screens inside the terminals of King Khalid International Airport in Riyadh.

Similar gestures were made at other Saudi airports as well.



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