

# Libyans in the dark over election with seven days to go

Author:

Fri, 2021-12-17 00:17

TRIPOLI: Seven days before Libyans were meant to cast presidential votes, there is utter confusion over the fate of an election that has not yet been formally delayed but that even an electoral official now says will be impossible to hold on time.

The planned Dec. 24 vote, along with a parallel election for a new parliament, was meant to help end Libya's past decade of chaos by installing a political leadership with national legitimacy after years of factional division.

However, the process has been dogged since the start by bitter disputes over the election's legal basis and fundamental rules, including over the eligibility of deeply divisive front-runners, that have never been resolved.

On Saturday, the electoral commission said it would not announce the final list of eligible candidates, drawn from the 98 who registered, until after legal discussions with the judiciary and parliament.

Amid continued arguments and fears for electoral integrity after major security incidents, a member of the elections commission said on Thursday that a Dec. 24 vote was no longer possible.

Few of the Libyans Reuters spoke to on Thursday believed the vote would happen on time, though many expected only a short delay.

"It will be postponed for a maximum of three months," said Ahmed Ali, 43, in Benghazi.

Rival candidates and political factions have been exchanging recriminations, accusing each other of trying to block or manipulate the electoral process for their own advantage.

International powers pushing for elections along with the UN have maintained their stance that polls must go ahead but this week stopped referring to the planned Dec. 24 date in public statements.

Over recent weeks very large numbers of Libyans have collected their ballot cards and thousands have registered to be parliamentary candidates, apparently signifying widespread popular support for an election.

Tim Eaton of Chatham House, the London think tank, said Libya's political bodies were not ready to publicly say the vote would not happen for fear of being blamed for its failure.

## BACKGROUND

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"It's pretty clear that the legal wranglings cannot be resolved in the current circumstances," he said.

"No one thinks this is happening on time, but nobody is saying it."

It left a choice between short delays to find fixes to push the elections over the line or longer delays to reshape the political road map, which could also include replacing the transitional government, he added.

Since the 2011 uprising that ousted Muammar Qaddafi, Libya has had no political stability and in 2014 the country split between warring eastern and western factions.

Oil company employee Ali Saad, 66, said he wept for Libya's future.

"Even if the elections are postponed, I hope it will be with an agreement and rules that can be worked on, because otherwise things will be tense and the consequences will be dire."

Analysts and diplomats say a return to direct warfare between eastern and western sides, both now well entrenched and with significant international military backing, appears unlikely for now.

However, they say there is a bigger risk of tensions erupting into internal factional warfare within either camp, particularly in Tripoli, where armed forces are more diverse and political divisions are more open.

On Wednesday night, an armed force surrounded government buildings in Tripoli, apparently in response to a decision to replace a senior military official, but there was no fighting and a security source said the situation was being resolved.

In the southern city of Sebha there were fierce clashes early this week between groups aligned with rival factions. Last month the electoral commission said fighters had raided voting centers, stealing ballot cards.



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## [UN: A third of people in 420m-strong Arab world do not have enough to eat](#)

Author:

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CAIRO: A third of the people in the 420-million-strong Arab world do not have enough to eat, the UN said on Thursday, highlighting that 69 million suffered from malnutrition last year.

In a report, the world body's Food and Agriculture Organization said that between 2019 and 2020, the number of malnourished in the Arab world rose by 4.8 million people to 69 million, nearly 16 percent of the population.

"The increase in the levels of undernourishment has occurred across all income levels, in conflict-affected as well as nonconflict countries," the FAO said.

"In addition, nearly 141 million people did not have access to adequate food in 2020 – an increase of more than 10 million people since 2019."

It said the COVID-19 pandemic “brought another major shock,” with the number of undernourished people in the region increasing by 4.8 million compared with 2019.

Conflict-hit Somalia and Yemen remained the worst-affected countries last year, with nearly 60 percent of Somalis going hungry and more than 45 percent of Yemenis undernourished.

“Yemen had the highest prevalence of anemia in 2020, affecting 61.5 percent of women of reproductive age,” it said.

The FAO said hunger has increased by 91.1 percent in the Arab world over the past two decades.

“Rates of stunting (20.5 percent) and overweight (10.7 percent) among children under five years of age were high in 2020,” the FAO noted.

It said adult obesity, especially in the richer Arab states, was also on the rise.

“The latest year estimate for the Arab region shows that 28.8 percent of the adult population was obese, i.e. more than double the global average of 13.1 percent.

“High-income countries exhibited the highest prevalence of adult obesity in the region whereas the low-income countries had the lowest levels.”



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## [Western coalition in Syria shoots down menacing drone](#)

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WASHINGTON: A drone that threatened a base with US and partner forces in southern Syria was shot down by a British fighter jet with the Western anti-Daesh coalition, the Pentagon said Thursday.

The US Central Command said that two "unmanned aerial systems" had flown toward the Al-Tanf desert garrison near the Syrian border with Iraq and Jordan late Tuesday.

"As one of the UAS continued its course deeper into the Al-Tanf Deconfliction Zone, it was assessed as demonstrating hostile intent and was shot down," said Bill Urban, spokesman for the US Central Command.

The second drone was not attacked and "likely left the area," Urban said in a statement.

The British defense ministry said the drone was downed by a missile from a Royal Air Force Typhoon, the first-ever air-to-air engagement by one of the British fighter jets.

The small size of the drone made it a "very challenging target," the ministry said.

But officials did not say if it was armed or not.

"This strike is an impressive demonstration of the RAF's ability to take out hostile targets in the air which pose a threat to our forces," said British Defense Secretary Ben Wallace.

Neither the United States nor the British would say who launched the drones toward the base.

The Pentagon has blamed drone attacks on US forces in Iraq over the past years on Iran-backed militia groups.

Iran-backed forces are deployed in close proximity to Al-Tanf, which sits on the strategically important Baghdad-Damascus highway.

In October the base came under attack by artillery fire and drones.

"We know that this is an increasingly used and increasingly potentially lethal threat that these Iran-backed militia groups are using, the use of drones," Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said Thursday.



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[Al-Tanf desert](#)

Israeli missile strike kills soldier in Syria, state media says Arab coalition begins legal steps to revoke immunity after Houthi missiles target Riyadh

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## [Watchdog says UN monitors needed in violence-hit Darfur](#)

Author:

Thu, 2021-12-16 00:44

CAIRO: A human rights watchdog urged the UN on Wednesday to deploy monitors to Sudan's western region of Darfur, where a surge in tribal clashes has killed more than 180 people since October.

Human Rights Watch said in a statement that the monitors should include experts on gender-based crimes, a year after the UN Security Council ended the mandate of a peacekeeping mission known as UNAMID in Darfur.

The violence between Arabs and non-Arabs in the war-wrecked region came as Sudan plunged into upheaval after an October military coup that removed Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok's government.

Though Hamdok was reinstated last month in a deal with the military, Sudan's pro-democracy movement has rejected the settlement and insists on a transition led by a purely civilian government.

Mohamed Osman, HRW's Sudan researcher, said tribal clashes over the past year in Darfur have left "a trail of devastation" in the region.

At least 183 people were killed, and dozens wounded since October, with thousands displaced and some crossing into neighboring Chad.

Osman called the latest violence a "stark wake-up call" for the international community to act.

"The UN's priority should now be to ramp up human rights monitoring and ensure rigorous scrutiny of Sudan's efforts to protect millions of Darfuris," he said.

The Security Council terminated the UNAMID on Dec. 31, 2020 and replaced it with a much smaller and solely political mission, whose mandate will be ended in June next year. HRW said the departure of UNAMID has caused a "gap in monitoring the abuses" fueled by impunity for atrocities committed in Darfur.



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## [Lack of jobs, crisis drive Iraqi Kurds to migrate](#)

Thu, 2021-12-16 00:32

RANYA, Iraq: The specter of unemployment haunts both students and teachers at universities in northern Iraq. Many speak of growing numbers of empty seats in classrooms across the semi-autonomous Kurdish region – seats once occupied by students who have left for Europe.

Those who remain, like 21-year-old law student Zhewar Karzan, are making plans to leave.

He sees no future at home, in the town of Ranya, nestled among picturesque mountains, rivers and Lake Dukan, the Iraqi Kurdish region's largest lake. A college degree provides no guarantee of a job, and his parents struggle to pay the bills, he said.

Come spring, Karzan plans to try his luck and leave with other hopeful migrants. His brother Jiyar, who in 2016 paid a smuggler to take him to Italy from Turkey, eventually reached Britain and now supports the entire family back home while working in a pizza restaurant.

"I will join him," said Karzan.

Iraqi Kurdish youth face a tough choice: Endure unemployment and corruption at home, or try to sneak into Europe at the risk of financial ruin, or even death during the perilous journey.

Though there are no firm statistics, a substantial number of young Iraqi Kurds are believed to have left, seeing no hope in their country. Meanwhile, students who stayed are struggling to get motivated because getting an education is no longer a sure path to a job.

Across the Middle East, struggling economies have failed to keep pace with growing populations. In the three Iraqi Kurdish provinces, between 43,000 to 54,000 jobs would need to be created every year to absorb new waves of young people joining the labor force, according to UN estimates.

The gap between tepid economic growth and a "youth bulge" has led to



persistently high unemployment. Among Iraqi Kurds between the ages of 15 and 29, it's 24 percent for men and 69 percent for women, according to a UN survey.



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