

Italy is a 'strategic partner,' says interim Libyan leader

Tue, 2021-06-22 19:50

ROME: The chairman of the Libyan Presidential Council, Mohamed Younes Menfi, considers Italy "a strategic partner for Libya." During a meeting with Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi in Rome on Tuesday he also stressed "the importance of partnership and cooperation" with the European nation, according to Italian sources.

Menfi also had a lengthy meeting with Italian President Sergio Mattarella. His visit to the Italian capital, his first official trip to another country since he was appointed in March, came on the eve of the second Berlin Conference on Libya.

German diplomatic sources told Arab News that the main points of final declaration by the conference about the continuing political process should include a call for the immediate withdrawal of foreign mercenaries from Libya, and strong encouragement to Libyan authorities to play their part in ensuring that democratic elections take place in the country by Dec. 24 as scheduled.

According to a press release issued by the Libyan Presidential Council following Menfi's meeting with Draghi, the Italian prime minister "reaffirmed his country's support for the political transition in Libya and to the work of the Presidential Council," and praised the results achieved so far.

Italian sources said that an agreement was reached for greater coordination in matters related to security and to the prevention of illegal immigration from Libya, and Italy has offered to provide further support to help secure Libya's borders.

The Italian Coast Guard has said that Libya is the main point of departure in North Africa for migrants attempting to reach Italy on often fragile vessels.



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[Mohamed Younes Menfi](#)

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EU threatens sanctions over Libya political gridlock

[UK urged to stand with Iranian people, reject new president](#)

Author:

Tue, 2021-06-22 18:48

LONDON: The British Committee for Iran Freedom (BCFIF) on Tuesday urged the UK government to reject newly elected Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi and campaign for him to face justice for human rights abuses.

Raisi won the presidential election on June 18, but the BCFIF said in a statement: "Elections in Iran are neither free, fair nor representative. It reflects the will of the unelected Supreme Leader and serves as a process to

further strengthen the theocracy's grip on power to the detriment of the Iranian people."

It added: "This was made clear again on June 18 as the Iranian people rejected the theocracy in its entirety with a widespread national boycott of the presidential election farce."

The BCFIF said Raisi "had an extensive role in the regime's current and past crimes against humanity, including the 1988 massacre of 30,000 political prisoners and PMOI (People's Mujahedin Organization of Iran) members and supporters in Iran as well as the killing of 1,500 protesters and torture of thousands of arrested protesters during and after the nationwide protests in November 2019."

In the week after Raisi's election victory, Sir David Amess, a Conservative MP and co-chairman of the BCFIF, said: "The people of Iran answered the call by the President-elect of the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI) Mrs Maryam Rajavi and completely boycotted the election farce in Iran."

He added that the BCFIF supports Rajavi's call "for Raisi to be investigated and face justice in an international tribunal. This issue must be a priority for the UK Government during the 47th Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council."

Andrew Rosindell, a Conservative MP and member of the Foreign Affairs Select Committee, said: "With Raisi as president, the regime is signalling that it will continue its repression, persecution of popular dissent and export of terrorism."

He added: "It is time for our government to follow the recommendations in our report which includes proscribing the IRGC (Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps) in its entirety and taking steps to end the impunity of Iranian officials by holding the regime to account for its support of terrorism and systematic human rights abuses."



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[EU threatens sanctions over Libya political gridlock](#)

Tue, 2021-06-22 16:53

LONDON: The EU has warned that any country or group that delays Libya's planned elections on Dec. 24 this year will face harsh sanctions.

The warning comes ahead of a meeting of foreign ministers to oversee the withdrawal of foreign forces from the war-torn country.

The Berlin talks will look to outline guidelines for the withdrawal of foreign fighters, and again demand that elections take place at the end of the year. However, previous deadlines set for military withdrawals have been

ignored.

The UN has proposed a meeting in Geneva next week of the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum to discuss election details.

But some groups in Libya's Parliament have engaged in what the EU now views as a delaying tactic, by blocking elections or demanding referendums on a new constitution prior to any nationwide vote.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken is set to attend the Berlin meeting, which follows talks last December that outlined an in-depth roadmap to take Libya toward democracy and end the civil war.

A national unity government was set up in February, but has been hampered by politicians privately seeking election delays.

Many in the country's elite political class, labeled as oligarchs by critics, are said to fear the loss of power and financial clout that could result from an election.

The Berlin meeting has been urged by the group Lawyers for Justice in Libya to protect human rights in the country and punish those breaching the UN arms embargo, including some states that took part in the last conference.

The advocacy group also warned that freedom of expression, assembly and association must be protected in order for free and fair elections to be held.

The House of Representatives, Libya's existing Parliament, has proved to be the main source of delays, despite its Speaker Aguila Saleh claiming that a national election is a prerequisite for reconciliation in the country.

The Parliament was ordered by the UN to agree to the idea of a constitution-based election and adopt legislation by July 1.

But Libya has descended into a political stalemate, with disagreements about the constitution that would control any future elected president.

Former Interior Minister Fathi Bashaga is a favorite to win, but there are rumors that Muammar Gaddafi's son Saif Al-Islam will also stage a bid for the presidency.



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UN in final push to salvage Libya political deal
Libyan official says EU help needed to tackle migrant route

[Donations pour in to rebuild Gaza bookshop](#)

Mon, 2021-06-21 19:54

LONDON: Cash and book donations have flooded in to help rebuild one of Gaza's largest and oldest bookshops, a two-storey building completely leveled by Israeli attacks.

The Samir Mansour bookshop was hit by multiple airstrikes on May 18, during 11 days of fighting between Israel and Palestinian militants that claimed the lives of around 150 Palestinians.

Founded over two decades ago, the Palestinian-owned shop was a much-loved part of the community.

It contained tens of thousands of books, covering genres from fiction to

philosophy and everything in between.

Now a global movement has emerged to rebuild the Gaza treasure, with UK-based online children's bookseller Books2Door donating 1,000 books.

"Without any hesitation I knew we could help," said Books2Door founder Abdul Thadha. "We were kindly informed by the fundraisers that Samir had a diverse, eclectic collection, so we hope we have done him proud."

A fundraiser set up by human rights lawyers Mahvish Rukhsana and Clive Stafford Smith has raised over \$210,000, and tens of thousands of books from all over the world have been donated to Mansour's rebuilding effort.

"Dropping bombs on Samir Mansour's bookshop is not the worst tragedy to have hit the people of Gaza – but this particular airstrike targeted access to books," said Rukhsana.

"It was an attack on the knowledge and literacy of this community. Samir lost almost 100,000 books and served schoolchildren and adults alike," she added.

"I knew hospitals and roads would receive funding, but secondary cultural institutions such as libraries are often overlooked but equally critical to the community."

They are hoping to rebuild the bookshop, replace all of Mansour's 100,000 lost books and create a new project, the Gaza Cultural Center, which would be a new library next door, allowing readers to borrow books without paying.

Rukhsana said in Mansour's shop, "people were allowed to stay, have tea and read his books for as long as they wanted free of charge without an obligation to purchase ... He has decided to use all gently used and some new books to create a true library."

Mansour told The Guardian that his "heart was burning" when he realized missiles had hit his bookshop.

"The Israeli airstrikes bombed half of the building and my bookshop was in the other half. I wished they would stop ... My feet took me a few steps forward, towards the bookshop. The last missile came and destroyed the building," he said.

"It was six in the morning. I didn't know what to do. I started searching among the rubble for anything related to my library. But everything was under the rubble," he added.

"I sat thinking about why my shop was bombed. I did not publish, write, or attack any country or person in my life. I did not spread hatred but spread culture, science and love. I did not find answers to my questions." But he vowed to "rebuild all over again, no matter what it took from me."



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[Egypt to open complex for vaccine production](#)

Mon, 2021-06-21 19:04

CAIRO: Egyptian Minister of Health and Population Hala Zayed inspected the factory complex of the Egyptian Holding Company for Biological Products and Vaccines (VACSERA) in the Sixth of October City.

The minister followed up on the final preparations being made on the new production lines for the manufacture of vaccines, with equipment costing about \$17 million, in addition to \$5.1 million in construction.

Khaled Mujahid, the spokesman for the Egyptian Ministry of Health, said that

the minister confirmed that the VACSERA factories will be the largest vaccine production complex in the Middle East and Africa and will contribute to raising the production capacity of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) vaccines in cooperation with various vaccine-producing companies in the world.

During her visit to the complex, Zayed inspected the departments dedicated to the production of the vaccines, including a production line, eight central laboratories to monitor the vaccines and a central refrigerator that can store 150 million doses. The production capacity of the factories can reach 3 million doses per day, equivalent to six times the production capacity of the company's factories in Agouza.

The minister praised the readiness of the VACSERA factory complex, which is environmentally friendly and which was built according to the highest levels of quality and according to the standards of the World Health Organization (WHO). Last September, the WHO sent a delegation of experts to evaluate the production lines at the VACSERA factories and praised the designs and construction.

Zayed confirmed that the company is the state's strong arm in the manufacture of vaccines, which will put Egypt in the ranks of the leading countries in this field.

The factory complex is scheduled to manufacture polio vaccines of all kinds, as well as the pneumococcal bacteria vaccine in cooperation with European companies.

Mujahid added that the complex will work in parallel with the company's production lines in the Agouza area, which have already started manufacturing the vaccine in cooperation with the Chinese company Sinovac.



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Egypt vaccines ready for clinical trials
Egypt COVID-19 cases could be '10 times higher' than reported figures