

WAR-WEARY LIBYANS MISS LIFE UNDER GADDAFI

TRIPOLI: Five years after an uprising killed Libya's Muammar Gaddafi, residents in the chaos-wracked country's capital joke they have grown to miss the longtime dictator as the frustrations of daily life mount. Those living in the capital say they are exhausted by power cuts, price hikes and a lack of cash flow as rival authorities and militias battle for control of the fragmented oil-rich country. "I hate to say it but our life was better under the previous regime," says Fayza Al-Naas, a 42-year-old pharmacist, referring to Gaddafi's more than four decades of rule.

Today, "we wait for hours outside banks to beg cashiers to give us some of our own money. Everything is three times more expensive." A UN-backed unity government has struggled to assert its authority nationwide since arriving in Tripoli in March, with a rival parliament in the country's far east refusing to cede power to it. On Friday it suffered a new blow when a rival seized key offices in the capital and proclaimed the reinstatement of a third administration previously based in Tripoli. The turmoil after



This file photo shows Libya's leader Muammar Gaddafi. — AFP

Gaddafi's 2011 fall has allowed the Islamic State jihadist group to gain a foothold on Europe's doorstep after seizing the strongman's hometown of Sirte in June last year. Forces loyal to the unity government

have for five months been fighting to expel the last jihadists from the former IS stronghold, with support from US air strikes since early August. With the loyalists weakened by the anti-IS battle, forces led by a controversial field mar-

shal last month seized key oil terminals to its east, allowing the National Oil Company to resume crude exports. The eastern parliament has thrown its support behind Khalifa Haftar, who presents himself as Libya's savior in the face of a growing jihadist threat but is a hugely divisive figure.

'Chaos or military rule'

While his army has ousted most jihadists from Benghazi, the birthplace of the 2011 uprising, his detractors accuse him of working towards the single goal of seizing power to establish a new military dictatorship. "Libyans are forced to choose between two extremes: either chaos with militias and Islamist extremists as the dominant forces, or military rule," said Libya analyst Mohamed Eljarh. "No other convincing options are on offer," added Eljarh, of the Rafiq Hariri Centre for the Middle East.

Haftar's forces have fought for more than two years to expel jihadists from second city Benghazi, while pro-GNA forces are caught up in fighting IS in Sirte. According to Libya expert Mattia

Toaldo, these rival forces might then want to extend their influence in other areas of the country and be met with tough local resistance. "It is hard to think that the country will be stabilized any time soon," said Toaldo. "Libyans seem to have swapped a repressive centralized authoritarianism with a more decentralized and chaotic form of authoritarianism, be it under militias or under the rule of general Haftar."

The persistent chaos has also enabled human traffickers to step up their lucrative trade in the Mediterranean nation, with hundreds of migrants dreaming of Europe drowning off the Libyan coast. And Libya has been the launchpad of deadly attacks on holidaymakers in neighboring Tunisia. While some Libyans mourn an easier life under Gaddafi, others stress that the chaos in Libya springs from decades of mismanagement under the dictator. "The struggles of Libyans today are the logical consequence of 42 years of systematic destruction and sabotage" by the state, said Abderrahman Abdelal, 32, an architect unable to find work in his field. — AFP

TOP COURT OVERTURNS JAIL TERM OF BAHRAIN'S OPPOSITION CHIEF

COURT OF CASSATION ORDERED A RETRIAL



AZ ZINJ, Bahrain: File photo shows a Bahraini cleric (left) walking past a cardboard cutout bearing the portrait of Sheikh Ali Salman, head of the Shiite opposition movement Al-Wafaq, during a protest against his arrest, at Al Wafaq headquarter building, in the village of Zinj. A top court yesterday overturned a nine-year jail term against Shiite opposition chief cleric Ali Salman, convicted of inciting hatred and calling for forceful regime change. — AFP

DUBAI: A top court in Bahrain yesterday overturned a nine-year jail term against Shiite opposition chief cleric Ali Salman, convicted of inciting hatred and calling for forceful regime change. The Court of the Cassation ordered a retrial of the head of the Al-Wafaq political formation before the Appeals Court, said a judicial source. The same court overturned three death sentences and seven life imprisonment sentences against a group convicted of killing three police, including an Emirati officer in a bomb attack more than two years ago.

Salman had been sentenced in July 2015 to four years in jail after being convicted of inciting hatred in the Sunni-ruled Gulf kingdom. But the appeals court in May more than doubled his jail term to nine years after

reversing an earlier acquittal on charges of calling for regime change by force. Salman's arrest in December 2014 sparked protests in Shiite-majority Bahrain. The cassation court had rejected a request to release the cleric earlier this month.

His jail sentence came during a crackdown on the Gulf nation's largest opposition group, which has been dissolved by a court order over accusations of "harboring terrorism". Al-Wafaq had the largest bloc in parliament before lawmakers walked out in February 2011 in protest over a deadly crackdown on Arab Spring-inspired protests. The crackdown on Wafaq has drawn criticism from UN chief Ban Ki-moon and Bahrain's allies in Washington, as well as rights groups. Hundreds of Shiites have been arrested and put on trial

since security forces backed by Saudi-led troops crushed in March 2011 month-long protests that demanded democratic reforms.

Authorities have also stripped at least 261 people of their citizenship since 2012, according to the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights, including the country's Shiite spiritual leader Sheikh Isa Qassim. In the other ruling, the court of cassation ordered a retrial of the case of 10 defendants found guilty of planting a bomb in March 2014 in Deih Shiite village, which killed an Emirati police officer and two Bahraini policemen. The Emirati officer was part of the Saudi-led Gulf force. Appeals court had on May 31 upheld the three death sentences and life terms for the other seven who were also stripped of their citizenships. — AFP

TACTICS OF BATTLE FOR IRAQ'S MOSUL

BAGHDAD: Iraqi security forces have launched a final push to retake Mosul from the Islamic State group, which seized the country's second city more than two years ago. Here are some of the tactics that will likely be employed by Iraqi security forces, and those IS may use against them:

Encirclement then assault

Iraqi forces will fight their way to Mosul and then seek to encircle the city before launching an attack inside it-tactics they have used in operations to retake other IS-held cities including Ramadi and Tikrit. The eventual assault into Mosul will likely be led by Iraq's elite counter-terrorism service, which has spearheaded most operations against the jihadists. To reach Mosul, Iraqi forces will have to advance through several dozen kilometers of IS-held territory, including multiple villages.

The US-led anti-IS coalition will carry out strikes against IS with various types of aircraft, possibly including Apache attack helicopters. The coalition has also deployed artillery including cannons and rocket launchers to provide fire support from the ground. The operation will involve a coalition of sometimes rival Iraqi forces including soldiers, police, peshmerga forces from Iraq's autonomous Kurdish region, and various pro-government paramilitary groups. The exact role of the various forces has not been publicly announced, but there have been reports of an agreement under which neither the peshmerga nor Iran-backed Shiite militia forces will enter Mosul, leaving that assault primarily to the Iraqi army. Iraqi forces are equipped with assault and sniper rifles, light and heavy machineguns, mine-clearing charges, armored personnel carriers, tanks, various types of artillery, attack helicopters and aircraft including Su-25 and F-16 jets.

Bombs, human shields

IS will be vastly outnumbered in the battle and will seek to use hit-and-run tactics, ambushes, snipers, bombs, berms and trenches to slow down and bleed Iraqi forces. The jihadists have littered other cities with thousands of bombs, placing them in roads, buildings and houses. The large civilian population inside Mosul may have limited the locations they could place explosives, but bombs will still play a major role in IS's defenses. Obstacles such as earthen barriers-sometimes with bombs inside-will be used to slow down Iraqi forces who will need to clear them to advance, exposing them to ambushes.

IS will target Iraqi troops with suicide bombers wearing explosive vests or belts, and others driving bomb-rigged vehicles. The jihadists may equip attackers with rifles as well as bombs, allowing them to attack with guns and then blow themselves up. The jihadists will likely seek to use Mosul civilians as human shields to limit air strikes against them, and have also previously lit fires in an attempt to provide cover from attacking warplanes. IS seized a large number of armored vehicles, trucks, arms and other equipment when they overran Mosul and other areas in June 2014, but it is unclear how much of it has been lost in previous battles that have driven the jihadists out of much of the territory they seized. IS fighters will be armed with assault and sniper rifles, light and heavy machineguns, armored vehicles, possibly including tanks, mortars, and a wide array of bombs-some planted to be triggered by Iraqi forces, and others set off by suicide bombers.

Questions of timing

Prime Minister Haider Al-Abadi announced yesterday that operations to liberate Mosul had begun after already calling an operation to retake Nineveh province, of which Mosul is the capital, in March this year. The timing of Abadi's announcement is in line with predictions by Western officials, including US Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Joe Dunford, that an offensive would be launched in October. A key requirement was the cooperation of peshmerga forces from the autonomous Kurdish region. Their leader Massud Barzani said on Saturday that the time had come to begin operations. Abadi remains on target to keep his promise that Mosul would be liberated in 2016 but it is still unclear when Iraqi forces will be in a position to move into the city proper. Paramilitary forces known as the Hashed Al-Shaabi (Popular Mobilisation) will also take part in fighting in the Mosul theatre. While they are ostensibly under Abadi's control, the most powerful groups operate with a great deal of autonomy and with input from Tehran. — Agencies



SIRTE, Libya: Members of the forces loyal to Libya's UN-backed Government of National Accord (GNA) gather in the coastal city of Sirte, east of the capital Tripoli, during their military operation to clear the Islamic State group (IS) jihadists from the city. — AFP

THE MAIN FORCES IN POST-GADDAFI LIBYA

TRIPOLI: A multitude of rival authorities and factions are contesting power amid the anarchy that has gripped Libya since its 2011 revolution which ousted longtime dictator Muammar Gaddafi. Below is list of the main warring forces.

Misrata dominates west

Located 200 kilometers east of Tripoli, the city of Misrata bore the brunt of the violence during the revolution and is now home to the country's main armed groups. The groups, after having inherited much of the arsenal of the fallen Gaddafi regime, are the best organized and armed in Libya. Some of these groups have sided with the UN-backed and internationally-recognized Government of National Accord (GNA) as it struggles to exert its authority beyond Tripoli. They have since mid-May taken part in an offensive to expel the Islamic State (IS) jihadist group from the coastal city of Sirte that had been its stronghold inside Libya.

Misrata groups make up the core of the Fajr Libya coalition which seized control of Tripoli in the summer of 2014, ousting their rivals from Zintan who have since regrouped in their hometown, 170 kilometers to the southwest. Fajr Libya controls virtually all coastal cities between Misrata and the Tunisian border as well as southern towns such as Gharyan, Nalut and Jado in the mainly Berber mountain range of Nafusa. The tribes of Zintan, which have been largely isolated, support the controversial anti-Islamist field marshal Khalifa Haftar.

Haftar rules the east

Rival authorities in eastern Libya, which sits on top of most of the nation's oil wealth, do not recog-

nize the GNA and have extended their influence to swathes of territory reaching the south of the country. They are supported by the armed forces under Haftar's command that in the space of three days in September seized control of Libya's oil crescent, defeating a force of oil terminal guards which had announced its allegiance to the GNA. In July 2014, Islamist militias drove Haftar's "Libyan National Army" (LNA) out of second city Benghazi, 1,000 kilometers east of Tripoli, taking refuge in towns such as Tobruk near the Egyptian border. It has since recaptured the city but still faces pockets of resistance from the Shura Council of Benghazi Revolutionaries, a coalition of anti-Haftar Islamist militias and radical groups. The LNA is composed mainly of former army officers from eastern Libya who defected at the outset of the 2011 revolt, including air force units and special forces.

Contested south

The Fezzan region with its oil fields is a smuggling hotbed, disputed by a myriad of tribal and ethnic forces. The factions are allied to Libya's rival authorities but regularly switch allegiances. Clashes often break out between the Touabou minority allied to Haftar and Tuareg tribes, which largely control the borders with Algeria, Niger, Chad and Sudan. Arab tribes such as the Sebha and Koufra are allied with the authorities in western Libya. A former Gaddafi-era army officer, Ali Kennah, in a video posted on the Internet, has vowed to work to restore security in the south while maintaining neutrality between the two main camps in Libya's power struggle. But the Haftar camp has accused him of trying to set up a "parallel army". — AFP

News

in brief

Police search German schools after threats

BERLIN: Police were searching at least a dozen schools across Germany after they received threats by email yesterday, although officials said they didn't believe the messages constituted a serious danger. Nine schools in the eastern city of Leipzig were emailed threats, a police spokesman said, without giving details of the content of the messages. Investigators were searching the premises while students and teachers were told not to leave the site, he said. Schools in the western city of Goettingen as well as the eastern city of Magdeburg also reported receiving similar messages.



KHANPUR: A Pakistani rescue team works on the wreckage of a deadly accident involving two buses, in Khanpur yesterday. — AP

Buses collide head-on in Pakistan, killing 24

MULTAN: Two passenger buses collided head-on in central Pakistan yesterday, killing 24 people and injuring 69, officials said. The accident, which occurred on a dangerous curve in Khanpur town in Rahim Yar Khan district, was likely caused by speeding, said police official Jamshid Shah. Several children, college students and women were among the victims, Shah said. He said police and rescue officials were using cutters and to retrieve bodies trapped inside the two buses. Dr Tasleem Kamran at a government hospital said the injured were being treated and that several were reported to be in critical condition. "We have declared an emergency."

Somalia gov't shuts down newspaper, arrests editor

MOGADISHU: Somali security forces shut down a newspaper and arrested an editor, the Somali journalists' union said yesterday, the latest crackdown in what reporters say is a climate of intimidation. Intelligence officers stormed the offices of Xog Ogaal, confiscating computers and cameras, and detained an editor, Abdi Adan Guled, on Saturday night, the National Union of Somali Journalists said. It was unclear why Guled was arrested, but the union said it was the first time the government had acted against the paper, which has been publishing since 1991. Somali authorities did not return calls seeking comment. Security forces and officials frequently detain or threaten journalists whose coverage has offended them.

A North Korean missile exploded after lift-off

SEOUL: An explosion almost immediately after launch was behind the failure of North Korea's latest test-firing of a powerful medium-range missile, the South Korean military confirmed yesterday. North Korea tested a Musudan missile-capable of hitting US bases as far away as Guam shortly after midday Saturday near an air base in the northwestern city of Kusong. Such launches are usually reported within a few hours or even minutes by South Korean and US military monitors, but the news of Saturday's test only came out around 16 hours after the event. "North Korea's missile launch failed shortly after lift-off so a considerable amount of time was needed to analyze it," a South Korean Joint Chiefs of Staff official told reporters yesterday.

Man 'blows himself up' in Georgia breakaway region

MOSCOW: An unidentified man yesterday blew himself up at the state-owned TV centre in Abkhazia, a tiny Russian-backed breakaway region of Georgia, local officials said. "A man blew himself up on the territory of the TV centre. It was obviously clear that he had a bomb," Russian news agency RIA Novosti quoted Abkhaz interior minister Aslan Kobakhiya as saying. Interfax news wire reported that the blast occurred at the entrance to the TV station's headquarters in the Abkhaz capital Sukhumi. It cited the separatist region's emergency services ministry as saying the "corpse of a bearded man" was found at the scene.

Suicide blast kills 10 in Baghdad's south

BAGHDAD: A suicide car bomb attack claimed by the Islamic State group and targeting an Iraqi army checkpoint south of Baghdad yesterday killed at least 10 people, security and medical sources said. The blast in Yusufiya, a frequently targeted area just south of the capital, also left at least 17 people wounded, an interior ministry official said. A medic at the nearby Mahmudiya hospital said at least four soldiers were among those killed in the blast. It came just hours after Iraqi forces launched an offensive to retake second city Mosul, in the north of the country, from IS.