

Post-Gaddafi Libya sliding from crisis to crisis 8 yrs on

TRIPOLI: Eight years after the revolt in Libya against Muammar Gaddafi's authoritarian regime, a modern and democratic state remains a distant dream in a country which has been sliding from crisis to crisis. While no major celebrations are planned for the anniversary of the uprising which started February 17, 2011 in the thick of the Arab Spring, Libyans profess no great nostalgia for the Gaddafi days. "I cannot regret Gaddafi's time because what Libya is today is the product of 42 years of systematic destruction," said Marwan Jalal, a 43-year-old oil industry engineer, referring to the autocrat's four decades in power. "Sooner or later, Libyans will find peace but the journey seems long," he said.

Post-Gaddafi Libya has remained a battleground, both on the terrain and in politics, between a myriad of rival militias and political factions operating with impunity. "The political and military divides... are deepening and efforts to bring rival constituencies to the table have thus far failed," said Claudia Gazzini, an analyst with the International Crisis Group. "There is no quick recipe to solve Libya's multilayered crisis," Gazzini said. "Any effort to unite Libya requires an integrated strategy with a political, a security and an economic component complementing each other and working together towards a common objective."

In the latest emergency, military strongman General Khalifa Haftar has launched a military push in southern Libya which he says is aimed at rooting out "terrorists" and foreign fighters. The offensive has fuelled new tensions in a country already wracked by violence and torn between rival administrations since the overthrow and killing of dictator Gaddafi. The vacuum has been exploited by unscrupulous people traffickers taking full advantage of the migration crisis.

A power struggle between the UN-backed Government of National Accord (GNA) based in Tripoli and a parallel administration backed by Haftar's self-styled Libyan National Army (LNA) in the east has left the country's vast desert south a lawless no-man's land. The rugged territory bordering Algeria, Niger, Chad and Sudan has become a haven for jihadists and armed groups, including Chadian rebels. The LNA in mid-January announced the start of its offensive to "purge the south of terrorists and criminal groups".

The region also hosts a struggle between Libya's minority Tubu community and Arab tribes, particularly over control of lucrative cross-border smuggling routes. "An escalation has thus far been averted, in part because anti-Haftar forces in the north have refrained from jumping into the fight, but the risk of retaliatory violence is still in the air and alliances with local tribe-based armed groups could prove fragile," according to Gazzini. Tripoli militias have condemned Haftar's operation as a power grab, although the GNA itself has not been as explicit in its opposition.

Analysts warn that the LNA's assault could endanger UN-led efforts to convene a "national conference" aimed at organizing already long-delayed elections this year as a way out of the political impasse in Libya. But "the repeated delays and the vagueness surrounding the UN-backed event have alienated important constituencies who are now eyeing alternative strategies outside the UN framework in order to bolster their position," said Gazzini. Emad Badi, a Libyan analyst, warned that "current developments are conducive to escalation and actors' military confrontation rather than dialogue". — AFP



TRIPOLI: Libyans carry national flags as they gather in the capital's Martyrs Square to celebrate yesterday, a day ahead of the eighth anniversary of the Libyan revolution. — AFP

7 Sinai militants killed, 15 soldiers dead or wounded

CAIRO: Egypt's army said yesterday seven suspected militants were "eliminated" and 15 soldiers killed or wounded in an attack in the Sinai Peninsula, where troops are fighting the Islamic State group. Security forces responded to the attack on a checkpoint in restive North Sinai with an "exchange of fire", army spokesman Tamer El-Refai said in a statement. "An officer and 14 non-commissioned soldiers were killed or wounded," he added, without giving a precise number for the dead. Medical sources in North Sinai told AFP that 11 soldiers were killed in the attack.

Security forces would continue to pursue "the terrorist elements to eliminate them", Refai added.

Egypt often announces that militants have been killed in military operations, but statements that security forces have suffered significant losses are very rare. Since the army's overthrow of elected Islamist president Mohamed Morsi in 2013, hundreds of soldiers and police have been killed in attacks by extremist groups. Civilians have also been targeted in attacks, particularly members of Egypt's minority Coptic Christian community.

Egypt's army launched an offensive a year ago dubbed "Sinai 2018" on the orders of President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, after an attack in North Sinai killed more than 300 people at a mosque. The army says that more than 550 suspected militants have been killed in the offensive - which has also targeted militants elsewhere in Egypt - at the cost of more than 30 soldiers. But no independent statistics are available and the North Sinai is largely cut off to media and foreigners. — AFP

Iranians cry for revenge at funeral...

Continued from Page 1

Jaish al-Adl was formed in 2012 as a successor to the Sunni extremist group Jundallah (Soldiers of God), which waged a deadly insurgency for a decade before it was severely weakened by the capture and execution of its leader Abdolmalek Rigi in 2010.

Jafari also blasted "the governments of Saudi Arabia and (the) Emirates" and said Iran will no longer tolerate their "hidden support for anti-Islam thugs and takfiri groups". He called on President Hassan Rouhani and the country's Supreme National Security Council to give the guards more freedom to carry out "retaliatory operations", but did not elaborate. Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has linked the perpetrators of Wednesday's attack to "the spying agencies of some regional and trans-regional countries".

Black flags attached to lamp-posts adorned Isfahan as the city prepared for the funeral and two days of mourning.

When the bodies of the troops arrived on the back of Toyota vans - the guards' signature vehicles - their comrades, women in black veils and young men in jeans were

there to greet them. Tens of thousands chanted "Down with America!" and "We will never submit!"

Iran's flag could be seen at half-mast in Bozorgmehr Square's southeastern side, and the crowd chanted "Allahu Akbar" each time the speaker read the names of the dead. The troops killed in the bombing belonged to the Guards' 14th Imam Hussein Division, which is based in Isfahan province, according to Tasnim news agency. Aged from 21 to 52, each will be buried in his hometown after the funeral.

A housekeeper originally from Khuzestan province, where a deadly attack killed 24 last year, told AFP of the thirst for revenge. "We demand that the blood of these troops be avenged," said Tayebbeh Rezaee, 34. "They cannot weaken the Islamic Republic in any way - not war, not economic attacks. So they have to stoop to such acts."

Sistan-Baluchistan has long been a flashpoint, where Pakistan-based Baluchi separatists and militants carry out cross-border raids. A Revolutionary Guard was killed and five wounded in a Feb 2 attack claimed by Jaish al-Adl on a base of the Basij militia in the town of Nikshahr, some way from the border. One of the wounded - Khodarahm Heidari, who was critically injured in that attack - died on Saturday, semi-official news agency ISNA reported.

On Jan 29 three members of an Iranian bomb squad sent to the scene of an explosion in the provincial capital Zahedan were wounded when a second device blew up as they were trying to defuse it, police said at the time. — AFP

country to normalize relations with Israel after the realization of a fair and comprehensive solution to the Palestine question and the establishment of a state of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital, based on the relevant resolutions of the United Nations and the Arab peace initiative.

On the group picture, he said normalization of relations between countries has various forms that do not necessarily include taking group pictures at international conferences. Kuwait participated in the Warsaw conference alongside with other sisterly countries in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), whose participating delegations were of a higher level than that of Kuwait, Jarallah noted. The conference was similar to other numerous international gatherings in which Israel takes part, including forums held under the UN umbrella, he added. — KUNA

KD 330 remains for me to live on and pay rent, as the rest goes for the installments," he rued.

Yaqoub Al-Yaqoub took a loan of KD 50,000 to rebuild the house of his father in 2013, and after six years of repaying it, he still has to pay KD 47,000.

"I pay KD 350 every month for the loan, and only KD 480 remains for me to survive with my wife and two children," he said. Youssef Al-Ali also took a loan to rebuild the house of his father in 2017. "The bank cuts KD 350 from my salary every month, and only KD 300 remains for me, my wife and two kids. At least I'm lucky I don't have to pay rent, but it's difficult to survive on this meager amount," he explained.

Munif Al-Harbi is retired, but still has to pay KD 26,000 out of the KD 31,000 taken as a loan in 2011. "I have eight children and owe KD 4,800 to a furniture company besides the loan. I don't have a house so I have to pay rent as well. I only end up with KD 300," he told Kuwait Times.

India's fastest new train hits...

Continued from Page 1

Since coming to office, Modi's nationalist party launched a crackdown on the slaughter of cows - considered sacred by many Hindus - which has led to crisis numbers of stray and unwanted cattle in the state.

India is struggling to upgrade its colonial-era railway system, which relies on creaking and outdated infrastructure to transport 23 million travellers each day. The

locally-made express train has a rated top speed of 180 km an hour, 20 percent quicker than the next fastest train in service. Railway authorities say the train is expected to reduce the 850-kilometre journey between the two cities from 14 to eight hours.

Yesterday's accident is the latest controversy for the express train - a pet project of Modi's government, which has vowed to debut India's first bullet train in 2022. Last week India's rail minister Piyush Goyal was left red-faced after he tweeted a digitally altered video of the train zipping by a station at lightning speed. He was later accused of altering the video to make the train appear faster, triggering widespread social media ridicule. — AFP

Trump border wall 'emergency' faces...

Continued from Page 1

New York, California and the American Civil Liberties Union. "President Trump is manufacturing a crisis and declaring a made-up 'national emergency' in order to seize power and subvert the constitution," said California Governor Gavin Newsome. "California will see you in court."

Trump said he expected a legal fight and predicted he would prevail. "We will have a national emergency, and we will then be sued," Trump said Friday. "Then we will end up in the Supreme Court, and hopefully we will get a fair shake, and we'll win in the Supreme Court."

Trump invoked the 1976 National Emergencies Act after Congress refused to allocate his requested \$5.7 billion for a wall in a spending bill. The White House says the emergency order empowers it to pull around \$6.6 billion from other sources, mostly already-allocated funds in the Defense Department budget. Democrats accused the president of an unconstitutional power grab. "The president's actions clearly violate the Congress's exclusive power of the purse," Nancy Pelosi and Chuck Schumer, the Democratic leaders in Congress, said in a joint statement.

It is a precedent-setting move, said American University law professor Jennifer Daskal, adding that the National Emergencies Act had "never been used in that way, for good reason". Critics warn that Trump opened the door for future presidents to call on the act whenever they fail to get their way with Congress. A frustrated Democratic president might someday invoke it to get funds to fight ongoing "emergencies" of cli-

mate change and gun proliferation.

The White House dismissed this argument, underscoring how a court showdown might proceed. "This actually creates zero precedent. This is authority given to the president in law already," said acting White House chief of staff Mick Mulvaney. "It's not as if he just didn't get what he wanted, so he is waving a magic wand and taking a bunch of money."

Any legal battle will focus on the definition of "emergency". The emergencies act "does not provide any explicit limitations on what does and does not constitute a national emergency," Daskal told AFP. Previous governments have declared emergencies based on the act due to immediate threats such as the September 11, 2001 attacks and the 2009 outbreak of swine flu. Trump said the emergency now is the flow of drugs and violent criminals across the border.

In the abstract, he appears within his rights. However, said Bobby Chesney, the associate dean at the University of Texas School of Law, "litigation won't be in abstract". "The pretext issue looms large here," he said in a comment on Twitter. He was referring to the problem of Trump resorting to declaring the border issue an emergency after spending two years in a losing political battle for wall funding. Trump himself appeared to undermine his argument as he announced the emergency on Friday. "I didn't need to do this, but I'd rather do it much faster," he said.

Daskal expects border landowners also to sue to protect their property rights. "A lot of the land that's at issue is not federal land, it's private land," she said. Chesney points to a challenge over the use of military funds. Defense Department rules say that, even if diverted, construction funds must be for a project that "requires the use of the armed forces". The wall, however, has been cast from the outset as a civilian project. "That is the main point of litigation vulnerability," said Chesney. — AFP

Kuwait against normalization...

Continued from Page 1

Our participation in the conference stemmed from keenness on defending these issues, not plundering them. We have made our point clear at all international forums, foremost among which is the UN Security Council through our non-permanent membership," he explained, adding that Kuwait's principled stance was highly appreciated by "the Palestinian brothers".

Jarallah reiterated that Kuwait will be the last

Indebted Kuwaitis call on Amir to cancel...

Continued from Page 1

loan and my first wife and her four children get KD 430. Only KD 260 remains for me and my second wife and two kids. In fact, I'm not able to pay my rent - my family is supporting me," Jassem Al-Mousawi told Kuwait Times.

Mshabib Al-Shali complained about the unequal rights of citizens, which forced him to take a loan. "As the government refused to send my father for medical treatment abroad, I took a loan to pay for his treatment and to get married. After more than five years of paying the KD 50,000 loan, today I still have KD 48,000 to pay, as the bank's interest is almost the same value as the loan. Only