

Cramped Gaza zoo reopens, only months after closure

RAFAH: A lioness is beaten with sticks while her cubs are dragged away – a Gazan zoo closed after a long campaign has reopened, with conditions seemingly as bad as ever. The Rafah Zoo in the southern Gaza Strip was known for its emaciated animals, with the owners saying they struggled to find enough money to feed them. In April, international animal rights charity Four Paws took all the animals to sanctuaries, receiving a pledge the zoo would close forever.

But last month it reopened with two lions and three new cubs, penned in cages only a few square metres in size. Critics say the owners want to bully Four Paws or other animal welfare organizations into giving them thousands of dollars to free the animals into their care. Four Paws paid the zoo's owners more than \$50,000 in the year before its closure for medical treatments, food and caretakers. The zoo's owner insists the reopening is solely for the enjoyment of local residents.

When AFP visited the zoo recently, the badly stuffed corpse of a lion was displayed near the entrance. An ostrich in a three-metre-square pen pecked endlessly at the cage's bars, while two monkeys sat chewing on litter. At the far end the lion and lioness were kept in separate cages, each only a few square metres. The owners were seeking to remove the cubs from their mother to play with visiting children. To do so they hit the lioness with sticks and banged on the cage to confuse her, with staff later taunting her when the cubs had been taken out.

"A lion needs 1,000 square metres to play in. Here they have seven square metres," Mohammed Aweda, a prominent animal enthusiast in Gaza, told AFP. "The zoo won't survive during the winter, because they are lacking in daily goods which cost a lot. For you or I or anyone who owns a zoo (in Gaza), the economy is very tough."

Palestinian Gaza is run by Islamist movement Hamas

and has been blockaded by Israel for more than a decade. There have been three wars between them in that time. The enclave of two million people had negative eight percent economic growth last year. Around two-thirds of young people are unemployed, while nearly 50 percent are below the poverty line, according to the World Bank. Many Palestinians are desperate for ways to make money.

Amid international outcry over conditions at the zoo, last year Four Paws reached an agreement with the owners. In April nearly 50 animals, including lions, monkeys, peacocks and porcupines, were taken out of Gaza through Israeli territory to sanctuaries in Jordan and elsewhere. The NGO said in a statement it explicitly does not pay for animals but provided funding for "costs for medical treatments, food and caretakers so that the over 40 animals were strong and healthy enough for the rescue and transfer".

In total the amount paid over a year was \$55,000, the NGO said. Four Paws said the zoo's owner promised not to reopen. Critics suspect the owners of seeking to bully Four Paws into paying again. "Any international organization won't deal with this issue easily because it has become trade," Aweda said.

The newly reopened zoo's manager Ashraf Jumaa, from the same family that owned the old one, said they brought the new lions through tunnels from Egypt. However others suggested they were bought from another animal center in northern Gaza. He denied they wanted to blackmail Four Paws. "The first goal is entertainment, not trade. The main reason we reopened the zoo was people in the area that supported us," he said.

He said it would be less expensive because there were fewer animals, but admitted they would struggle to afford enough food once the cubs were fully grown. "Every day they will need between 22 and 30 kilos of meat costing between 100 and 150 shekels (between



RAFAH: Palestinian children and an employee pet three recently-born cubs at a zoo in the southern Gaza Strip on Sept 8, 2019. — AFP

\$28 and \$43)," he said. They currently receive around 50 visitors a day, he said, with tickets on average costing two shekels (around \$0.50).

Four Paws said footage it saw from the zoo was "very concerning". "The animals are not kept in species-appropriate conditions. They seem to be in bad

conditions and urgently need medical attention and proper food," it said. An official from the Gaza agriculture ministry, speaking on condition of anonymity, said there had been no coordination regarding the zoo's reopening. He said Gaza needed a large park meeting international standards. — AFP

Demonstrators clash with Egyptian forces

CAIRO: Egyptian security forces clashed with hundreds of anti-government protesters in the port city of Suez on Saturday, firing tear gas and live rounds, said several residents who participated in the demonstrations. A heavy security presence was also maintained in Cairo's Tahrir Square, the epicenter of Egypt's 2011 revolution, after protests in several cities called for the removal of general-turned-president Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi.

Such demonstrations are rare after Egypt effectively banned protests under a law passed following the 2013 military ouster of Islamist ex-president Mohamed Morsi. But discontent over rising prices has been swelling in Egypt, where Sisi's government has imposed strict austerity measures since 2016 as part of a \$12-billion loan package from the International Monetary Fund. Nearly one in three Egyptians live below the poverty line on less than \$1.40 a day, according to official figures released in July.

On Saturday protesters headed to downtown Suez for the second night in a row, where they were met by security forces barricading the streets and armored vehicles. "There were about 200 or so people. They (security forces) fired tear gas, rubber and live bullets and there were injuries", a man who took part in the demonstration but declined to be named told AFP.

Another resident, who also preferred to remain anonymous,



SUEZ, Egypt: This combination of pictures created yesterday shows confrontations between Egyptian security forces and protesters in Al-Arbaeen Square in the center of this port city. — AFP

said the tear gas was so thick it had reached her apartment block a few kilometres away from the turbulent downtown area. "My nose started burning up. The smell was seeping through the balcony. I also saw some youth run and hide in our street", the woman said.

On late Friday, hundreds of Egyptians poured through the streets of Cairo, chanting slogans including "Leave, Sisi!" and demanding the "fall of the regime". At least 74

people were arrested after clashes between the crowds and police in the capital, a security source told AFP. The protests came after Mohamed Aly, an exiled businessman and opponent of Sisi posted calls online for demonstrations against Sisi.

He upped the pressure on Saturday in an expletive-filled video, imploring Egyptians to join a "million-man march" next Friday and to fill all "major squares" of the

country. "This is a people's revolution... We have to link up together as one... and organize going down to the major squares," he said in a Facebook appeal to his followers. The construction contractor has been posting videos that have gone viral since early September, accusing Sisi and the military of rampant corruption. The president denied the allegations last week, saying he was "honest and faithful" to his people and the military. — AFP

Trump joins rally in Modi...

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John Sifton, the Asia advocacy director of Human Rights Watch, said it was critical to raise concerns to Modi while he is abroad as, unlike previous Indian prime ministers, he has little back-and-forth interaction with the media. "He is really in a kind of bubble in Delhi," Sifton said. "This is a moment for Modi to burst outside of his bubble and hear some criticism of what's happening in Kashmir."

"Today we celebrate our community and its importance in Houston and all America," said Ketan Inamdar, who works in the administration of Houston's Democratic Mayor Sylvester Turner, and painted an American flag on his right cheek and an Indian one on the left. "Trump is very welcome here today. This event is to build harmony and love," he said, standing just in front of the dais where Trump and Modi spoke. "Race, religion and political parties don't matter today."

Houston is a rare Democratic stronghold in Republican-dominated Texas and serves as the economic anchor of a state that will be critical to Trump's 2020 re-election bid. Polls show tepid support by Indian-American voters, some 75 percent of whom voted for his Democratic rival, Hillary Clinton, in 2016. But organizers of the "Howdy, Modi!" event that was kicked off with a 90-minute cultural program featuring 400 costumed dancers, say Trump can expect a receptive audience.

It will not be the first time Modi, who heads the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party, has addressed a large crowd in the United States, which is home to about 4 million Indian-Americans including about 300,000 in Houston and nearby Dallas, according to a Pew Research Center analysis of U.S. Census data.

MoE, MoH to sack hundreds...

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On the other hand, the sources explained that MoH layoffs will include administrative staff members and the

Some 19,000 people turned out for a similar event in New York in 2014, and Indian-American volunteers living in US suburbs helped run a telephone blitz of voters in India in the run-up to his May re-election campaign.

Modi's visit to Houston comes ahead of this week's UN General Assembly in New York and amid a particularly tense time on the subcontinent. The Indian leader further strained long-simmering relations with Pakistan last month by revoking the partial autonomy enjoyed by Muslim-majority Kashmir, which both nuclear-armed countries claim. Modi's move has been met by international criticism. Pakistan has condemned the crackdown and its Prime Minister Imran Khan warned it would drive more of the world's Muslims into extremism.

The US-India relationship on trade and tariffs is rocky, though Trump and Modi appear to have strong personal ties. But Devesh Kapur, director of Asia Programs at Johns Hopkins University, who has written a book on Indian-Americans, said that while the rally has symbolic value for both leaders, "it's unlikely by itself to impact thorny trade issues ... but it can't hurt." Kapur also forecast little improvement regarding Trump's standing with Indian-Americans. "The Trump administration's hard-line policies on immigration ... have hardly endeared (him) to the community," Kapur said. "Appearing with PM Modi might mildly help but certainly not reverse the community's overall pro-Democrat leanings."

Sporting a matching vest and sari in yellow embroidery from Modi's home state of Gujarat as well as caps in the Indian tricolor, Bhavin Parikh of Sacramento, California said he and his wife Shipti wanted to show their support. "We are big fans of Modi and what he is doing for India and wanted to show our support," Parikh said. He called the gathering "historic" due to Trump's presence. But he demurred on whether the gathering also indicated backing for Trump. "It is not a question of Democrat or Republican. It's the American president supporting the Indian prime minister," he said. — Agencies

eldest doctors and nursing staff members. The sources said employees to be laid off will be notified before the end of the year, while teachers will be notified before the end of the school year.

Meanwhile, MoE's assistant undersecretary for administrative development affairs Fahd Al-Ghais said 67 newly-recruited teachers arrived from Jordan and 12 more are to arrive soon, while 58 teachers recruited from Tunisia had arrived, with 39 more to arrive soon.

Iran slams foreign forces for raising...

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initially raised the possibility of a military response, saying the US was "locked and loaded".

Washington later expanded its long list of sanctions against Tehran by further targeting its central bank, as Trump indicated he did not plan to strike back. On Friday, Defense Secretary Mark Esper said the US was sending reinforcements to Saudi Arabia at "the kingdom's request", while noting the forces would be "defensive in nature".

In his speech, Rouhani called on the foreign powers to "stay away" from the Gulf. "If they're sincere, then they should not make our region the site of an arms race," he said. "Your presence has always brought pain and misery... The farther you keep yourselves from our region and our nations, the more security there will be. We are even ready to ignore their past mistakes... since today the situation is such that the enemies of Islam and the region, meaning America and Zionism, want to abuse the rift between us. Our logic is the logic of a Persian Gulf whose security comes from within."

The annual military parade marks the start of the week commemorating Iran's 1980-1988 war with Iraq known as

the "sacred defense". Among the new weaponry debuting at yesterday's parade was an upgraded warhead for the Khorramshahr ballistic missile, the Kaman 12 drone with a range of 1,000 km and a mobile radar system capable of detecting landmines, local media reported.

Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif tweeted that Rouhani would announce details of the "Hormuz Peace Endeavour" at the UN General Assembly. Rouhani is expected to travel to New York today, a day before general debate kicks off at the UN gathering. Tensions have flared in the Gulf since May, when Iran began reducing its commitments to the nuclear deal and the US said it was sending forces to waters near the Islamic republic in response to "indications of a credible threat" from its forces.

The US deployed an aircraft carrier strike group and a bomber task force to the sensitive waterways, before sending B-52 bombers, an amphibious assault ship and Patriot missile battery. Following the deployments, commercial ships were mysteriously attacked, drones downed and oil tankers seized in Gulf waters. In June authorized a military strike after Iran shot down a US drone, only to call off the retaliation at the last moment.

The crisis deepened with the September 14 attacks on Saudi energy giant Aramco's Abqaiq processing plant and Khurais oilfield which halved the kingdom's crude output. Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi rebels claimed responsibility, but the US says attacks involved cruise missiles from Iran and amounted to "an act of war". — AFP

Five-year period ending 2019 set...

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long spending binge," said Professor Dave Reay, chair in Carbon Management at the University of Edinburgh. "Our global carbon credit is maxed out," he added. "If emissions don't start falling there will be hell to pay."

In 2018, global carbon dioxide was 407.8 parts per million (ppm), 2.2 ppm higher than 2017 and set to reach or exceed 410 ppm by 2019. "The last time Earth's atmosphere contained 400 parts per million CO₂ was about 3-5 million years ago," the report said. At that time, global mean surface temperatures were 2-3 degrees Celsius warmer, ice sheets at both poles had melted, and seas were 10 to 20 meters higher.

Other major takeaways include that the extent of

Arctic summer sea ice has declined at a rate of 12 percent per decade over the past 40 years, with the four lowest values between 2015 and 2019. Overall, the amount of ice lost from the Antarctic ice sheet increased by a factor of six each year between 1979 and 2017, while glacier loss for 2015-19 is also the highest for any five-year period on record.

Sea-level rise is also accelerating as is the process of acidification, with an increase in 26 percent in acidity today compared to pre-industrial periods, as a result of absorbing increased carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. The report also found that heatwaves were the deadliest weather hazard in the 2015-19 period, affecting all continents and setting new national temperature records.

The summer of 2019, which included the hottest ever month on record (July), saw unprecedented wildfires in the Arctic. In June, these were responsible for emitting 50 megatons of carbon dioxide. The report also comes at a time of increasing mobilization over the question of climate change, with millions taking part in a youth-led global strike Friday, before the first UN youth climate summit on Saturday. — AFP