

## International

# Dozens of migrants detained; EU readies Belarus sanctions

## 50 migrants cross the heavily-guarded border 'by force'

**WARSAW:** Dozens of migrants have been detained after crossing into Poland from Belarus, Warsaw said yesterday, warning of a possible larger breakthrough ahead of an EU meeting to widen sanctions on Belarus. Police said on Twitter that 50 migrants had crossed the heavily-guarded EU and NATO border near the village of Starzyna "by force" on Saturday. They were all later detained, the border guard said, adding that they could see signs of "a bigger attempt at crossing the border today". Thousands of migrants from the Middle East are camped out on the EU-Belarus border, creating a stand-off between the EU and US on one side and Belarus and its ally Russia on the other.

Western countries accuse Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko's regime of deliberately engineering the crisis by encouraging migrants to come to Belarus and then taking them to the border. Belarus denies the charges and blames the West. "If someone thinks that Lukashenko or Belarusians will flinch, then this will not happen," Lukashenko, referring to himself in the third person, said in an interview released on Saturday.

Aid agencies say at least 10 migrants have died so far and have warned of a humanitarian crisis unfolding as temperatures drop below freezing, urging a de-escalation to help the migrants. In the biggest camp, near the village of Bruzgi in Belarus, Belarusian authorities say there are 2,000 people, including pregnant women and children. Belarusian authorities have delivered aid including tents and heaters - a move that could make the camp a semi-permanent presence on the border.

**'Provocation' on border?**  
Poland has refused to allow the migrants in and has accused Belarus of preventing them from leaving. Interior Minister Mariusz Kaminski on Saturday said a rumor was being spread among the migrants that on Monday Poland would allow them through and coaches would come from Germany to pick them up. "A provocation is being prepared," Kaminski said.

The government has sent a text message to all foreign mobile phones along the border saying: "It's



### Mideast migrants camp out on the EU-Belarus border

a total lie and nonsense! Poland will continue to protect its border with Belarus. "Those who spread such rumors seek to encourage the migrants to storm the border, which may lead to dangerous developments," the text message reads. EU foreign ministers are also due to meet on Monday to widen the sanctions already imposed on Belarus for its crackdown on opponents of Lukashenko, who has ruled the country for nearly 30 years.



**GRODNO:** A family has a meal at a camp set up by migrants near the Belarusian-Polish border in the Grodno region. — AFP

EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said ministers would allow sanctions on anyone "taking part in the trafficking of migrants" in Belarus, including airlines, travel agencies and officials. "Lukashenko got it wrong. He thought that by acting in this way he would twist our arm and force us to cancel the

sanctions. The opposite is happening," Borrell told Journal du Dimanche, a French weekly. Following pressure from EU diplomats, Turkey has now banned Iraqis, Syrians and Yemenis from flying to Belarus and private Syrian carrier Cham Wings Airlines is also halting flights to Minsk. — AFP

## In Texas, 'sanctuary cities' pass their own anti-abortion laws

**TEXAS:** While the US Supreme Court ponders a ruling on Texas' controversial abortion law, some communities in this conservative state are deciding not to wait and are declaring themselves "sanctuary cities for the unborn." Inspired by SB 8, the highly restrictive Texas law that bans abortion after six weeks and makes no exception for rape or incest, around forty local municipalities have passed measures effectively prohibiting the procedure on their territory.

This week, Anson, a town of about 2,400 residents in central Texas, became the latest community to adopt such legislation, a move that made resident Mariah Mayo proud. "I stand here today for ... the innocent unborn who are unable to have their voices heard," Mayo, a local nurse, was quoted as saying by Liveaction.org, an anti-abortion organization. "I agree 100 percent with what my preacher said and I too want abortions to be outlawed.

Let's add this to our many reasons why we are proud to live here in the great city of Anson, Texas." Laws restricting abortion have been passed in multiple Republican-led states over the years, but they have been struck down by the courts because they violated previous Supreme Court rulings that guarantee the right to an abortion until the fetus is viable outside the womb, typically around 22 to 24 weeks.

The Texas "heartbeat law" differs from other efforts in that it attempts to insulate the state by giving members of the public the right to sue doctors who perform abortions - or anyone who helps facilitate them - once a heartbeat in the womb is detected. In recent years, the term "sanctuary cities" has been used to refer to Democratic communities that passed legislation to shield undocumented migrants from deportation or prosecution by the federal government under former president Donald Trump.

### Activist pastor

The idea of creating abortion-free communities belongs to Mark Lee Dickson, a former Baptist pastor in his mid-thirties who comes from a Texas family of anti-abortion activists. Wearing a baseball cap that is usually turned backward, Dickson started his campaign in 2019 in the town of Waskom, a small community on the state border with Louisiana. Dickson managed to convince local officials that an abortion clinic in the neighboring state was planning to relocate to their town.

Even though the clinic denied any such plans, Waskom's five municipal council members, all of them men, unanimously passed legislation that effectively prohibited abortions in their community. Since then, Dickson has been crisscrossing Texas, persuading local municipalities to follow suit - with success. Dozens of communities have declared themselves abortion-free sanctuaries and about twenty other cities are considering the measure, according to the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), one of the country's leading human rights organizations. Similar efforts are underway in the states of Ohio and Michigan. "They are going to continue to do this until there is no access to abortion at all. That is their goal. Let's be very clear about that," said Blair Wallace, a policy and advocacy strategist with the ACLU of Texas. — AFP

## Al Jazeera TV chief in Sudan held, after 6 killed in protests

**KHARTOUM:** Sudanese security forces have arrested the bureau chief of Qatari-based Al Jazeera TV, the network said yesterday, a day after the latest crackdown on anti-coup protesters left at least six dead. Among those killed were two teenagers, according to a medics' union. It was one of the bloodiest days since a coup almost three weeks ago, derailing a transition to full civilian rule, sparking international condemnation and provoking regular protests. Sudan has a long history of military coups, enjoying only rare interludes of democratic rule since independence in 1956.

"Security forces raided the house of Al-Musalami Al-Kabbashi, the Al Jazeera bureau chief in Sudan, and detained him," the network said on Twitter without elaborating. Al Jazeera has given prominent coverage to demonstrations against the October 25 power grab, but last week it also aired a detailed interview with top general Abdel Fattah el-Burhan. The protests, including by tens of thousands of people nationwide on Saturday, have continued despite internet outages forcing demonstrators to communicate via graffiti and SMS messages.

Among those killed on Saturday was Alsheikh Yasser Ali, 18, who was protesting in Khartoum's



**KHARTOUM:** Sudanese protesters carry an injured man to safety during an anti-coup demonstration in the Khartoum Barre neighborhood, outside the capital. — AFP

twin city of Omdurman to demand civilian rule. "I attended the body's autopsy, which showed that he took a bullet to the shoulder which hit the heart and the lungs," his uncle Zaher Ali told AFP. "I almost collapsed in the morgue." An independent union of medics said a 15-year-old was also among the six killed Saturday. Five were shot dead, while one died from "suffocation by tear gas", the medics said, who have recorded a total of 21 killed since the coup.

### Media crackdown

Other media outlets besides Al Jazeera have

been targeted since the putsch, when Burhan declared a state of emergency, detained the civilian leadership and removed the government installed after the April 2019 military ouster of autocratic president Omar Al-Bashir. Burhan, de facto head of state since Bashir fell, has sacked the heads of Sudan's state television and the official news agency. The head of media council granting journalist permits has also been switched, and handed back to Abdelazim Awad, who led the council during Bashir's authoritarian rule.

The coup has triggered punitive measures by Western countries and the World Bank, imperiling the impoverished country's need for investment and aid. The United Nations has called on security forces to show restraint, in a country where more than 250 people had already died in mass protests leading to Bashir's ouster. Yesterday, Britain's Minister for Africa, Vicky Ford, said she was "deeply concerned at reports of protesters killed", adding that Sudan's "military must listen to the huge numbers calling for restoration of the democratic transition."

Earlier, Washington's embassy in Khartoum said it regretted the loss of life and injuries to "dozens of Sudanese citizens demonstrating...for freedom and democracy." Gunshots were heard and tear gas fired as security forces tried to break up Saturday's protests, witnesses and AFP correspondents said. But police denied using "live rounds" and said 39 of their personnel were "severely wounded" in confrontations with the protesters, whom they accused of attacking police stations. — AFP



**NEW ADMINISTRATIVE CAPITAL:** This file photo shows a view of construction work ongoing at the 'business and finance district' of Egypt's 'New Administrative Capital' megaproject, some 45 kilometers east of Cairo. — AFP

## Egypt leader looks to 'New Capital' to cement his legacy

**NEW ADMINISTRATIVE CAPITAL, Egypt:** An opulent presidential palace, a brand new parliament, a regal opera house and spacious parks are all part of the vision for an ambitious new administrative capital rising up out of the Egyptian desert. As far as the eye can see, building sites dot the horizon heralding the arrival of this crown jewel of President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi's grand urban plans.

About 50 km east of the north African country's 1,000-year-old capital, Cairo, construction workers are racing to finish the project. It had been set to be unveiled on June 30 - the date marking the anniversary of 2013 mass protests, backed by the military, which toppled the divisive rule of late Islamist president Mohamed Morsi. But the launch was postponed because of the COVID pandemic that led to a downturn in the market.

After a series of false starts, Sisi this month issued a directive for civil servants to relocate to the new capital in December for a "six-month trial period". The city is forecast to cost around \$45 bil-

lion, is roughly the size of Singapore, and has been touted as a solution to overpopulation in the sprawling metropolis of Cairo, home to more than 20 million people.

After being first elected in 2014, Sisi anointed the new capital as "the birth of a new state ... and republic". Some believe, however, the new city, just known officially as the New Administrative capital, will not compete with Cairo in the same way as Brazil's new capital Brasilia and even risks eventually being swallowed up by its huge neighbor.

"The new capital for me is a mystery," said Galila El-Kadi, an urban planning professor and director of the Marseille-based Research Institute for Development. "It's already on the edge of Cairo without anyone moving there yet and within a few years it will expand and fuse into Cairo. This will only increase problems of managing human density of such magnitude," she told AFP.

Sisi has staked his legacy on massive infrastructure projects, and ground has also been broken in other new cities including on the Mediterranean Sea at El Alamein, in the fertile Delta near Mansoura and in the south near Aswan. In 2019 Sisi inaugurated a massive mosque in the new capital with capacity for 3,000 worshippers, as well as the largest cathedral in the Middle East for the Copt population, seeking to enhance his image as the country's self-proclaimed unifier. — AFP

## Jihadist attacks kill 7 Nigerian troops

**KANO:** At least seven Nigerian soldiers were killed in two separate ambushes by IS-affiliated jihadist fighters in the northeast of the country, the army and military sources said. Convoys have increasingly come under attack from Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) jihadists in the northeast where soldiers are battling to end a 12-year Islamist insurgency that has killed more than 40,000 civilians.

On Saturday four soldiers, including a military commander, were killed when ISWAP fighters ambushed them as they moved to provide reinforcements during a jihadist attack on Askira Uba town in Borno state, the army said in a statement. "Sadly, a gallant senior officer Brigadier General Dzarma Zirkusu and three soldiers paid the supreme sacrifice in a very rare display of gallantry as they provided reinforcement in a counter offensive against the terrorists," the statement.

Troops supported by fighter jets "neutralized several" jihadists in the fight and destroyed many of their vehicles, added the statement issued by the military's spokesman. Another three soldiers were killed on Friday when ISWAP fighters ambushed a military convoy in neighboring Yobe state, according to two military sources. Scores of jihadists opened fire on the convoy with heavy guns in an ambush at Tamsu Kawu village along the 120-kilometre highway linking Maiduguri and Yobe state capital Damaturu, the two sources told AFP.

"We lost three soldiers in the ambush from ISWAP terrorists," said one of the military officers. The militants seized a military vehicle in the attack, said the military officer. His account was supported by a second military officer who gave the same toll. The attacks happened as the military claimed a string of successes against the jihadists, including raids on their camps. On September 17, at least 16 Nigerian soldiers were killed in an ISWAP ambush on the highway linking Maiduguri and the garrison town of Monguno in the Lake Chad region. A week later, eight soldiers died when the jihadist group ambushed a military convoy near the town of Dikwa in the same area. ISWAP has been consolidating territory in the Lake Chad area since rival Boko Haram commander Abubakar Shekau was killed in fighting between the two jihadist forces earlier this year. — AFP