

Business

North African climate change threatens farming in Tunisia

Farmers left high and dry by increasingly long and intense droughts

SIDI SALEM, Tunisia: Tunisian olive farmer Ali Fileli looked out over his parched fields and crushed a lump of dry, dusty earth in his hand. "I can't do anything with my land because of the lack of water," he said. Fileli is just one of many farmers who have been left high and dry by increasingly long and intense droughts across North Africa.



KAIROUAN, Tunisia: A farmer holds a handful of soil parched because of drought in Tunisia's east-central area of Kairouan.

"When I started farming with my father, there was always rain, or we'd dig a well and there would be water," said the 54-year-old, who farms around 22 hectares (54 acres) of land near the northern city of Kairouan. "But these last 10 years there has always been a lack of water. Every year the water table drops three to four meters (10-13 feet)."

Fileli showed AFP his sprawling orchard of olive trees. With the olive harvest approaching, some bore small, shriveled fruits, but the rest were dead. He said that over the past decade, around half of his 1,000 olive trees have died due to drought. The country's water crisis is clearly visible at the Sidi Salem reservoir, which supplies water to almost three million Tunisians, including the capital Tunis.

Years of drought have left its water level critically low, an ominous sign for the region's future. The sur-

face of the lake lies 15 meters (50 feet) below a high-water mark left by floods in 2018.

Engineer Cherif Guesmi says that he has seen "terrifying climate change" during a decade working at the dam. "The situation today is really critical," he said. "There's hardly been any rain since a 2018 flood, and we're still using that water today."

As Tunisia sweltered in record temperatures topping 48 degrees Centigrade (118 Fahrenheit) in August, the reservoir lost 200,000 cubic meters per day from evaporation alone, he said. Despite heavy rain in late October, little fell in the dam's catchment area and the reservoir remains at just 17 percent of capacity, according to official figures this week.

Tunisia's neighbors face similar challenges. The North African nations of Algeria, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia are among the 30 most water-stressed countries in the world, according to the World Resources Institute. Experts warn this could drive social change that is likely to upset the region's tenuous sociopolitical balances.

'No future here'

Fileli has also had to delay plans to sow winter wheat or barley in his fields. He lists the knock-on effects: smaller crops mean farmers fall deeper into debt and hire fewer seasonal workers, adding to an 18 percent unemployment rate which has pushed many to leave the country.

"My son is saying, 'Dad, should I go and find work in Tunis or somewhere else? If things stay like this I have no future here.'" The problems facing Tunisia are felt across the region. "The water table across North Africa is dropping due to a combination of over-pumping and lack of precipitation," said Aaron Wolf, a professor of geography at Oregon State University.

He cited Libya's massive Man Made River, a huge system built under the late dictator Moamer Kadhafi, to pump "fossil water" from finite aquifers in the southern desert to the country's coastal cities.

In Algeria—the scene of huge forest fires in August—



TESTOUR, Tunisia: A view of the Medjerda river flowing through the Sidi Salem dam in the northern Tunisian area of Testour, in the Beja province. —AFP photos

valuable drinking water is regularly used for irrigation and industry. And in Morocco, drought has "strongly affected agricultural production", according to the economy ministry. Rabat's Agriculture Minister Mohammed Sadiki has told parliament that rainfall is down 84 percent from last year.

Need to adapt

Wolf said the implications of drought go far beyond the countryside, causing migration within and across national borders. "It's in all parties' interests to solve rural water problems," he said. "Drought drives all the things that lead to political instability: rural people migrating to the city, where there is no support for them, exacerbating political tensions."

Gulf Bank hosts data expert at data and analytics program

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank hosted a training session for its employees led by Dr Thomas Redman, a world-renowned expert in data quality and data analytics who is also known world-wide as the "Data Doc." The training session was held as part of Gulf Bank's recently launched Data Ambassadors program, which will train 142 employees across various departments in key data quality and analytics. The new program aims to upskill and empower employees to use advanced data science in order to enhance the Bank's offerings and services.

The data expert led a Data Quality training session, working closely with Gulf Bank's Data Ambassadors to build knowledge and expertise around data quality concepts. Dr. Redman also held a session with Gulf Bank's Data & Analytics Team to discuss how Gulf Bank can initiate successful data strategies by focusing on data quality, building organizational capabilities, and putting data to work in innovative ways. It is worth noting that the data ambassadors' curriculum was developed completely in-house by Gulf Bank's Data and Analytics office, and is the first stand-alone Data & Analytics program in the country. The new curriculum, which was developed primarily by Kuwaiti talent, has also been endorsed by Dr Redman, whose books and articles have been featured in respected periodicals including MIT Sloan and Harvard Business Review.

The new program is part of Gulf Bank's strategy for the year 2025, which aims to provide customers with an unprecedented banking experience based on digital transformation. The launch of the new program marks a remarkable undertaking by the Bank to train employees both quickly and efficiently in key concepts including data quality, data concepts and Tableau training. As part of the new program, 1 out of 10 employees in each team will be trained on how to use data and analytics tools.

Gulf Bank's General Manager of Human Resources, Salma Al-Hajaj emphasized the value and uniqueness of the Bank's new Data Ambassadors program, saying: "Our people are the secret behind Gulf Bank's excellence in the banking industry. With Gulf Bank spearheading multiple digitization efforts in the local banking sector, our employees are gaining valuable training and development opportunities and access to world-renowned expertise. The launch of our Data Ambassadors program marks the first standalone data and analytics program in Kuwait, and we are so proud to be able to give our employees the chance to partake in it."

Gulf Bank's Chief Data Officer (CDO), Mai Al-Owaish, also commented: "Gulf Bank's digital transformation is well underway, and we believe that the best way to enhance digital transformation is to focus first

and foremost on our data, our people, and our culture. By prioritizing a transformation across all these levels, we believe we will be able to not only better understand our customers, but also facilitate more creative ways to meet their needs and better serve our stakeholders."

Dr. Thomas Redman, the "Data Doc," also added, "I am so excited for colleagues at Gulf Bank, who are embarking on a new, data-driven adventure that will empower everything they aim to do. Now more than ever, organizations must recognize the fundamental importance of data and data quality. I am excited to witness a palpable digital transformation at the employee level at Gulf Bank, and I am excited to witness the successes that Gulf Bank's Data Ambassadors will achieve both within the Bank and beyond."

Gulf Bank plans to hold its Data Ambassadors program annually as part of its commitment to upskill new employees and enhance existing talent. The Bank also plans to launch a bank-wide Data Literacy program to upskill Gulf Bank employees on an ongoing basis, and enable departments to create automated data flows and use state-of-the-art tools and technologies to advance projects. Notably, Gulf Bank's Chief Data Officer (CDO), Mai Al-Owaish, is also the first female CDO in Kuwait and a board member of the world-renowned Digital Analytics Association (DAA).

Gulf Bank's vision is to be the leading Kuwaiti Bank of the Future. The Bank is constantly engaging and empowering its employees as part of an inclusive and diversified workplace in recognition of every employee's role in delivering customer excellence and serving the community at large. With its extensive network of branches and innovative digital services, Gulf Bank is able to give its customers the choice of how and where to conduct their banking transactions, all while ensuring a simple and seamless banking experience.

Gulf Bank is committed to maintaining a robust sustainability program at the community, economic, and environmental levels through sustainability initiatives that are strategically selected to benefit both the country and the Bank. Gulf Bank supports Kuwait Vision 2035 "New Kuwait" and works with the different relevant parties to achieve it.



Dr Thomas Redman with Gulf Bank employees



DUBAI: A female visitor in a red business costume walks towards a Dassault Falcon business jet aircraft on the tarmac at the 2021 Dubai Airshow. — AFP

Outlook starting to brighten for aviation, says Airbus CEO

DUBAI: The global aviation sector has begun to emerge from the COVID pandemic, its worst-ever crisis, and the "outlook is starting to brighten", Airbus CEO Guillaume Faury told journalists yesterday.

A large order of 255 of Airbus' single-aisle A231 planes announced Sunday at the Dubai Airshow "completely justifies" a shift to ramping up manufacturing, the CEO said, predicting production of long-haul planes could pick up by the second half of the decade. Yesterday, US Air Lease signed a letter of intent for 111 Airbus aircraft, the manufacturer said. Faury spoke to journalists, including AFP, on the sidelines of the Dubai Airshow. The following is a summarized and translated version of his comments in French:



Guillaume Faury

Has the airline sector recovered?

"The crisis was very brutal, lasting 15 months at its worst stage. We are in the process of emerging, we can see aerial traffic recovering, the reopening of travel lines, the planes travelling here to Dubai were full or nearly full. "The United States has largely resumed, Europe is also resuming. Asia will probably take a little longer, but globally the figures point to a recovery in the global economy and air traffic.

"When we say we are on the way out of the crisis, it is because we are coming back from the low point, we are progressively climbing back up. "Airbus began the gradual recovery some months ago on short and medium-haul aircraft, the A320 family, but not on long-haul aircraft. "We continue to believe that we can return to 2019-level air traffic at some point between 2023 and

2025 — regionally likely in 2023 and internationally in 2025. "We are much more optimistic because the outlook is starting to brighten. "We can see from yesterday's order that the airlines are also starting to look to the horizon and prepare for a post-crisis situation."

Is the order for 255 A321 a sign?

"We quickly understood in 2020 that airlines and charter companies did not want to make decisions during the crisis that would have had too great of an impact on their future growth and their ability to remain key players.

"At the start of 2021, I said that I was not expecting big orders in 2021 and they would come in 2022. "There are exceptions that prove the rule. We are in discussion with several players that are positioning themselves more quickly than others. "We are in a recovery scenario that is not very different from what we had imagined. "This confirms that the value of access to aircraft production is very important for the big players in aviation."

Will the order reassure other manufacturers?

"It completely justifies the ramp-ups we are anticipating. "We are in the process of determining whether a ramp-up in the production to 70 and 75 will go on," he said referring to the number of new A320 and A321 aircraft per month in the summer of 2025.

"For the entire supply chain, it is a difficult moment, but (the ramp-ups) are clearly an opportunity. "We think that for the second half of the decade, it is quite probable that what is happening with medium-haul aircraft will happen with long-haul aircraft because there will have seen five or six years of very weak deliveries. "Many planes have been placed in long-term storage, some of which will be retired, which will create a deficit of new, high performance, fuel-efficient planes. "Therefore, it is likely that there will be a strong ramp-up of long-haul aircraft at some point during the second half of the decade." —AFP

CBK bonds and related Tawarruq

KUWAIT: The Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) announced the most recent issues of CBK Bonds and related Tawarruq at a total value of KD 240 million for six months with a rate of return at 1.250%.



Dr Thomas Redman with Gulf Bank employees