

Kuwait Times

THE LEADING INDEPENDENT
DAILY IN THE ARABIAN GULF
ESTABLISHED 1961

Founder and Publisher
YOUSUF S. AL-ALYAN

Editor-in-Chief
ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-ALYAN

EDITORIAL : 24833199-24833358-24833432
ADVERTISING : 24835616/7
FAX : 24835620/1
CIRCULATION : 24833199 Extn. 163
ACCOUNTS : 24835619
COMMERCIAL : 24835618

P.O. Box 1301 Safat, 13014 Kuwait.
E MAIL: info@kuwaittimes.net
Website: www.kuwaittimes.net

Issues

RETURN OF IRAN OIL
MAY CAUSE MORE
OPEC TENSIONS

By Caroline Varin

The return of oil from Iran following the landmark nuclear energy deal with world powers could create fresh tensions within OPEC but may reinforce the cartel's output strategy, analysts say. Tehran and major powers - Britain, China, France, Germany, Russia and the United States - clinched a historic agreement in Vienna on Tuesday aimed at ensuring Iran does not obtain a nuclear bomb, and which paves the way for the removal of sanctions and the gradual return of Iranian oil to the global market next year.

The accord puts strict limits on Iran's nuclear activities for at least a decade. In return, sanctions that have slashed the oil exports of OPEC's fifth-largest producer will be lifted and billions of dollars in frozen assets unblocked. The Islamic republic's exports could reach a potential 2.4 million barrels per day (bpd) in 2016, from 1.6 million bpd in 2014, according to data from economist Charles Robertson at investment bank Renaissance Capital.

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries - whose 12 members including Iran pump one third of global oil - is mindful that Iranian oil could worsen a global supply glut and depress oil prices further. OPEC decided at its last meeting in Vienna in June to maintain output levels, extending its Saudi-backed strategy to preserve market share and fend off competition from booming US shale. Oil prices sank last week, hit by the Iran nuclear deal and the strong dollar, raising jitters among some OPEC members who next meet on Dec 4. London Brent oil slid to about \$56 per barrel and New York's West Texas Intermediate dropped to around \$52 a barrel.

Divisions in Cartel

Poorer OPEC members Angola, Algeria and Venezuela - whose budgets are heavily reliant on oil revenues - may again argue for less output to support prices, analysts say. Richer Gulf producers, led by OPEC kingpin Saudi Arabia, remain eager for the cartel to preserve valuable market share and force out high-cost US shale producers with lower oil price levels. "Clearly there is a divide between the countries on this new policy of seeking new market share," Ann-Louise Hittle at consultancy Wood Mackenzie told AFP. "So it could be a contentious (OPEC) meeting and there could be pressure for an emergency meeting before December."

Faced with stubbornly low prices, Algeria's energy minister Salah Khabri indicated to state news agency APS last week that an emergency OPEC meet could be needed. "The real problem starts when OPEC members begin to fight for quotas amid oversupply and market share disputes," said Jassem al-Saadun, head of Kuwait's Al-Shall Economic Consultants. "If Iran, Venezuela, Algeria and Libya - all of which need to pump more - enter into a dispute with the Gulf producers, then it could be the end for OPEC," he warned.

Danske Bank analyst Jens Naervig Pedersen said such countries had been "really hit" by low oil prices. But he added: "Their collective power is probably not great enough to turn the mind of Saudi Arabia and the core members of OPEC in the Middle East."

Global Demand Key

In June, OPEC's collective output ceiling was left at 30 million bpd - where it has stood for three and a half years - despite an oil price collapse between June 2014 and January that slashed precious revenues. The organisation appeared to shrug off calls from some members, including Iran, for a "reasonable" oil price of between \$75 and \$80 per barrel. Oil is forecast to languish at an average of just above \$62 per barrel next year, according to French bank Natixis.

Hittle cautioned that low price levels could slow down US shale energy production and make room for returning supplies from Iran - provided that global energy demand does not falter. "When we look at fundamentals (of supply and demand) in the next year, with prices at this level we do expect to see a much slower growth in US oil supply," she said. "So there might actually be some room for Iranian production to start up, as long as oil demand growth holds up and continues." —AFP

VICTIMS' FAMILIES WAIT FOR JUSTICE
A YEAR AFTER MH17 SHOT DOWN IN UKRAINE...

SEARCH FOR JUSTICE LAGS BOOM IN IVORY COAST

By Joe Bavier

Four years after the civil war ended in Ivory Coast the economy is booming, but for men like Yaboua Assie, who lost two young daughters in one of the conflict's most notorious massacres, the justice they seek remains as elusive as ever. The killings took place in a grassy lot behind the government offices in the small town of Bolequin, an event Assie relives almost nightly in his dreams. "When I close my eyes, I'm here in this courtyard," he says, gazing around the walled compound, which was meant to be a refuge for those fleeing the 2011 war.

He stands at the edge of a rectangular depression that until recently was a mass grave containing the remains of 45 massacred civilians. Two were his daughters: one 12, the other six months old. The bodies were exhumed by an investigative unit charged with prosecuting rights abuses during the conflict, in which campaigners say 3,000 people were killed. The war started when then-president Laurent Gbagbo refused to quit despite losing an election to Alassane Ouattara in late 2010.

Four years later, with Ouattara in power, Ivory Coast is forging ahead - its economy forecast to grow 9 percent this year - but the quest for justice has lagged behind, hampered by lack of government support, rights groups say. Gbagbo was extradited to the International Criminal Court in The Hague charged with crimes against humanity. His top political and military supporters were jailed. Dozens, including his wife Simone who is also wanted by the ICC, were convicted in Ivory Coast this year.

By contrast, Ouattara's military backers have received top posts in the army, despite allegations they too were responsible for civilian massacres. With elections in October, Ouattara is keen to face down accusations of 'victor's justice' from sections of Gbagbo's Ivorian Popular Front party and opposition groups. The president has pledged no one will be above the law. Last week, rights groups revealed that around 20 former rebels serving in the army had finally been indicted for alleged crimes committed during the crisis.

But the families of many victims have little faith that

those who did the killing will pay for their crimes. When pro-Gbagbo mercenaries attacked his neighbours that March day in 2011, Assie saved himself and his 5-year-old daughter by playing dead as the bodies piled up on top of him. "It's war. They say to let it go. And we let it go," he says. "When something is ruined, it's ruined."

A Pointless Spectacle?

In Abidjan, commercial capital of the world's largest cocoa exporter, the completion of a long-awaited third bridge across the lagoon last year marked a symbolic end to a decade of stagnation following an earlier 2003-2004 civil conflict. The return of the headquarters of the African Development Bank, which had moved to Tunis in the wake of that conflict, is seen as a sign of a return to stability.

An opinion poll last month by the Washington-based International Republican Institute showed public support for Ouattara. Two-thirds of respondents said the country was heading in the right direction, and more than three-quarters approved of the job being done by the president. Yet the same polls underlined one of the main failures of his first term: slow progress towards healing Ivory Coast's deeply divided society.

The National Truth and Reconciliation Commission set up in the wake of the conflict recorded the lowest approval rating of the 14 institutions included in the poll at just 37 percent. And just 18 percent of the country's citizens believe justice had been served to all Ivorians following the post-election crisis. "The slow judicial process and dubious impartiality cast a shadow on reconciliation and mid- and long-term stability prospects," said Gilles Yabi, an analyst and founder of the West Africa-focused think tank Wathi.

Scepticism has bred resistance to the exhumations in some quarters. Justice Minister Mamadou Gnenema Coulibaly, who views them as critical to building criminal cases, questions the motives of those opposed to the process. "Some think we are looking to incriminate Gbagbo. If they are pro-Gbagbo, they'll act in bad faith," he told Reuters. "Others think we are looking for proof of their own involvement in the crimes and they try to block things."

The government's handling of previous investigations has contributed to the reticence. Julien Kpahi last saw his brother loaded into an army truck early one morning in 2012 after an attack on a camp for war-displaced civilians outside the town of Duekoue. Witness accounts implicated government soldiers and pro-Ouattara traditional Dozo hunters in the raid, which took place a year after Gbagbo fell. The government has never acknowledged any role in the violence.

Months later, a survivor led Kpahi to a well where he said his brother's body had been thrown. Under pressure from human rights groups, authorities opened an investigation, removed six bodies from the well and brought them to Abidjan for autopsy. Kpahi has heard nothing since. Three years later, his brother's remains have yet to be returned. "I have no hope it will lead to anything," said Kpahi, who was recently prevented from visiting the well by UN peacekeepers. "For me, it's pointless ... It's a spectacle."

First Step

For Human Rights Watch researcher Jim Wormington, this month's indictments of pro-Ouattara commanders were a promising sign but only a first step. Among those formally accused are Lieutenant Colonel Cherif Ousmane, the deputy head of Ouattara's presidential guard, and Lieutenant Colonel Losseni Fofana, another senior commander. "To prove its commitment to impartial justice, the government should provide the judiciary with the support it needs to finish the investigations and bring the cases to trial," he said.

In Duekoue's Carrefour neighbourhood, there are plenty who doubt this will happen. On March 28, 2011, hundreds of people were killed in an area predominantly inhabited by Guerres, an ethnic group seen as among Gbagbo's staunchest supporters. Here, no amount of economic progress will convince the war's victims to turn the page. And residents like Georges Doue, 51, who lost seven members of his family in the massacre, have little faith the government will investigate the killings. "There's no trust," he said. —Reuters

WHY LIBYA COASTGUARD STRUGGLES WITH MIGRANTS

By Ulf Laessing

A few weeks ago, a sailor in Libya's coastguard scooped up Luchiya Mhreteab and her two small children after the boat taking them to Italy sank off Libya's northern tip. Mhreteab, 30, had fled Eritrea and is pregnant. She and her five-year-old daughter Dina and three-year-old son Yosan now live on a mat in the courtyard of a Libyan detention centre. They eat rice and vegetables three times a day, Mhreteab explained, her ripped black abaya stretched across her growing tummy. "I don't know what to do next."

All the passengers in Mhreteab's boat were saved that day. But often Libya's 12-metre inflatable patrol boats are too slow or too small to rescue everyone. The boats have no satellite phones. The radio of the coastguard's central command in Tripoli is often shut off. Some days, coastguards help bury the dead in piles of sand on the beach. Split between two rival factions which both claim to run the country, Libya can sometimes seem as powerless as the tens of thousands of impoverished migrants who use it as a launch-pad for a better life in Europe.

European nations want to stop the human smugglers, and have asked Libya to secure its borders and coastline. But interviews with coastguard officials, prosecutors, police, and border authorities, in addition to migrants waiting to depart, show that the war-torn country has neither the means nor the will to stop the flow of migrants. Nowhere is that powerlessness - and Europe's failure - more obvious than in the country's coastguard.

Libya's navy was destroyed in the 2011

uprising that toppled Muammar Gaddafi. That has left its 1,800 km of coastline vulnerable. In 2013, the European Union set up an aid program with an annual budget of €26 million (\$28 million) to train Libya's coastguard, and airport and land border officers. But that program has been abandoned, and Libya's coastguard remains ineffective. It has just six boats, including two small inflatables not designed for use on the open sea. The force was rebuilt after 2011 by recruiting former rebel fighters, who had very little experience on the water. Officials have even recruited local fishermen to help. The captain of the main Tripoli coastguard boat is a fisherman whose family runs a restaurant.

Because the country is split, the coastguard's command centre in Tripoli, home of one self-declared government, has no contact with officials in the eastern part of the country. The people-smugglers are richer and better equipped than Libyan border control, police or coastguard officials. Sadiq Al-Sour, head of the investigations department at Libya's state prosecutor in Tripoli, said he knew the identities and whereabouts of several smugglers, but simply did not have the forces to conduct searches or carry out arrests. "Libya needs a strong coastguard, helicopters and secure borders in order to combat illegal immigration," he said. "If not, we can't stop it."

Left Alone

After the 2011 uprising, Italy agreed to spend millions on training Libya's border guards. But it suspended its cooperation two years ago when Libya became too unstable. "There was an agreement for training to help create a state security

force and police. Then the situation degenerated and we cut off all ties. Until there's a recognised single authority, that's likely to be how things will remain," said a spokesman at Italy's defence ministry.

The European Union was also helping to build up a coastguard. Trainers focused on delivering basic sea skills such as wearing life vests and rescue drills. But it too pulled out last summer when fighting over Tripoli broke out. Ayoub Qassem, spokesman for the Libyan navy, said the training had been of limited help. Without modern boats and equipment such as radar, even well-trained sailors were limited in what they could do.

Even European diplomats said the training had changed little. Up to half the budget was spent on protection and accommodation for trainers and officials, who lived in a high-security compound and luxury hotel. Colonel Rida Essa, commander of the coastguard in Misrata, said the coastguard still struggles with corruption. Some officials will turn a blind eye to boats packed with migrants, he said.

Seeking Europe

When the coastguard picked up Mhreteab's boat, the migrants on board resisted, disappointed that they would not make it to Europe. Many of the migrants who are rescued off the coast of Tripoli end up 10 km inland in a detention centre in Qarabouli. Last month, 400 people from across Africa were being held there, guarded by police. The centre is run by the Tripoli government. Libya used to send most people back to their own countries, but fighting between tribes in the south has cut off the main exit route by land to

Niger. As well, most countries have closed their embassies in Tripoli since they do not recognise the government there, leaving migrants unable to get travel documents.

In the Qarabouli centre, the migrants spend their days lying side by side, dozing on mats. Three times a day the doors are opened for guards to bring rice and vegetables, and occasionally meat. There is no budget for a doctor; a charity sends a health worker once a week. Simon Najwa, a 27-year-old Eritrean medical graduate, had been living in the Qarabouli centre for three weeks, after the coastguard stopped his boat off the coast of Tripoli. Naiwa said he had left Eritrea because he had been drafted into the army shortly after graduating from medical college.

He had crossed into Khartoum and then his family had paid smugglers \$1,600 for him to be transported to a farm near Tripoli. "I don't want to go back to Eritrea," said Naiwa, adding that he needs to go to Europe so he can repay his family for financing his trip. Mhreteab's journey also took months. She too travelled to Khartoum, where she agreed to pay \$2,000 to travel on a crowded truck for 10 days into Libya. After two months in a detention centre - where she discovered she was pregnant - she and 50 other people were transported to a farm in Libya where they waited another two weeks. Then one night, she was told to get up with her children and walk to the shore.

Barely had they set sail when the Libyan coastguard rescued them, and brought them to Qarabouli. "This place is very bad where we stay. But I don't want to go back to Eritrea. I would be arrested. I want to go to Europe," she said. —Reuters

All articles appearing on these pages are the personal opinion of the writers. Kuwait Times takes no responsibility for views expressed therein. Kuwait Times invites readers to voice their opinions. Please send submissions via email to: opinion@kuwaittimes.net or via snail mail to PO Box 1301 Safat, Kuwait. The editor reserves the right to edit any submission as necessary.