

International

As Libya's war drags on, Tripoli drowns in waste

Rubbish crisis adds to the daily ordeal for residents

TRIPOLI: Faraj Al-Doukali hastened to unload the dozens of rubbish bags from his van onto a sidewalk dump in Siyahiya, a residential district west of the Libyan capital. "Each weekend I collect the rubbish from my four brothers at the farm where we live and I look for somewhere to dump it. I have no choice but to leave it here on the footpath," he said. Across Tripoli, tons of waste overflows from bins and piles up on roadsides. The rubbish crisis adds to the daily ordeal for residents of the capital, where life is already punctuated by shortages of fuel, electricity and water. Fed up with the smell and the sight of rats and stray cats feasting in the garbage, some residents have taken to burning the rubbish.

But this only replaces the stench of rotting garbage with columns of nauseating smoke in the streets of the capital. Tripoli's trash turmoil isn't a new phenomenon but it has reached alarming proportions in recent months. Municipal rubbish trucks no longer collect waste because the city's main landfill is on a frontline. The dump is at Sidi al-Sayeh, 45 kilometers (28 miles) south of Tripoli, where forces loyal to the capital's UN-recognized Government of National Accord (GNA) are battling those of eastern strongman Khalifa Haftar, who launched an offensive on April 4 to seize the city.

'Find a solution'

Doukali seems more angered by the rubbish

than the fighting. "Is it up to citizens to collect the garbage now? Why doesn't the government and the municipality provide skips in every neighborhood?" he asked. A furious passerby interjected: "I'm talking to the government of the east (which supports Haftar) and that of the west (the GNA): keep your ministerial portfolios and the money, but find a solution to this rubbish crisis because it's making us sick."

Without long-term solutions and as long as fighting continues, "the crisis will worsen", said Tarek al-Jadidi, director of environmental protection at the National Centre for the Prevention of Diseases in Tripoli. "In addition to the lack of environmental awareness among citizens, the state is unable to manage the rubbish in the streets, while ongoing conflict prevents the implementation of plans like in other countries," Jadidi said. In theory, waste management in Tripoli takes place in stages, with rubbish being taken first to collection points and then onwards to the main landfill. But with the landfill in a combat zone, collection points are overflowing. Rubbish sorting and recycling are out of the question. Glass, paper and plastic could be recycled, but specialized facilities "require a stable security situation", Jadidi said. Rouqaya Al-Hachemi, an environmental researcher, recently conducted a study on the rubbish crisis in Tripoli.

She found that respiratory illnesses and skin conditions have clearly increased among chil-



TRIPOLI: Photo shows a view of rubbish piling up along the side of a street in the Libyan capital Tripoli. — AFP

dren, the elderly and pregnant women. "People are aware of the environmental risks and dangers of garbage fires but they complain about a lack of skips," she said. To resolve this chronic crisis, Hachemi recommends "the creation of a

ministry of environment to manage the rubbish situation, and laws to punish offenders". Waste management may not seem like Libya's most pressing issue, but ultimately, Hachemi said, "it's about the health of citizens". — AFP

173 civilians killed by landmines in Syria this year

BEIRUT: At least 173 civilians, including 41 children, have been killed in Syria by landmines and explosive remnants of war since the start of the year, a monitor said yesterday. Syria's warring parties have all planted landmines in urban as well as rural areas since the conflict started in 2011. Across the country, more than 10 million people live in areas contaminated by explosive hazards, the United Nations says. "Since early 2019, 173 civilians, including 41 children, have been killed by landmines and explosive remnants of war," said the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

Of the victims, at least 40 have been killed while digging for truffles, the Britain-based monitor said. "Every day civilians are losing their lives or being maimed for life due to landmines and unexploded ordnances," said the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). "It is estimated that 2 out of 3 survivors of an

explosive hazard incident in Syria will sustain a life-long impairment," it added on Twitter.

The United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) says landmine contamination "hampers" attempts to clear rubble and cultivate agricultural land. It also poses a threat to children and obstructs the return of displaced Syrians to

their hometowns and villages, UNMAS told AFP in August. In July 2018, UNMAS signed a memorandum of understanding with the government to establish a permanent representation in Damascus. The war in Syria has killed more than 370,000 people and displaced millions since erupting in 2011 with the repression of anti-government protests. — AFP



AIN ISSA: A volunteer caretaker who looks after 24 orphaned children, reportedly linked with foreign fighters of the Islamic State (IS) group, covers her face as she carries a child at a camp in the northern Syrian village of Ain Issa. — AFP

US re-opens embassy in Somalia's capital

MOGADISHU: The United States said Wednesday it had re-opened an embassy in Somalia's capital, 28 years after it was shut as the country plunged into civil war, highlighting warming ties between the two nations. Washington closed its embassy during the 1991 overthrow of president Siad Barre's military regime which ushered in decades of chaos, however diplomatic relations have strengthened in recent years.

"Today we reaffirm the relations between the American people and the Somali people, and our two nations," said Ambassador Donald Yamamoto in a statement. "It is a significant and historic day that reflects Somalia's progress in recent years, and another step forward in regularizing US diplomatic engagement in Mogadishu since recognizing the federal government of Somalia in 2013." A permanent diplomatic presence was established in Mogadishu in December 2018, however was operated out of Nairobi.

The country continues to be wracked by an Islamist insurgency, and Al-Shabaab militants on Monday staged an attack on a military base that is a major launching site for US drone operations, as well as a European Union convoy. US strikes in Somalia surged in April 2017, after President Donald Trump declared the south of the country an "area of active hostilities". "The United States remains a strong partner to Somalia in its effort to build a stable, credible, and democratic country," said the statement. — AFP