



Islamabad warns of genocide in Kashmir

Clean energy or food? Asian nations grapple with new demands on land

Page 9

Page 9



TUNIS: An unpaved road in pictured in the Tunis district of Ettadhamen ahead of the September 15 presidential election. The Tunis suburb of Ettadhamen has a bad reputation but it is a must be stop on the campaign trail of candidates running in the presidential election who are keen on showing they are fighting against poverty and for social justice. — AFP

Will we eat democracy? Tunisians ask

Economic troubles undermine trust in politics

FERNANA: As he watched a campaign bus pull into town plastered with slogans and posters for one of the 26 candidates for president, Mondher Jawad slapped his hands with fury while the woman next to him shouted abuse at the candidate's staff. "Democracy means nothing to us," said Jawad, a 45-year-old with no job who has struggled to feed his three children in the dusty town of Fernana near the border with Algeria.

"Will we eat or drink democracy?" The birthplace of the "Arab Spring", Tunisia is the only country to achieve a peaceful transition to democracy following the 2011 popular revolts that swept autocrats from power across North Africa and the Middle East.

But as the time comes to choose a successor to the first democratically elected president, Beji Caid Essebsi, who died in office at 92 in July, many voters are in a dark mood, frustrated by the government's failure to improve the quality of life. There is still pride in democ-

cracy, and the country's first televised presidential debates, spread over three successive nights this past week, were widely watched. But turnout in elections for local government last year was only 34% and came on the heels of widespread protests over living standards. Politicians have warned that a failure to show real progress could jeopardize the democratic project itself. Economic opportunities must improve "if Tunisia is to join the club of strong democracy," Prime Minister Youssef Chahed, one of the presidential candidates, said in an interview with Reuters last month.

Strikes, unemployment

Tourism, a vital source of foreign currency, has only just recovered from militant attacks four years ago. Public spending has been cut sharply to tame the state finances, while economic growth has not risen fast enough to make a dent in unemployment. Many state

workers have gone on strike to demand more pay or better conditions, sometimes prompting counter protests. Outside a big post office shut by strikes in central Tunis last week, furious protesters tried to rip open the door to demand work resume so they could pick up pay cheques.

"I can't even withdraw 50 dinars (\$17)," said Sihem ben Salem, a woman crying outside the door. "The gangs, including politicians and unions, have taken over. They're only ones to benefit from the revolution," she added. In the countryside, the political tumult of the capital seems remote. Further out from Fernana towards the Algerian border, the people of Oued al-Berber had hoped the revolution might bring them running water. Instead, they still have to walk an hour each day to reach the well by donkey.

"I remember the president died but I don't know who's president now. Nobody important comes here.

Not before the revolution or afterwards," said Noura Mechergui, 38, next to the wells where she and other villagers filled casks of water from the same concrete troughs where their animals drank. Down the valley, in a homestead of five mud and stone buildings roofed with wicker and thatch, the three Ben Rabeh brothers and their families eek out a subsistence life far from the politics of the capital.

Each family sleeps, cooks and eats in a single room on a rough earthen floor under a bare lightbulb. The men are unemployed and spend their days hauling water from the spring and tending to their vegetable patch. There is no money for schoolbooks for the children. Still, Ahmed Ben Rabeh, 49, a father of four, said he was considering voting. He would ask somebody in a nearby village who to vote for, he said. "When I watch television sometimes, I understand that politicians do not talk about people like us," he said. — Reuters

Foreigners flee S Africa attacks

JOHANNESBURG: Beverly Nyamakwenje was fast asleep in her home in the east Johannesburg township of Katilehong when she was woken by gunshots. Instructed by her panicked father, the 19-year old Zimbabwean grabbed a few belongings and fled with him to a police station for safety. "We left our bags," Nyamakwenje said. "We only took two minutes."

Nyamakwenje is one of around 850 people who have taken refuge in halls set up for foreigners displaced by xenophobic violence in the Joburg region, a municipal spokesman said. The door and windows of her little home have been smashed and the rooms wrecked. Everything inside has been stolen or burnt. She and her father are holed up in Katilehong's Tsoalo community hall, alongside 250 Zimbabweans and Malawians.

More than 500 Mozambicans have been placed in a hall nearby. "It happened so fast," said Nyamakwenje on Monday, her fourth day at the shelter. "I only got one pair of shoes and two of my jeans." At least 12 people have been killed by a surge of anti-foreigner violence in the country's financial capital last week. South Africa is a major destination for economic migrants from neighboring countries. They have often borne the brunt of anger from locals frustrated over jobs.

But the latest surge of attacks on businesses and homes has worried other African countries. Nigeria is flying hundreds of its citizens home. For now, Nyamakwenje sits on a plastic chair in the dimly-lit hallway, walls lined with blankets and hurriedly packed suitcases. Baby cries echoed around her. Outside, excited children clambered around municipal pick-up trucks. Women weaved each others hair. Boys kicked lazily at a football. Most live in the area, but they are too frightened to return home.

Violence flared up again on Sunday, breaking the tentative calm that returned to Johannesburg by the end of last week. "In the news they are saying that the fighting was finished but... they are fighting with us, even today," said Poronkie, a 47-year old plumber from Zimbabwe afraid to give his full name. Another



JOHANNESBURG: A partially destroyed shop is seen in Johannesburg's Malvern suburb after South Africa's financial capital was hit by a new wave of night violence. — AFP

two people were killed in the attacks on Sunday, with hundreds of shops and properties looted, and more than 600 people arrested. "I am homeless," Poronkie said. "They burnt everything that belonged to me. I thank God that I am still alive."

'We are not doing anything'

Millions of economic migrants live in South Africa - the continent's second largest economy - though official numbers are unclear as most are undocumented. In poor districts, many South Africans scapegoat foreigners for the limited progress made by the majority black population since apartheid ended in 1994.

"The South Africans don't want us anymore and they are executing us very brutally," said Joseph Mozorodze, 25, a Zimbabwean builder who has worked in Johannesburg for several years. "We are not doing anything, we are just looking for jobs to earn money." Xenophobic attacks are not uncommon, especially for migrants working in low-skilled labor. Municipal police spokesman William Ntadi told AFP he had dealt with similar situations during his career.

Anti-foreigner violence left 62 people dead in 2008, while seven were killed in attacks in Johannesburg and Durban in 2015. "The number we

have now is less than the previous one," said Ntadi. "(In 2015) we had to use many municipal facilities to accommodate them." Community leaders were working to ease tensions between groups and help reintegrate the displaced, he said. Aid organizations are providing meals and donations.

'Worried about my life'

John Chirwa did not have high hopes. Since the violence broke out, the 27-year-old Malawian security guard has been too nervous to leave his wife and newborn alone at night. They sleep at the shelter while he goes to work. "I was not feeling good, I couldn't work as usual," said Chirwa, picking at a plate of corn meal and chicken before his night shift. "This violence is not just violence. It's called xenophobia. People are getting killed."

He toyed with the possibility of returning to his country, like many displaced. "If I insist on staying maybe I'm going to lose my life," said Harry Mrevo, also from Malawi, whose home was destroyed by mobs. "So I'm waiting to go home if they provide transport." The embassies of Zimbabwe, Malawi and Mozambique have liaised with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to carry out voluntary repatriations. — AFP

Lebanon Shiites mark Ashoura in show of anti-Israel defiance

BEIRUT: Anti-Israeli chants rang through the streets of a Hezbollah bastion in the Lebanese capital yesterday as thousands of black-clad Shiites commemorated the seventh-century killing of Prophet Mohammed's (PBUH) grandson. "We have taught Israel that our people are not weak," the men cried, beating their chests in unison, during an Ashoura commemoration marking the killing of Imam Hussein in battle by Caliph Yazid's forces.

This year's ceremony comes shortly after a series of confrontations between Hezbollah and Israel, including an exchange of cross-border fire at the start of the month. Standing behind the crowd, a black banner tied around his head, Mohammad Ali praised the September 1 Hezbollah missile attack on Israel that triggered the border flare-up. "For years, our families and our children have slept in bunkers because of the Israelis," said the 49-year-old. "Now it is their turn to sleep in bunkers," he told AFP. "The era of defeat is over."

Message to Israel

From sunrise, thousands of men gathered in Beirut's southern suburbs, a Hezbollah bastion and target of an August 25 drone attack that the movement blamed on Israel. Some were crouched on the floor crying, tears streaming down their faces, as they listened to a recital of Hussein's death. Others sat in prayer as the recital blasted from speakers, interrupted only by the sporadic weeping of the narrator.

Some carried black flags at the ceremony which came one day after Hezbollah said it had downed and seized an Israeli drone as it flew across the Lebanese border. In the procession, thousands marched towards a main square, watched by Hezbollah forces deployed on rooftops and on sides of the road. In a televised speech broadcast live, Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah said his movement would respond to any Israeli attack on Lebanon. — AFP