

# Public buses return to Tripoli after 30 yrs

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## Tripoli

**P**arked in a hangar in downtown Tripoli, some 35 buses awaited this week's launch of a new urban public transport scheme -- the first in the Libyan capital in three decades.

Imported from China, the brand new vehicles will make their first trips in the coming days, across a city that for six months has lived with the deadly rhythm of combat in its outer suburbs.

Since April, eastern strongman Khalifa Haftar has been battling forces loyal to the UN-recognised Government of National Accord for control of Tripoli.

Equipped with wifi and air conditioning, the blue and white buses will run 20 routes, from Jazour 15 kilometres (nine miles) west of Tripoli to Tajoura, 12 kilometres east of the city. Another route will travel 25 kilometres south to the airport (though the facility is not operational).

Transport company Al-Sahem -- whose name means arrow -- wants residents to re-embrace public transport as a way to reduce congestion in this Mediterranean city where urbanisation sprawls along the coast.

With commutes lengthening,



Public buses are returning to the streets of the Libyan capital for the first time in three decades

increasingly dilapidated private transport options aren't meeting people's needs, said al-Sahem head Aboubakr Qormane.

"We urgently need to re-establish public transport services in Tripoli, a city that has suffered in its absence," he said.

The system will "prioritise workers who need public transport the most... reducing congestion during rush hour," he said.

## Traffic jams

Every day, Mohamed al-Bouzedi commutes via minibus or ancient taxi from his home in Jazour to his clothing shop in town.

"There hasn't been public transport in Tripoli for decades... this project will be really helpful to residents," said al-Bouzedi, whose journey is often punctuated by breakdowns and traffic jams.

"Modern buses should help me get to my shop in less time. I'm eager to try it," he said.

Until now, those without a car have had the choice between taking a taxi or relying on rundown private minibuses -- known locally as Ivecos after their manufacturer -- which ply the main roads.

Qormane said al-Sahem had contracted Chinese manufacturer King Long to provide 145 vehicles over two years at a cost of \$13 million (11.8 million euros).

Selecting the capital for al-Sahem's pilot project was a logical choice, Qormane said: "A third of Libya's population lives in Tripoli and its roads present no great challenges, beyond a general disregard for the road code."

After launching its Tripoli project, Al-Sahem hopes to introduce intercity lines, in particular connecting isolated southern cities dotted across a vast desert landscape in a country of more than 1.7 million km2.

## Insecurity

With fighting still imperiling

certain districts around Tripoli, shopkeeper al-Bouzedi worries for the future of a public bus project.

"The situation on the outskirts of Tripoli, particularly in the southern suburbs, is bad. Rocket fire is indiscriminate and



Tripoli's streets are notoriously clogged with three million vehicles in a city of two million people, where petrol costs 10 cents a litre

unpredictable. It would be tragic if a rocket hit a bus filled with 40 passengers," he said.

Another obstacle to the transport network is more mundane: severe traffic clogs Tripoli's roads daily.

In an oil-rich country, where subsidised petrol costs about 10 cents a litre (less than bottled water), the average household owns two to three cars.

In Tripoli alone, the number of privately-owned vehicles has more than tripled in less than a decade, jumping from 600,000 in 2010 to two million this year.

Together with municipal vehicles, taxis and minibuses, the number rises to three million -- in a city of two million inhabitants.

But if buses will be a boon for most citizens, some taxi drivers worry for their future earnings.

Abdel Mohayem fears he could be forced to sell his cab if his passengers prefer the bus, the driver said.

"Many will be affected by this project... even if it does reduce traffic jams and travel time," he said.

## Hong Kong leader rules out concessions in face of escalating violence



Carrie Lam

Reuters | Hong Kong

**E**mbattled Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam yesterday ruled out making any concessions to pro-democracy protesters in the face of escalating violence, which police said was now "life threatening" citing the detonation of a small bomb.

"I have said on many occasions that violence will not give us the solution. Violence would only breed more violence," Lam told a news conference.

"For concessions to be made simply because of escalating violence will only make the situation worse. On the other hand, we should consider every means to end the violence."

Protesters have five main demands, which include universal suffrage and an independent inquiry into what they say has been excessive force by police in dealing with the demonstrations.

Hong Kong has been rocked by four months of unrest.

# Prince William, Kate meet Imran Khan, friend of Diana



Prince William, Catherine, Imran Khan pose after a meeting in Islamabad



William and Catherine attend a meeting with President of Pakistan, Arif Alvi, at the Presidential Palace in Islamabad



William and Catherine arrive at Margalla Hills in Islamabad

Reuters | Islamabad

**B**ritain's Prince William and his wife Kate yesterday met Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan, a former international cricket star who the prince played cricket with in London as a child.

The royal couple, on a five-day visit, also toured a school and a national park in the capital Islamabad where they chatted with children and admired their drawings.

The trip, which focuses on climate change and access to education, has been described by palace officials as the most complex the couple have undertaken due to security issues.

Yesterday afternoon, the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge met Khan at his official residence. William's mother Princess Diana, a hugely popular figure in Pakistan, visited Pakistan several times in the 1990s and helped Khan raise money for a cancer hospital.

Earlier William and Kate met students at an Islamabad Model College for Girls, discussing education with a group of older students and visiting the classrooms of younger students.

As they left, a group of girls sang one of Pakistan's national songs and the couple greeted preschoolers who had lined up to chant 'bye bye'.

They then visited the Mar-

gallah Hills National Park on the edge of Islamabad, which is under threat from poaching, wildfires, invasive species and littering.

For the morning events, Kate wore a periwinkle blue silk shalwar kameez, the national outfit of Pakistan consisting of a loose tunic worn over trousers. Many on social media and in the fashion industry had been hoping she would don the outfit, which Princess Diana had worn during visits.

The designer, Maheen Khan said on Twitter: "It is an honor to have been asked to create this outfit for the Duchess."

The Duchess of Cambridge's fashion choices, including a

bright green tunic over white pants to meet with the Prime Minister, appeared to echo many of the colours and outfits worn by Diana.

Foreign policy experts and officials have said the trip, the first by a British royal family member in more than a decade and made at the request of the British foreign office, represented a soft power push, which may help both sides further their diplomatic aims.

It comes as Britain seeks to reinvigorate its foreign relationships as the deadline looms for its departure from the European Union, while Pakistan works to repair its global image to boost tourism and investment.