

Tears as UK shooting victim Aya Hachem's body returns to Lebanon

Sat, 2020-05-23 20:23

BEIRUT: Amid heart-wrenching scenes, Ismail Hachem and his family bid farewell to their 19-year-old daughter Aya, who was killed a week ago in a shooting in Blackburn in the north of England.

A coffin containing Aya's body was flown to Beirut aboard a Middle East Airlines flight early on Saturday. Aya's father, mother and two brothers accompanied the coffin, while a third brother is expected to return from Australia.

Relatives and friends in Qlaileh in southern Lebanon, 95 km from Beirut, joined the grieving family. Aya's mother insisted on staying by the coffin's side. "It is the last time I see her before bidding her farewell," she said.

Residents of the town are mourning the young woman's death, with pictures of a smiling Aya on display in people's living rooms and in cars in a show of solidarity with the devastated family.

Aya's mother told Arab News: "I do not have much time. I have to say goodbye to my daughter Aya."

She said that moments before the fatal shooting, Aya had sent her photographs, saying that she was fasting and wanted to make a date cake.



In a heart-wrenching scene, Ismail Hachem and his family bid farewell to their 19-year-old daughter Aya Hachem who was killed a week ago in a shooting



In a heart-wrenching scene, Ismail Hachem and his family bid farewell to their 19-year-old daughter Aya Hachem who was killed a week ago in a shooting in Blackburn, northern England. (Firas Haidar/AN Photo)

She confirmed that her family “has no problems with anyone – instead it has many friends, and we have moved as refugees to Blackburn.”

The Hachem family left Lebanon on Nov. 24, 2011 on a family visit to Aya’s paternal uncle, who lives in the UK. Aya’s father applied for asylum for himself and his family. Aya’s mother said that before applying for asylum “we moved from one region to another on the request of British authorities, before being granted a residence visa valid for two and a half years.”

Aya’s father is still in shock. “I saw in Aya the embodiment of my dreams and wishes,” he told Arab News.

“She was an ambitious and passionate girl, studying law at the University of Salford. I used to tell her that one day she would become Britain’s prime minister. Aya was a smart girl, always ready to help people, and worked with charities all over London, Manchester and Burnley for nine years.



In a heart-wrenching scene, Ismail Hachem and his family bid farewell to their 19-year-old daughter Aya Hachem who was killed a week ago in a shooting in Blackburn, northern England. (Firas Haidar/AN Photo)

“Aya was two meters from the supermarket. She was killed by mistake. The police arrested 13 people and five appeared in court today.

“More than 150 police officers rushed to the scene of the crime. The shooting has nothing to do with terrorism or racism. It was the result of a personal dispute. Aya was the victim of this dispute, as the shooter reportedly meant to target another person,” he said.

Hachem said that he did not regret seeking asylum in England.



In a heart-wrenching scene, Ismail Hachem and his family bid farewell to their 19-year-old daughter Aya Hachem who was killed a week ago in a shooting in Blackburn, northern England. (Firas Haidar/AN Photo)

“I escaped the meaningless and absurd wars in my country, but it was the destiny of my daughter to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. This crime could have occurred anywhere. But the Blackburn region is small, quiet and safe. Everybody showed me sympathy and the whole country condemned the crime. I want justice to take its course and for the criminals to be punished.”

Hachem said he would return to England with his family when Beirut airport reopens.

“Life there is comfortable and there is safety, but fate wanted to take Aya’s life,” he said.



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[Middle-East](#)

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[Lebanon](#)

[Aya Hachem](#)

Aya Hachem, student killed in UK shooting, to be buried in Lebanon
Three more arrested over killing of UK student Aya Hachem

[Sudan to establish police force to protect health workers](#)

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Sat, 2020-05-23 15:13

CAIRO: Sudan's transitional authorities are working to create a police force to protect health facilities, the prime minister's office said Saturday, as attacks against health workers and hospitals increase amid the coronavirus pandemic.

The move came after doctors across the country threatened Thursday to go on strike to pressure authorities to provide protection for health workers and facilities.

Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok met with representatives of doctors on Friday

to find “decisive and strict solutions” to “the phenomenon of repeated attacks on health workers,” his office said in a statement.

The government will introduce a draft bill to provide protection to health workers, the statement said.

At least two dozen attacks on health care workers and facilities have taken place in the past two months across the country, according to a tally by the Sudan Doctors’ committee. The group is part of the protest movement that last year helped oust longtime autocratic president Omar al-Bashir.

In one instance last month, a riot erupted at a hospital in the city Omdurman, across the Nile River from the capital, Khartoum, when a rumor spread that it would take coronavirus patients. Police arrested several people who tried to attack the building.

On Thursday alone, there were at least three attacks on health workers and facilities in Khartoum that led to a temporary suspension of services at a hospital there, the committee said.

Sudan has reported at least 63 deaths from COVID-19 among around 3,380 confirmed cases of the coronavirus, which causes the disease.

Sudan’s health care system has been weakened by decades of war and sanctions. The country is still reeling from last year’s uprising that toppled al-Bashir.

Meanwhile, a handful of young people took to the streets in Khartoum on Saturday on the first anniversary of the deadly dispersal of a protest camp in in the last days of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan last year. The protesters torched tires but there were no clashes reported between protesters and security forces.

Footage circulated online showed some protesters practicing social distancing or wearing face masks as a precautionary measure against the virus.

The violent break-up last year of the protest camp outside the military’s headquarters in Khartoum was an alarming turn of events in the standoff between the military and civilian protesters. The protesters had been holding a sit-in to pressure the military council to hand power over to civilians after al-Bashir ouster.

The protesters say at least 128 people were killed and hundreds wounded during the sit-in dispersal and the subsequent crackdown. However, military-backed health authorities say only 87 died, including security forces.

Later, the generals and the protesters reached a power-sharing deal that established a joint military-civilian sovereign council that would lead Sudan toward elections.



Main category:

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[Easing of restrictions intensifies COVID-19 cases in Lebanon](#)

Sat, 2020-05-23 01:07

BEIRUT: A crackdown on any gatherings on Eid has been announced in Lebanon after 26 new COVID-19 cases were recorded during the past 24 hours, raising the total number of cases in the country to 1,086.

Lebanese Interior Minister Mohammed Fahmy has blocked the reopening of malls, entertainment and sports gatherings, and gyms, playgrounds and parks will also stay shut. Dar Al-Fatwa sources confirmed to Arab News that Eid prayers "will be held in mosques but with adherence to social distancing. The central

Eid prayer in Beirut will be attended by Prime Minister Hassan Diab.” Lebanon had eased its restrictions, calling for the population to adhere to preventive measures. But the scenes of people crowding into markets in Beirut and other regions without using face masks or adopting social distancing raised concerns.

In the markets popular perceptions of the need for wearing personal protection equipment varied hugely.

Saleh, a young man from the North Bekaa, said: “We do not have any infections. People live their lives naturally. Cafes opened and people smoke the forbidden hookah. Some people do not believe this disease exists.”

A woman in her 50s, who was following up a personal matter at the social security office and does not wear a mask, said: “Do you believe that there is corona disease? Do you know anyone who got it? I don’t know anyone. I think they are lying to us.”

Amid this state of denial, on Friday Health Minister Hamad Hassan visited Majdal Anjar, the border town with Syria which recently recorded an unprecedented increase in the number of COVID-19 cases.

FASTFACT

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Hassan said: “If we do not take responsibility, then there is no doubt that the coronavirus will be disastrous. Overcrowding and social mixing cause a rapid spread of infection.”

The security forces cordoned off Majdal Anjar, together with the town of Mazboud in the province of Al-Kharoub on Mount Lebanon, because the number of infections had increased there.

Lebanon had also resumed returning Lebanese expatriates, especially students. Seven flights arrived from Istanbul, Riyadh, Dammam, Paris, Dubai and London. The Minister of Health also said that “returning expatriates do not have the right to break the home quarantine imposed on them for 14 days and cause a danger to the country and its citizens.” He pointed out that “the cases that do not show symptoms are those that lead to the spread of the pandemic, and constitute the real danger.”

Hassan suggested that “we may go for herd immunity, but in a calm manner, and we may close the country completely when the number of beds in hospitals becomes insufficient, but the immunity tests that have been carried out do not indicate an outbreak or spread of the pandemic yet and we will not witness a second wave if we are careful and responsible.”

Dr. Abdul-Rahman Al-Bizri, an infectious diseases specialist and member of the Health Ministry’s crisis committee, said that “what is happening now is the result of lack of seriousness in dealing with this.”

He told Arab News that “The roots of the problem are clear. The return of people from abroad was mishandled. At first, there was discipline and things were acceptable. But later, we did not see good organization. When the authorities opened the country internally, it did not work to protect the

interests of people by stressing the application of prevention measures. And the most dangerous group which the authorities ignored is foreign workers who live in crowded places where it is easy to transmit infection between them and to others.”

Al-Bizri stressed the importance of “re-organizing things before resuming flights from abroad to stop the current chaos.”

Information Minister Manal Abdel Samad confirmed after a session of the Council of Ministers on Thursday that “there is currently no decision to reopen Beirut airport, and the last flight for returnees will be on the 27th of this month. As for the resumption of flights, it is suspended indefinitely.”



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

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Morocco prisoners make masks for fellow inmates The activation of Turkey's Ilisu Dam is likely to complicate relations with Baghdad

[Morocco prisoners make masks for fellow inmates](#)

Sat, 2020-05-23 01:03

RABAT: Prisoners in Morocco are doing their bit in the country's fight

against the spread of coronavirus – by making thousands of face masks for fellow inmates.

“We feel like we are contributing to the collective effort, even if it’s from behind prison walls,” 40-year-old Khalid, wearing a white coat and a face mask, told AFP during an interview in the presence of prison management. An inmate at Casablanca’s Ain Sebaa prison – the kingdom’s most crowded jail, with some 8,000 inmates – Khalid leaves his cell every day for the sewing workshop, passing through long corridors that reek of disinfectant. He finishes off the masks while others cut the fabric or pack the protective items into plastic bags for distribution to some 80,000 prisoners across the country.

The North African kingdom has officially declared 7,300 coronavirus infections, including 197 deaths.

It has extended its lockdown until June 10, and anyone going outdoors requires authorization and must wear a mask.

Police checks are frequent, and those caught risk up to three months in prison and a fine of up to 1,300 dirhams (\$130) for violating the rules. One of the aims of the pilot program, launched at Ain Sebaa prison at the start of May, is to “foster a spirit of citizenship” among detainees and “help them to manage their detention during the lockdown,” prison management said.

SPEEDREAD

The North African kingdom has officially declared 7,300 coronavirus infections, including 197 deaths.

Since Morocco declared a medical state of emergency in mid-March, prison visits and any activities that require outside intervention have been halted. Hospital visits are limited to emergencies, while court attendance has also been suspended, with hearings held via video conference.

Over 300 virus cases have been recorded among inmates in the country’s prisons, with about a quarter of infections among personnel, according to official figures.

Rights groups have urged authorities to release some detainees to limit the risk of infection among the country’s notoriously overcrowded prisons.

At the start of April, King Mohammed VI pardoned more than 5,600 prisoners.

No cases have been registered at the Ain Sebaa facility, which has “rigorously” applied preventive measures, director Abderrahim Kerrari said. Disinfectant has been installed at the main entrance and in areas leading to the cells, and sanitizing gel stands on every table in the workshop.

Some of the mask-makers, like 54-year-old Mustafa, worked in the clothing industry before their arrest.

He said he was happy to be “useful to society,” while fellow inmate Wafaa, 37, said he’d signed up to develop skills and gain experience.

The program also aims to “prepare inmates for reintegration into society by instilling in them values such as solidarity,” Kerrari said.

Those taking part were already involved in the prison’s sewing workshops, and received two days of training on mask-making.

Participants are paid for their efforts, based on the number of days worked, although the amount was not disclosed.

The administration chose them for their “good conduct,” giving priority to inmates serving shorter sentences, Kerrari added.

Collectively, some one hundred prisoners in around 20 Moroccan facilities are making 20,000 masks a day – just a drop in the ocean when compared to the 10 million produced daily in local factories repurposed in the fight against the pandemic.

But in the workshop of the women’s wing, 35-year-old Meriem expressed a sense of satisfaction in taking part.

“I am very happy to be doing a job that’s useful for our people during the pandemic,” she said.

“I feel I am doing my duty, even if it’s just a modest contribution.”





Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Coronavirus](#)

Easing of restrictions intensifies COVID-19 cases in Lebanon
The activation of Turkey's Ilisu Dam is likely to complicate relations with Baghdad

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Sat, 2020-05-23 00:11

ANKARA: Turkey's controversial, decades-long Ilisu Dam project reached a milestone on Tuesday when its first turbine began generating power.

When fully operational the dam, on the river Tigris in the southeastern Mardin province, is expected to generate 4.1 billion kilowatt hours of electricity a year.

However, in addition to ongoing criticism of the displacement of 80,000 people whose homes were flooded, there are concerns about the possibility that the \$2 billion dollar project will reduce water flow to neighboring, water-scarce Iraq.

"The Ilisu dam adds another twist to the already complicated relationship between Iraq and Turkey," said Dr. Muhanad Seloom, an assistant professor of security studies at the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies.

"The shares of Tigris water have been present in almost all high-level diplomatic, commercial and security meetings between the two sides. Iraqi officials accuse Turkey of using water shares to further its economic interests, and to force the Iraqi government to attack and eventually expel the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) from its territories."

Seloom said the partially-formed government of Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhimi has neither the capacity nor the mandate to negotiate with Turkey about mitigating the effects of the dam on Iraq's water supply and agriculture.

"Iraq will most likely issue another rhetorical statement voicing concern and calling on Turkey to respect its obligations under international water-shares treaties," he said.

Geopolitical analyst Bashdar Ismaeel said that water is such an important issue for drought-susceptible Iraq, and its agricultural sector in particular, it is imperative that agreements are reached with Turkey that guarantee requirements are met.

"Agriculture provides a means of livelihood for more than a third of Iraq's population, and 80 per cent of the country's water goes to agriculture, so you can see its reliance on water," he said. "If Iraq gets sufficient rainfall, then concerns over water supply from Turkey can be papered over, but any semblance of drought and Iraq will suffer greatly."

The problem, he added, is that Ilisu is just the latest in a number of dams that have given Turkey control over Iraq's water supply. As a result, Iraq is at the mercy of Turkey.

"In case of any water shortages, does Turkey put its own interests first or those of Iraq?" Ismaeel wondered.

Ilisu Dam is 140 kilometers from Iraq, and experts warn that that it could easily be used as a "regional weapon" in any dispute between the neighbors.

"Iraq's vast oil resources give it strategic and political advantage in the region, so in a similar vein, Turkey can (argue it has the right to control) strategic water resources that emanate from its lands," said Ismaeel.

"If relations are cordial, it is unlikely that Iraq and Turkey would fall out over water. But with the sensitive sociopolitical and economic landscape in the region, it would not take much for tension or disagreements to arise.

"Future tit-for-tit measures might mean Iraq could also try to undermine Turkey's interests, through proxies or direct means, if Turkey threatened to cut off water supplies."

Baghdad has expressed many concerns about the building of dams in Turkey. Even if the Iraqi government reaches a compromise with Turkey, Ismaeel said, it would face a massive backlash from the public if there are any water shortages.

“The Iraqi government cannot afford more mass protests and social and political chaos,” he added. “If it appears the Iraqi PM is appeasing Ankara at the expense of the welfare of ordinary Iraqis, then can you imagine the reaction from the public?”

Ankara has not made any statement about legal guarantees that might be given to Baghdad about the operation of the Ilisu Dam.

“With the dam set to produce a huge amount of electricity, there could yet be a trade off, economically, for Iraq,” said Ismaeel. “Even if water flow is reduced, Iraq could benefit in other ways.

“If Iraq gets sufficient rainfall, water-flow rates might not be problematic and Iraq’s resistance to the dams might be more muted – but this is a dangerous tactical approach.”



Main category:

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