

# Date palm, Arab region symbol of prosperity, listed by UNESCO

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DUBAI: The date palm, which was recognized by UNESCO on Wednesday, has for centuries played an important role in the establishment and growth of civilizations in the hot and dry regions of the Arab world.

Now date palm-related knowledge, traditions and practices have been inscribed on UNESCO's list of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

The tree, whose roots penetrate deep into the soil, allowing it to grow in arid climates, has not only been a source of food but also of economic gain.

"Date palms gather in oases of different densities within desert areas indicating the presence of water levels suitable for irrigation," according to a nomination put forward by 14 countries – Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestinian Territories, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

"As a result, this aided mankind in settling down despite harsh conditions," said the document.

Until this day, platters of dates adorn tables in homes and businesses across the Arab world, where the symbol of the date palm tree has historically presented prosperity.

The offering of the sweet fruit, coupled with a cup of coffee, is a sign of good old-fashioned Arab hospitality.

According to the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization, the date palm is probably the most ancient cultivated tree.

It was grown as early as 4,000 BC and used for the construction of the moon god temple near Ur in southern Iraq – the ancient region of Mesopotamia.

"The population of the submitting states has been associated with the date palm tree for centuries as it aided them in the construction of civilization," they said in the nomination.

"Historical research and various antiquities excavations have resulted in the plant's significant cultural and economic status in numerous regions such as Mesopotamia, ancient Egypt and the Arab Gulf."

The ancient crop also faces some modern challenges. Gulf countries have fought hard to eradicate the red palm weevil, which originally came from Asia and was first detected in the region in the 1980s.

The beetle, which is barely a few centimeters (around an inch) long, produces larvae that feed off palm trunks, killing the trees.

"In Gulf countries and the Middle East, \$8 million is lost each year through removal of severely infested trees alone," according to the FAO.

All parts of the date palm were and are still used in some parts of the region for shelter or to produce a range of products, including handicrafts, mats, rope and furniture.

To celebrate and promote their date palm heritage and palm products, some of

the submitting countries hold annual date festivals, most notably the annual Liwa Date Festival in the UAE and the Dates Festival in Al-Qassim in Saudi Arabia.

Both Gulf countries are among the top date exporters, according to the Geneva-based International Trade Center.



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## [Political crisis is costing Lebanon more than \\$70m a day](#)

Author:

Wed, 2019-12-11 23:20

BEIRUT: Lebanon is losing more than \$70 million a day as a result of the political and economic crisis, ministers say. There has also been an alarming decline in imports and the 2019 budget deficit will be much greater than expected, they added.

Meanwhile private-sector bosses gathered to demand action, and revealed the devastating effects of the crisis on their businesses, which has forced many to cut wages or fire staff as they struggle to survive.

The country has been in turmoil since October 18, when protests began against the ruling elite. On October 29, Prime Minister Saad Hariri and his government resigned, but replacements are yet to be named, leaving the economy and banking system in chaos.

"Public-sector employees will get paid before December 25 and their salaries for the next months are guaranteed, but there is a dramatic decline in state imports," said caretaker Finance Minister Hassan Khalil. "The deficit will rise and 2020 budget figures will be reconsidered."

Caretaker Economy Minister Mansour Bteish added: "The country is half-paralyzed. The total income per day is \$150 million, which means the national economy is losing at least \$70 to 80 million a day. The crisis has dramatically worsened and urgent solutions are needed."

Owners of private businesses gathered in the heart of Beirut to demand action.

"The private sector in Lebanon represents 75 percent of the country's revenues," said Waddah Sadeq, owner of a marketing and advertising company. "Fifty percent of companies are in danger and might close amid the financial and economic crisis, due to the lack of a consensus to form a new government that could save the country."

"The private sector can only survive until the first quarter of 2020. There are 40,000 private companies in Lebanon with 850,000 employees providing for 500,000 families. About 5,000 employees have been dismissed, especially in the restaurant, tourism and services sectors."

"Factories are struggling to survive and if the situation does not improve, they will most certainly close. Imports have been blocked due to the banking restrictions and so the work of businesses relying on imports is suspended. What are politicians still waiting for?"

Pierre Issa, the cofounder of Arc-en-ciel, a non-profit organization that works with private companies, said: "Our state is making us pay taxes with no services in return. The situation of organizations such as ours has become very critical and we are stuck with two options: paying employees or paying taxes."

Sahar, a restaurant owner, said: "Work has been severely affected. Suppliers are unable to withdraw their money from banks to meet our needs. People are avoiding eating at restaurants because they are being paid half their salaries or have been fired from their jobs."

"We are struggling to survive. This month I must cut my employees' salaries in half because I do not want to fire any of them. But I do not know what I will have to do if the situation remains this bad in 2020."

Architect Fouad Naayem said he had to let some staff go, and added: "I have kept only eight employees because I had to reduce expenses. Our work in Lebanon is paralyzed. If the economic stagnation continues, I will be forced to migrate."

Nabil Kettaneh is the owner of Kettaneh Group, which was established in 1922 and sells cars, hospital equipment and home appliances.

“My concern today is to provide the salaries of 210 employees, given that the company is making zero revenues” he said “People have stopped buying cars due to the banking restrictions and the economic crisis. We want a government able to control the situation, save the national economy and restore banks’ trust. Our deposits are blocked . We cannot transfer money abroad to import goods.”

The International Support Group for Lebanon, which convened in Paris on Wednesday, said that the preservation of “Lebanon’s stability, security, sovereignty, political independence and territorial integrity requires the urgent formation of a competent and credible government to implement economic reforms.” The group added that the government must “be independent of regional crises and tensions,” and called for “the adoption of a reliable budget for 2020” as soon as possible.



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# Turkey uses air base as a leverage against Washington

Author:

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ANKARA: Turkey may re-evaluate the status of the Incirlik Air Base and Kurecik Radar Station if the US imposes sanctions, said Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu in an interview to pro-government channel A-Haber.

This bombshell statement has come on Wednesday amid widespread claims that the US' long-awaited Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) may be on their way toward Turkey before the end of the year.

Ozgur Unluhisarcikli, Ankara office director of the German Marshall Fund of the US, said one of the core principles of Turkish foreign policy is reciprocity and Turkey will definitely seek ways to retaliate if the US imposes the CAATSA sanctions.

The Incirlik issue has long been a focal point between the nations. It is regularly used as a bargaining chip at times of tension because the air base symbolizes Turkey's anchorage to the West.

But despite all the previous threats over Incirlik's use, it has always remained open, even at times of heightened tension.

"Turkey is not the place to host US nuclear arms," Steven Pifer, from the American Brookings Institution research group, recently wrote in a report following US President Donald Trump's public confirmation of the weapons' presence on Turkish soil.

The critical military air base, which is located in the southern province of Adana close to the Syrian border, was used regularly for anti-Daesh airstrikes in Syria and Iraq.

Two years ago, Ankara allegedly warned US officials that it could close its airspace to American jets and deny the US' decades-long access to Incirlik if the Syrian Kurdish YPG participated in the Raqqa operation against Daesh.

In June, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan reportedly played the Incirlik card as a leverage in his meeting with Trump on the sidelines of the G20 summit in Osaka, Japan.

However, for Unluhisarcikli, Incirlik is currently one of the few cards Turkey is holding and perhaps the only consequential one.

"The US has alternatives to Incirlik, but they are more costly and less efficient," he told Arab News.

Section 13 of the Countering Turkish Aggression Act of 2019, a bill which was introduced on Oct. 16, requires "the president within 30 days of enactment to

submit an interagency report assessing viable alternative military installations or other locations to host US forces personnel or assets currently stationed at Incirlik Air Base in Turkey.”

The bill, which was sponsored by Republican Senator Lindsey Graham, has not been enacted.

In the meantime, Italy has begun withdrawing its SAMP/T anti-missile battery and 130 soldiers it has deployed in Turkey’s southeastern province of Kahramanmaraş for 30 months as part of a NATO operation.

Unluhisarcikli said that closing down the Kurecik Radar Station, a key NATO base in the eastern Malatya province, may not be an appropriate response as it serves NATO’s missile defense system, not the US’.

“If Turkey shuts down Kurecik, it will face a strong reaction from European allies who have nothing to do with the sanctions the US will likely impose on Turkey,” he said.

Ankara is considering Russian warplanes as an alternative to the US-made F-35 jets if Washington does not deliver them over the concern that the operation of the S-400s missile systems could expose some of the jet’s classified features to Russian intelligence gathering.

Turkey and Britain have also agreed to accelerate their joint project on building fighter jets.

Joe Macaron, a fellow at the Arab Center in Washington, said the immediate repercussions of closing Incirlik and Kurecik is moving beyond rhetoric and taking tangible steps to disentangle the core of the strategic partnership between Washington and Ankara.

“The US priority should be having contingency plans to secure withdrawing the US nuclear weapons storage in the Incirlik air base, if such a plan is not executed yet,” he told Arab News.

As a back-up plan, the US recently invested heavily in the Jordanian Muwaffaq Salti Airbase, although experts underline that no single base can substitute the strategic location of Incirlik.

“The operation to kill Daesh leader Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi took off from Iraq and there have been Turkish restrictions on US operations in Syria launching from Incirlik base,” Macaron said.

But, for Macaron, it is unlikely that Ankara will close the Incirlik base for US operations.

“The Turkish government is once again exploiting the divide between the White House and Congress over US sanctions on Turkey, hence hoping that Trump would veto the congressional bill on Turkey. If Ankara gives Incirlik to Moscow, which is not anticipated in the foreseeable future, Turkey will have gone too far in its alliance with Russia and that will have far-reaching implications on regional and global politics,” he said.



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## [Egyptian civilian triggers discovery of ancient temple](#)

Wed, 2019-12-11 23:04

CAIRO: Nobody in the Egyptian Ministry of Culture could believe that an illegal attempt by a civilian to prospect for monuments underneath his own home would lead to a grand discovery.

But that is just what happened when this week the ministry began archaeological excavations in the Mit Rahinah area, neighboring the pyramids of Giza.

The illegal digging by the 60-year-old resident alerted the authorities who arrested him in the first week of this month. The tourism authorities then went in and were surprised by the discovery.

The archaeological mission discovered an entire temple underneath the village

of Mit Rahinah.

According to a statement issued by the ministry, 19 chunks of pink granite and limestone bearing inscriptions depicting Ptah, the god of creation and of the ancient city Manf, were also discovered.

Among the finds were also an artifact traceable to the reign of Ramesses II and inscriptions showing the king practicing a religious ritual.

Egyptian researcher Abdel-Magid Abdul Aziz said Ptah was idolized in Manf. In one image, the god is depicted as a human wrapped in a tight-fitting cloth.

The deity was also in charge of memorial holidays and responsible for several inventions, holding the title Master of all Makers.



“There’s a statue of the god Ptah in the Egyptian Museum, in its traditional form as a mummy,” Abdul Aziz said.

“His hands come out from the folds of his robe ... as depicted in art pieces. Ptah appears as a bearded, buried man,” he added.

“Often he wears a hat, with his hands clutching Ankh (the ancient Egyptian hieroglyphic symbol for the key of life).”

Ayman Ashmawy, head of ancient Egyptian artifacts at the Ministry of Antiquities, said: “The artifacts are in the process of being restored, and

have been moved to the museum's open garden in Mit Rahinah." He added that work was being done to discover and restore the rest of the temple.

As for the illegal prospecting of the area by its people, Ashmawy said the residents of Mit Rahinah were seeking to exploit the monuments.

He added that the law forbids prospecting for archaeological monuments, and that doing so could lead to a long prison sentence and a major fine, up to hundreds of thousands of Egyptian pounds.

Mit Rahinah contains a large number of monuments, which have been discovered by chance. The area is home to an open museum, 20 km south of Cairo.

"What we see from current discoveries in Mit Rahinah are just snapshots of an ancient city that was once vibrant," Ilham Ahmed, chief inspector of the archaeological mission, told Arab News.



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# UN experts: Libya is new focus of Daesh extremists

Author:

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UNITED NATIONS: UN experts say the interference of Chadian and Sudanese fighters in Libya is “a direct threat” to the security and stability of the war-torn country, which a leader of the Daesh extremist group has declared “one of the main axes” of its future operations.

The panel of experts said in a 376-page report to the UN Security Council released Tuesday that the presence of the Chadians and Sudanese “has become more marked” in 2019 as a result of the intensification of the conflict in Libya. It said their continued presence as organized groups or as mercenaries “may lead to further instability.”

Libya has been in turmoil since a civil war in 2011 toppled Muammar Qaddafi, who was later killed. In the chaos that followed, the country was divided, with a weak UN-supported administration in Tripoli overseeing the country’s west and a rival government in the east aligned with the Libyan National Army led by Gen. Khalifa Haftar, each supported by an array of militias and foreign governments.

Haftar launched a surprise military offensive April 4 aimed at capturing Tripoli despite commitments to attend a national conference weeks later aimed at forming a united government and moving toward elections. Fighting for Tripoli has stalled in recent months, with both sides dug in and shelling one another along the city’s southern reaches with increasingly sophisticated weapons.

While the LNA and the eastern government enjoy the support of France, Russia, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates and other key Arab countries, the Tripoli-based government is backed by Italy, Turkey and Qatar.

“Jordan, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates routinely and sometimes blatantly supplied weapons, with little effort to disguise the source” in violation of a UN arms embargo, the report said.

The experts identified multiple cases of non-compliance with the arms embargo, the majority of transfers to Haftar’s LNA from Jordan or the United Arab Emirates and the majority to the Tripoli government from Turkey. But, the panel said, “Neither side has the military capability to effectively decide the outcome to their advantage.”

The experts said counter-terrorism operations in Libya against Daesh and Al-Qaeda extremists by the government and Haftar’s forces, and an increase in activity by the United States Africa Command, continue to disrupt the structure of both groups and temporarily reduce their capacity to conduct operations.

But the panel also reported the new focus on Libya by Daesh, also known as ISIL, quoting a video in July by a Daesh leader in Libya, Mahmud Massud Al-Baraassi, also known as Abu Musab Allibi. In the video, the report said, “he highlighted that Libya was now one of the main axes of future ISIL operations, which are designed to compensate for the loss of ground” in Syria.

“ISIL in Libya finances its activities through robbery, kidnap for ransom, extortion of Libyan citizens and the cross-border smuggling of artifacts and other commodities,” the panel said. “Taxation of human trafficking networks continues to be a source of funding for ISIL in Libya.”

As for foreign fighters, the experts named five Sudanese armed groups operating in Libya – four in support of Haftar’s LNA and one backing the government’s forces. They named four Chadian armed groups – one supporting the LNA, two supporting the government, and one with 100 fighters whose factions support both side.

In one example, the panel estimated 1,000 Sudanese troops from Sudan’s Rapid Support Forces were deployed to Libya on July 25 by Gen. Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, initially to guard critical infrastructure so Haftar’s troops could carry out offensive operations.

The panel said Sudan and Dagalo, who has command responsibility, both violated UN sanctions.

The Associated Press reported last week that Libyan government officials plan to confront Moscow over the alleged deployment of Russian mercenaries fighting alongside Haftar’s LNA. US officials also accuse Russia of deploying fighters through a private security contractor to key battleground areas in Libya in the past months.

The UN panel of experts, who monitor sanctions against Libya, made no mention of Russian mercenaries in the report. Several diplomats said they expect the Russian mercenary issue to be raised in the Security Council.



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