

[Iraqi PM warns disrupting Hormuz oil route would be 'major obstacle' to Iraq's economy](#)

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Tue, 2019-07-09 17:12

BAGHDAD: Iraqi Prime Minister Adel Abdul-Mahdi said on Tuesday any disruption to oil exports through the Hormuz Strait will be a "major obstacle" for his country's economy.

His government was studying contingency plans to deal with possible disruptions, including looking at alternative routes for oil exports, Abdul Mahdi told reporters at his weekly press conference.

On Monday, Bloomberg reported that a BP oil tanker had turned around before reaching Iraq's main oil terminal to load its cargo and was anchored off the coast of Saudi Arabia. The British company were weary of sending the ship through the Strait of Hormuz because of the threat from Iran to retaliate to the seizing of an Iranian ship off Gibraltar last week by UK forces.



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[Iran tensions](#)

[Adel Abdul-Mahdi](#)

Iran to face 'very, very strong reaction' if it closes Strait of Hormuz: Al-Jubeir
British oil tanker anchors off Saudi Arabian coast amid fears of Iranian retaliation

President Donald Trump and the Emir of Qatar hold talks at White House

Author:

Tue, 2019-07-09 19:51

WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump met the Emir of Qatar at the White House Tuesday.

Trump and Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani are scheduled to participate in an afternoon of meetings that will include a working lunch and the signing of a deal to purchase Boeing jets.

Trump said Qatar is investing heavily in the US, buying military equipment and commercial planes.

The White House has said their talks are expected to focus on security cooperation, counterterrorism issues and other developments in the region.



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Qatari royal takes to Twitter to condemn 'unbearable' conditions under Sheikh Tamim
Qatar's emir to meet with Trump on July 9

[Don't ruin summer, Lebanon tourism minister pleads after shootout](#)

Author:

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Tue, 2019-07-09 14:46

BEIRUT: Lebanon's tourism minister urged politicians on Tuesday not to wreck the country's best tourist season in years, after a deadly shooting in a popular mountain region stirred fears of strife. Avedis Guidanian said more tourists came to Lebanon in the first half of this

year than in the same period any year since 2010. But he warned the president in a meeting that the summer forecast would take a hit if political tensions persisted.

"I told him, in case this incident cannot be contained, there are fears. There are many questions from people planning to come," the minister told a press conference at the presidential palace.

He added that there were no big cancelations so far.

"His excellency (President Michel Aoun) assured me that things are on the right track. God willing, soon, we will have really overcome this."

The government has vowed to restore security after the shootout on July 1 killed two aides of a minister in the Chouf mountains, one of the bloodiest theaters of Lebanon's 1975-90 civil war.

The tourism industry, once a mainstay of Lebanon's now-battered economy, has been in the doldrums since 2011 – the year conflict erupted in neighboring Syria.

Political paralysis in Lebanon and travel warnings from Gulf Arab states also added to the sector's woes.

The slump in tourism has played a part in years of weak economic growth and a hike in the huge public debt, which the government now pledges tough reforms to bring under control.

As relations with Gulf Arab states and security improved, officials including Prime Minister Saad Al-Hariri have predicted a promising summer for tourism this year.

"The numbers of people traveling to Lebanon in first six months of 2019 are very encouraging," Guidanian said on Tuesday.

More people were arriving from Europe and Gulf states including Saudi Arabia, which lifted its travel warning against citizens going to Lebanon this year, the minister said.

Guidanian said the expected rise in tourists would bring in big revenues which Lebanon direly needed. "Imagine if we stopped shooting ourselves in the foot – the politicians I mean."



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[As waters warm, lionfish invasion strains Lebanon's seas](#)

Author:

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Tue, 2019-07-09 14:33

SARAFAND: Lebanese fisherman Hassan Younes has been diving the same waters off his coastal hometown for three decades but has never seen anything like this year as native species disappear and invasive lionfish take their place. Gone are the days when he used to boast an abundant catch of red lobster, sea urchin and red mullet. Now he counts himself lucky if he catches a sea bass. What is abundant, however, are lionfish: a predatory venomous fish native to

the Red Sea, and Indo-Pacific region that eat smaller fish, crustaceans and even each other.

Environmentalists and marine biologists say because of the 2015 expansion and deepening of the Suez Canal, which connects the Red Sea and the Mediterranean, and warming waters resulting from global climate change, lionfish have made a new home for themselves in the Mediterranean.

The rapid expansion of the lionfish is also being felt more widely, threatening coral reefs and fish stocks.

The United States' National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), said their populations have swelled dramatically in the past 15 years, partly as a result of people releasing unwanted fish from home aquariums, and they are harming native coral reefs in the Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico and Caribbean. "This sea is not the sea we grew up with," Younes said on a recent morning out on his boat.

"Many times, we go out to sea and come back emptyhanded. We don't even make enough to cover the price of diesel," he said.

The fish, with venomous wing-like fins and spines, was first sighted in the Mediterranean in 1991, then not again until 2012 off the coast of southern Lebanon. Since 2015 it has steadily spread across the region, said marine biologist Jason Hall-Spencer.

"LIKE GENOCIDE"

Fisherman Atallah Siblani, who specializes in spearhunting, said he started seeing the fish three years ago but it was rare.

"Now it is like 30 to 50 of them in one place. They started to scare away the other fish including sea bass which we depend on and they eat everything."

"It is like genocide."

Environmentalists in Lebanon say the livelihoods of the fishermen and the survival of the marine ecosystem maybe depend on people eating lionfish. The spread of the fish has been especially hard on Lebanon's marine ecosystem already weakened by decades of overfishing, pollution and urbanization

"It eats a lot and breeds all year long so it is very easy for it to disturb the ecological balance," said Jina Talj, an environmentalist.

"But luckily for us, it is also one of the tastiest types of fish," added Talj, who runs a campaign to encourage people to eat lionfish, which tastes like sea bass. So far, it is mainly the fishermen who have heeded the call but Talj hopes her campaign can help.

Her NGO, Diaries of the Ocean, has government recognition but receives no funding and relies on volunteers.

"The biggest problem we face is lack of knowledge among the public about the sea. So how can we save it if we don't know what we have?" she said.

The invasive fish spawn every four days and can lay up to two million eggs every year capable of surviving ocean drifts.

Hall-Spencer says the spread this year has been in "plague-like proportions" across the Eastern Mediterranean including Greece, Turkey, Israel and Cyprus which has just launched a cull.

To curb the problem in the long term, he would like to see the construction of a salt water lock in the Suez Canal – an area of very salty water which would stop species moving from one sea to the other.

But until then, the best thing to do is to catch the lionfish "and also celebrate the fact that they are good to eat," he said.





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[Tunisia presidential candidate charged with money laundering](#)

Author:

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Mon, 2019-07-08 17:53

TUNIS: Tunisian media magnate and would-be presidential candidate Nabil Karoui has been charged with money laundering, had his assets frozen and slapped with a travel ban, a judicial source said Monday. Karoui and his brother, Ghazi Karoui, have been under investigation since 2017 after anti-corruption watchdog I-Watch submitted a dossier accusing him of tax fraud, said Sofiene Sliti, spokesman for the judiciary department for financial cases.

"After an inquiry into the complaint filed by I-Watch and having summoned and heard the two men... the judge decided 10 days ago to charge Nabil Karoui and Ghazi Karoui with money laundering," he told AFP.

The judge also decided to freeze their assets and ban them from traveling

abroad.

The brothers in 2002 launched Karoui & Karoui, an international media and advertising company.

Nabil Karoui was an active supporter of President Beji Caid Essebsi's election in 2014 but has become a fierce opponent of Prime Minister Youssef Chahed.

In May, Karoui, who has also founded a major private television channel, Nessma, said he would run for the presidency in November polls to succeed Essebsi.

But amendments to the electoral law passed the following month would rule out his candidacy.



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Tunisian president Essebsi leaves hospital Tunisia rallies after a "black day," president's health improves