

Suspects back in Morocco court over Scandinavian hiker murders

Author:

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ID:

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Thu, 2019-05-16 16:48

SALE, Morocco: Two dozen extremist suspects charged over the murder of two Scandinavian women hiking in Morocco appeared in court Thursday, with the lawyer of one victim saying the government must be held "morally responsible" for the killings.

Danish student Louisa Vesterager Jespersen, 24, and 28-year-old Norwegian Maren Ueland had their throats slit while camping in an isolated area of the High Atlas mountains in December.

The main suspects, who allegedly pledged allegiance to Daesh, are all from the Marrakesh region near the site of the killings, which shocked the North African country.

Abdessamad Ejjoud, a 25-year-old street vendor and the alleged leader of the group, had been jailed for trying to join Daesh in Syria. He was released in 2015.

Younes Ouaziyad, a 27-year-old carpenter, and 33-year-old street vendor Rachid Afatti have also been named as key suspects.

The defendants were taken from prison to an anti-terrorism court in Sale, near Rabat, in vans escorted by police on motorcycles for the resumption of their trial, an AFP reporter said.

They face charges including promoting terrorism, forming a terrorist cell and premeditated murder.

They could face death sentences if found guilty, although Morocco has de facto suspended executions since 1993.

The families of the accused did not attend the court session.

The lawyer for the Jespersens, Khalid Elfataoui, said the government must be held "morally responsible" so the family could receive compensation, a request accepted by the court.

Elfataoui said he would push for death sentences "even if the countries where the victims came from are opposed to it in principle."

The main suspects "spontaneously admitted their crime during the investigation, and today they regret what they did," their lawyer Hafida Mekessaoui told AFP.

The trial – which opened on May 2 – was adjourned to May 30 after Thursday's brief hearing.

Among the suspects is a Spanish-Swiss convert to Islam who is accused of teaching the main defendant how to use encrypted communications and fire a gun.

Nature lovers Jespersen and Ueland shared an apartment and went to Norway's Bo University where they were studying to be guides.

They had traveled together to Morocco for their Christmas holidays.

Their lives were cut short in the foothills of Toubkal, the highest summit in

North Africa, some 80 kilometers (50 miles) from the city of Marrakesh, a tourist magnet.

According to the charge sheet, the assailants traveled to the High Atlas mountains on December 12 on a mission to kill tourists.

Several potential targets were passed over because the foreigners were accompanied by guides or local residents.

It was four days before the killers selected their targets, according to the prosecution. It said two of them carried out the killings while the third filmed them on a telephone.

After the bodies were discovered, the Moroccan authorities were initially cautious, referring to a "criminal act" and wounds to the victims' necks. But that changed when the video surfaced showing a victim being beheaded. A separate video published in the initial aftermath of the murders showed the alleged killers pledging allegiance to Daesh leader Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi. Investigators said the "cell" was inspired by Daesh ideology, but Morocco's anti-terror chief insisted the accused had no contact with the extremist group in conflict zones.

Daesh has never claimed responsibility for the double murder.



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Morocco court adjourns trial in murder of Scandinavian hikers
New social deal signed in Morocco, salaries to rise

Plane crash near Dubai airport kills three Britons and a South African

Thu, 2019-05-16 20:10

DUBAI: Four people were killed when a small plane crashed near Dubai International Airport, temporarily halting some flights in and out of the busy regional hub.

The crash killed three Britons and a South African on board the four-seater Diamond DA62, the Dubai Civil Aviation Authority said. The UK registered plane was on a mission to calibrate terrestrial navigation systems at the airport when it crashed about 5 kilometers south of the airport.

The crash was due to a mechanical fault, Dubai Media Office said.

The airport said it halted flights from 7.36 p.m. until 8.22 p.m. local time over the crash.

"All operations at the Dubai airport are running smoothly after a slight delay and diversion of some flights as a precautionary measure to ensure security following a minor incident involving a small plane," the media office said.

Government of Dubai Media Office: An accident involving a small plane with 4 passengers occurred resulting in the death of the pilot and his assistant. The relevant teams are on the scene.
pic.twitter.com/HVX9tJrKYp

– Dubai Media Office (@DXBMediaOffice) [May 16, 2019](#)

Dubai International Airport, home to the long-haul carrier Emirates, is the world's busiest airport for international travel.



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Normal operations resume at Dubai airport after suspected drone activity grounded flights
Dubai Airport dismisses reports of Houthi drone attack

[Macron to meet Libya's eastern commander Haftar next week](#)

Author:

Reuters

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Thu, 2019-05-16 16:15

PARIS: French President Emmanuel Macron will meet eastern Libyan commander Khalifa Haftar in the middle of next week to discuss how to resume peace talks in the country, a French presidential source said on Thursday. Macron last week called for a cease-fire in the month-long battle for Libya's

capital Tripoli after meeting UN-backed Libyan Prime Minister Fayez Al-Serraj.

"They will discuss the situation in Libya, the conditions for a return to political dialogue following the visit of Serraj and in co-ordination with the United Nations and partners," the source told Reuters.

Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte met Haftar on Thursday as European powers seek to put an end to fighting after troops loyal to Haftar launched an offensive on the capital breaking months of UN-led peace negotiations.

"Prime Minister Conte reiterated the need to agree to a cease-fire as soon as possible to avoid a humanitarian crisis in the country and safeguard the already difficult conditions of the Libyan people," his office said.

Tripoli is home to the UN-backed administration but some European countries such as France have also supported eastern military commander Haftar as a way to fight militants in a country in chaos since the toppling of Muammar Qaddafi in 2011.

A day after meeting Macron last week, Serraj's administration asked 40 foreign firms including French oil major Total to renew their licenses or have their operations suspended.



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El-Sisi and Haftar discuss Egyptian support for Libyan National Army
Daesh attack on Haftar camp in south Libya kills 9 soldiers

Radio Free Palestine broadcasts global Nakba Day marathon

Author:

Wed, 2019-05-15 22:41

AMMAN: Radio producer Hadeel Al-Biss wanted to make her work make a difference. "We were asked to participate in a radio marathon for Nakba Day, and I figured that the best way to do that was to carry as many voices of Palestinian refugees as possible," she told Arab News.

Al-Biss, the producer of the "Talet Sobh" morning show on Amman's Radio Al-Bald, asked her team to report from various Palestinian refugee camps in Jordan. "People spoke freely and honestly about their desire to return, and the fact that hardships will not deter them from pursuing their rights."

In Washington DC, Katea Stitt told Arab News that the WPFW and WBAI stations were carrying the marathon on Nakba Day across DC and New York. "We got involved, two years ago on the 69th anniversary of the Nakba, carrying three hours of programming about Palestinian refugees and the right of return. The next year we carried the entire 12-hour multilingual broadcast. Washington is an international city with people from different backgrounds, so we made sure that people heard in Arabic, English, Spanish and French," she said.

Stitt, the interim program director of WPFW, part of the Pacifica Network, said that she was involved in the broadcast in order to support justice in Palestine. "Lewis Hill, the founder of Pacifica Radio, was a conscientious objector, and founded the network because he believed that he could create media that spoke truth and justice through the media arts. WPFW carries that mission."

The radio marathon is taking place over a 24-hour period on May 15, and is being broadcast over 28 stations in Palestine, Lebanon, Jordan, Tunis, Morocco, the US, Canada and over Pacifica Network stations.

Laith Marouf, Radio Free Palestine's international coordinator, who began the idea of a radio marathon back in 2006, says that the project has grown a lot in recent years. "This year we were able to transmit Palestinian voices from Lebanon and Jordan, and bridge them with Palestinians in Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Gaza."

Marouf says that he hopes that next year, the 24-hour broadcast will be available in four languages. "If Palestine is not free by next May 15, we will be able to broadcast the marathon live in Arabic, English, Spanish and French," he told Arab News from Beirut.

George Rishmawi, head of the Rapprochement Center in Bethlehem, told Arab News that they have been involved in this project for 10 years, and it has

been gradually gaining importance. "It is important that we can get Arab and international voices all on the same day because it shows the solidarity with the Palestinian people," he said.

Rawan Jayyousi, anchor on "Talet Soboh," told Arab News that the reaction of the program was huge. "I felt from the reaction I got on social media and personal contacts that despite the difficulties facing Palestinians, there is a hidden strength that came out and a feeling that Palestinians are not surrendering but are strong and resilient."



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Nakba: Images of Palestine before and after 1948Thousands of Palestinians demonstrate to mark 'Nakba'

[US Embassy in Lebanon advises citizens to keep low profile](#)

Author:

Wed, 2019-05-15 21:51

BEIRUT: The US Embassy in Lebanon on Wednesday advised Americans to “maintain a high level of vigilance and practice good situational awareness” in view of “heightened tensions in the region.”

In a statement published on its website, the embassy urged US citizens to keep a low profile, be aware of their surroundings, review their personal security plans, and ensure that their travel documents are up to date.

The embassy called on US citizens to contact it for help, follow its Facebook and Twitter accounts, and visit the State Department’s travel website travel.state.gov.

Diplomatic sources told Arab News that the warning has nothing to do with Lebanon, but is related to what is happening in the region.

The embassy had issued a warning to US citizens on March 20 following reports that organizations in Lebanon had called for a demonstration near the embassy to protest the secretary of state’s visit to the region.

Wednesday’s warning came as the acting assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern affairs, David Satterfield, continued his meetings in Lebanon.

He met with President Michel Aoun, Prime Minister Saad Hariri, Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri and Foreign Minister Gebran Bassil.

Lebanon’s National News Agency (NNA) reported that the meeting between Bassil and Satterfield was very positive, and that they discussed developments in the region.



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US official in Lebanon to discuss border dispute with Israel
Protests return to Lebanon as government discusses austerity