

# Palestinians to cut civil servant salaries after Israeli tax freeze

Author:

AFP

ID:

1550775479382606300

Thu, 2019-02-21 18:39

RAMALLAH: The Palestinian finance minister on Thursday announced salary cuts for civil servants, days after Israel said it would withhold tens of millions of dollars in tax transfers to the Palestinian Authority.

Israel's security cabinet on Sunday approved the freezing of \$138 million (122 million euros) over the PA's payments to the families of prisoners, or prisoners themselves, jailed for attacks on Israelis.

Israel, which collects taxes on behalf of the PA, says the payments encourage further violence.

The PA claims they are a form of welfare to families who have lost their main breadwinner.

Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas said Wednesday he would not accept anything but full payment of the tax transfers owed by Israel.

The PA, which is already running a deficit, will "pay the salaries of civil servants in time, but they will be reduced", said PA finance minister Shukri Bishara after a meeting with EU representatives in Ramallah.

The cuts will not apply to salaries "paid to pensioners and families of martyrs, wounded or prisoners", he added, adding that wages below 2,000 shekels (\$550) would also not be affected.

Many Palestinians view prisoners and those killed while carrying out attacks as heroes in their conflict with Israel. Palestinian leaders often venerate them as martyrs.

Under a 1994 agreement, Israel collects around \$190 million each month in customs duties levied on goods destined for Palestinian markets that transit through Israeli ports.

The money it then transfers to the PA is the authority's most important source of revenue.

The Palestinians want EU countries to pressure the Israeli government to rescind its decision, said Mahmoud al-Aloul, deputy of Abbas's Fatah party. Palestinian leaders will take steps to "boycott Israeli goods", he said, adding they had already prepared "a list of Israeli products that have local (Palestinian) equivalents".



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Two Gazans die in Egypt border tunnel: Hamas ministry Israeli fire kills 2 Palestinian teens: Gaza officials

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## [Security chief in south Libya town assassinated: ministry](#)

Author:

AFP

ID:

1550773099912360600

Thu, 2019-02-21 18:08

TRIPOLI: Armed men have murdered a security official in southern Libya, the UN-backed government said Thursday, a day after forces opposed to it said they had entered his town.

The interior ministry of the internationally-recognized unity government branded the murder of General Ibrahim Mohamad Kari, security head in the town of Murzuk, a "cowardly crime" and vowed to bring the culprits to justice.

In a brief statement, it said Kari was killed on Wednesday by “an outlawed armed group,” without giving further details. Authorities “will pursue his murderers and bring them to justice” and “will not remain idle in the face of crimes that threaten the security and stability of the country,” it added.

Libyan media said Kari, a member of the minority Tubu community, was killed when armed men raided his home in Murzuk.

On Wednesday night, forces loyal to Libyan strongman Khalifa Haftar said they had entered and taken control of Murzuk as part of an offensive launched in January.

Haftar’s self-styled Libyan National Army has said the operation is intended to “purge the south of terrorists and criminal groups” including rebels from Chad.

Haftar’s forces have accused Tubu of supporting the Chadian rebels. Murzuk is a stronghold of the Tubus, many of whom are opposed to Haftar’s offensive, and lies in a region where tensions run high between them and Arab tribes, who have largely joined LNA ranks.

Kari’s murder also reflects the many divisions that have divided Libya since the 2011 NATO-backed uprising that toppled and killed longtime dictator Muammar Qaddafi.

The Tripoli-based GNA is locked in a bitter and protracted power struggle with a parallel administration based in the country’s east and backed by Haftar’s LNA.



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Libya's NOC to assess security at El Sharara oilfield before resuming production  
Libyans, to varying degrees, celebrate 2011 uprising

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## Protests against jail sentences for journalists in Turkey

Author:

Thu, 2019-02-21 21:27

ISTANBUL: A group of lawyers on Thursday gathered outside Istanbul's main courthouse to protest against an appeal court's upholding the convictions of former journalists and executives from opposition daily Cumhuriyet.

The court on Tuesday confirmed jail sentences against 14 former Cumhuriyet staff including prominent journalists who are charged with "aiding and abetting terror groups without being a member."

They had been free pending the appeals, but after the court verdict eight of them would have to go back to prison and the remaining six – who were given sentences of more than five years, have the option of appealing further to the Supreme Court.

The controversial case against Cumhuriyet – one of the few remaining dailies opposing President Recep Tayyip Erdogan – has sparked concerns over the state of free press in Turkey.

### **Media supporters**

Around 100 supporters of the journalists including lawyers and opposition MPs staged a protest outside the Caglayan courthouse.

Tora Pekin, a lawyer in the Cumhuriyet case, said the latest ruling meant "the end of the free press" in Turkey, in an address to the crowd.

"It is the time to remember what we said from the very beginning of the case: The ruling delivered is the end of the free press that no longer exists even on paper," he said.

Veteran journalist Kadri Gursel and lawyer Bulent Utku, who were initially supposed to remain free given their time served, will also have to go back to prison in line with the laws, Pekin said.

"Gursel is supposed to remain in prison for one or two days to fill the remaining term," Pekin told AFP, adding that the eight were due to return to jail within a week after an arrest warrant.

Turkey is currently ranked 157th out of 180 countries in Reporters Without Borders' 2018 Press Freedom Index.



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Turkey seeks to detain over 300 for alleged Gulen ties Russia tells Turkey to get Assad's 'green light' for safe zone in Syria

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## [Largest mass grave of 3,500 people found outside Raqqa city in Syria](#)

Author:

Thu, 2019-02-21 21:10

RAQQA: Two feet deep, below a plot of farmland outside the Syrian city of Raqqa, lies a large and deadly legacy of Daesh: A mass grave holding an estimated 3,500 people.

First responders learned of the burial site in the Al-Fukheikha suburb last month, more than a year after US-backed forces captured Raqqa from Daesh and as they closed in on the group's final redoubt of Baghouz further south.

The belated discovery is the biggest example yet of how the violence Daesh

sowed will be harvested for years to come, diggers and activists said.

Several dozen mounds of dirt line one side of the Al-Fukheikha plot, marking the more than 120 bodies already dug up by the Rapid Response Division of Raqqa's civil defense service.

"These are individual graves, but behind us, by the trees, are the mass graves of those executed by Daesh," said Asaad Mohammad, the 56-year-old forensic assistant at the site.

## **FASTFACT**

**The belated discovery is the biggest example yet of how the violence Daesh sowed will be harvested for years to come.**

"There are some 2,500-3,000 bodies estimated there, plus between 900 and 1,100 bodies in the individual graves, so at least 3,500 total," he said.

Eight other mass graves have already been identified around the northern Syrian city, including one nicknamed "Panorama," from which more than 900 bodies had been exhumed.

Earlier this week, diggers in flimsy medical masks excavated a small bundle wrapped in greying, damp cloth.



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## [Syria](#)

500 bodies exhumed from mass grave in Syria's Raqqa With little aid, Syria's Raqqa struggles to revive schools

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# [Qatar Airways flight from Doha to Lagos diverted to Khartoum](#)

Thu, 2019-02-21 18:55

LONDON: A Qatar Airways flight from Doha to Lagos, Nigeria was diverted to Khartoum, Sudan for unknown reasons on Thursday.

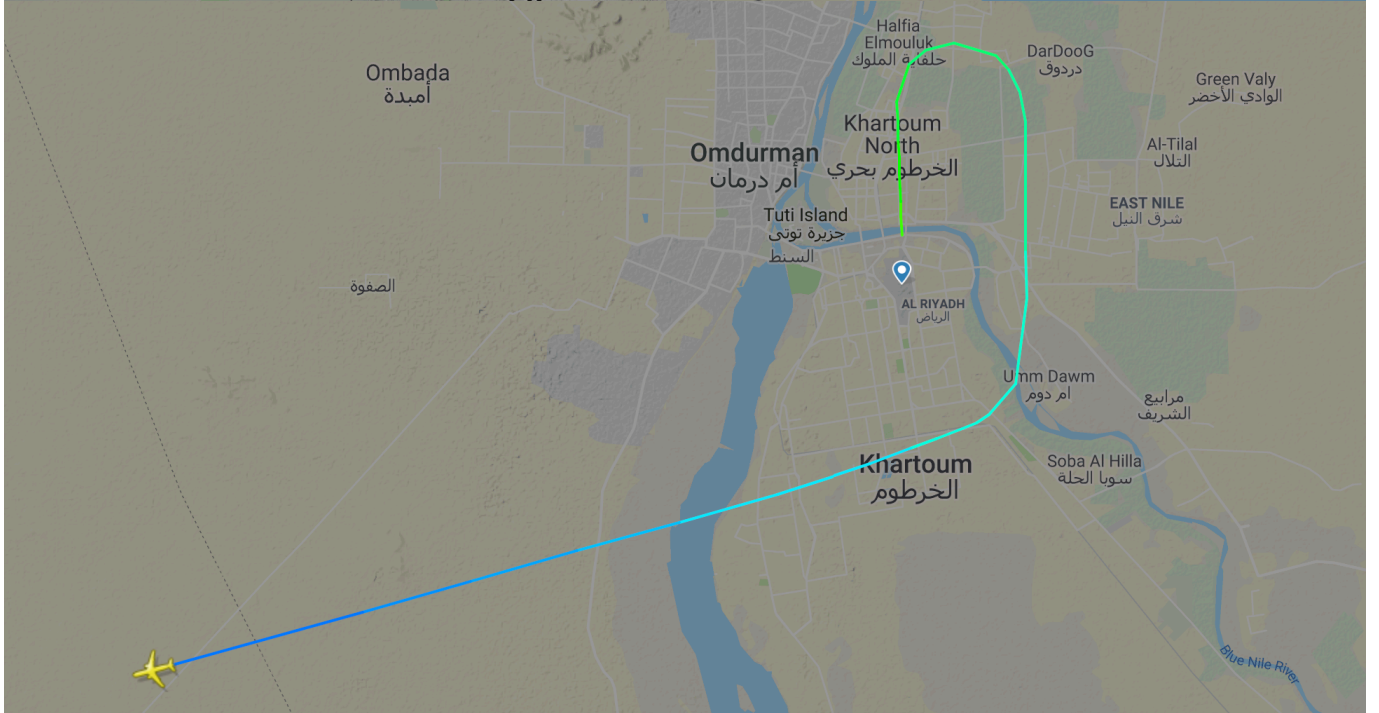
According to data from the aircraft-tracking website FlightRadar24, the Qatar Airways jet – a Boeing 787-8 Dreamliner – was crossing Ethiopia when it made a diversion to the north-west.



The plane then landed at Khartoum airport at 12:20 p.m. UTC, according to FlightRadar24 tracking.

The next movement was recorded at 3:43 p.m. UTC, when flight QR1409 was tracked flying south-west, in the direction of Lagos.





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