

Turkey closes airspace to Russian planes carrying troops to Syria

Author:

Sat, 2022-04-23 23:44

ISTANBUL: Turkey has closed its airspace to Russian civilian and military planes flying to Syria, Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu was quoted as saying Saturday by local media.

The announcement marks one of the strongest responses to date by Turkey, which has cultivated close ties with Moscow despite being a member of the NATO defense alliance, to Russia's two-month military assault on Ukraine. "We closed the airspace to Russia's military planes – and even civilian ones – flying to Syria. They had until April, and we asked in March," Turkish media quoted Cavusoglu as saying to reporters on a plane en route to Uruguay. He said permission had been given for three month periods until April, and then the flights stopped.

Cavusoglu said he conveyed the decision to his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov, who then relayed it to President Vladimir Putin.

"One or two days later, they said: Putin has issued an order, we will not fly anymore," Cavusoglu was quoted as telling Turkish reporters aboard his plane to Uruguay.

Cavusoglu added that the ban would stay in place for three months.

There was no immediate response to Turkey's announcement from Russia, which together with Iran has been a crucial supporter of Syrian President Bashar Assad during the war-torn country's civil war.

Turkey has backed Syrian rebels during the conflict.

Ankara's relations with Moscow briefly imploded after Turkey shot down a Russian warplane near the Turkish-Syrian border in 2015.

But they had been improving until Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which Turkey views as an important trade partner and diplomatic ally.

Turkey has been trying to mediate an end to the conflict, hosting meetings between Russian and Ukrainian negotiators in Istanbul, and another between Lavrov and Ukrainian counterpart Dmytro Kuleba in Antalya.

Cavusoglu said talks were continuing between Russia and Ukraine and the sides were working toward a draft joint declaration.

Ankara is now trying to arrange an Istanbul summit between Putin and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, although Cavusoglu conceded that the prospects of such talks at this point remain dim.

"If they want a deal, it's inevitable," Cavusoglu was quoted as saying. "It might not happen for a long time, but it can happen suddenly."

(With AFP and Reuters)



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Russian mercenaries are Putin's 'coercive tool' in Africa
Turkey's refugee problem at the center of heated debates

[Boat carrying 60 migrants capsizes off north Lebanon](#)

Sun, 2022-04-24 00:04

BEIRUT: A boat carrying 60 migrants capsized Saturday night off the Lebanese coast, the Lebanese Red Cross said. It was not immediately clear if there

were any deaths.

The Red Cross said it sent 10 ambulances to the port of the northern city of Tripoli in case there were casualties.

Prime Minister Najib Mikati's office said the boat capsized shortly after leaving the northern coastal town of Qalamoun near Tripoli, Lebanon's second largest city.

Mikati's office said the Lebanese army and authorities were on high alert following the case.

An AFP correspondent in northern Lebanon said the army had closed off the port, allowing entry only to ambulances which were zipping in and out.

Families of some of the passengers started gathering to check on their loved ones but they too were denied access.

The fate of the passengers was not immediately clear.

For many years Lebanon was a country that took in refugees, but since the country's economic meltdown began in October 2019, thousands of people have left on boats heading to Europe.

Lebanon, a small Mediterranean nation of 6 million people, including 1 million Syrian refugees, is in the grip of the worst economic crisis in the country's modern history. The economic meltdown has put more three-quarters of the country's population into poverty.

The UN refugee agency says at least 1,570 people, 186 of them Lebanese, left or tried to leave illegally by sea from Lebanon between January and November 2021.

Most were hoping to reach European Union member Cyprus, an island 175 kilometers (110 miles) away.

This is up from 270 passengers, including 40 Lebanese, in 2019.

Most of those trying to leave Lebanon by sea are Syrian refugees, but Lebanese have increasingly joined their ranks.

(With AFP and AP)



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Sudden exchange rate turmoil angers Lebanese ahead of parliamentary elections
Lebanese painter Aref El-Rayess' daughter pays tribute to her late father in retrospective exhibition

[Egypt's 15m Coptic Christians join national celebrations with renewed sense of hope](#)

Sat, 2022-04-23 22:14

LONDON: On Sunday, the 15 million Coptic Christians in Egypt and 2 million more in scattered migrant communities across the world celebrate Orthodox Easter.

The following day, together with Egyptians of all faiths, Coptic Christians will celebrate the national holiday of Sham Ennessim.

Like the Copts themselves, the festival of spring, whose origins date back millennia to the days of the pharaohs, survived the Arabization of Egypt in the seventh century to become an integral part of Egyptian society.

In a special Minority Report, Arab News tells the extraordinary story of the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria, which parted company with the rest of Christendom in the fifth century after a fundamental disagreement over the nature of Christ's divinity.

Founded in the great city of Alexandria by Mark the Evangelist in about A.D. 60, the church and its followers have undergone centuries of turmoil.

During the Roman era, Coptic Christians were singled out for bloody persecution, with St. Mark himself brutally martyred in A.D. 68.

During the reign of the Roman emperor Diocletian (A.D. 245-313), what became known as the Diocletianic Persecution saw countless hundreds of Christians massacred in Alexandria alone. Among them was Peter, the Patriarch of Alexandria, who was beheaded.

After the rise of Islam and the conquest of Egypt in the seventh century, although there were isolated periods of persecution, over the centuries the Copts were treated well enough.

But the pressure of rising taxes imposed on non-Muslims saw many Christians convert to Islam, while the rapid spread of Arabic culture caused the Coptic language to fall into disuse.

Although rarely heard outside the churches, today the language, a direct descendant of the ancient Egyptian tongue spoken in the time of the pharaohs, lives on in the liturgies and monasteries of the faith.

In modern times, the Copts in Egypt have faced waves of violence at the hands of Islamists, who have bombed Coptic churches and murdered believers.

The filmed killings of 20 migrant Coptic workers in Libya in 2015 shocked the world, while a wave of attacks on Copts and their churches in Egypt in 2017 left dozens dead.

“One of the most important things for Copts today, in Egypt and abroad, is that over the past decade we have seen a much greater, harmonious existence between Christians and Muslims.”

Archbishop Anba Angaelos, Coptic Orthodox Archbishop of London

Since the 1970s, many Copts, driven either by fear or economic pressures, have emigrated to seek new futures in the West, mainly in the US, Canada,

Australia and the UK.

Wherever they have put down roots, Coptic communities and their churches have blossomed, and maintain close links with Egypt and the faith.

Today, Coptic leaders look optimistically toward a brighter future.

“One of the most important things for Copts today, in Egypt and abroad, is that over the past decade we have seen a much greater, harmonious existence between Christians and Muslims,” Archbishop Anba Angaelos, head of the Coptic Church in the UK, exclusively told Arab News.

In “The Coptic Miracle,” Arab News tells the story of how Egypt’s historic Christian church not only survived but thrived, at home and abroad.



The Coptic miracle

How Egypt's historic Christian church survived and thrived

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Egypt's Copts celebrate Christmas at home

Israeli restrictions on Holy Fire ceremony in Jerusalem spark Christian outrage

Author:

Sat, 2022-04-23 21:59

RAMALLAH: Thousands of Christians were prevented from going to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in East Jerusalem on Saturday to celebrate the Holy Fire ceremony because of Israeli police checkpoints in the Old City.

Photos and videos from the scene and the Old City showed a large number of police and barriers deployed at the church entrances. Officers were seen pushing and hitting women and clerics, keeping them away from the building.

The scouts' band performed in the streets leading to the church with pilgrims watching in delight.

Israel's Supreme Court ruled there were no restrictions on the number of visitors to the church, but Israeli police forces decided the rules on the ground and ignored the court's decision.

A Christian woman from East Jerusalem told Arab News that the number of police barriers had increased this year in response to the court's decision. "Every year we suffer from these racist measures. We want to celebrate this day freely and without restrictions, and we want a solution," she said.

Police asked church authorities to reduce the number of worshippers and said it would only allow 1,000 people to enter the church on Holy Saturday and 500 people to enter the Old City and reach the patriarchate squares and the church roof.

The church moved the court, emphasizing its right to worship and demanding to access the church without restrictions or conditions.

Police tried to bargain with the church by offering to allow 4,000 worshippers in, but the petitioners rejected the offer and demanded free and unconditional entry for any number of worshippers.

"We consider that the Israeli authorities limiting the number of worshippers and celebrants in the church today constitutes a challenge to the historical and legal situation of the church for decades, and the Israeli police today did not allow our people to enter the church as it should, and there was harassment against them," Bishop Monib Younan, the former head of the Lutheran Union in Jerusalem, told Arab News.

"Holy Saturday is the only day for Christians to celebrate in Jerusalem, and

Christian pilgrims came from Egypt, but we were not allowed to enter to celebrate.

“Unfortunately, the matter is related to what is happening in Al-Aqsa Mosque, the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood, and Bab Al-Khalil. We condemn this restriction and affirm that the existing legal and historical status of the church must be adhered to under the auspices of King Abdullah II of Jordan,” he said.

The monarch is the custodian of the holy places in Jerusalem.

Israel says it wants to prevent another disaster after a crowd stampede at a packed Jewish holy site last year left 45 people dead. Christian leaders say there is no need to alter a ceremony that has been held for centuries.



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Crowds gather for Holy Fire ceremony at Jerusalem's Holy Sepulchre Israel says no change to status-quo at Jerusalem mosque compound

Sudden exchange rate turmoil angers Lebanese ahead of parliamentary elections

Author:

Fri, 2022-04-22 22:48

BEIRUT: A sudden upheaval in Lebanon's exchange rate has angered people ahead of parliamentary elections.

Economist Louis Hobeika said the turmoil should motivate people to "vote for change and not re-elect those in power."

He told Arab News that the ruling parties had all the time they needed to issue laws but did nothing.

The Lebanese pound hit a sudden low, trading at LBP28,000 to the dollar on Friday, with the country on official holidays until Tuesday for Orthodox Easter.

The exchange rate turmoil caused a clamor in the markets, as people said on social media that shop owners had already started pricing goods based on a rate of LBP30,000 to the dollar.

Protesters cut off the southern highway with burning tires, denouncing the deteriorating living conditions, Lebanon's National News agency reported.

Electricite du Liban, the state-owned electricity supplier, said on Thursday that the Deir Ammar power plant had shut down. The Zahrani power plant shut down last week, leaving the Lebanese with no electricity supply until a ship carrying a fuel delivery is unloaded and tested.

Subscription fees for private generators that are charged in dollars continue to rise.

The two plants depend exclusively on Iraqi fuel as part of an agreement concluded between the two countries last August.

The state is unable to secure dollars to import additional quantities of fuel, while the agreement to draw electricity from Jordan and gas from Egypt is yet to be implemented.

According to the agreement with Iraq, every month only one shipment of 40,000 tons of gas oil is supplied to Lebanon, for the benefit of EDL.

The agreement expires in September, and EDL had pledged to ensure "a minimum level of stability in electricity supply, until May 18," that is after the parliamentary elections on May 15.

Lebanon was supposed to start importing electricity and gas from Jordan and

Egypt in March, but the implementation was delayed due to the World Bank's failure to finance the two agreements.

Energy Minister Walid Fayyad said he had not been officially notified by the World Bank of the decision to delay funding.

"We are constantly contacting the World Bank and the US ambassador to Lebanon, Dorothy Shea, and her French counterpart Anne Grillo, and the ball is now in the court of the US administration and the World Bank to begin formal negotiations, which is an essential stage for financing," Fayyad said on Thursday.

On Friday, the US-based Al-Hurra TV channel quoted a State Department spokesperson as saying that the government was awaiting final contracts and financing terms from the parties to ensure the gas and electricity projects complied with US policy and address any potential sanctions concerns.

Egyptian gas will be pumped to Lebanon via Jordan as well as Syria, which is subject to US sanctions under the Caesar Act.

Hobeika said the "political confusion and failure to find solutions to the problems at hand, naturally leads to chaos again."

He added that all signs indicated that Lebanon was further deteriorating, including the value of the national currency.

"There is a clear political inability to find solutions and deal with reality, and the best evidence is the chaos and sub-standard effort that happened in the Parliament session that was held to discuss the capital control bill.

"We are only three weeks away from the parliamentary elections, and such discussions should be postponed until the elections are held. Until then, chaos will prevail, and the national currency will further depreciate.

"This is due to the bad impression the ruling authority has left, which will increase demand for the dollar. The worst thing the ruling parties are doing is trying to outsmart the International Monetary Fund. They claim they are working on reforms, but things have remained the same. Reform needs laws, and such laws don't exist yet in Lebanon."



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