

Egypt refers man accused of killing Coptic priest to trial

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CAIRO: Egyptian prosecutors Tuesday referred a man to trial for allegedly stabbing to death a Coptic Christian priest in an attack that shocked the Arab World's most populous country.

The public prosecution said in a statement the suspect was accused of killing the priest earlier this month at the popular seaside promenade in the Mediterranean city of Alexandria. He was also accused of illegal possession of a knife used in the attack, it said.

No date was set for the trial . The suspect could face a death sentence if convicted.

The Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria identified the priest as Arsanious Wadid, 56, who served at a local parish.

Sectarian violence is not uncommon in Egypt. Islamic extremists have also targeted Christians in recent years, especially following the 2013 military ouster of an Islamist but elected president amid mass protests against his divisive rule.

In September 2017, an alleged Daesh supporter stabbed to death an 82-year-old Christian doctor in Cairo. He was sentenced to death the following year.

Egypt's Copts, the Middle East's largest Christian community, have repeatedly complained of discrimination. They account for about 10 percent of Egypt's over 103 million people.



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[Security fears: Israel might ban citizens from going to Qatar for World Cup](#)

Author:

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RAMALLAH: Israel is considering banning its citizens from traveling to Qatar in November to watch World Cup matches over security concerns, according to Israeli security sources.

Nearly 15,000 Israelis have bought tickets for the World Cup, and sports tourism agencies estimate that between 25,000 and 30,000 Israelis will travel to Qatar.

However, the Israeli National Security Council will meet next week to discuss issuing an advisory calling on the Israelis to avoid traveling to Qatar.

Israeli press reports said on Tuesday that there are "increasing" Israeli security concerns about the possibility of Israelis being subjected to "harm" in Qatar. Israel cannot make security arrangements as there are no diplomatic ties between Doha and Tel Aviv. Israel describes Qatari policies as "supportive" of Hamas and expects "many Iranians" at the World Cup matches.

The Israel Today newspaper quoted an Israeli source concerned with the matter, as saying: "This constitutes not a simple security challenge. It requires the cooperation of the authorities in Qatar, which is not guaranteed; this is a first-class challenge. After security discussions, we will know if this can be done and how. If there is no agreement over Israeli security considerations, there may be recommendations to avoid traveling to Qatar for objective reasons."

The report said that the Anti-Terrorism Authority recommends avoiding non-essential travel to Qatar, claiming that "in light of the Qatari street's hostility toward Israel and the presence of terrorist elements in Qatar, there is a danger to the safety of Israeli citizens who visit or stay in Qatar."

According to the report, the geographical proximity between Iran and Qatar and the possibility that Iran will send hundreds of thousands of its citizens to watch the World Cup poses a threat to Israelis staying in areas close to "many hostile elements."

Meanwhile, thousands of Israelis bear a second, foreign passport, besides their Israeli one to use it to travel to Qatar and watch some of their preferable matches there without being identified as Israeli citizens.

The Israeli national team did not qualify for the World Cup, and the last time it participated was in 1970 in Mexico.

Ahmed Owaisat, reporter and sports expert for Makan, the official Israel Radio station in Arabic, told Arab News that large Israeli sports media teams intend to go to Qatar for coverage. The primary television channel KAN and Makan, and the official Israeli radio, will broadcast exclusively all World Cup matches to the Israeli audience.

Owaisat added that thousands of Israeli football fans intend to go to Doha and stay there until the end of the competition.

"Even if a decision is taken to prevent them from going to Qatar – and I rule out such a decision – this will not prevent them and they will travel using foreign passports, as most Israeli citizens have other nationalities and speak English fluently and there is no need to speak Hebrew, so it will be difficult to identify them."

Owaisat says that many Israelis are interested in going directly as Israelis to Qatar, taking advantage of the fact that FIFA laws allow them to go with their passports even if there are no diplomatic relations between their country and the host country.

He said if anti-Israel demonstrations occur in Qatar before the World Cup, that might result in a reduced number of Israelis being allowed to go to Qatar.

The Israeli National Security and Counter-Terrorism Council has warned Israelis not to go to the Sinai Peninsula in Egypt for fear of being targeted by extremist groups, but hundreds of Israelis still go.

A former senior Israeli security official told Arab News: "I think in the end, the Israeli security authorities will not prevent Israeli citizens who want to attend the World Cup from going to Qatar, and the most they can do is advise and warn them not to go, nothing more."

Israeli political expert and analyst Yoni Ben Menachem told Arab News: "I think the security authorities are right about their fears, but hundreds of Israelis will attend the World Cup in Qatar despite all these fears and warnings and any measures Israel might take."

He said despite security warnings for the Israelis against going to Sinai, there are currently 15,000 Israelis spending the Jewish Passover holiday there.



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Israeli forces injure 72 Palestinians UAE summons Israeli ambassador to protest incidents at Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa Mosque

[Lebanon expects deal with World Bank on food security](#)

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Tue, 2022-04-19 22:08

BEIRUT: Lebanon is close to reaching an agreement with the World Bank in which the international agency would give the crisis-hit country a \$150 million loan for food security and to stabilize bread prices for the next six months, the economy minister said Tuesday.

Amin Salam said talks with the International Monetary Fund were progressing in a positive way.

"Work is ongoing and the train is moving. I am optimistic," Salam said in an interview with The Associated Press. He said the IMF is focusing on three sectors that are improving – electricity, transportation and high-speed Internet – because they can help reactivate the whole economy.

Salam said the government does not have immediate plans to lift bread subsidies, especially for flour used in making flat Arabic bread, the main staple in Lebanon.

Lebanon is in the grip of a devastating economic crisis that has been described as one of the worst in modern history. It imports most of its wheat and has faced shortages over the past weeks as the war in Ukraine leads to increases in prices of oil and food products around the world.

There have also been concerns that the government might lift wheat subsidies as foreign currency reserves drop to critical levels at the central bank. Any lifting of subsidies would sharply increase the price of bread affecting the poor in the Mediterranean nation where more than three quarters of its 6 million people, including 1 million Syrian refugees, now live in poverty.

"We are working with the World Bank to keep market stability for the next six months by getting \$150 million," Salam said. He added that the deal with the World Bank will stabilize the price of bread and wheat until a ration card policy is in force so that people in need can benefit.

Salam added that subsidies cannot continue forever, especially for flour that is used for making pastries and sweets. He said that such policies were implemented in Egypt and other countries where subsidies were lifted for wheat used in some products and left for the bread.

Salam said meetings were scheduled with officials from the World Bank on Wednesday, after which Lebanon will propose final recommendations to the

bank's board. Salam said there is tentative approval from the Lebanese state and the World Bank, adding that it could be effective in three weeks to a month.

He said that the war in Ukraine is forcing Lebanon to find new sources of wheat that are far away and more expensive.

Earlier this month, Lebanon and the IMF reached a tentative agreement for comprehensive economic policies that could eventually pave the way for some relief for the country after Beirut implements wide-ranging reforms.

Salam, who is part of the Lebanese negotiating team with the IMF, said the government, parliament and all Lebanese officials are fully aware that if Lebanon does not fully abide by the IMF program, conditions "will become very difficult because there is no alternative plan."

He said the banking sector has to be restructured because without a banking sector it is impossible to move forward with economic growth. Salam added that during the talks with the IMF the Lebanese side worked to make "the banking sector carry some of the losses without destroying the banking sector."

He said whenever a final deal with the IMF is reached and there is political intention for success by authorities, Lebanon can start achieving tangible results in the next two to three years. And in five years "Lebanon can be in a very good place."

The Lebanese pound, which has lost more than 90 percent of its value since the economic meltdown began in October 2019, can become more stable, he said. The staff level agreement that Lebanon reached with the IMF on April 7 lists five "key pillars" that should be implemented, including restructuring the financial sector, implementing fiscal reforms, and the proposed restructuring of external public debt, anti-corruption and anti-money laundering efforts. Salam said the country's 14 largest banks will be held up as a standard to work on restructuring the sector since they control about 80 percent of the market. The smaller banks that have problems should be taken over by bigger lenders. He said most likely people with deposits of up to \$100,000 will eventually get their money back while those with much bigger balances will end up either getting treasury bills or become shareholders in banks or state institutions.

"The 100,000 figure will be a number that will be protected for everyone," he said.

Breaking with the position of the prime minister, he suggested that central bank Gov. Riad Salameh should go.

"His situation has become tenuous," Salam said, saying it will be difficult for future governments in Lebanon to work with him.

Salameh, who has been in the job since 1993, is facing investigations in Lebanon and several European countries into possible cases of money laundering and embezzlement. The governor is protected by several top officials, including the prime minister and parliament speaker.

"I'm all for change," Salam said. "No one is irreplaceable."



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[Protests held in Beirut against draft capital control law](#)

Tue, 2022-04-19 19:41

BEIRUT: Protests were held in Beirut on Tuesday against a draft capital control law, even as parliamentary committees discussed the proposed legislation.

Formal capital controls are an International Monetary Fund policy recommendation, and Lebanon hopes to secure an IMF aid package after the country's financial system imploded in 2019, paralyzing the banking system

and freezing depositors out of their US dollar accounts.

Depositors gathered in the vicinity of parliament to prevent MPs from attending the session. Members of the Free Professions Syndicates also held sit-ins at their headquarters in protest against the draft law.

They said it was unjust on depositors who they believed were being forced to bear the consequences of the country's economic crisis and corruption.

Nader Kaspar, head of the Beirut Bar Association, said: "One of the most immoral issues in Lebanon is depositors' money. It is a national, humanitarian, and social issue par excellence. We lost our entire life savings and now, after over two years, they want to talk about capital control.

"The banks did not shut down, and the owners still have their private jets and luxurious villas. Now they want to talk about distributing losses without any concrete plans?

"We will escalate our action. A strike is not enough. There is a constitution that must be respected and we will not accept laws that legitimize taking over people's money."

The Federation of Syndicates of Bank Employees in Lebanon said: "Touching depositors' money is forbidden. The federation will join in every action to confront those trying to take over people's money."

The Lebanese Press Editors Syndicate also objected to the attempt to pass a capital control bill, along with the continued restrictions on union deposits and funds, and banking restrictions.

Syndicate head Joseph Kossaifi said: "The unions have deposits in banks and there are mutual funds that deposit large sums in banks, which are subscriptions and donations to ensure people's pensions. Does this mean that the money of about a million people has evaporated?"

In a letter to Prime Minister Najib Mikati, the Association of Banks in Lebanon said: "The IMF's proposal to make banks bear the losses is unfair, just as the proposal to charge a large part of these losses to depositors means exempting the state and the Banque du Liban from debt and losses.

"If this were to happen, banks, shareholders, and depositors would file lawsuits against the state and BDL, which benefited from the funds of the banks and depositors and still refuse to find satisfactory solutions to solve the issue."

Mikati told an ABL delegation on Tuesday: "One of the government's priorities in the economic process is to preserve the rights of depositors. The recovery plan gives priority to preserving people's rights, reactivating the various productive sectors, and preserving the banking sector."

With the government insisting on its amendments to the draft law and demanding that parliament approve it quickly having signed a staff-level agreement with the IMF, the head of the Administration and Justice Committee, MP George Adwan, said after the parliamentary committee meetings: "The government did not present any recovery plan. We have removed some articles of the draft so no one can say that parliament does not want the Capital Control Law."

Adwan added that Mikati's claims about not wasting people's deposits were "mere words without any concrete action."

Meanwhile, pharmacies across Lebanon closed on Tuesday in protest against the country's security turmoil and the killing of a pharmacist at her workplace on Monday in the town of Mrouj in Mount Lebanon.

Leila Rizk was found dead in the pharmacy toilet on Monday evening. Rizk, a mother of three, had been working as a pharmacist for 20 years. Joe Salloum, head of the Pharmacists Syndicate, condemned the crime and demanded that the security forces protect pharmacies in light of the “ongoing security chaos.”

While the preliminary investigation did not reveal the reasons for the crime, information suggested that the crime was not about stealing money or drugs. President Michel Aoun called Salloum and assured him that instructions had been given to the security services to “pursue and arrest” the perpetrators. On Tuesday, Aoun met Lebanon’s ambassador to Saudi Arabia Fawzi Kabbara before he left for the Kingdom. Saudi Arabia’s ambassador to Lebanon, Walid Bukhari, returned to Beirut last week.

“The president’s directives have always been to ensure the best relations between Lebanon and the brotherly Arab countries in general, and the Gulf states in particular, especially Saudi Arabia,” Kabbara said.



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Turkey begins large-scale operation in northern Iraq against Kurdish militants

Author:

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ANKARA: Turkey has begun the new week with the launch of a large-scale ground and aerial cross-border offensive against Kurdish militants in northern Iraq.

Alongside artillery, T129B helicopters, drones and F-16 fighters, Turkey's Special Forces and elite commando units were also deployed as part of the campaign that reportedly struck targets of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, in northern Iraq's Metina, Zap and Avashin-Basyan regions.

The cross-border action, named Operation Claw Lock, came a day after Turkey's Minister of Interior Suleyman Soylu said: "We will save Syria and Iraq from the hands of the US and Europe, and bring peace there."

For Zaed Ismail, member of the scientific committee of the Istanbul-based Academy of International Relations, the operation is related to increased missile strikes against the Turkish base in Zilikan in Nineveh, and the PKK's expansion in northern Iraq deep into Sinjar. It is also linked to recent political contact between Ankara and Irbil.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan recently met with Masrour Barzani, the prime minister of Iraq's Kurdistan regional government in Irbil.

Experts have noted that Sinjar is turning into an alternative headquarters for the PKK.

"The military operations began about a week after the visit of Barzani to Ankara and it clearly indicated the existence of security coordination between Irbil and Ankara to launch the military operation," Ismail said.

Ismail said the PKK "began posing an increased existential threat to the political stability of the entire geography of northern Iraq, with repeated missile attacks on Irbil Airport."

The offensive was carried out in coordination with Turkey's "friends and allies," the Defense Ministry stated.

But, for Ismail, it is difficult to resolve the battle through airstrikes, unless the international conditions are created for a broad ground operation.

The operation, which began at midnight, was launched as Russia showed no letup in its invasion of Ukraine, while Turkey's mediation role was welcomed

by Western partners.

Both the US and the EU have already designated the PKK as a terror group.

Tuna Aygun, an Iraq expert at Ankara-based think tank ORSAM, said the latest operation took place as part of a previous offensive, but this time Turkey was targeting runaway elements of the PKK from the eastern and western parts of the region.

“The operation area (had been) a shelter for the PKK militants for some time. Especially since 2017, (the) PKK mostly concentrated its logistical and military strength in Iraq to hit targets in Turkey,” he told Arab News.

“By establishing temporary military bases, Turkey aims at establishing its control on the transit routes of the militants according to the geographical characteristics of the territory,” said Aygun.

However, it is still unclear how long the military operation will endure and whether the movements of the PKK militants will be restricted.

“It will not be a one-day operation. But with the increased use of armed drones during such offensives, these moves do not depend any longer on the clim(atic) conditions,” Aygun said. He added that Turkey’s latest operation has the support of Baghdad and Irbil because it is being seen as a way to stabilize a region where thousands of civilians were displaced in recent years due to the PKK’s presence.

Ahead of the upcoming elections next year, this operation is also likely to have domestic repercussions in Turkish politics in the eyes of nationalist voters, and used as a trump card against the opposition pro-Kurdish Peoples’ Democratic Party.

Yerevan Saeed, research associate at the Arab Gulf Institute in Washington, said Turkey has been seeking to build a security zone inside the Kurdistan region for a number of years.

“The military operation appears to be deeper and more intense this year,” he told Arab News.

Its objectives are likely to include seizing control of strategic areas of Afashin, Matin, Khukuk and Zab. “(The) Turkish military has failed to control them in the past,” he added.

“If successful, Ankara will be able to separate Qandil mountains where PKK bases are located from (the) Rojava and Sinjar areas, (restricting the) PKK’s movements.”

Ali Semin, an expert on Iraqi politics from Nisantasi University in Istanbul, said the offensive is part of a series of operations since 2019 to create a buffer zone between its border with Northern Iraq and PKK-dominated areas.

“Ankara seems to seize the best political opportunity to expand its operation,” he told Arab News.

"The leadership in Baghdad and Irbil consider the latest activities of the PKK as an intervention (to) their political presence," said Semin.

"Unlike the past operations of Turkey that were criticized by Iraqi authorities as a violation of their territorial sovereignty, Turkey's current operation mostly (have) their backing," said the expert.

Over the last three decades, Semin said, about 250 villages had been evacuated in northern Iraq. This was also where fighting in the past few years has intensified between Peshmerga forces loyal to the Kurdistan Democratic Party and the PKK.

According to Noah Ringler, an expert from Georgetown University, the offensive has received military support from the Turkish-aligned KDP Peshmerga and comes amid ongoing challenges with government formations in Baghdad, where Turkish officials now believe they have broad support from political parties for the operation.

"The goals of the operation likely include new Turkish operations posts closer to the PKK's strategic strongholds near Qandil mountains, which holds political significance in Turkey, as well as disruption of PKK operations and influence in the region, and the strengthening of Kurdish and Iraqi political actors aligned with Turkey," he told Arab News.

Experts also note that the success of such operations will also influence local dynamics in Syria.

"(The) Kurdish People's Protection Units are mostly supported logistically and militarily by the PKK bases in Sinjar," Semin said.

Baghdad and Irbil reached a security and administrative agreement on Sinjar on Oct. 9, 2020.

However, the agreement that called for the removal of PKK forces in the region has not been implemented yet.

"Turkey, together with Baghdad and Irbil, can be a facilitator to execute this agreement and turn the region into a secure zone where the Iraqi authorities regain control," Semin said.



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