

A top-notch hospital in Doha is busy: Only falcons allowed

Author:

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DOHA: At first glance, the Souq Waqif clinic in the historic center of Doha, the capital of Qatar, could be any other state-of-the-art hospital.

Nurses in blue scrubs move briskly through the bright wards, conducting rounds. Radiology and operating rooms whir with the beeps and blinks of monitors. Specialists squint at X-rays and masked doctors make incisions with all the high-tech tools of modern surgery on hand.

There's just one thing: The rooms are filled with falcons.

In the tiny, wealthy emirate of Qatar, the desert birds are among the nation's most pampered residents.

Long revered across the Arabian Peninsula for their ferocity and hunting prowess, falcons today serve as status symbols recalling a Bedouin past. The bond between falconers and their falcons has been an inspiration since the Paleolithic period, when drawings of the creatures first appeared on cave walls.

Although less fashionable now than in the days of yore, the art of falconry is still passed down from one generation to the next in Qatar and other Arabian Gulf countries.

With demand growing in recent years, clubs that teach the sport have sprouted up across the region. Falcons compete in an increasing number of races and beauty contests. The finest falcons fetch at least a few thousand dollars and Qataris spare no expense to maintain their good health.

"The establishment of the hospital was to support the hobby and heritage of raising falcons ... it's a pastime that stretches its veins into multiple generations," Souq Waqif hospital director Dr. Ikdam Al Karkhi said. "Keeping them alive and well is an essential duty."

Public hospitals like Souq Waqif offer expert care to sick and wounded hawks, roughly 30,000 a year. The marbled reception area bustles with owners and handlers bringing their birds in for check-ups, medical tests, feather replacements, orthopedic surgeries – and even something akin to mani-pedis.

Falcon nail filing is very serious business, as birds transplanted from the desert wild to opulent homes in skyscraper-studded Doha or bred in captivity cannot easily find sharp surfaces on which to trim their talons.

The falcon's hunt may be a long-venerated tradition, but it's also grisly work. The cornered prey at times puts up a fight, clawing an attacking falcon and hobbling its wings. Each of a falcon's feathers is vital to its flight,

necessitating careful feather replacement after a scuffle.

Doctors pull from a bank of shed feathers to find one that perfectly matches the wounded bird's breed – plumage of the same pattern, length and color.

“If these damaged feathers remain, it can cause loss or reduction of the bird's fitness,” Al Karkhi said. “They must be treated.”

Hospital surgeons treat other casualties of the hunt, too. Falcons' beaks and talons suffer damage from all that swooping and plunging and gobbling.

In the clinic waiting room, falcons perch regally on their owners' gloved wrists. The Qatari men in their flowing white robes treat the prized birds like children, stroking their feathers and misting their beaks with water.

“If a person is neglecting their bird, it's a huge problem,” said Hamad Al-Mehshadi, a falcon festival manager taking his raptor for a regular medical checkup. “When one holds onto their bird, it is something else. The love of the bird is extraordinary.”

Oil wealth and global business may have transformed Doha into a futuristic capital with a gleaming array of skyscrapers and megaprojects, including giant stadiums soon to host millions of soccer fans for the upcoming 2022 FIFA World Cup. But Souq Waqif still sees a steady stream of 150 falcons a day – a sign that the echoes of Qatar's ancient past are not lost.

“Even the look that a falcon and its owner share, it's different than any other look,” Al Karkhi said. Falconers “feel the loyalty of this bird – a fierce warrior in the wild and yet a pet in my hand.”



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Saudi Falcons Club takes part in Expo 2020 Dubai3rd Saudi International Falcons and Hunting Exhibition opens

[Lebanon optimistic about resumption of relations with Gulf states](#)

Fri, 2022-03-25 00:51

BEIRUT: The Saudi and Kuwaiti foreign ministries have responded warmly to the Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati's call to restore diplomatic ties with Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states.

The Lebanese are hoping for a swift resumption of the suspended relations, hopes which have been bolstered by statements from Riyadh and Kuwait City.

Saudi Arabia praised the "positive points" in Mikati's statement, adding that it hoped it would "contribute to the restoration of Lebanon's role and status on the Arab and international levels." The Kuwaiti government, meanwhile, said it was looking forward to engaging in practical measures that would contribute to more security, stability and prosperity for Lebanon.

Mikati's expression has also been enhanced by the announcement of the launch of the French-Saudi joint fund to support the Lebanese people.

The Saudi and Kuwaiti statements came after Mikati issued an official statement pledging that the Lebanese government would commit to taking all necessary measures to enhance cooperation with Saudi Arabia and the Gulf Cooperation Council countries.

Mikati also pledged that Lebanon would abide by all Arab League resolutions, focus on international legitimacy and complete the implementation of their decisions in a way that guarantees civil peace and national stability for Lebanon and fortifies its unity.

In the statement published on Monday evening, Mikati stressed the "necessity to stop all political, military, security and media activities that affect the sovereignty, security and stability of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, which originate from Lebanon."

Mikati affirmed "the obligation to take all measures to prevent the smuggling of contraband, especially drugs, to Saudi Arabia and the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, directly or indirectly, tighten controls at all border crossings."

He pledged Lebanon's commitment to the Riyadh Agreement for judicial cooperation and the extradition of wanted persons to Saudi Arabia.

Mikati pledged that the "Lebanese government will work to prevent the use of Lebanese financial and banking channels to conduct financial transactions that might harm the security of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf Cooperation Council countries."

In the Cabinet session that was held on Wednesday afternoon, Mikati welcomed "the statements issued by Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, which indicate that the cloud that disturbed Lebanon's relations will soon disappear, and we are keen to implement the ministerial statement and call on the Arabs to stand by Lebanon."

Lebanese political commentators declared that this step will help usher in the return of the Saudi and Kuwaiti ambassadors to Lebanon and that relationships between Lebanon and the Gulf countries should return to normal before the next Arab summit is held.

Saudi Arabia's return to diplomatic engagement with Lebanon will be achieved primarily through the French-Saudi joint fund, according to some observers, who said that it will help the Lebanese people from beyond the framework of the state.

Politician and author Dr. Khaldoun Al-Sharif said the Saudi Foreign Ministry's position on Lebanon is a good response to Mikati's statement.

"As for the political return of the Kingdom, it needs a regional settlement, and Lebanon is not a party to it. The strong party in Lebanon is Hezbollah, which supports forces opposed to the Arabian Gulf directly or indirectly, and this affects the relationship between Lebanon and the Gulf," said Al-Sharif.

He added: "What is currently required is the stability of Yemen, then Iraq, and Lebanon comes after that."

The reopening of closed doors between Lebanon and the Arabian Gulf states came about 36 hours before the arrival of Iranian Foreign Minister Hussein Amir Abdollahian to Beirut.

Flying over from Damascus, Abdollahian's visit was supposed to take place a week ago after he visited Moscow, but developments related to the so-called nuclear deal delayed it until Thursday.

The Iranian official's visit fell the day after Lebanese President Michel Aoun defended Hezbollah's weapons and said in an interview during his stay in Rome that the group's arms "have no security effect inside Lebanon, and resisting the occupation is not terrorism."

At Beirut's Rafic Hariri International Airport, the Iranian minister said that there are many important political developments and all parties must ensure everyone has an opportunity to exchange views.

The minister reaffirmed "Iran's official readiness to extend bridges of

cooperation with Lebanon in various fields, especially economic and commercial ones.”

Abdollahian also reiterated the proposal he made during his meeting with Mikati on the sidelines of the Munich Security Forum about a month ago regarding Iran’s willingness to contribute to building two power plants in Lebanon with a capacity of 1,000 MW each.



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Italian president says Lebanon ‘must be supported’ to ensure Middle East stability
Political concerns shape Russia’s economic relations with the GCC amid the Ukraine crisis

[**Egypt’s President El-Sisi receives**](#)

[phone call from Ukrainian counterpart](#)

Thu, 2022-03-24 23:00

LONDON: Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi on Thursday stressed the importance of dialogue and diplomatic solutions to the ongoing Ukraine crisis, during a phone call with his Ukrainian counterpart Volodymyr Zelensky.

During the call, Zelensky briefed El-Sisi on the latest developments in the crisis and in the course of the negotiations, where the Egyptian leader affirmed his country's support for all endeavors that would speed up a political settlement to the conflict through discussions and negotiations. Spokesman for the Egyptian Presidency Bassam Rady said El-Sisi said that Egypt was following with great concern and concern the developments on the ground and the resulting deterioration of the humanitarian situation, expressing appreciation for the measures taken by the Ukrainian side to facilitate the exit of Egyptian citizens from the Ukrainian ports, and to ensure their safety and security.

Zelensky expressed his appreciation and gratitude for Egyptian efforts to continue hosting Ukrainian tourists in tourist resorts in Egypt, providing them with all means of assistance since the outbreak of the crisis, as well as facilitating the procedures for their return to Ukraine's neighboring countries.



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Yemen on the brink as Ukraine conflict cuts off 'world's breadbasket' Egypt bids for more British tourists

[UN official uses 'apartheid' for first time to describe plight of Palestinians](#)

Thu, 2022-03-24 21:48

NEW YORK: An investigator appointed by the UN has accused Israel of the crime of apartheid in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. It is the first time an official from the organization has used the term to describe what other international watchdogs have said is a struggle for equal rights rather than a dispute over land.

Michael Lynk is a special rapporteur, an independent expert appointed by the UN Human Rights Council, tasked with investigating human rights abuses in Palestinian territories occupied since 1967.

"There are now five million stateless Palestinians living without rights, in an acute state of subjugation and with no path to self-determination or a viable independent state, which the international community has repeatedly promised as their right," Lynk said ahead of the publication of a full report on his most recent investigations.

The two-tier justice system that Israel operates in the West Bank has cemented oppression of Palestinians that can no longer be seen as an unintended consequence of temporary occupation, he added.

"The differences in living conditions and citizenship rights and benefits are stark, deeply discriminatory and maintained through systematic and institutionalized oppression," Lynk stated in his report.

It describes a situation in which Israeli Jews and Palestinians in the Occupied Territories live "under a single regime which differentiates its distribution of rights and benefits on the basis of national and ethnic identity and which ensures the supremacy of one group over, and to the detriment of, the other."

This system "endows one racial-national-ethnic group with substantial rights, benefits and privileges while intentionally subjecting another group to live behind walls, checkpoints and under a permanent military rule. (This)

satisfies the prevailing evidentiary standard for the existence of apartheid.”

Other international watchdogs have previously accused Israel of implementing policies of “domination and oppression” in the Occupied Territories that amount to apartheid.

Amnesty International is the latest rights advocate to accuse Israel of operating an apartheid system by embracing laws and practices that are intended to maintain a “cruel system of control over Palestinians, have left them fragmented geographically and politically, frequently impoverished, and in a constant state of fear and insecurity.”

Although Palestinian and Israeli human rights organizations have described the situation in the Occupied Territories as “apartheid” for many years, in recent months the term has increasingly become part of the international discourse about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. During a recent meeting of the UN Security Council, Palestinian UN envoy Riyad Mansour wore a black mask emblazoned with the words “end apartheid.”

“This council may not be ready to use the word but apartheid is, and has been for a while now, our reality,” he told the members of the council.

Israeli authorities have repeatedly accused the UN of producing biased reports. They have said that it is unfair to apportion blame to Israel without taking into account the security challenges it faces and the daily threats to its citizens from armed Palestinian groups.



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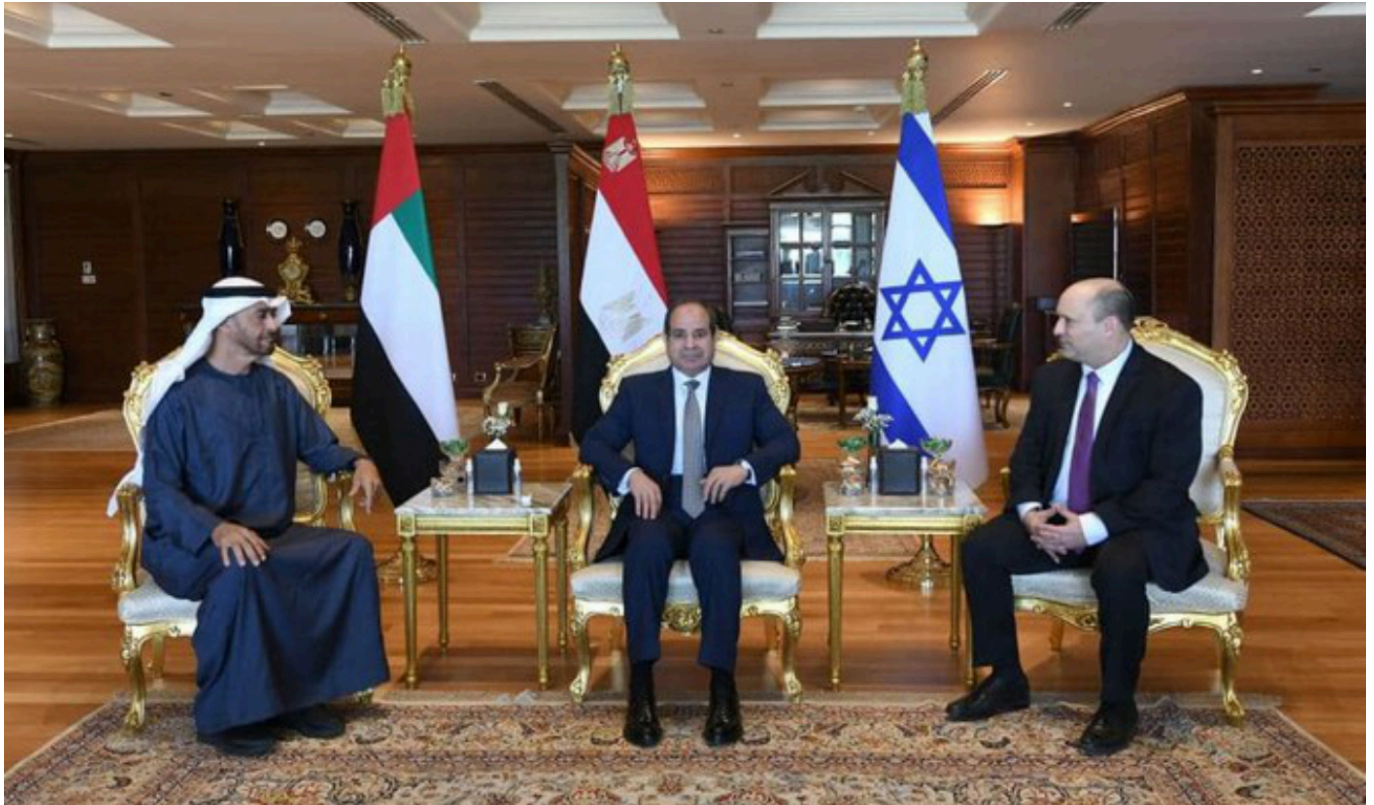
Thu, 2022-03-24 01:00

WASHINGTON/CAIRO: The US State Department said it welcomed the trilateral summit on Tuesday between the leaders of Egypt, Israel and the UAE, who met in Sharm El-Sheikh for talks on the economic impact of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the growing influence of Iran in the region.

State Department spokesperson Ned Price told reporters that US Special Envoy for Iran Robert Malley has been in close consultations with Gulf partners.

The summit came nearly a month after Russia invaded Ukraine in a move that sparked concerns about security and sent prices of oil, wheat and other key commodities soaring.

"Against the backdrop of the recent developments in the world and the region, the leaders discussed the ties between the three countries and ways to strengthen them on all levels," said a statement from the office of Israeli Premier Naftali Bennett.



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