

Jordanian Royal Court rejects 'inaccurate' claims surrounding King Abdullah's accounts

Author:

Mon, 2022-02-21 23:29

AMMAN: The Jordanian Royal Court on Monday rejected as "inaccurate" and "misleading" news reports about foreign bank accounts reportedly belonging to King Abdullah.

In a statement, the Royal Court said the reports included "inaccuracies, and outdated and misleading information that were employed with the aim of defaming Jordan and His Majesty, as well as distorting the truth."

The statement, seen by Arab News, came after the emergence of a series of reports in the international press based on leaked data from Credit Suisse, a leading Swiss bank.

The reports claimed King Abdullah had six accounts with Credit Suisse, one worth around \$224 million.

The Royal Court said the total balance mentioned in a number of reports is "inaccurate and exaggerated, as a result of significant duplicative counting."

The data, leaked to Germany's Sueddeutsche Zeitung, contains details of 18,000 bank accounts for prominent global figures, which were held from the 1940s to the 2010s, including by the sons of former Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, Alaa and Gamal, who allegedly held a total of six accounts at various points, including one in 2003 worth \$196 million.

"The majority of the sums listed in the accounts (of King Abdullah) relate to the sale of a large Airbus 340 airplane for \$212 million, and replacing it with a smaller, less costly Gulfstream aircraft. His Majesty had inherited two planes from His Majesty the late King Hussein, which were sold, with the resulting sum used to replace them more than once over the past 20 years, including the sale of the Airbus 340 and the purchase of the Gulfstream aircraft currently used by His Majesty," the statement said.

The closed accounts, the Royal Court added, include an account with deposits inherited by King Abdullah from King Hussein.

Regarding an account belonging to Queen Rania of Jordan, the Royal Court said that it was established as a trust fund for the king's children. The funds came from the king's private wealth, and the account was entrusted to the children's mother, as they were minors at the time, the statement said.

In response to reports, linking the monarch's wealth to foreign aid, the Royal Court said the king's "private assets have always been independent of

the Treasury and public funds.”

The Royal Court reaffirmed that all international assistance coming to Jordan is “subject to professional audits, and their allocations are fully accounted for by the government and donor entities, in accordance with cooperation agreements subject to the highest standards of governance and oversight.

“Any allegations that link the funds in these accounts to public funds or foreign assistance are defamatory, baseless, and deliberate attempts to distort facts and systematically target Jordan’s reputation, as well as His Majesty’s credibility, especially coming after similar reports published last year that were based on leaks from previous years.”



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Jordanian Royal Court](#)

[Amman](#)

Jordan’s prime minister contracts COVID-19 – state media
Durra border reopens between Saudi Arabia and Jordan

Two years after pandemic, Lebanon succeeds in coping with COVID-19

Mon, 2022-02-21 23:05

BEIRUT: Lebanon has been able to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic well despite its "critical and difficult circumstances," a top health official told Arab News on Monday.

Lebanon "has overcome the waves of the pandemic with an acceptable rate of losses despite the collapse of official institutions," said Dr. Abdul Rahman Bizri, an infectious disease specialist and head of the National Committee for the Administration of coronavirus vaccine.

"The real partnership between the public and private sectors, especially in the voluntary field, coordination in a scientific manner, and matching the measures taken globally with the Lebanese reality led to this success," Bizri said.

Like the rest of the world, Lebanon learning to live with the virus, although the gradual abolition of precautionary measures has not yet been approved.

Restaurants and cafes are crowded on weekends, especially those that allocate outdoor seating areas.

Two years have passed since the first coronavirus infection was reported in Lebanon, and the total to date is 1,043,028 cases. The total number of deaths reached 9,970 on Sunday.

The daily number of new cases has fallen during the past two months from a peak of 10,000 to less than 4,000.

"I believe that we will coexist with the virus and it will become like any common cold," said Aida Nouri, nursing supervisor of the hospital department at Al-Makassed Charitable Hospital in Beirut.

Nouri said that 95 percent of the deaths from the coronavirus variants registered in the hospital are among the unvaccinated.

The vaccinated suffer from simple symptoms, which have recently become very mild and do not require hospitalization, said Nouri.

In a report a week ago, the Lebanese Ministry of Health noted "the decrease in the percentage of positive tests and local incidence."

The report indicated the beginning of the countdown phase to the end of the wave of the omicron variant in the next two months.

According to the ministry's daily medical reports, the largest percentage of those who are currently infected with the virus are unvaccinated – 77 percent.

The number of people registered to receive the vaccine has risen to more than 3,700,000 people. This means that the number of people who will receive or have received the vaccine through registration on the platform of the Ministry of Health has exceeded 68.3 percent of the population.

According to Bizri, "Lebanon relies on RNA-based vaccines for its vaccination campaign because they are more desirable around the world. Lebanon receives European and American donations of these vaccines."

Bizri said they were preparing "a new phase for vaccinating children between the ages of 6 and 12 years, subject to the arrival of a batch of vaccines soon."

He said the coronavirus "has begun to turn from a pandemic to an endemic, which means that the virus that transmitted from animals to humans is adapting to live among humans, but in new forms.

"It is behaving like a human virus to continue life, and this is logical in virology, as it enhances its ability to spread and evade the immune system, causing the least disease symptoms so as not to eliminate its carrier, and this is what we witnessed with omicron."

Bizri also talked about the chaos, violations and corruption that marred the vaccination process.

Some fraud cases were reported in the results of PCR tests and vaccination certificates.

He said: "It is related to the deterioration of the security situation in a country where there is no social security number for every citizen.

"Moreover, the electronic firewalls are not robust, and the most dangerous thing is that perpetrators are not held accountable or punished.

"However, despite the limited capabilities, Lebanon has realized a healthy and notable achievement."



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Lebanon](#)

[Coronavirus](#)

How political dysfunction precipitated Lebanon's healthcare collapse
Tensions tail off in Lebanon after Hezbollah-Israel drone stand-off

[Hotel-dwelling asylum seekers fear UK tourism uptick could render them homeless](#)

Mon, 2022-02-21 19:21

LONDON: Thousands of asylum seekers living in hotels provided by the UK government fear they could lose their places as hotels aim to offer their rooms to tourists and other travelers.

A letter seen by The Guardian sent to a group of asylum seekers in a central London hotel provided by the Home Office said: "Dear guests, we would like to kindly inform you that your accommodation with us is going to end on 31 January [2022]. We advise you to get in touch with your local council for alternative accommodation."

However, a later note by Clearsprings, the company hired by the Home Office to manage the accommodation, contradicted the first letter sent.

The second letter said: "Under the law [hotel owners] cannot ask you to leave the premises forcefully. Please note that if for any reason your entry card is cancelled and you cannot gain access to your apartment please call the police immediately as this will be classed as an illegal eviction."

The Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants is supporting asylum seekers in this accommodation who received the letter. They say they are vulnerable and include a mother with a newborn baby and a survivor of domestic violence.

Minnie Rahman, the campaigns director for the JCWI, told The Guardian: "Nobody should have to fear they'll be kicked out on to the streets on a cold winter's night."

She also said the number of eviction threats asylum seekers have been receiving is increasing.

"Our lawyers have been on the phone to young mums and families who've been terrified they were going to end up homeless, and unfortunately we know these kinds of threats are widespread," said Rahman.

"The Home Office needs to be granting people who've sought safety here decent, stable accommodation so they can rebuild their lives."

The Home Office acknowledges that asylum seekers are entitled to long-term accommodation but said that it could not yet locate enough housing for the thousands of asylum seekers currently in hotels.

Visit Britain is predicting a significant boost in tourist numbers this year, and London hotels have reported a surge in tourist bookings as pandemic travel restrictions ease.

Meanwhile, the Home Office has already said it is spending £4.7 million (\$6.4 million) a day on hotel accommodation for 12,000 Afghans being resettled in the UK and 25,000 asylum seekers – a total cost of over \$2.3 billion per year.

A Home Office spokesperson said: "The letters were sent to a small number of people in one accommodation site in error and without approval from the Home Office. We are liaising with Clearsprings to make sure this does not happen again.

"The use of hotels is only ever a short-term solution and we are working with local authorities to find appropriate long-term accommodation across the United Kingdom."



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[United Kingdom \(UK\)](#)

[asylum seekers](#)

[UK Home Office](#)

[London hotels](#)

UK govt says cost of keeping refugees in hotels four times higher than first announced
Asylum seekers in UK 'ghetto' accommodation victims of racist abuse

[Skiing in Lebanon too steep for most with currency in freefall](#)

Author:

Sun, 2022-02-20 23:45

BEIRUT: Skiing in Lebanon has long been a luxury for the well-off, but the eastern Mediterranean country's financial meltdown has thrown most people into poverty and made taking to the slopes even more exclusive. The Lebanese pound has lost more than 90 percent of its value since 2019. "Skiing is a hobby for the dollar class, not for us," said Mohammad Atwi on a recent visit to the mountains. "We came here to sit and have shisha. The most we spend is 200,000 pounds (\$10)." Prices for ski passes at the Mzaar ski resort, which boasts panoramic views

over the Mediterranean, are listed in dollars in a country where the vast majority earn in pounds.

An all-day pass runs at \$35 on weekdays and \$50 at weekends, according to a website listing prices. That equates to between 700,000 and a million pounds – more than the current monthly minimum wage and a sizeable chunk of an average salary.

Lebanon is mired in its worst crisis since the 1975-90 civil war, with banks imposing tight restrictions on how much cash savers can withdraw, forcing even those with money to think more carefully before they spend.

Still, the slopes are packed at weekends with those who can afford it.

“Skiing has become expensive, especially if you have many kids, but at the end we want to live,” said Delphine Markarian as she walked through the snow with skis strapped to her back.

“When the weather is nice like this, you ski with your children, they enjoy it and that is what we look for – an experience to be happy with our children. That’s the most important thing.”



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Lebanon](#)

[skiing](#)

Lebanon’s Arab Basketball Championship stars receive heroes welcome from fans in Beirut
Lebanon approves \$18 million to hold May election

Sudan's fate in the balance as democratic transition hits a bump

Sun, 2022-02-20 22:49

DUBAI: Photographer and activist Lana Haroun, 34, was in Khartoum in 2019, at the epicenter of the revolution in Sudan. She helped to document the rage and optimism of the movement that brought an end to the 30-year rule of dictator Omar Bashir in April that year.

Like thousands of Sudanese people who had long dreamed of political change, Haroun was hopeful as the country subsequently began a difficult transition to democratic civilian rule. Those hopes soon turned to despair.

Abdalla Hamdok, a respected UN diplomat who was appointed prime minister in August 2019, offered a vision of peace and prosperity. But with the economy in crisis, Sudan soon began to run short of food, fuel and medicine.



Sudanese Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok. (AFP file photo)

He acknowledged the hardship arising from the austerity measures he had adopted, but expressed hope that their positive impact would be felt very soon.

However, as daily street protests became increasingly violent, Haroun decided it was time to leave the country. In November 2020, she and her family packed up and moved to Dubai, where she now works for a petroleum company.

"The economic situation was very bad in Sudan and there are many things I want to do in my life," she told Arab News. "I had to leave."

Sudan's democratic transition stalled in October 2021 when military chief Gen. Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan staged a coup, toppling the civilian government and removing Hamdok from office.

In response to the international condemnation that followed, the military proposed a power-sharing deal and reinstated Hamdok as prime minister in November. The agreement proved unpopular with pro-democracy groups, however, leading Hamdok to resign on Jan. 2.

"No one knows what will happen now," Haroun said. "Many people are leaving Sudan because they are afraid to lose their lives, not just because there is no food or money but because they are afraid of being killed.

"Sudan is now worse than in Bashir's time. We don't have what we need to live normal lives and more people are being killed than ever before."

In a televised address following his resignation, Hamdok said the country was at a "dangerous turning point that threatens its whole survival." This was no exaggeration; with rising inflation, shortages of basic goods, and deadly unrest in Khartoum, the outlook has seldom been gloomier.

"Sudan has unfortunately fallen from the grace of being a rare positive story in the Horn of Africa into the hands of another military regime," Mohamed Osman, a Sudanese former journalist and an independent specialist on the region, told Arab News.

"This is history repeating itself for the third time since the country's independence. But this time it's a poignant combination of tragedy and farce."

One major challenge for international observers is the lack of reliable information from inside Sudan, in large part because of frequent internet blackouts.

FASTFACTS

A number of former govt. officials and activists have been detained by Sudan's new military rulers.

Among those targeted are members of The Committee to Dismantle the Regime of June 30, 1989.

As a result, responsibility for the killings of protesters – whether the result of factional infighting, criminality or deliberate targeting by the feared Rapid Support Forces – is hard to ascertain.

"No one knows who is doing the killing in the streets," said Haroun, who tries to follow the events as best she can from her self-imposed exile in Dubai.

"It's crazy. But for sure this killing is from the military themselves because they are running the show in Sudan now."

Since October, the value of the Sudanese pound has depreciated alarmingly, compounding inflationary pressure. Sudan's removal from the US State Sponsors of Terrorism list in 2020 was expected to stimulate financial flows that could benefit growth. By all accounts, the advantage has been squandered.

"The economy was already struggling to recover," said Osman. "Now this coup has worsened its situation, making life in Khartoum very hard. Many people are running out of money and trying to leave the country."

According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, about 14.3 million people in Sudan, almost one in three of the population, will need humanitarian assistance this year – about 0.8 million more than last year.

Further complicating matters, disputes over land, livestock, access to water and grazing since October 2021 have triggered a spike in tribal clashes, lootings and rape in the vast, arid Darfur region.

The World Food Programme has suspended operations following looting at its warehouses in North Darfur state, an act which "robbed nearly two million people of the food and nutrition support they so desperately need," the agency said.

Though the main Darfur conflict has subsided, the parts of Darfur bordering Chad are awash with guns and home to most of Sudan's three million displaced people.

"The situation in the short-to-medium term is very bleak," Rashid Abdi, a Horn of Africa analyst at Nairobi-based think tank Sahan Research, told Arab News. "The army, digging in, has refused all ideas about a resolution. They want a solution on their own terms."

"I think they understand that they are not going to continue the strategy of Bashir and hope that a military government will be acceptable in the long term."

But Abdi believes the public in Sudan will not accept this status quo, so army chiefs probably want to install a civilian administration that is weak, that they can control. If that is the military's game plan, he said, it is unlikely to fly with the Sudanese public.

"Their hope was that Hamdok would be the person to steer the country to better days," he said. "I think he became trapped by the military and could not maneuver and did the decent thing, which was to resign."

On Jan. 26, the splits in Sudanese society appeared to widen further when thousands of pro-military protesters gathered outside the Khartoum office of the UN Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan demanding an end to "foreign interference" and for the UN's special representative for Sudan, Volker Perthes, to "go back home."

Perthes, who was appointed head of UNITAMS in January 2021, has been trying to bring Sudanese stakeholders to the negotiating table to discuss a peaceful political solution and get the democratic transition back on track.

He has said that the UN itself “is not coming up with any project, draft or vision for a solution.” But Sudan’s military-led government has rejected his efforts, arguing that he should be working as a “facilitator and not a mediator.”

Meanwhile, Sudan’s overwhelmingly young anti-coup protesters have continued to march in the streets of Khartoum, where they routinely clash with security forces amid a ferocious crackdown on dissent. Since the coup, at least 79 people have been killed and hundreds more injured.

The daunting task of restoring the democratic transition has fallen on a population fed up with unending internal conflict, displacement and impoverishment.

“The protests are not just in Khartoum but also in Darfur and other parts of the country,” Erika Tovar Gonzalez, communication and prevention coordinator at the International Committee of the Red Cross, told Arab News from the Sudanese capital.

“There’s a humanitarian crisis, there’s armed and criminal violence and tribal clashes that continue to displace thousands of people. The youth are depressed. Some even have suicidal thoughts. They feel they have no future.”

The result is two seemingly irreconcilable visions, with the nation’s fate hanging in the balance.

“Even the Sudanese political parties that would have been willing to give Al-Burhan the benefit of the doubt for pragmatic reasons are more careful now,” said Gonzalez.

“Because once they get into bed with the military, they damage their credibility and won’t get any support from the public. Al-Burhan has become more toxic as an ally.”

Analysts therefore believe it is unlikely that Al-Burhan and the military will be able to maintain their grip on power.

“I don’t think the military (strategy) has clarity,” said Abdi. “One speculation is that the military is aware that it is not going to be accepted but what they are trying to do is to buy more time to make good their promise of exit.”

Osman thinks the military badly miscalculated how events would play out after it launched last October’s coup.

“Who will give them money now?” he asked. “Western assistance is suspended. Gulf countries won’t give them enough cash. You cannot stabilize a regime without money. The military shot itself in the foot. The economic situation can only get worse as they move forward with this coup.”

Osman added: "There can be no hope for a political compromise unless the military stops its deadly crackdown on protests first."





Main category:
[Middle-East](#)
Tags:
[Editor's Choice](#)
[Sudan](#)

[abdalla hamdok](#)

[General Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan](#)

Sudanese man killed in crackdown on anti-coup protests as UN expert arrives
Over 100 Sudanese detainees, including high-profile politicians, start hunger strike