

2 missing after Lebanese training plane crashes into the Med

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BEIRUT: A civilian training plane that belonged to the Lebanese Aviation Club crashed into the Mediterranean Sea on Wednesday morning and the two people on board are missing, the Lebanese Army announced.

The crash site is off the coast of Halat near Byblos where search operations continue for the pilot, Ali Hajj Ahmed, and a student pilot, Pascale Abdel Ahad.

The Cessna 172 plane took off from Beirut-Rafic Hariri International Airport at 10:06 a.m. local time on Wednesday, according to the Directorate General of Civil Aviation in Lebanon. Less than 20 minutes later, the plane disappeared from air navigation radars over the sea in the Halat area.

"The captain of the plane did not contact the control tower and did not give a distress signal, which is strange," Kris Kashouh, of the Lebanese Plane Spotters, told Arab News.

The Lebanese Navy, Air Force, and Civil Defense have joined the search operations.

"The search concentrated on a wide area at a distance of one kilometer away from Halat beach and at depths ranging between 30 and 35 meters," a Lebanese Civil Defense source said. "Divers from the civil defense took turns in the search operations in very delicate conditions, due to the tides and winds in the area."

Unconfirmed reports indicated that Abdel Ahad had contacted the control tower because the pilot of the plane suffered a health condition.

But Lebanese Aviation Club board member Michel Abboud dismissed that claim.

"The planes are usually in continuous contact with the control tower and there were no defects reported by those who were on board the plane," he said.

The Lebanese Aviation Club, which was created in 1923, is one of three aviation learning centers in Lebanon that train private pilots and provide licenses. The Cessna 172 plane that crashed is what is typically used for training flights and cannot hold more than three people, including the pilot. A similar accident occurred on July 8, when a Cessna 172 with three people on board crashed in the Ghosta region, 36 kilometers north of Beirut, after having deviated from the approved flight plan. That plane was owned by Open Sky and the flight was for tourism. The pilot and two passengers on board were killed.

"In the Ghosta accident, the captain also did not contact the control tower which adds to the peculiarity of the situation," Kashouh said. "The results of that investigation have not been released."

Lebanese Interior Minister Bassam Mawlawi traveled by boat to the crash site where he was briefed on the rescue operations of the Lebanese Army and Civil

Defense teams.

“Rescue boats split the crash area into squares so that the divers could scan the whole area,” Mawlawi said. “There is a large number of volunteers with their equipment who are helping in the rescue mission.”

Mawlawi also urged the Lebanese Ministry of Public Works to take additional measures in inspecting all aviation training planes.

“As part of ensuring public safety, so that these accidents do not get repeated,” he said.



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[Tunisia, Morocco hoteliers eye an end to COVID-19 downturn](#)

Author:

Thu, 2021-10-14 00:46

HAMMAMET, Tunisia: The October sun warms the sands of Hammamet beach on Tunisia’s east coast, but the coronavirus pandemic still casts a shadow and visitor numbers are yet to bounce back.

After two ruined seasons in a row, operators in Tunisia and Morocco are licking their wounds and hoping the lifting of travel restrictions will spell better days.

This year was better than the last, “which was really a terrible season. But (2021) was still only half as good as 2019,” said Haykel Akrouf of the Bel Azur hotel.

The luxury facility, with swimming pools overlooking rows of deckchairs along the shore, had to halve its capacity of 1,000 beds in July as a spike in coronavirus cases battered Tunisia.

The country found itself on European nations’ red lists, making it virtually impossible for holidaymakers from major markets including France, Germany and Italy to visit.

But as restrictions have begun to ease, some have managed to reach the North African country.

Elena Bakurova flew in from Vladivostok in the east of Russia to celebrate her 44th birthday and “discover Africa.”

Yanis Merabti, from France’s Lyon, said he had chosen a holiday in Tunisia for the price and the weather.

“France isn’t like this in October. You can’t get to the beach or enjoy the sun, it’s cold,” he said. “It’s so nice here.”

Akrouf said the hotel was at around 30 percent capacity, with Russians making up roughly half that number.

“We are talking about survival – it’s nowhere near profitable,” he said.

Dora Milad, head of the FTH hoteliers’ association, said the “catastrophic” 2020 season had battered the sector, with hotel stays down by 80 percent.

This year saw an 11 percent uptick, she said. “That’s very slightly better ... but it’s still far from normal.”

In a good year like 2019, Tunisia registers about 9 million hotel stays, and the tourism sector accounts for up to 14 percent of gross domestic product – providing livelihoods to around 2 million Tunisians.

Nearby Morocco also depends heavily on visitors to its coastal resorts and historic inland cities.

This season saw a modest influx of tourists when the country reopened its borders in June following months of closure.

Roughly 3.5 million visitors had entered the country by the end of August – up from 2.2 million the year before.

But that is still far short of the 13 million registered in the same period of 2019.

Facing its own spiking COVID-19 caseload, Morocco was forced to impose new restrictions, such as limiting travel to the tourist hot spots of Marrakech

and Agadir.

“The recovery has been focused on the coastal cities, but it has been slowed down by the restrictions imposed in August,” said Hamid Bentahar, the president of the country’s tourism federation.

In neighboring Algeria, the sector depends largely on domestic tourism, also hit hard by the pandemic.

National Hoteliers’ Federation chief Ahmed Oulbachir said facilities were operating at just a quarter of their normal rate.

Tunisia has seen its coronavirus cases tumble since their mid-year peak, and finally has had some good news on the tourism front too.

Key markets the UK and France have both removed the country – along with Morocco and Algeria – from their travel red lists.

For the Bel Azur, “it’s already too late,” said Akrouit.

“But at least it lets us save the 2022 season, as we can sign contracts with tour operators.”

Hotels in Hammamet are now preparing for a recovery.

But Akrouit says it is time to rethink the sector beyond the cliches of “camels and the beaches.”

“Mass tourism has shown its limits. It’s time to make use of magnificent sites that are totally unexploited,” he said.

Milad of the Tunisian hoteliers’ association agreed.

The sector has “sat on its laurels” since the 1960s and failed to fully exploit country’s desert south, spectacular interior and the ancient ruins of Carthage, near Tunis, she said.

She also pitched the capital Tunis as a destination for weekend city escapes.

Since the start of the last century, “Tunisia has been a destination for winter breaks in the sun, and to treat lung conditions,” she added.

“That could be an opportunity, after Covid, to regenerate and get out in the fresh air.”



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Tunisia police seize equipment used by pro-Ennahda channel
Morocco gets 1st batch of Turkish armed drones: report

[Sudan security service slaps travel ban on top civilian politicians](#)

Author:

Thu, 2021-10-14 00:40

KHARTOUM: Sudan's security service has slapped a travel ban on members of a task force overseeing the country's transition to democracy, government sources said, as tensions between civilian and military leaders threaten to boil over weeks after a failed coup.

The political crisis erupted on Sept. 21, when Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok said rogue troops still loyal to Omar Bashir had sought to derail by force the revolution that removed the ousted president from power in 2019.

Two senior civilian government sources said on Wednesday that the General Intelligence Service's travel ban affected 11 civilian officials, most members of the committee tasked with dismantling Bashir's financial and political legacy.

There was no immediate comment from the GIS.

The sources said the list included Mohamed Al-Faki, who at a news conference last month accused the military of using the coup as an excuse to try to seize power.

Al-Faki is also part of the ruling Sovereign Council, on which both civilian and military officials sit and which has run Sudan since Bashir's overthrow.

Since the coup attempt, military leaders have withdrawn protection for the task force committee and demanded changes to the civilian coalition with which they share power.

A senior military source said the military had no involvement in the travel ban, and that such measures were not among its responsibilities.

The sources said the ban was illegal as it originated from the GIS rather than the public prosecutor's office, and that the Cabinet – which sits below the Sovereign Council – was pressing for an investigation.

The ban came to light after another person on it, businessman Salah Manaa, managed to board a flight to Cairo, the sources said.



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Sudan running out of essential medicine, fuel and wheat due to port blockade
Sudan to return to economic growth, forecasts finance minister

Syria reports Israel airstrikes on central province of Homs

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Wed, 2021-10-13 21:26

DAMASCUS, Syria: Syrian air defenses responded Wednesday to an Israeli airstrike targeting areas close to the historic Syrian town of Palmyra in the central province of Homs, state television reported.

The report said the airstrike took place shortly before midnight without giving further details.

The strikes came five days after Syrian state media reported that Israeli strikes in Homs province wounded six soldiers.

Over the past years, Israel is believed to have been behind many strikes inside government-controlled parts of Syria.

Israel has staged hundreds of strikes against Iran-linked military targets in Syria over the years but rarely acknowledges or discusses such operations.

Israel views Iranian entrenchment on its northern frontier as a red line, and it has repeatedly struck Iran-linked facilities and weapons convoys destined for Lebanon's militant Hezbollah group.



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Turkey says it will do 'what is necessary' after Syria attacks Syria's Assad allows exiled uncle to return to avoid prison

[Yemeni government intensifies efforts to end Houthi siege in Abedia](#)

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Wed, 2021-10-13 23:01

AL-MUKALLA: The internationally recognized government of Yemen has intensified diplomatic efforts and military operations on the ground to put an end to the Houthi siege of the district of Abedia, in the central province of Marib, where thousands of civilians are at risk of starvation.

Foreign Minister Ahmad Awad bin Mubarak on Tuesday called UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to alert him about the grave situation in Marib and to urge him to pressure the Houthis to end their siege of Abedia. "On a telephone conversation, I briefed UNSG @antonioguterres on the catastrophic situation in Abedia district which has been under #Houthi siege for more than three weeks now, called UN to condemn this war crime, urgently provide essential needs and evacuate the injured," the Yemeni minister said on Twitter.

On the behalf of the Yemeni government, the country's Permanent Representative to the UN Abdullah Al-Saadi on Tuesday sent a letter to the UN, highlighting the Houthi crimes against thousands of civilians trapped in Abedia and accusing the rebels of depriving more than 35, 000 civilians of food, drinking water, medicine and other vital necessities. Al-Saadi warned that thousands of civilians face death and starvation as the Houthis intensify their missile and drone strikes on civilian gatherings and targets and block the distribution of life-saving humanitarian assistance to the besieged people.

The Houthis, who had previously failed to roll into the district due to fierce resistance from local fighters and army troops, have held the district of Abedia under siege for more than 22 days.

Meanwhile, heavy fighting broke outside the city of Marib as Yemeni government troops launched counterattacks to recapture areas fallen to the Houthis and reinforced defenses in Al-Kasara and Mashjah, west of Marib.

Gen. Abdu Abdullah Majili, Yemen's army spokesman, told Arab News on Wednesday that government forces foiled Houthi attacks on Juba and Abedia as the coalition's warplanes targeted the militia's gatherings and locations outside Abedia in a bid to break the siege.

"The coalition's warplanes carried out intensive airstrikes on the Houthis," Majili said.

Local media reports said on Wednesday that the Houthis heavily shelled the besieged Abedia district with missiles, mortar fire and explosive-rigged drones after failing to break the loyalists' defenses.

An unidentified number of civilians were killed and wounded on Wednesday when a missile fired by the Houthis exploded near a petrol station in government-controlled areas in the district of Juba, local media and officials said.



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US demands end to Houthi militia siege in MaribArab coalition destroys two Houthi explosive-laden boats in Red Sea, hits targets in Abdiya