

Crises will not stop expats visiting Lebanon

Sun, 2021-07-18 00:30

BEIRUT: The endless crises that Lebanon has faced for more than a year have not deterred expatriates from visiting their home country in large numbers, Middle East Airlines officials have told Arab News.

According to the statistics of Beirut-Rafic Hariri International Airport, the number of passengers who came to Lebanon on July 1 exceeded 15,000, including 13,606 Lebanese expatriates. A record number of 20,000 returning expatriates was registered by the end of this week.

Nisrine, who came back from Germany with her children for a summer vacation, said: "People look tired, nobody laughs, everybody is nervous and tense, they start to complain the moment they see you; no electricity nor gasoline, and life is too expensive."

Loris, a Lebanese woman whose daughter is getting married, said that her relatives coming from Sweden and Canada for the wedding were surprised by the overcrowded coffee shops and restaurants in Broummana, Jounieh, Byblos and Batroun, while darkness prevails in Beirut. The Lebanese capital was hit by a massive explosion last year.

Pierre Ashkar, president of the Association of Hotel Owners in Lebanon, said: "The political and security situation does not seem to make expatriates leave the country after the prime minister-designate Saad Hariri resigned ... They have always been successful in finding solutions."

Ashkar estimated the number of Iraqis who came to Lebanon during June at about 30,000. He said: "These people are fleeing from the security situation in their country, which is far worse than that of Lebanon."

FASTFACTS

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He said: "As for the Lebanese expatriates if they face a blocked road, they can go to other roads which they know. And if there is tension in the capital, they can go to guesthouses in Ras Baalbek and other remote villages."

Ashkar said: "The explosion of the Port of Beirut last year resulted in the closing of (many) luxurious hotels ... (This situation) reflects the huge economic blow to the capital.

"Prices in Lebanon are much cheaper for expatriates or tourists than for Lebanese people who earn their income in Lebanese pounds. However, the huge

increase in the exchange rate of the US dollar in the black market is causing problems for the owners of tourist venues.” The US dollar exchange rate in the black market has passed 22,000 Lebanese pounds for \$1.

Most Lebanese people find the price of a meal in a restaurant extravagant. Yet you have to book ahead to reserve a table in restaurants and wedding halls in hotels are fully reserved throughout the summer.

May, a Lebanese lady living in Canada, returned to Lebanon for the summer and did not find the country cheap. She said: “I cannot cope with the increase in the exchange rate of the dollar.”

She said: “How can I spend money while my parents’ pension is worth nothing ... My daughter could not go to the dentist because there are no antibiotics, and I did not bring medicines with me from Canada.”



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Sun, 2021-07-18 00:20

CAIRO: Arab League Secretary-General Ahmed Aboul Gheit has reiterated the organization’s full support for the Libyan government in leading the current

transitional phase and preparing for elections on Dec. 24.

He stressed his full commitment to supporting the Libyans in bringing the country to safety after a prolonged period of turmoil.

He held talks on Friday with Libyan Prime Minister Abdel Hamid Dbeibeh on the sidelines of his visit to New York to participate in a UN Security Council meeting on the country.

The two men discussed the situation in Libya and relations with the Arab League. It was agreed that the secretary-general would visit at the earliest opportunity.

Aboul Gheit said earlier that the league adhered to the implementation of the political roadmap in Libya leading to elections being held on time.

He warned that not holding elections on the date agreed upon by all parties “may once again push the country into a dark tunnel of differences and political fragmentation, which no party desires.”

He emphasized that holding the presidential and legislative polls on Dec. 24 represented “a watershed on the path to saving Libya and preserving it as a sovereign united state.”



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UN envoy: ‘Spoilers’ are trying to obstruct Libyan elections
Groups blocking Libyan elections reminded of sanctions threat

Iranian deputy foreign minister says Vienna talks must await Iran's new administration

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Sat, 2021-07-17 22:22

CAIRO: Iran's chief nuclear negotiator said on Saturday that the next round of talks in Vienna must wait until the new Iranian administration takes office in early August.

"We're in a transition period as a democratic transfer of power is underway in our capital. Vienna talks must thus obviously await our new administration," Abbas Araqchi said on Twitter.

Indirect US-Iranian talks on reviving the 2015 deal have been on hold since the last round ended on June 20 and Iran has made clear it is not ready to resume before President-elect Ebrahim Raisi takes over.

In his tweet, Araqchi also said the United States and Britain need to stop linking the exchange of prisoners with the nuclear deal.

"Ten prisoners on all sides may be released tomorrow if US&UK fulfil their part of a deal," he said.

Iran, which is holding a handful of Iranian-Americans, has been accused by rights activists of arresting dual nationals to try to extract a concession from other countries. Iran has dismissed the charge.

Iran said earlier this week that it was holding talks on securing the release of Iranian prisoners in American jails and other countries over violations of US sanctions.

In May, Washington denied a report by Iranian state television that the countries had reached a prisoner swap deal in exchange for the release of \$7 billion in frozen Iranian oil funds under US sanctions in other countries. The hiatus in nuclear talks, which US and European officials attribute to hard-line Raisi's election, has raised questions about next steps if the talks hit a dead end. The US State Department has acknowledged it may need to rethink its stance.



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Iran says upcoming round of Vienna talks could be the last Iran's hard bargaining tactics raise the stakes at Vienna nuclear negotiations

[Egypt seeks global push in Ethiopian dam talks](#)

Sat, 2021-07-17 21:07

CAIRO: Egypt is keen to complete the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) negotiations to reach a fair and binding legal agreement that meets the aspirations of all in the development, Minister of Irrigation Mohamed Abdel-Aty said.

Ethiopia is pinning its hopes of economic development and power generation on the GERD, but Egypt fears it will threaten its water supply from the Nile.

Sudan is concerned about the dam's safety and its own water flow.

During his visit to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) on Friday Abdel-Aty stressed Egypt's keenness to protect its water rights and achieve benefits for all in any agreement on the dam.

He highlighted a request by Cairo and Khartoum for the participation of the US, EU and UN in any GERD negotiations to maximize their chances of success, given the deadlock as a result of Ethiopia's intransigence.

The minister said that Egypt and Sudan would not accept Addis Ababa's unilateral decision to fill and operate the GERD dam.

Abdel-Aty said a high-tech rain forecast center to be set up in the DRC will help to study the effects of climate change and to identify measures to protect citizens from its risks.

He said Egypt has trained the staff at the center in the use of rain and flood forecasting systems, aerial image analysis, hydrologic modeling and technical reporting.

He said the establishment of this center stems from Egypt's keenness to transfer its expertise in the field of integrated management of water resources to its "brothers from the Nile Basin countries" with the aim of maximizing the use of these resources.

Egypt, he said, has been providing and is still keen to provide all forms of support through bilateral cooperation projects with the Nile Basin countries.

He explained that Egypt has established several rainwater harvesting dams and underground water stations to provide clean drinking water in remote areas by using the solar energy technology in a large number of underground wells.

He said Egypt has established many farms, fisheries and river marinas with the aim of developing the surrounding areas economically, socially and environmentally, creating job opportunities, developing fishing conditions and reducing swamp areas, which reduces diseases.



Battle for the Nile

How will Egypt be impacted by Ethiopia filling its GERD reservoir ?

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Family: Palestinian Authority covering up critic's death

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Sat, 2021-07-17 21:12

RAMALLAH: The family of a political activist who died in the custody of Palestinian security forces last month on Saturday accused the Palestinian Authority of trying to cover up his death.

Relatives of Nizar Banat said they still have not received a document with an official cause of death and said the Palestinian Authority has made efforts to settle the matter out of court.

"The behavior of the Palestinian Authority until this moment is criminal behavior, covering up a crime," Ghassan Banat, Nizar's brother, told reporters.

Nizar Banat was an outspoken critic of the Palestinian Authority who called on Western nations to stop providing aid to the PA due to human rights violations and growing authoritarianism.

In a series of posts and live videos on Facebook, Banat had criticized the authority's close security coordination with Israel, seen by many Palestinians as betrayal, and its corruption. He also lashed out at President Mahmoud Abbas in April for calling off what would have been the first Palestinian elections in 15 years. Banat was a candidate on an opposition slate.

His family has said security forces stormed into Banat's bedroom while he was sleeping and beat him, inflicting bloody head wounds before removing him from the house. He died shortly afterward while in custody.

His death has prompted weeks of protests. On July 5 at least six activists were arrested by security forces when protesting outside the Palestinian Authority headquarters. Multiple witnesses said the police used pepper spray and beat the protesters with batons.

Some 150 people demonstrated in Ramallah on Saturday evening, holding up posters of Banat and chanting anti-Abbas slogans. The protest was peaceful and there were no reports of violence or arrests.

The Palestinian Authority, seen as a crucial partner of the US and other Western countries, has formed an investigative committee into Banat's death. His brother said that weeks later, the family has heard little from the government.

"Until this moment, we have failed to obtain a death certificate. How can you have a citizen who dies without issuing a death certificate?" Ghassan Banat said.

Accompanied by two family lawyers, the brother rejected what he said were attempts by the authority to send tribal elders to the family in hopes of closing the case and stopping it from reaching the courts.

“This file will not be resolved or closed through elders or tribal ways,” he said. “Nizar’s file is a political assassination and will remain open until justice is achieved, even if it takes 1,000 years.”

The Palestinian Authority is widely viewed as corrupt and authoritarian, with a recent poll last month showing that support for Abbas, who took power for what was supposed to be a four-year term in 2005, had nosedived.

Abbas has faced mounting pressure after calling off the elections when it appeared that his Fatah party would suffer a crushing defeat to the rival Hamas militant group.

Last month, Palestinian security forces arrested prominent activist and critic, Issa Amro, after he criticized recent arrests on Facebook.



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Palestinian minister withdraws threat to quit over activist Israel troops arrest dozens of Palestinian university students