

Netanyahu: 'Business as usual with Iran' will be mistake

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JERUSALEM: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Sunday said it would be a mistake "to go back to business as usual with Iran," signaling Israeli resistance to an expected push by President-elect Joe Biden to revive the international nuclear deal with Iran.

Netanyahu spoke at a press conference with Robert O'Brien, President Donald Trump's national security adviser.

But his comments appeared to be aimed at Biden, who has said the US will rejoin the nuclear deal if Iran agrees to strict adherence. The deal, which lifted sanctions on Iran in exchange for curbs on its nuclear program, has unraveled since Trump withdrew from it in 2018.

Netanyahu led an unsuccessful fight against the deal when it was negotiated by then-President Barack Obama in 2015 and welcomed Trump's withdrawal three years later. Netanyahu says the deal will not prevent Iran from developing a nuclear weapon and fails to address other belligerent Iranian behavior, such as its support for proxies across the region and its development of a long-range missile program.

"As long as Iran continues to subjugate and threaten its neighbors, as long as Iran continues calling for Israel's destruction, as long as Iran continues to bankroll, equip and train terrorist organizations throughout the region and the world, and as long as Iran persists in its dangerous quest for nuclear weapons and the means to deliver them, we shouldn't go back to business as usual with Iran," Netanyahu said Sunday. "We should all unite to prevent this major threat to world peace."

O'Brien arrived days after the US announced that Israel and Morocco were establishing full diplomatic relations – making it the fourth such deal between Israel and an Arab state brokered by the outgoing Trump administration.

O'Brien said the Trump administration's pressure campaign against Iran has been successful and said the string of agreements between Israel and Arab countries would cement what he called "the legacies of peacemakers" Trump and Netanyahu.



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[Lebanon's collapse is like the Titanic's sinking, only without the music – Le Drian](#)

Author:

Reuters

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Sun, 2020-12-13 19:42

PARIS: French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian said Lebanon's political and economic collapse was like the sinking of the Titanic, only without the music.

"Lebanon is the Titanic without the orchestra," Le Drian told the daily Le Figaro in an interview published on Sunday. "The Lebanese are in complete denial as they sink, and there isn't even the music."

Le Drian's remarks set a pessimistic tone a little over a week before President Emmanuel Macron makes his third visit to Beirut since a massive port blast destroyed swathes of the city and killed 200 people in August. Macron is losing patience with Lebanon's politicians as rival politicians mired in turf battles stand in the way of sweeping reforms that donors say are imperative for badly-needed financial aid to be released.

It is believed the Titanic's orchestra kept playing for as long as it could as the liner went down in the Atlantic Ocean in 1912, trying to help keep passengers calm amid impending doom. All the musicians perished.



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Lebanese judge charges caretaker PM Diab, ex-ministers over Beirut port blast
Events in Beirut expose public distrust of Lebanese authorities

Egypt, Jordan and Iraq discuss peoples' movement by land

Author:

Sun, 2020-12-13 22:19

CAIRO: The 75th General Assembly of the Arab Bridge Maritime Company, held on Saturday in Cairo, brought together transportation ministers from Egypt, Jordan and Iraq to discuss the establishment of a means to transport passengers by land between the three countries. The meeting was attended by Egyptian Minister of Transportation Kamel Al-Wazir, his Jordanian and Iraqi counterparts and the company's board of directors.

During the meeting, they discussed organizing the movement of passengers by land between their respective countries, whether through the establishment of the Arab Bridge Land Transport Company or through the integration of already existing land transport companies with the Arab Bridge Maritime Company. The goal is to reach a model system that would facilitate the transportation of passengers between the three countries with a unified ticket.

The general assembly reviewed the technical condition of the maritime company's ships, the effects of the pandemic on the company's activity, recent business and financial results, as well as mechanisms that have been employed to ensure the continuity of the company's activity, which represents an important trade link between Egypt, Jordan and Iraq.

The Egyptian minister said that the directives of the political leadership in Egypt are always based on increasing cooperation and trade exchange between Egypt, Jordan and Iraq. He pointed out that the Arab Bridge Maritime Company represents a pioneering model for cooperation between Arab countries in the field of transport.

Al-Wazir praised the company's role in enhancing intra-Arab trade and increasing the volume of Arab-Asian-African trade exchanges. Among the points discussed during the meeting was how to ease procedures for the entry of goods, drivers and travelers in order to help smooth the trade movement. The Jordanian minister of transportation affirmed that this would help achieve economic integration between the three countries.



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[Erdogan's recitation of 'sensitive poem' angers Tehran](#)

Author:

Sun, 2020-12-13 21:58

JEDDAH: The latest row between Turkey and Iran over the controversial poem that was recited by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan during his visit to Azerbaijan continues to escalate.

Iranian lawmaker Ali Asgar Hani threatened the Turkish president by posting a picture of Saddam Hussein hanging on Twitter with the caption: "Mr Erdogan, this was the fate of the last person who coveted Iranian land." The image was later deleted.

On Saturday, Ankara reprimanded Tehran for "offensive language" aimed at

Erdogan about the poem, that refers to Iran's northwestern provinces as belonging to Azerbaijan. Tehran considers some verses of the poem as promoting separatist ideas among Iran's Azeri minority.

Ethnic Azeris, who speak Turkish, live in Iran's three northwestern provinces of West Azerbaijan, East Azerbaijan and Ardabil.

The disagreement added another layer to an already tense relationship between the two countries, whose geopolitical interests clash in several Middle Eastern countries.

Iran is concerned with Azerbaijan's recent victory in Nagorno-Karabakh over Armenia, as it fears an Azeri awakening within Iran, and views Turkey as a regional competitor.

"They didn't tell Erdogan that the poem he ill-recited in Baku refers to the forcible separation of areas north of Aras from the Iranian motherland," Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif tweeted.

In the meantime, Iran's Foreign Ministry said on its website on Friday: "The Turkish ambassador was informed that the era of territorial claims and expansionist empires is over."

Iranian authorities also summoned the Turkish ambassador to Tehran to protest about Erdogan's "interventionist and unacceptable remarks." Turkey retaliated by summoning the Iranian ambassador to Ankara over the "groundless" claims.

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu also called his Iranian counterpart on Saturday to criticize the "heavy statements aimed at Erdogan," calling them unacceptable.

Erdogan's communication director, Fahrettin Altun, condemned Tehran's use of "offensive language" over the "emotional poem, whose meaning has been deliberately distorted.

"It does not include any references to Iran. Nor is that country implied in any way, shape or form," he added. Some experts believe the spat will soon blow over.

"The recent controversy over a poem recited by Turkey's president as part of aggressive victory celebrations in Baku appeared to lead to Iranian concerns that Ankara was stoking 'expansionist' ideas," Seth J. Frantzman, executive director of the Middle East Center for Reporting and Analysis, told Arab News.

"However, the controversy was quickly patched up and even Iran's foreign minister was quickly excusing the Turkish leader's comments, claiming he simply was not informed about the poem's origins. It shows that the real desires of Tehran and Ankara are to cultivate a closer working relationship, including between each other and Russia," he added.

"Clearly, Iran and Turkey's current leadership value each other and do everything possible not to cause any missteps. This can be seen in the warm

embrace that Iran receives whenever there are official visits,” he said.

“Turkey’s ruling party, which tends to use bluster and threats against other countries in the region, such as Egypt, Israel, the UAE and Greece, is quick to not condemn Iran, and to work towards (an) amicable understanding with Tehran,” Frantzman added.

“The overall assessment of the Erdogan government is that Iran is a partner in the region, and that more authoritarian regimes, that jail journalists, can work together against Europe, the West, and moderate states in the southern part of the Middle East.”



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Kameel Ahmady for 9 years

Author:

Reuters

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DUBAI: A court in Iran has handed a nine-year jail sentence to British-Iranian anthropologist Kameel Ahmady, after convicting him of conducting "subversive" research work, the semi-official news agency Tasnim said on Sunday.

Ahmady was also fined 600,000 euros (\$727,000) – the sum Iranian authorities said he received for his research from institutions accused of seeking to topple Iran's Islamic government, Tasnim reported.

There was no immediate official confirmation of the sentence, which was also reported by other Iranian news agencies and a human rights groups.

"Ahmady was accused of acquiring illicit property from his cooperation in implementing subversive institutions' projects in the country," Tasnim said. Ahmady, an ethnic Kurd who had researched controversial issues such as child marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM) in Iran, was detained in August 2019 but released on bail three months later, according to human rights groups.

After his arrest, his wife told the New York-based Center for Human Rights in Iran that his work was independent and published with government approval. Rights activists have accused Iran of arresting dozens of dual nationals to try to win concessions from other countries – a charge that the Islamic republic has regularly dismissed.



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