

Women on 10 flights from Qatar invasively examined: Australia

Wed, 2020-10-28 03:33

SYDNEY: Female passengers on 10 planes flying out of Doha were forced to endure invasive physical examinations, Australia's foreign minister said Wednesday, greatly expanding the number of women previously thought affected. It was revealed on Sunday that women were removed from a Sydney-bound Qatar Airways flight in Doha earlier this month and forced to undergo vaginal inspections after a newborn baby was found abandoned in an airport bathroom. Australian Foreign Minister Marise Payne told a Senate hearing Wednesday that women on "10 aircraft in total" had been subject to the searches she has described as "grossly disturbing" and "offensive."

"We became aware of that yesterday through advice from our post in Doha," she said.

She said 18 Australian women on the October 2 flight to Sydney were affected, along with "other foreign nationals." AFP understands one French woman on the flight was among them.

Payne did not detail the destinations of the other flights.

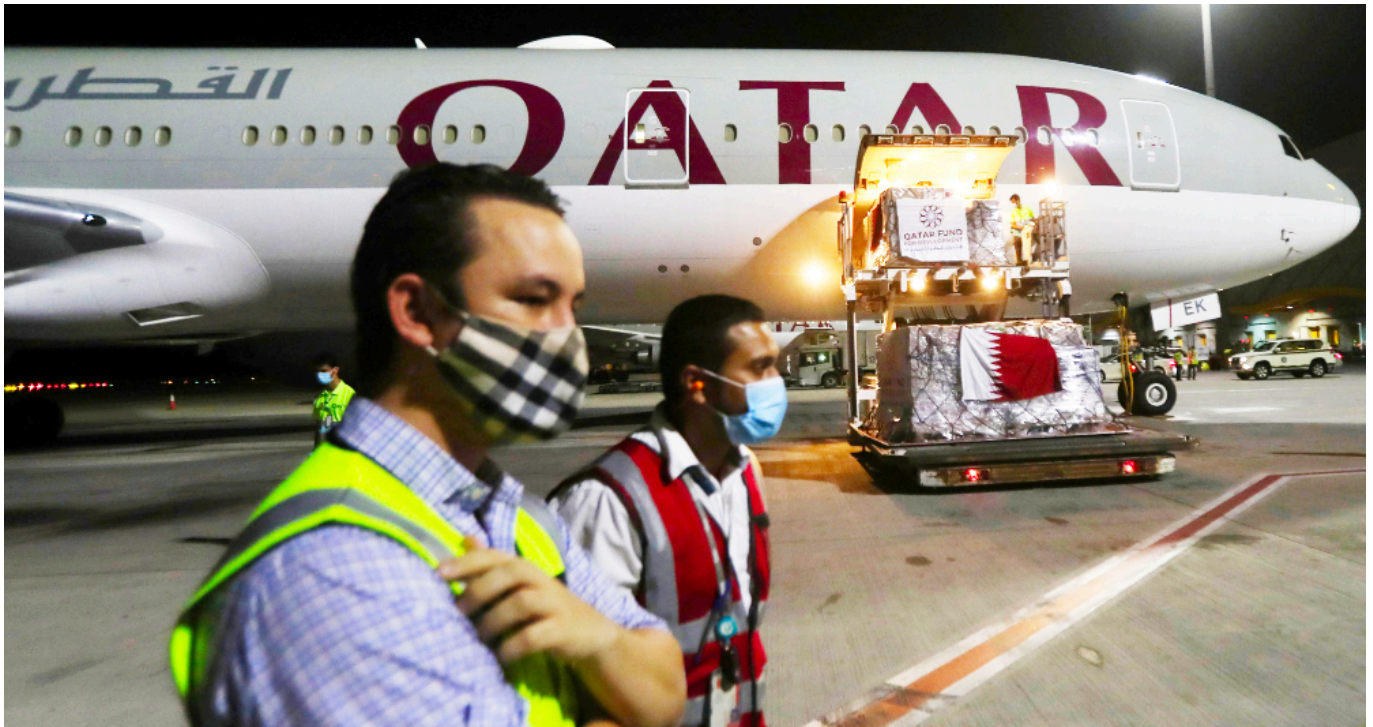
The incident has sparked a diplomatic row between Australia and Qatar, with Canberra lodging protests with the Middle East nation over the treatment of its citizens.

Officials said Australia was also working with other countries to jointly raise concerns with Doha but refused to name those countries, citing privacy concerns.

Payne admitted she had not spoken directly to her Qatari counterpart, saying she was "waiting to see the report" on the incident, which she expected to receive this week.

Doha's Hamad International airport previously confirmed a broad outline of events, without providing details of the procedures, or the number of women and flights involved.

It also launched an appeal Sunday for the child's mother to come forward, saying the baby remains unidentified but is "safe under the professional care of medical and social workers."



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Australian recalls 'terrifying' moment female passengers strip-searched in Qatar
Australia refers invasive search of women at Qatar airport to federal police

[Lethal airstrike is Moscow's 'warning shot' to Turkey](#)

Author:

Wed, 2020-10-28 02:01

ANKARA: A Russian airstrike on a rebel training camp in the Syrian province of Idlib is Moscow's "warning shot" to Turkey over its support for extremism, political analysts say.

The airstrike on Monday – one of the deadliest in nine years of conflict in Syria – killed almost 80 Turkish-backed militia fighters in the Faylaq Al-Sham rebel camp, near Syria's border with Turkey.

In the wake of the attack debate raged about the message Moscow wanted to send Ankara by targeting Turkey's major proxy in the war-torn country.

The attack is considered as a serious breach of Moscow's cease-fire agreement

with Ankara.

Idlib is the focus of a growing dispute between Turkey and Russia, with the former supporting the rebel forces, while Moscow backs the Assad government's offensive to retake the province.

The rebels, ideologically close to the Muslim Brotherhood, have helped Turkish forces secure observation points in contested zones. Militia fighters also make up the largest armed group backed by Ankara.

Observers say the airstrike will lead to an escalation in tensions between Russia and Turkey.

The two countries have already halted joint patrols along Idlib's key M4 highway despite Turkey's decision to test-fire its controversial Russian S-400 air defense system, ignoring warnings from Washington.

Meanwhile, Turkey has stepped up reinforcements at military posts along the M4 to strengthen its foothold in the region.

According to Samuel Ramani, a Middle East analyst at the University of Oxford, Russia is increasingly concerned that Turkey might ramp up support for rebel groups and organizations that Moscow views as extremists.

The latest Russian airstrike shows Moscow is willing to push Turkey on its support for extremism, he told Arab News.

However, Orwa Ajjoub, affiliated researcher at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at Lund University in Sweden, said the airstrike on the Turkish-backed rebels should be seen as part of a wider conflict between the two nations.

"Ankara and Moscow have failed three times to maintain a permanent cease-fire in Nagorno-Karabakh, where the two actors are supporting the opposing states of Azerbaijan and Armenia, respectively," he told Arab News.

"In Libya, the UN-brokered 'permanent cease-fire' between Gen. Khalifa Haftar's forces supported by Russia, the UAE and Saudi Arabia, and the government of National Accord supported by Turkey and Qatar, was also met with suspicion and unease since both Ankara and Moscow will have to withdraw their mercenaries from the country before securing a decisive win," Ajjoub said.

Turkey's Ministry of Foreign Affairs is yet to make any statement on the Russian attack.

During a visit to Athens on Monday, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov commented on the two countries' relationship, saying: "We have good relations with Turkey, but it is not without problems."

However, Ajjoub believes Russia is hoping to "reshuffle the cards" in Syria in an attempt to pressure Turkey's stances on both Nagorno-Karabakh and Libya.

“Russia’s decision to carry out an attack on Ankara’s primary proxy is designed to change the status quo in Idlib,” he said.

Since the March 5 cease-fire between Turkey and Russia, Idlib has enjoyed relative calm interrupted by attacks mainly by the Syrian regime.

The attacks are aimed at “redrawing the map of northwest Syria,” Ajjoub added.

“Turkey, which has already shown some flexibility by withdrawing its forces from the Morek military post, does not seem interested in offering more concessions to Russia.

“By carrying out such a significant attack on Faylaq Al-Sham’s headquarters, Russia is reminding Turkey that achieving relative success in a multi-front conflict, especially in Nagorno-Karabakh and Libya, can be undermined in Syria, where Moscow’s military might is undisputed.”

Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mevlut Cavusoglu, spoke with Lavrov by telephone on Tuesday, with Russian airstrikes topping the Turkish agenda.



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Turkey-backed fighters retaliate against Syria-allied troops
Syrian, Russian airstrikes in Idlib amount to war crimes, as do extremist attacks – UN

Libya UN envoy expects election date to be set at coming talks

Author:

Wed, 2020-10-28 01:39

TUNIS: The United Nations acting Libya envoy expects coming political talks to designate a date for national elections, she told Reuters on Tuesday, after the country's two warring sides agreed a cease-fire last week.

"What resonates is a clear and direct desire for there to be elections in as rapid a timeframe as possible," Stephanie Williams said.

Libya has been split since 2014 between factions based in the capital Tripoli, in the west, and in the city of Benghazi, in the east.

Last week a truce was agreed in Geneva by the Tripoli-based Government of National Accord (GNA), which is recognized by the UN, and Khalifa Haftar's eastern-based Libyan National Army (LNA).

Previous cease-fires have collapsed and earlier efforts to agree a wider political settlement have run aground. The political talks have started online and will move to Tunis on Nov. 9.

The UN has said it is imperative to agree on arrangements to hold elections as soon as possible, including by forming a new unified leadership to oversee them.

"Whatever executive authority they agree on really needs to have a clear focus – preparing for the elections," Williams said. "I do fully expect there to be a date designated for elections."

Williams said she was hopeful for the talks, citing a recent lack of fighting, progress in ending an eight-month oil blockade and reopening internal transport routes, and involvement of figures from across Libya's political spectrum.

"We have learned from previous political processes not to exclude any political constituency and so in this dialogue you do also have representation from the previous regime," she said.



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UN says Libyan sides sign countrywide cease-fire deal
Libyans voice hope, doubts over cease-fire deal

[New co-chairs of UK Parliament Palestine group urge settlement goods boycott](#)

Author:

Tue, 2020-10-27 22:17

LONDON: The two new co-chairs of the Britain-Palestine All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) have urged the UK government to “stand up for international law” by banning all imports from illegal Israeli settlements.

Julie Elliot, a member of the UK’s main opposition Labour Party and one of

the two new co-chairs, also said Britain should recognize Palestine as a state.

In a message released online to mark her election to the APPG, she said: "It's time that the British government stood up for international law, sought action against products from the settlements – ban them in this country – and also move towards helping to end the blockade on Gaza, which has brought such dreadful, dreadful suffering to the people of Gaza." She added: "It's time for the British government to recognize Palestine. The time is now."

Baroness Sayeeda Warsi, the other new co-chair and former co-chair of the governing Conservative Party, said: "Palestinian rights must be continually raised in the UK Parliament. It's vital that we continue to pressure the UK government to act to end the occupation and to stand up for international law."

APPGs are groups in UK politics convened across party lines that meet to discuss, campaign on and promote a certain issue. They are often effective parts of wider parliamentary campaigns.

Chris Doyle, director of the Council for Arab-British Understanding, welcomed the election of Elliot and Warsi as the APPG's new co-chairs.

"They're two politicians who understand the Palestinian issue, and it's really important to push things, as they both have, such as British recognition of a Palestinian state along the 1967 lines with Jerusalem as its capital," he told Arab News.

"The Palestine APPG is one of the best supported in Parliament – that's a sign of the interest in the issue."

But Doyle said they may have their work cut out in getting their message on Palestine across. "The challenge right now is to give airtime to any issue that isn't COVID-19 or the American elections," he added.

"The conflict issues in the Middle East are starved of the sort of attention they need because of the pandemic."



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Palestine's Mahmoud Abbas asks UN for international peace conference next year
Palestinians in occupied territories want US to solve conflict with Israel: survey

[Houthi minister shot and killed in Sanaa 'was victim of internal feud'](#)

Author:

Tue, 2020-10-27 21:24

AL-MUKALLA: Gunmen shot and killed a senior Houthi official in Sanaa on Tuesday as an internal feud among the Iran-backed militia group threatened to spiral out of control.

Hassan Zaid, minister of youth and sports in the Houthi administration, died in hospital from his wounds after gunmen on motorcycles opened fire on his car in an area of the Yemeni capital that houses embassies.

His daughter, who was driving the car, was wounded in the attack. Witnesses said she cried for help and pleaded with passers-by to rescue her dying

father.

The Houthi interior ministry alleged, without evidence, that Zaid was shot by “criminal elements” linked to the Saudi-led military coalition supporting the internationally recognized government.

However, Zaid was the most prominent of several Houthi officials killed this year in the capital and other militia-controlled areas, and experts told Arab News he was the victim of infighting between rival political wings.

Hardline Houthis from Saada, the rebels’ heartland, are settling scores with moderate figures such as Zaid who joined the group later, analysts said.

Zaid was a founding member of the Al-Haq party and a senior member of the Joint Meeting Parties, a gathering of opposition groups formed during former president Ali Abdullah Saleh’s administration. He became a minister in Khaled Bahah’s government in 2014.

When the Houthis overthrew Yemeni president Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi’s government in early 2015, Zaid switched sides and joined the rebels.

In 2017, he proposed closing schools for a year and sending students and teachers to fight. In 2017, the Arab coalition placed bounties on dozens of Houthi leaders, including Zaid, accusing them of orchestrating and supporting Houthi terror.

Meanwhile dozens of Houthi fighters, army troops and allied tribesmen have been killed in the past two days during fierce battles in the provinces of Sanaa, Jouf and Marib, local officers said on Tuesday.

Brig. Gen. Abdu Abdullah Majili, a Yemeni army spokesman, told Arab News that army troops backed by air support from coalition warplanes engaged in heavy fighting with Houthis in the Najed Al-Ateq region in Sanaa after rebels tried to seize a strategic military base.

“The national army and the tribesmen have foiled Houthi attacks and advanced on the ground,” Majili said.



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Houthis vow to bolster Iran ties as Tehran's new Hezbollah-linked 'ambassador' makes appearance
Yemen minister: UN failed to convince Houthis to allow access to decaying oil tanker