

Israel approves plan for immigration of 2,000 Ethiopian Jews

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AFP

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JERUSALEM: Israel's government on Monday approved immigration plans for 2,000 Ethiopians whose desire to move to the Jewish state has stirred controversy and faced extended delays.

The group are members of the Falash Mura, descendants of Ethiopian Jews who converted to Christianity – many under duress – in the 19th and 20th centuries.

They are not recognized as Jews by Israel's Orthodox rabbinical authorities, but claim the right to immigrate under family reunification rules.

The government approved about 9,000 claimants in 2015 but then rescinded the decision the following year, citing budgetary constraints.

Some groups in Israel, including members of the Ethiopian community, have opposed immigration of the Falash Mura, citing doubts over their claim to be Jewish.

Netanyahu told his cabinet on Monday that it was time to bring "2,000 of our people, our brothers and sisters from Ethiopia."

"We will also act to bring all of the rest," he said.

Integration Minister Pnina Tamano-Shata, the first Ethiopian Jewish woman elected to Israel's parliament, praised the government's "unanimous vote to bring 2,000 people to Israel who are waiting in Ethiopia to be united with their families."

The bulk of Ethiopia's Jewish community was brought to the country between 1984 and 1991 under the Law of Return, which guarantees Israeli citizenship to all Jews.

The Ethiopian-Israeli community has since grown to 140,000-strong, including 50,000 born in Israel.

Many say they faced racial discrimination, notably abuse by Israel's police.



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Ethiopian-Israelis decry family separation as discriminatoryAngered by police killing, Ethiopian-Israelis demand change

[Lebanese ex-PM looks to revive French rescue plan](#)

Author:

Mon, 2020-10-12 22:49

BEIRUT: Former Lebanese prime minister Saad Hariri has put himself forward as a potential leader in a bid to break the country's growing political deadlock.

He also began political consultations with other parties in order to revive the possibility of a successful French rescue plan on Monday.

After a meeting with President Michel Aoun in the Presidential Palace, Hariri said: "We have no time to waste on political polemics. If someone wants to change the concept of the French initiative, let them bear the

responsibility.”

The French plan, launched by President Emmanuel Macron on Sept. 1 to help Lebanon cope with its crises, failed after Hezbollah and the Amal Movement demanded ownership of the finance portfolio and the presence of Shiite ministers in a new government.

Hariri said that the government should be “formed of specialists who do not belong to parties and who will undertake specific reforms within a specific timetable, which does not exceed a few months.”

Lebanon is scheduled to begin negotiations with Israel on Wednesday to demarcate maritime borders amid an absence of government in the country, which is enduring one of its worst economic and financial crises to date.

President Aoun said he “wants to form a new government as soon as possible, because the situation no longer tolerates further deterioration.”

Aoun also urged “the necessity of adhering to the French initiative.”

In a statement, Hariri said the consultations, which also included meetings with Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri and other former prime ministers, were designed to “float Macron’s initiative.”

He added that the French plan “is the only and last opportunity to stop the collapse and rebuild what was destroyed by the Beirut Port explosion.”

Hariri said he would “send a delegation to communicate with all the main political blocs to ensure that they are still fully committed to the terms of the paper that they previously agreed upon during the meeting with President Macron at the Pine Palace.”

“The government’s goal is to implement only economic, financial and administrative reforms. Governments formed on the traditional basis of party representation failed to implement reforms and brought the country to the great collapse in which we are living.

“The great collapse threatens our country with more tragedies and threatens the state with complete demise.

“Macron has pledged to all of us to mobilize the international community to invest in Lebanon and to provide external financing. Do you understand what that means? It means that he will hold a conference to save Lebanon from collapse.”

“If any political party wants to change the concept of the initiative, especially concerning its economic aspect and the clause of specialized ministers, knowing in advance that this leads to its failure, then let them assume their responsibility before the Lebanese people and inform them of this matter,” he added.

President Michel Aoun will begin consultations with parliamentary blocs on Oct. 15 to assign a Sunni figure to form the next government and succeed

Prime Minister Hassan Diab's caretaker administration.

Diab's government resigned on Aug. 10 following the Beirut explosion, while Mustapha Adib, who was assigned prime minister-designate on Aug. 31, stepped down a month later after he failed to form a Cabinet based on the French plan.

Following Adib's downfall, Macron condemned Lebanon's political dysfunction, with a particular focus on Hezbollah and the Amal Movement.

He singled out the former as a "terrorist militia that terrorizes political forces with weapons," adding, "some of the leadership preferred to be hostages with Hezbollah."

On Monday, Lebanon listed the members of its delegation being sent to discuss maritime borders with Israel. The meeting, which begins on Oct. 14 at the Naqoura UNIFIL headquarters, will be overseen by US officials.

The leader of the delegation is Brig. Gen. Pilot Bassam Yassin, while members include Marine Col. Mazen Basbous, Petroleum Administration official Wissam Chbat and maritime expert Najib Masihi.

The Presidency of the Republic said the negotiations are "purely technical," downplaying rumors that the talks are part of a normalization process with Israel.

Hezbollah's parliamentary bloc said last week that the negotiations "have nothing to do with making peace with Israel and do not come in the context of reconciliation with the enemy, nor with normalization policies."

The economic stranglehold on the Lebanese public is tightening, with citizens voicing complaints about lack of medicine available in pharmacies.

The country's chemists are preparing to stage their first-ever strike on Tuesday, in a bid to prevent "the smuggling of subsidized medicines out of Lebanon, and steps to remove subsidies on medicines."

President of the Pharmacists Syndicate Dr. Ghassan Al-Amin said medicine smuggling is affecting Lebanon's ability to provide vital medicine to the public. He added: "There are 17 pharmacies in Iraq that sell drugs smuggled from Lebanon, and there are pharmacies in Syria that sell smuggled Lebanese medicine."

Amin also warned of "importers storing subsidized drugs in Lebanon."

Minister of Health Hamad Hassan revealed during a meeting with the Pharmacists Syndicate that "a truck covered with shades was seized containing a large number of vaccines being transported abroad."

The minister also warned of "large quantities of medicines arriving at pharmacies and being smuggled at night across the border with Syria."



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Lebanon names team for maritime border talks with Israel
Fires brought under control in Syria, Lebanon

[UAE reports 1,064 coronavirus infections, one death](#)

Mon, 2020-10-12 21:55

DUBAI: The UAE on Monday recorded 1,064 new COVID-19 cases and one death. The Ministry of Health and Prevention said the total number of cases since the pandemic began has reached 107,293, while the death toll rose to 446. The ministry also said 1,271 cases recovered from COVID-19 over the previous 24 hours, bringing the total to 98,555.

Dubai Economy closed a real estate office and issued fines to eight businesses and a warning to one shop for not adhering to anti-COVID-19 measures.

During daily inspection rounds, teams from Dubai Economy, in cooperation with Dubai Sports Council, fined five sports establishments over the weekend for failing to adhere to COVID-19 precautionary measures, while six others received warnings.

Dubai Health Authority announced that COVID-19 tests required for traveling could now be booked at some malls.

The UAE, with a population of around 9.9 million people, has conducted 10.8 million tests so far.

Meanwhile, Khalifa University of Science and Technology said a research team had developed an anti-viral eco-friendly face mask.

Helping to combat the pandemic while protecting the environment, a team of researchers from [@KhalifaUni](#), together with partners, have successfully developed the first working prototypes of the NavaMASK – a fully biodegradable & biocompatible anti-viral adaptive face mask

– مكتب أبوظبي الإعلامي (@admediaoffice) [October 12, 2020](#)

The scientists claim the “navamask” eliminates more than 99 percent of bacteria.

Elsewhere, Kuwait recorded 777 new COVID-19 cases, bringing the total to 111,893. The death toll reached 664 after six new fatalities were registered.

تعلن [#وزارة_الصحة](#) عن تأكيد إصابة 777 حالة جديدة، وتسجيل 534 حالة شفاء، و 6 حالات وفاة جديدة بـ [#فيروس_كورونا_المستجد](#) COVID-19 ، ليصبح إجمالي عدد الحالات 111,893 حالة pic.twitter.com/eEmeHwSbeS

– (@KUWAIT_MOH) [October 12, 2020](#) وزارة الصحة – الكويت

Oman’s health ministry confirmed 685 new cases and eight deaths, bringing the total to 106,575 and the death toll stands at 1,046.

[#Statement](#) No. 203

October 12, 2020 pic.twitter.com/Nwqgw0JIVD

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[Oman to introduce 5% VAT within six months](#)

Mon, 2020-10-12 16:14

DUBAI: The Sultan of Oman, Haitham bin Tariq Al-Said, issued a decree on Monday to start imposing a five percent value-added tax (VAT) within six months.

Oman News Agency said that a law was also issued to amend some provisions of

the Criminal Procedures Law, and that the VAT law will be imposed on most goods and services, with some exceptions.

The government said it will have a limited impact on the cost of living. The tax will be applied 100 percent on tobacco and its derivatives, energy drinks, alcoholic beverages and pork, while 50 percent will be applied to soft drinks based on their retail price.

The sultanate intended to impose five percent VAT in 2018, but postponed it until 2020.

The law is part of a broader 2016 agreement between all six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states and Saudi Arabia. The UAE and Bahrain have already implemented the five percent VAT law.



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Oman imposes nighttime lockdown in fight against COVID-19
Oman banks on SMEs, tourism to revive economy

Latest US sanctions are a logical step in Trump's robust Iran policy, says expert

Mon, 2020-10-12 15:59

The Office of Foreign Assets Control, which administers the sanctions, has targeted 18 major Iranian banks – the entire financial sector – which US Secretary of the Treasury Steve Mnuchin identified as “an additional avenue that funds the Iranian government’s malign activities.”

Mnuchin vowed sanctions “will continue until Iran stops its support of terrorist activities and ends its nuclear programs.”

This latest punitive measure comes weeks after the US declared a “snapback” of sanctions on Iran that were waived under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, a 2015 international deal over Iran’s nuclear program, accusing Tehran of having breached that agreement.

“This new targeting of Iran’s financial sector is very much in line with US President Donald Trump’s maximum pressure policy towards Iran, which is using very creative tools to punish, coerce and deter the clerical regime and get them to come back to the negotiating table,” Behnam Ben Taleblu, senior fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, a non-partisan DC-based think tank, told Arab News.

[#LISTEN](#): [@FDD](#)’s Behnam Ben Taleblu says the [#JCPOA](#) [#Iran](#) nuclear deal is no longer alive after Tehran’s multiple violations <https://t.co/ijwpM07jp9> [pic.twitter.com/BcYmbTC6bl](https://t.co/BcYmbTC6bl)

– Arab News (@arabnews) [October 12, 2020](#)

“The Iranian economy is absolutely not healthy right now. And if this present (US) policy continues, the Iranian revolutionary foreign policy, the policy of resistance to negotiations and foreign pressure, can’t continue.”

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said the sanctions “are directed at the regime and its corrupt officials that have used the wealth of the Iranian people to fuel a radical, revolutionary cause that has brought untold suffering across the Middle East and beyond.”

He added: “The United States continues to stand with the Iranian people, the longest-suffering victims of the regime’s predations.”

But while the US Treasury asserted that the new tranche of sanctions will

continue to allow for humanitarian transactions, critics object that they could have a detrimental impact on Iranians' access to humanitarian resources.

"It's going to make it even harder for Iran to get ahold of food and medicine," Barbara Slavin, the director of the Future of Iran Initiative at the Atlantic Council, told CNN.

"It certainly will bring a lot of people to their knees, but it will not bring down the Islamic Republic, it will just intensify their hatred for the US."

Ben Taleblu said: "It's absolutely a legitimate concern. But we have to keep in mind that this is the US intentionally choosing a peaceful tool of punishment, coercion and deterrence rather than a militarized tool to deal with this regime (when) Iran is constantly opting for a non-peaceful, dangerous, and destabilizing tool.

"Concurrent with this economic tool, the US, perhaps more so than any other point in its history, tried to create legal loopholes and more regulations to permit humanitarian trade with Iran. For instance, the Central Bank of Iran, despite having been hit under multiple nonproliferation and terrorism authorities because of how destabilizing it is, was the subject of discussion of a general license by the Treasury Department for certain humanitarian transactions."

Iran's mission to the UN accused the US of committing "economic terrorism."

Ben Taleblu commented: "It's really a shame when Iran's leaders, who for 41-plus years now have chosen to put revolutionary interest over national interest and regime ideology over popular welfare, all of a sudden feel confident weaponizing the Iranian people, who have been downtrodden for so many years, as kind of a tool in their larger debate against the policy of Western pressure."

The new US order will also penalize non-Iranian institutions that do business with the banks, effectively cutting them off from the international financial system.

It gives foreign companies 45 days to wind down their operations in Iran and cease all activities or face "secondary sanctions."

Foreign banks are likely to be uncomfortable with trading even in the exempted humanitarian areas because of the risk of being penalized.

That is one of the reasons why Europe has always opposed the blanket financial services blacklisting.

Observers argue the latest US actions will deepen tensions with European nations and others over Iran.

"Unfortunately, Europe's policy is more of the same," said Ben Taleblu.

"Many international and European leaders stand side-by-side with American leaders condemning the Iranian material support for terrorism, Iranian acts of terrorism abroad, the activities of Tehran's proxies in the heartland of the Middle East, weapons proliferation, missile testing and transfers as well as Iran's growing nuclear stockpiles and other violations of international agreements.

"But when rubber hits the road, they've done very little about it. The last time the EU (put) sanctions on Iran using missiles was in December 2012."

The DC-based expert believes, however, that this transatlantic gap in viewing the Iranian threat could be bridged, and that there is an opportunity for Europeans to "put their money where their mouth is on human rights" and refine their sanctions on Iran, particularly after the regime's execution of wrestler Navid Afkari.

Some circles in Washington fear that the new sanctions would create a more toxic environment in the region and push Iran to retaliate via its proxies in Iraq.

When the US announced the "snapback" last month, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani threatened "a crushing response to the US bullying" and warned of "dangerous consequences."

Taleblu sees this as Iran's policy of graduated escalation: "Where the policy you are presenting them with is so damaging they have no other recourse than to scare you into not continuing that policy.

"The sanctions are so effective, Iran is throwing its hands up more and more in the air. I liken this to asphyxiation. The more you get closer to choking them, the more their hands are going to flail up and down as air is leaving their body. So, it is going to produce this kind of reaction. The question from a policy perspective is: Are you able to contain, limit, contest and nullify it?"

The Iran expert emphasized that, in the end, enforcement of the new penalties is key in determining their success in deterring the regime. Otherwise, laxness can lead to "more cheating, violations, and busting, not just by Iran but also by third parties."



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Mnuchin says US will ramp up pressure on Iran
US Treasury imposes sanctions on 18 major banks in Iran