

Yemen begins repatriation of thousands of stranded citizens

Author:

Thu, 2020-05-28 21:37

AL-MUKALLA: Yemen began repatriation flights on Thursday for thousands of Yemenis stranded abroad due to coronavirus lockdown. However, there were fears that those repatriated might push up coronavirus cases in the war-ravaged Yemen.

In March, Yemen's internationally recognized government canceled flights to and from the country's airports to prevent the spread of coronavirus. Thousands of Yemenis stranded abroad sent appeals to the government to arrange rescue flights as they had run out of money.

A plane operated by Yemenia, the national airline, touched down on Thursday at Seiyun Airport in the southeastern province of Hadramout carrying 152 Yemenis from Amman amid heavy safety procedures. These included preventing the passengers from having contact with the airport staff and disinfecting their luggage and the plane. A health worker wearing personal protective wear collected passports as other workers disinfecting the luggage.

"The travelers were not allowed to enter the terminal building. Buses carried them from the airport tarmac to their homes," a worker at the airport told Arab News, speaking on the condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak to reporters.

A Yemenia plane might be carrying the same number of stranded people from Cairo airport to Seiyun airport next week, the airport worker said.

Yemeni government officials said that Thursday's flight from Amman is part of a larger plan to evacuate more than 10,000 Yemenis by air, land and sea in June.

A local government official in Aden told Arab News that the Yemeni government would pay for plane fuel, empty seats and Polymerase chain reaction (PCR) tests for COVID-19 in some countries. "We have paid a big bill to bring them back home," he said. All stranded people would have to do PCR tests to make sure that they are free of the virus 48 hours before leaving their host countries.

"The biggest concentration of stranded Yemenis is in Egypt, where we signed contracts with local labs for coronavirus tests," the government official said. More than 1200 stranded Yemenis in the UAE will be carried on UAE commercial flights to Riyan airport in the city of Al-Mukalla. The UAE will provide them with free of charge coronavirus tests. Stranded Yemenis in Oman and Saudi Arabia can go by land to Yemen provided they are carrying coronavirus test reports. Yemenis in Djibouti would have to sail to Yemeni seaports on the Red Sea, the government official said.

Regarding stranded Yemenis who live inside Houthi-controlled areas, the Yemeni government official said a Yemenia plane would touch down in Sana'a but not before receiving a formal assurance from the UN that the Houthis would allow planes to depart Sana'a airport. "We are worried that the Houthis might seize the planes," the government official said.

Despite the announcement of the government repatriation process, stranded Yemeni arranged sit-ins in many countries, demanding immediate evacuation. On Thursday, dozens of Yemenis arranged a small sit-in in the Indian capital to demand their government to accelerate the repatriation process. "We heard about rescue flights from Amman. Our situation here in India is different. Those who are sick cannot not find money to buy food, let alone medicine. We want the government to arrange at least one flight a day to bring us back home," a protester said in a video seen by Arab News.

The Aden-based national coronavirus committee said on Wednesday that seven new cases in Taiz, Shabwa and Dhale brought the total number in Yemen to 256, including 10 recoveries. It said there have been one new death, bringing the total number to 53 fatalities.



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[Kuwait replaces full-time curfew with 12-hour one](#)

Author:

Reuters

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Thu, 2020-05-28 18:33

CAIRO: Kuwait will ease its full-time curfew, to be a 12-hour one during night, the interior minister said in a press conference after the cabinet meeting on Thursday.

The minister added that the curfew will be from 6 PM to 6 AM, starting Sunday.

The health minister said easing the curfew will be among the first phase in a 5-phases plan, each to last at least 3 weeks, to go back to normal life.



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Kuwait Airways to lay off 1,500 foreign employees

[Exclusive: Ex-Trump envoy Jason Greenblatt says 'door to Israeli-Palestinian negotiations remains open'](#)

Wed, 2020-05-27 23:16

CHICAGO: Jason Greenblatt, the architect of US President Donald's Trump's

Middle East peace vision, says peace is still possible if Palestinians abandon their rejection of the plan and negotiate with Israel.

In an exclusive interview with the Arab News, Greenblatt, who served as White House's Middle East envoy, said that negotiations could even stall or prevent Israel's plans to annex the Jordan Valley which Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said could happen as early as July 1.

Even though he is no longer a key adviser in the Trump administration, Greenblatt said there was still time for Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas to reverse his rejection of the Trump Peace Plan and return to the negotiating table.



US special envoy Jason Greenblatt attends the launch of a project to improve access to wastewater treatment and water for Palestinian farmers, on October 15, 2017. (AFP/File Photo)

Knowing President Trump, White House Senior Adviser Jared Kushner and US Ambassador to Israel David Friedman as well as he does, Greenblatt said "the door to the White House to negotiate a peace agreement will remain open."

But he warned that the door may close on annexation given that it may happen as early as July 1. If the Palestinians wait too long "and annexation happens, then it happens," he said.

"But they (Trump, Friedman, Kushner) are also, like me, people who are dedicated to not only resolve the conflict but to help the Palestinian people. And I know them to be people who – if President Abbas or Saeb Erakat called to say they are ready to talk – would at a moment's notice sit down and talk."

A month after winning the US presidential election, Trump designated Greenblatt, a New York lawyer and businessman and his adviser on Israel, as his "Representative for International Negotiations" in December 2016.

Greenblatt was tasked with drafting an Israeli-Palestinian peace plan. After nearly three years of discussions with Israelis and Palestinians, Greenblatt presented Trump on Jan. 28, 2020, with a proposal that quickly acquired the moniker "deal of the century."



A picture taken on May 13, 2020 shows construction works in the Jewish settlement of Givat Zeev, near the Israeli-occupied West Bank city of Ramallah. (AFP)

But as details leaked out, Palestinian optimism turned to anger, reflected in the Palestinian refusal to attend an economic conference in Manama, Bahrain, in June 2019.

The conference was organized by Kushner, who is also Trump's son-in-law. Business leaders from around the world gathered and promised more than \$50 billion in financial support to the Palestinians if they engaged in the peace

negotiations.

Abbas and Palestinian leaders across the board rejected the plan, declaring, "We say a thousand times: 'No, no and no to the 'deal of the century.'"

Abbas said, adding that the White House's vision "will not come to pass" and that "our people will send it to the dustbins of history." He dismissed the plan as "the slap of the century."

The Greenblatt peace proposal included, for the first time in Palestinian-Israeli relations, a map that defined starting boundaries for a Palestinian state that would include about 70 percent of the West Bank and all of Areas A and B, as defined by the Oslo Accords, and parts of C.

The plan proposed a Palestinian Capitol adjacent to East Jerusalem in Kafr Akab, Abu Dis and Shuafat, and dangled the possibility that Israel would transfer Arab-populated areas in Israel called the "Triangle" – consisting of Kafr Kara, Arara, Baka al-Gharbiya, Umm el-Fahm and more – into the new Palestinian state.

Israel would also give up land in the Negev, near the Gaza-Egypt border.

Greenblatt insisted the plan was not set in stone.

"How sad that the Palestinian leadership won't even engage and see if there is something in this plan that they can help shape differently. If in the end after spending a lot of time and good faith negotiations the peace effort fails. I get it. If the deal is unacceptable to them and no deal the Israelis can make is unacceptable to them, Fine," Greenberg said.

"I get that the fact that they are angry. I get the fact that the leadership is disappointed. I get the fact that the plan doesn't meet their expectations. And by the way, we get plenty of criticism in Israel too because of this peace plan.

“But to refuse to engage and see if you can make it better, to simply say these are my deal points and these are the only deal points that I will accept, no deal is going to happen that way and Israel will thrive and prosper and unfortunately the Palestinians will fall further and further behind. And that is a tragedy, in my mind.”



Demonstrators wave Palestinian flags as they burn effigies of US President Donald Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu during a protest against Trump’s proposed Israeli-Palestinian peace plan. (AFP/File Photo)

Greenblatt’s plan included the annexation of the Jordan Valley by Israel and retention of all of the major settlements plus buffer zones around them, but leaving 15 smaller settlements in enclaves inside the Palestinian state boundaries.

He denied that Trump used the policy changes such as moving the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, his recognition of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital, or sanctions closing the PLO mission in Washington D.C. as pressure tactics to force the Palestinians to engage in negotiations.

He said those actions were policies Trump promised as a candidate and would implement regardless of the peace talks.

“We weren’t into the business of trying to give them a carrot or incentive just to come to the negotiating table. That had been tried before and it just wasn’t going to work,” Greenblatt said.

“The carrot is that the deal is on the table. Go through it and in good faith come back with a proposal. If you don’t want to, you do that at your risk. If you really think that the UN is going to deliver some deal that Israel is going to be stuck with, I don’t think that is ever going to happen, and that is terribly misguided.”



US special envoy Jason Greenblatt attends the launch of a project to improve access to wastewater treatment and water for Palestinian farmers, on October 15, 2017. (AFP/File Photo)

Palestinians and critics of the plan asserted that the real purpose of the Trump Peace Plan was to present something that Israel knew the Palestinians would reject, in order to hand Israel justification to launch large-scale annexation.

Greenblatt denied the claim and insisted that the plan offers the only real alternative to the status quo.

“One of the reasons we have designed the plan the way we did, which is to actually say, Israel, you can take over this land if the Palestinians don’t engage, but we have demarcated an area of lands for the Palestinians and we gave them four years to come to terms with negotiating because we wanted to protect Palestinian interests,” he said.

“Our conclusion was, and this plan reflects, is that time does march on. We can no longer let the Palestinian Authority have a veto on Israel’s progress. I wish we could no longer let the Palestinian Authority have veto on Palestinian progress, but that is out of our hands.

“But at least we tried to protect their interests. And all that we asked of the Palestinian leadership, besides obviously trying to figure out how to deal with their own governments, is to sit down and negotiate.

Despite the negative political discourse with regard to the plan, Greenblatt said Palestinians missed an opportunity to engage in negotiations directly and to suggest changes and adjustments.



Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas speaks during the Palestinian leadership meeting at his headquarters in the West Bank city of Ramallah, on May 19, 2020. (AFP)

“Ultimately, what people want, what people aspire too and what people achieve are going to be different things. We will recognize that the Palestinian leadership, over the decades, have promised things to the Palestinian people and are seeking a certain solution to this conflict that they believe they are entitled too,” he said.

“What they are asking for is not achievable and what they are asking for, in our view, is not grounded in rights.

“We need to get the two sides to the table. Because it isn’t going to go to the United States, the United Nations, the EU, Russia.

“Nobody can enforce the deal (except Palestinians and Israelis). The Palestinian leadership has to get its house in order. Until you get your house in order, there is nothing to discuss.”

“(The Bahrain workshop) was another example of the Palestinian Authority trying to undermine an effort for the Palestinian people. Nobody was trying to write a \$50 billion check to the Palestinians saying ‘Here is your money, now go away.’ Not only [would that have been] incredibly disrespectful but [also] completely unrealistic.



A picture taken on May 13, 2020 shows a partial view of the Jewish settlement of Givat Zeev, near the Israeli-occupied West Bank city of Ramallah. (AFP)

“What we were trying to do is say [that] if we manage to figure out how to get out of this conflict, you will be able to have all of this massive capital infusion to build up a new state to become something remarkable.”

“If we reach a peace agreement, the Palestinian Authority is going to have a very easy path to building up something unique and hopefully as spectacular as Israel because the entire world would be there with money and with assistance. Unfortunately, they tried to undermine the conference ... Palestinians were discouraged from going.

“It was a tremendous missed opportunity.”

Greenblatt said he had no confidence in the Israeli Palestinian leadership, which won 15 seats in the last Israeli elections, saying they were “not helpful.”

The Arab “Joint List,” which initially entered into negotiations with Netanyahu’s political rival Benny Gantz to form a government, was eventually shut out when Gantz decided to share leadership in a new all-Zionist coalition with Netanyahu.

Under the new coalition, Netanyahu, who is facing corruption charges, will hold the office of prime minister for 18 more months, before turning the office over to Gantz to serve 18 more months.

“That is the reality. This is a government that has actually embraced the

peace plan,” Greenblatt said.

FASTFACTS

Jason Greenblatt

* Was the executive vice president and chief legal officer to Donald Trump and The Trump Organization. * In January 2017, Trump designated him Assistant to the President and Special Representative for International Negotiations. * In February 2020, joined OurCrowd, a venture investments platform.

“You have both Benny Gantz and Bibi Netanyahu endorse the peace plan and a willingness to engage the Palestinian leadership on it. They should welcome it as an opportunity to engage, not actually throw it all out.”

Peace is still possible, Greenblatt argued.

“I would say that despite the disappointment, perhaps anger, the US is committed to peace. President Trump is the type of leader who can achieve peace,” he said.

“I think the Israeli government – and I know Bibi Netanyahu well – if he can be assured of Israel’s security and the things that are essential to reach a peace agreement, we can reach peace in this time.

“But to do so, it is going to require that President Abbas be a strong leader. It is going to require compromise. I would strongly encourage him to try. It is a tremendous missed opportunity at a very unique time in history.”

Greenblatt said he would not refer to the plan as embracing the “two-state solution,” adding that a new concept had to be pursued and that his proposal spoke to the realities of 72 years of failed peace.

BIO

Jason Greenblatt

* Born in 1967 to Hungarian Jewish refugees and raised in New York City.

* Was Executive Vice President and Chief Legal Officer to Donald Trump and The Trump Organization.

* Designated Assistant to the President and Special Representative for International Negotiations by Trump in January 2017.

* Creator of a blog on resources for parents and teens and author of three travel books.

* Joined OurCrowd, a venture investments platform, in February 2020.

“I don’t use the phrase ‘two-state solution’ simply because it is a three-word phrase – and you can’t possibly summarize this extraordinary complicated process with just those three words.

“The way I would describe it is I support a realistic Palestinian state that adheres to the 60-to-80-page plan that we developed with whatever compromises the two sides are willing to engage in.

“But ultimately, what I would like to see is a thriving Palestinian state that is safe and secure next to a safe and secure Israeli state. But that safe and secure Palestinian state is going to come with criteria.

“If it adheres to the criteria, then there won’t be an issue. It doesn’t adhere to the criteria, then all the more reason why that criteria need to be established.

“What I don’t want to see is a Palestinian state that ultimately ends up threatening Israel and then Israel gets condemned by the UN or the rest of the world for securing its people’s safety.”

Greenblatt added: “But it is also not fair to ask the Palestinians to live in a way that is substandard. I don’t think our plan does that. I think our plan gives the Palestinians every opportunity in the world, if its leadership plays its cards right and acts according to the rules.”

The carrot is that the deal is on the table. Go through it and in good faith come back with a proposal. If you don’t want to, you do that at your risk.

Greenblatt urged the Palestinians to return to the negotiating table, and warned that continued rejection dooms the Palestinians to a future of statelessness.

“This discourse is so important. There is a lot of misleading information out there,” he said.

“There is a lot of political rhetoric where people try to undermine whether it is the peace plan, or connections between Palestinians and Israelis or Israelis and Arabs. All of that just drives peace further and further away and it really, really harms lives.”

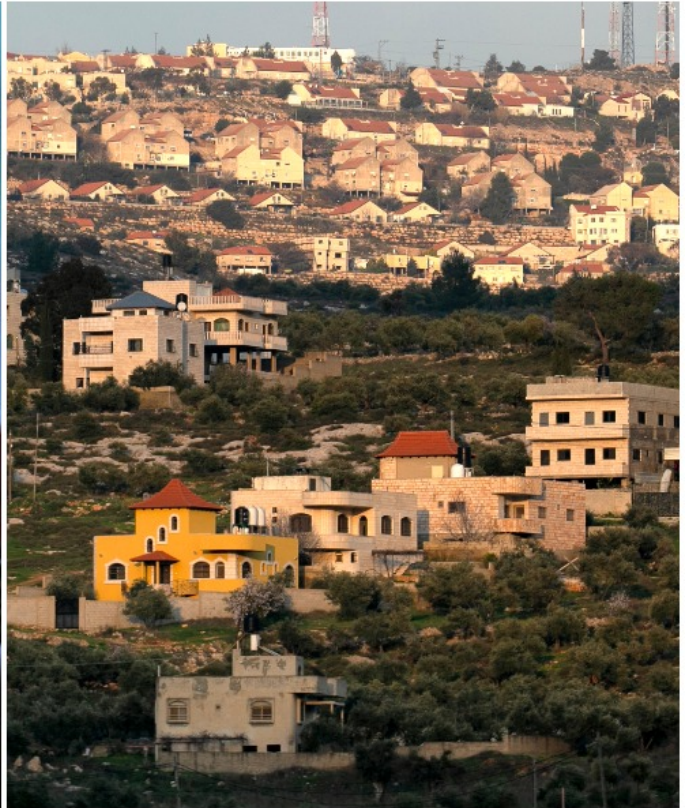
“What I would like to see is discussions like this, with ordinary people, media. Just keep talking. Conversations are difficult and sometimes they are painful. But unless and until we reconnect both societies, Israelis and Palestinians, and of course Israelis and the Arabs, we won’t have a stronger chance of making peace.

“But if connect everybody and have these heart-to-heart conversations, as difficult as they may be, then we increase the chances of potentially solving

the conflict.”

Greenblatt left the White House in September 2019 to pursue his own business goals and joined OurCrowd, a global venture-investments platform, as a partner in charge of building ties in the Middle East.

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Former European leaders slam Trump peace plan
Pope appears to give thumbs down to Trump's Middle East peace plan

[Lebanon leader backs UN peace force after protests](#)

Author:

Wed, 2020-05-27 23:32

BEIRUT: Lebanon's Prime Minister Hassan Diab on Wednesday repeated his backing for UN peacekeeping forces in the country, saying the troops were needed "in light of Israeli destabilization attempts."

Diab visited the headquarters of the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) in the southern border town of Naqoura amid a dispute between the government and Hassan Nasrallah, secretary-general of the Iran-backed Hezbollah, over the mission's mandate.

Less than 12 hours before the Lebanese leader's visit, Nasrallah accused the US and Israel of using the peacekeeping force to expand their interests.

"If they want to reduce or increase the number of UNIFIL soldiers, it does not make any difference. We are not against UNIFIL's stay, but the Americans are mistaken if they consider this to be a pressure card against Lebanon. We believe that UNIFIL is an Israeli interest more than a Lebanese interest," Nasrallah said.

Diab, accompanied by Defense Minister Zeina Akar and Armed Forces Commander Gen. Joseph Aoun, held a meeting with Maj. Gen. Stefano Del Col, UNIFIL force commander and head of the mission.

At a joint press conference, Diab stressed the need for "UNIFIL forces to cooperate with the Lebanese army" deployed in the volatile southern border region.

The Lebanese leader also called on the UN "ensure the implementation" of UN Security Council Resolution 1701, intended to resolve the 2006 Israel-Lebanon conflict.

Del Col said that "cooperation between UNIFIL and the Lebanese Armed Forces" had brought 14 years of peace in southern Lebanon, and called for all parties to "build on this long period of unprecedented stability."

The peacekeeping chief said that he looked forward to working "with the government and the army to implement Resolution 1701, to address any outstanding issues, and to prevent and reduce tension."

The UN Security Council is expected to renew UNIFIL's mandate in August.

Hezbollah fears that the peacekeeping force's mandate will be extended as a result of "US and Israeli pressure," allowing it "freedom of movement" and the right to inspect private property in its area of operations.

Two days ago, residents of the nearby town of Blida protested after an attempt by a UN patrol to enter a private property. In another incident, residents of Mays Al-Jabal complained of "disturbances" caused by peacekeeping troops in the area.

Nasrallah said: "The Israelis want UNIFIL to have the right to raid and search private properties, and the Americans are pressuring Lebanon on this issue."

A civilian UNIFIL source told Arab News that according to its mission, the UN force must inform the Lebanese army of its patrols.

"But what is happening is that UNIFIL conducts its patrols without

notification,” the source said. “This is what happened in Blida.”

The source said that UN forces carry out 486 land, air and sea patrols daily, and have 10,500 soldiers to carry out these tasks, while the Lebanese army has no more than 5,000 troops in the area.

“The Lebanese army cannot keep up with all UNIFIL patrols,” the source said.

After a US call for a drastic reduction in the UN peacekeeping force’s budget, more than \$1 million is believed to have been slashed on spending for the coming financial year, starting on July 1.

Forty-four countries took part in UNIFIL forces this year, three more than the previous year. European forces continue to dominate the command of the force’s operational areas.



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Modest Eid celebrations take place in Lebanon amid coronavirus restrictions
Easing of restrictions intensifies COVID-19 cases in Lebanon

Sudan says 3 jailed members of ousted Bashir regime have coronavirus

Author:

Reuters

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Wed, 2020-05-27 18:25

KHARTOUM: At least three jailed senior members of the toppled regime of former Sudanese leader Omar al-Bashir have the coronavirus, the country's public prosecution service said on Wednesday.

The Arab African country, which has reported 4,146 coronavirus cases and 184 deaths, released more than 4,000 prisoners in March as a precaution against the spread of the disease in jails.

But political sensitivities mean all those jailed for offence committed as part of the administration run by the veteran Islamist, who was ousted in an uprising a year ago, remain in custody.

They include Ahmed Haroun and Abdel Raheem Muhammad Hussein, both wanted by the International Criminal Court (ICC) for alleged crimes in Sudan's Darfur region, and who the prosecution service said had tested positive for coronavirus.

Haroun was a senior Bashir aide while Hussein served as defence and interior minister. Ali Osman Taha, a former vice president, was also infected, it said in the statement said.

All three are under health quarantine in Khartoum hospitals, the statement said.

Bashir, scores of politicians close to him and members of his family, were detained after the uprising on various charges including corruption and violence.

COVID-19 tests on two other detainees including Ali al-Bashir, a brother of the former president, came back negative, though they were quarantined as a precautionary measure.

Tests results are still awaited on two other suspected cases, the prosecution service said, adding that all other detained members of the former regime had refused to be tested for coronavirus.

This month, Sudan, which has a poor health system, extended a lockdown of the state of Khartoum by two weeks to slow the spread of the virus.



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