

Beirut ministry barriers removed after snarling traffic for years

Author:

Reuters

ID:

1549384363106078300

Tue, 2019-02-05 13:17

BEIRUT: Lebanon's Interior Ministry removed concrete security barriers in central Beirut on Tuesday that had for years choked a major road nearby, days after the long-delayed formation of a new government.

The office of the outgoing minister, Nohad Machnouk, said he had ordered the barriers removed "owing to the end of security reasons," due in part to his five-year "fight against terrorism."

But the office of the new minister, Raya Al-Hassan, told local TV that she had taken the decision in order to remove a daily encumbrance and improve transport.

Cranes were brought in to lift the concrete panels, each painted with the Lebanese flag.

Cab driver Ibrahim Sauli, 65, said he was no fan of Hassan's politics but added: "I raise my hat to this minister. She's not scared and she wants to work properly."

Hassan is one of a record four women ministers in the new cabinet. Machnouk will pass the baton at a ceremony on Wednesday.

In recent years, Lebanon has suffered from a spillover of tension and sometimes violence from neighboring Syria, where the Lebanese Shiite Hezbollah movement has fought in support of President Bashar Assad.

The last deadly militant operation in Lebanon took place in 2016, when suicide attackers carried out a string of bombings in a village in the north.



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[First wave of new Ethiopian immigrants arrives in Israel](#)

Author:

AP

ID:

1549311087899497200

Mon, 2019-02-04 19:40

L0D, Israel: Nearly 100 Ethiopian Jews have landed in Israel in the first wave of new immigration since the government said last year that it would let some of the 8,000 remaining community members join relatives in Israel. Local Ethiopian community members on Monday welcomed the newcomers after years of delays. Israel recognizes the community's Jewish roots but does not consider them fully Jewish, so they require special approval to immigrate that has not always been forthcoming.

Alisa Bodner, spokeswoman for an Ethiopian-Jewish activist group, said she was “far from satisfied” by the slow trickle of Ethiopian immigration, long stalled despite government promises to bring all remaining members of the community to Israel.

The bulk of the Ethiopian Jewish community was airlifted to Israel in major operations in the 1980s and 1990s.



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Ethiopian Israelis rally in Tel Aviv against police violence
Netanyahu gives 1,000 Ethiopians right to immigrate to Israel

[Assassination of writer on Karbala street provokes indignation](#)

Mon, 2019-02-04 22:06

KARBALA: The recent assassination of a writer in the middle of a street in

Karbala has provoked indignation in Iraqi cultural circles.

The city's police force said several fatal shots were fired at Alaa Mashzoub in front of his home on Saturday.

In a sign of the sensitivity surrounding the subject, the police immediately tasked a senior squad to investigate, and promised to find the perpetrators.

"This is killing words – free, honest and beautiful words," fellow writer Ali Lefta Said said, in reaction to the murder.

On Sunday, intellectuals and artists from Karbala, around 100km south of Baghdad, staged a sit-in.

Ahmed Saadawi – whose novel "Frankenstein in Baghdad" has scored success beyond Iraq's borders – hit out at the culprits on his Facebook page.

"You really have to be a coward to fire a gun at someone who only has words and dreams," he wrote.

"Shame on the murderers – and shame on the authorities, if they don't find and judge them immediately," he added.

Tributes have poured in for the prolific novelist.

Mashzoub was well known in Karbala, whose historic districts he wove with care into his writing.

Parliament's cultural commission has said it will monitor the police probe into his murder. But nobody has been willing to point the finger at potential suspects.

Late last Summer, the death of four high profile Iraqi women – including model and social media influencer Tara Fares, whose fatal shooting was caught on camera – sparked anger.

Official investigations into those deaths have failed to yield convictions or even publicly announced conclusions.



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[Alaa Mashzoub](#)

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Iraqi novelist gunned down in Kerbala
Suicide bomber hits Iraq Shiite shrine city of Karbala

[Pope Francis and Al-Azhar's Sheikh Ahmed Al-Tayeb sign declaration of fraternity in Abu Dhabi](#)

Author:

Zaynab Khojji

ID:

1549307119109275400

Mon, 2019-02-04 22:02

ABU DHABI: The first day of the historic visit by Pope Francis to the Arabian Peninsula ended with the signing of a "Human Fraternity Document" by the leader of the Roman Catholic Church and one of the highest authorities in

Islam, Sheikh Ahmed Al-Tayeb, grand imam of Al-Azhar Mosque.

The declaration of fraternity – which pledges the religious leaders to work together in perpetuity and to reject violence and radicalism – was also signed by Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum, prime minister of the UAE, which hosted the ceremony in its capital Abu Dhabi.

The pope told an audience: “Fraternity is established here at the roots of our common humanity, as a vocation contained in God’s plan of creation.”

His address centered on the themes of fraternity, education, justice, and human development built on inclusion.

“There is no alternative,” he added. “We either build the future together, or there will not be a future. Religions, in particular, cannot renounce the urgent task of building bridges between peoples and cultures.” The speech was delivered in Italian translated into Arabic for most in the audience.

Al-Tayeb said: “The document is historic, and it calls for policymakers to stop bloodshed and conflict. Muslims must protect their Christian brothers. I will work with my brother and friend Pope Francis to protect all communities.”

The grand imam added: “It is encouraging to see the UAE investing in human resources, and especially the youth. Far-sightedness and wisdom transformed the UAE into a bright country that hosts such a meeting.”

He said: “Muslims in Western countries must follow and respect the rules and regulations of the countries in which they reside.”

The Western media “exploited” the 9/11 attacks in the US “to show Islam negatively as a bloodthirsty religion, and to show Muslims as savage barbarians who pose a danger and threat to modern societies,” he added, quoting numerous Qur’anic verses about the value of life.

The pope aimed a slanted barb at modern economic inequality, saying: “The world’s religions also have the task of reminding us that greed for profit renders the heart lifeless, and that the laws of the current market, demanding everything immediately, do not benefit encounter, dialogue and family ... Religions should be the voice of the least, who are not statistics but brothers and sisters.”

The route of [#PopeFrancis](#) through the [#UAE](#)’s capital [#AbuDhabi](#) on the first full day of his trip. <https://t.co/VU0o20qDSv>
[#PopeFrancisinUAE](#) [#PopeinUAE](#) pic.twitter.com/xnJ5SYeazP

– Arab News (@arabnews) [February 4, 2019](#)

He added: “Here, in the desert, a way of fruitful development has been opened which, beginning from the creation of jobs, offers hope to many persons from a variety of nations, cultures and beliefs.”

He continued: “Religious freedom is not limited to freedom of worship, but to others as brothers in humanity ... We must have the courage to accept and recognize freedom of the other.”

The pope also held out the promise of further visits to Islamic countries, saying: “It is in this spirit that I look forward to concrete opportunities for meeting, not only here but in the entire beloved region, a focal point of

the Middle East.”

Al-Maktoum offered a deed for the plot of land on which the first church in the UAE was built. There are an estimated 76 churches and other non-Muslim places of worship in the country.







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[Pope Francis visits the UAE](#)

Pope Francis meets Muslim leaders in Abu Dhabi on historic UAE visit
Pope's visit generating hope for a new era of tolerance in the Gulf

[Jordan to host new talks on Yemen prisoner swap](#)

Author:

Shounaz Mekky

ID:

1549305762709219400

Mon, 2019-02-04 21:34

AMMAN: Yemeni government delegates and Houthi militia leaders will reconvene in Jordan from Tuesday for a new round of talks to thrash out a deal on a prisoner exchange, the UN said.

The swap, which could involve up to 15,000 detainees from each side, was

agreed in principle as a confidence-building measure ahead of peace talks in Sweden in December.

In mid-January, representatives of Yemen's warring parties held two days of talks in Amman during which they submitted lists of prisoners they wanted to see released to UN mediators.

Those talks were also attended by representatives of the United Nations, which brokered the swap agreement, and the International Committee of the Red Cross, which will supervise its implementation.

On Wednesday government and rebel representatives would meet again in Amman for "technical" talks to "discuss the steps taken... (by both sides) to finalize the list of prisoners," a UN statement said.

UN envoy Martin Griffiths and ICRC president Peter Maurer "are scheduled to take part in the first day" of the talks, the statement said without specifying how many days the meetings would last.

It also described the Jordan talks as "important," and thanked the government in Amman for hosting them.

At the end of January, the Iran-linked Houthis released a Saudi soldier under the deal while the Arab coalition supporting the internationally recognized government set free seven Houthi prisoners.

That prisoner swap was the first to take place since Yemen's warring sides agreed in Sweden a deal that involved a cease-fire in the lifeline port city of Hodeida.

For nearly four years, the Houthis have been locked in a war with the regional pro-government military coalition, which includes Saudi Arabia.

Some 10,000 people have been killed, according to the World Health Organization.



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