

[Head of Yemeni presidential leadership council arrives in Abu Dhabi](#)

Author:

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ABU DHABI: The head of the Yemeni Presidential Leadership Council Rashad Al-Alimi arrived in Abu Dhabi on Friday for an official visit that will last for several days.

Al-Alimi will hold official talks with the Emirati leadership on strengthening and developing relations between the two countries in the political, economic, security and military fields.

Al-Alimi will also talk reconstruction and mobilizing political and development support for Yemen to face the repercussions of the war ignited by the Iranian-backed Houthi militia, according to the Yemeni News Agency (SABA).

He also praised the Emirati political, military and humanitarian support provided to Yemen over the past few years.

Al-Alimi arrived in the UAE capital from Jeddah, where he had been received by King Salman at Al-Salam Palace on Wednesday.

The meeting was also attended by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.



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Yemeni council head meets King Salman, crown prince in Jeddah
Saudi ambassador to Yemen meets with US counterparts

[Syria accused of flouting Chemical Weapons Convention at UN](#)

Author:

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LONDON: On the 25th anniversary of the implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention, the US on Friday accused Syria of flouting the treaty and obstructing inspectors.

"The Assad regime has used chemical weapons against its own people on at least eight occasions since joining the convention," said Richard M. Mills Jr., US deputy ambassador to the UN.

"And the picture is even more grim than that. The US assesses that the Assad regime has used chemical weapons at least 50 times since the conflict in Syria began," he added.

"Syria, as a state party to the CWC, agreed to fully disclose the precise location, aggregate quantity and detailed inventory of chemical weapons it possesses, yet as we've heard countless times ... Syria's declaration still cannot be considered complete and accurate."

Izumi Nakamitsu, UN undersecretary-general of disarmament affairs, told the Security Council: "Despite the accession of Syria to the CWC, the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons continues to document instances of chemical weapons use in Syria."

She added: "This council has not fulfilled its responsibility to hold accountable the perpetrators of these heinous acts."

Nakamitsu said while the regime had agreed to limited talks in Beirut, the OPCW had yet to receive documentation about Syria's remaining stockpiles, an attack on a military installation in March 2021, and an attack on the city of Douma in 2018. The regime had also refused to issue a visa for a key inspector, she added.

"The Syrian Arab Republic has agreed to the limited round of consultations, while at the same time requesting the exclusion of one OPCW secretariat expert," she said.

"Until these outstanding issues are closed, the international community cannot have full confidence that the Syrian Arab Republic's full chemical weapons program has been eliminated."

Syrian Ambassador Bassam Sabbagh said the inspector in question had been denied access because of a "lack of objectivity and professionalism." He accused the OPCW and the CWC of political bias.

Russian Ambassador Vasily Nebenzya said the convention had become a "punitive" instrument wielded in the interests of a "narrow group of countries" against Syria.

"At its 25th anniversary, the OPCW has very serious systemic problems and a tarnished reputation," he added.

"Russia unconditionally supports the CWC and is committed to its letter and spirit. What gives rise to question to us is how its provisions are being implemented by the OPCW."

Mills, though, said: “In the face of irrefutable proof documented by the meticulous work of the OPCW that Syria is flouting its CWC obligation, the Assad regime in this chamber hurls preposterous accusations of bias at the OPCW independent and professional experts in a failed effort to immune them and distract from proven facts.”

The UK, China and others also accused Syria of not cooperating with the international community, with France calling its use of chemical weapons “odious.”

The UAE said while the CWC had succeeded in securing the disposal of “99 percent” of the world’s chemical weapons, they were being sought by terrorist groups such as Daesh.

“As we have recently witnessed in Al-Hasakah, terrorist groups continue to develop their methods of attack, and seek to obtain advanced weapons such as chemical weapons to achieve their nefarious goals,” said Mohamed Abushahab, the UAE’s deputy permanent representative.

“Accordingly, we stress the importance of continuing our fight against Daesh in Syria and elsewhere ... to prevent them from acquiring chemical weapons.”



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Syria has likely used chemical weapons 17 timesDeep Security Council divisions over Syrian chemical weapons again laid bare

Jordanians enjoy Ramadan as normalcy returns after COVID-19

Author:

Fri, 2022-04-29 00:12

JORDAN: Life returned to normal a few days before Ramadan when the Jordanian government eased the COVID-19 lockdown after nearly two years of restrictions.

To curb the spread of coronavirus – which took the lives of almost 14,000 Jordanians – the government imposed a lockdown that led to curfews and the closure of businesses, limiting the mobility of people.

People continue to wear masks as a precaution – however it is not mandatory to do so in open spaces. Stadiums, wedding halls, cafes, restaurants, Ramadan tents and iftar banquets are running at full capacity during iftar and sahoor.

Worshippers now stand shoulder-to-shoulder to offer prayers in mosques and churches.

“This is how mosques should be in Ramadan and this how we should pray, and anything other than that is abnormal,” said Abdulatif Al-Jarrah, comparing the Ramadan rituals of 2020 and 2021 with 2022.

As Ramadan 2020 coincided with the height of the coronavirus pandemic, Jordan completely closed mosques even for the five basic prayers, let alone Itikaf, where people go into seclusion to pray during the last 10 days of Ramadan.

With calls growing to ease some COVID-19 restrictions during Ramadan two years ago, the Jordanian authorities responded at the time by allowing people to walk and go for Fajr and Maghrib prayers in mosques for only 30 minutes.

“Ramadan in 2020 and 2021 was sad. I have never, ever experienced that sadness before, and not only because we were not allowed to pray at mosques but also because I was unable to invite my sons and daughters to iftar,” said 70-year-old Al-Jarrah.

Organizing big iftar feasts was not allowed in 2020 and 2021, and it remained almost impossible even after the easing some of the lockdown restrictions.

The easing of COVID-19 restrictions was not only a relief for worshippers but

also for business owners, who are hopeful that this Ramadan and the summer season may bring some recovery for their hard-hit businesses.

Wedding venue owner Mohammad Bashaireh said that his business was closed for two years due to restrictions, incurring “big financial losses” that he hopes to make up for this summer season.

“I had to close my wedding venue for two years but at the same time I was paying the rent of the property, and I was unable to lay off my employees and had to pay them their salaries under the defense orders,” he told Arab News.

Under the sixth defense order, which has been in effect since April 2020, companies are unable to lay off employees but instead can lower their salaries according to rules outlined by Jordan’s Social Security Corporation.

“The decision to allow large gatherings and cancel the capacity limit has really brought back the spirit of Ramadan,” said Sufyan Dweiri, who organizes Ramadan tents in Irbid, some 80 km north of Amman.

“Ramadan is solidarity and bringing together people. This spirit was missing during the past two years,” Dweiri said.

Amer Badran, the owner of a cafe in Amman, also expressed relief about the removal of COVID-19 restrictions, expressing hopes that Ramadan and the summer season would help his business to recover.

“In addition to the positive economic impact, removing restrictions has brought back the spirit of Ramadan ... People staying out until dawn at mosques, cafes, restaurants,” he said.



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Jordan's restoration efforts push back on degrading land Jordan's king agreed with US Biden on need to defuse Jerusalem tension

[Lebanese security forces warn of rise in kidnappings for ransom](#)

Thu, 2022-04-28 22:20

BEIRUT: Lebanon's security forces have warned citizens and residents that there has been a rise in kidnappings in the country, with perpetrators seeking large sums of money for the safe return of their victims.

The General Directorate of the Internal Security Forces, or ISF, said that these gangs have been using social media to lure their victims, often through ads on TikTok, claiming they can help with emigration applications.

The gangs are mostly active in the Baalbek-Hermel area and on the Lebanese-Syrian border, but also operate deep in Syrian territory.

A security source told Arab News that between Jan. 1 and April 20, the security services in Lebanon recorded 53 cases of kidnapping in Lebanon.

A few days ago, the Lebanese army's intelligence officers managed to liberate local businessman Akram Jomaa seven hours after he was kidnapped in the town of Lala in the western Bekaa.

The kidnapers had fled with him to the Baalbek-Hermel area in the northern part of Bekaa and tried to sell him to another gang.

They demanded that his family pay a ransom for his return, but he was eventually released between the towns of Dar Al-Waseah and Bouday, in the vicinity of Baalbek.

The army's intelligence officers also managed to free Sadiq Roli, an Egyptian national working for the Al-Sabbah Media Corporation, after he had been detained by his kidnapers for about a month and a half.

On April 16, unidentified gunmen intercepted a car transporting Roli and crew members of a TV company filming a series in Baalbek, near the town of Brital on the Baalbek-Hermel road.

They fired at the car to stop, and kidnapped Roli, while the other passenger managed to escape. The kidnapers demanded a ransom of more than \$1 million in exchange for his release but at midnight on Tuesday, Roli's kidnapers

released him in Baalbek.

Hassan Atoui, 32, was kidnapped by two Syrian men who sold him to a gang for LBP3 million (\$1,975.50).

Atoui was kidnapped in early April in the town of Nabatiyeh, south of Lebanon, after returning home from working in an African country.

Atoui had communicated via social media with a travel agency based in the Hermel region, which had offered to process a visa to the US in exchange for a sum of money.

He agreed to meet the person who claimed he was running the agency, but was subsequently ambushed by unknown persons who took him to the Baalbek-Hermel area where they sold him to another gang. They also stole the money he had in his possession.

The new gang demanded his relatives pay a ransom of \$25,000 in exchange for his release, and sent his family video footage of him being beaten up.

The family's attorney, Ashraf Al-Moussawi, told Arab News: "The Baalbek-Hermel region is witnessing an unprecedented state of security chaos."

"There are organized gangs that include fugitives and others that have been formed recently, and find it easy to earn money through kidnappings, in the absence of (security provided by the) state."

"I have noticed that many gangs are now using women, mostly related to gang members, whom they train ... to lure victims and blackmail them."

"The security services know the members of these gangs by name ... some of them have no previous arrest warrants against them, which means that they are new to the world of kidnapping and crime, but are making a lot of money through this."

Despite the successful release of some victims, no kidnappers have yet been arrested, with the exception of three women suspected of being involved in Jomaa's kidnapping.

The security source noted: "Some of these kidnapping schemes are clever, but what is most dangerous, is that these gangs gather a lot of information about their victims, and have many accomplices helping them in various regions."

"The security services know the members of these gangs by name but cannot arrest them because they are hiding inside Syrian territory (from where they) are running their operations."

The source said Roli was taken into Syrian territory, and Jomaa would have ended up there as well.

Meanwhile, the source said Lebanese citizen George Mufrej, who was the first person to be kidnapped by these gangs, while he was traveling on the road to Beirut airport, was transferred by his kidnappers to Syrian territory and is

still missing.

The border areas in the Hermel region with Syria are not subject to state control, as illegal crossings for smuggling abound, along with those controlled by Hezbollah, which have multiplied since the war began in Syria.

The source said that the Lebanese security services have been placing pressure on the families of the kidnapers to force their sons to comply.

"We need to use the same methods they are using, perhaps it would help in freeing the kidnappees," said the source.

"Roli and Jomaa have been released thanks to this method; we detained the mothers of the kidnapers, raided their homes, and forced the families to contact them and tell them to let the kidnappees go," said the source.

"The kidnapers did not like the taste of their own medicine and have been threatening the army intelligence official in the area, Col. Mohammed Al-Amin," he explained.

The source estimated the age of the kidnapers to range between 25 and 35 years of age.

"These people will one day have to come back from Syria to their homes in the Al-Sharwana neighborhood in Baalbek and Dar Al-Waseah. Some are from the Jaafar, Zeaiter, Mardi, and Saab families, and we will be waiting for them when they return."

The source noted that they have cooperated with the Syrian army where necessary.

"We will tirelessly continue pressuring these gangs. This is the only way to get to them and curb their crimes," said the source.

"We are doing the best we can with the available capabilities; stopping kidnapers is a priority but we have a million tasks ... every day, and fighting terrorism is one of them."



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Extortion, kidnappings on rise in crisis-hit Lebanon
Lebanese border town sounds alarm over Syrian 'takeover'

[UN Yemen envoy seeks to rescue truce, resume flights from Sanaa airport](#)

Thu, 2022-04-28 21:11

AL-MUKALLA: UN Special Envoy for Yemen Hans Grundberg said on Thursday that he is working hard to salvage the two-month truce and resume commercial flights from Houthi-controlled Sanaa amid new reports of dozens of violations of the truce across the country.

Grundberg said that the Houthis and the Yemeni government told him again that

they would stop hostilities during the truce and discuss challenges to resuming commercial flights from Sanaa, urging both sides to stick to their commitments.

“The parties have reiterated their commitment to upholding the truce. We are working tirelessly to help them identify solutions to resume flights from Sanaa,” the UN envoy said in a statement, vowing to keep pressure on the parties till they open roads in Taiz and the other provinces.

“We also continue pushing for progress on opening roads in Taiz and other governorates,” said the envoy. “I have called on the parties to work constructively and in good faith to prioritize the interests of Yemeni civilians.”

The UN-brokered truce came into effect on April 2 as warring factions agreed to stop fighting on all fronts, mainly outside the central city of Marib, open roads in the provinces, resume commercial flights from Sanaa airport and allow fuel ships to enter Hodeidah seaport.

The truce received a heavy blow on Sunday when the first commercial flight from Sanaa airport was postponed as the Houthis insisted on adding dozens of passengers with unofficial passports.

The Yemeni government on Wednesday proposed opening a new passport office in Sanaa to help people in Houthi-controlled areas get passports and to end the impasse over the departure of flights from Sanaa airport.

Hundreds of violations by the Houthis, including the deployment of military forces, tanks and heavy artillery outside Marib, have also threatened to torpedo the truce.

Yemen’s army said that the Houthis violated the truce 74 times in Taiz, Hajjah, Marib, Hodeidah and Juf on Tuesday, accusing the Houthis of sending more military reinforcements to flashpoint sites in Marib, Hodeidah and Hajjah.

On Thursday, the government’s Joint Forces announced unilaterally opening the Al-Jarahi-Hays road in Hodeidah province under the UN-brokered truce, urging the Houthis to open the road from their side.

The current raging conflict in Yemen began in late 2014 when the Iran-backed Houthis militarily seized power in the country and expanded across the country.

The war has killed tens of thousands of people and caused the world’s worst humanitarian crisis, according to the UN.



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UN special envoy for Yemen condemns Houthi attacks on UAE
Houthis snub new UN envoy for Yemen, president welcomes appointment