

Tunisia, Italy sign MoU to boost investments

Author:

Wed, 2022-04-13 12:56

ROME: A memorandum of understanding to boost the investments of Italian companies in Tunisia was signed in Milan by the Foreign Investment Promotion Agency and Promos Italia.

FIPA Director General Abdelbasset Ghanmi and Promos Italia President Alessandro Gelli said at a press event attended by Arab News that the MoU seeks to “establish cooperation between the two structures, devise a joint strategy to improve trade relations between Italy and Tunisia, and encourage the exchange of technical competences and training opportunities.”

Tunisia is an attractive investment destination for Italian companies because of “its geographical closeness, its investment promotion regulations and the low cost of production,” said Gelli.

“Furthermore, Tunisia represents for Italy a bridge over the Mediterranean, a natural production platform for Italian companies committed to diversifying their activities and penetrating new markets in North Africa, the Gulf and French-speaking Africa. In this country, the presence of Italian companies is strong and well rooted.”

According to FIPA, more than 800 Italian companies are established in Tunisia, employing more than 60,000 people.

Bilateral trade in 2021 reached €5.5 billion (\$5.95 billion), up 22 percent from €4.5 billion in 2020.



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Tunisian President Kais Saied promises 'free and fair' elections in talks with EU delegation
Olympic sailor from Tunisia, aged 17, dies in training

[Truck hits tourist bus in Egypt, kills 10 including 4 French](#)

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Wed, 2022-04-13 09:24

CAIRO: A tourist bus collided with a truck on a highway in southern Egypt and burst into flames on Wednesday, killing at least 10 people, including four French and a Belgian, authorities said.

The crash happened on a highway about 43 kilometers (27 miles) south of the city of Aswan, provincial authorities said in a statement. The bus was traveling to the Temple of Esna on the west bank of the Nile River, some 55 kilometers (34 miles) south of the ancient city of Luxor.

Along with the foreign tourists, five Egyptians were killed in the crash. At least 14 others were injured, including eight from France and six from

Belgium, they said. The cause of the crash was not immediately clear. Many bodies were charred, and the injured suffered from burns, bruises and fractures, according to a health official who spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to talk to the media. President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi posted on Twitter that he was closely following the crash and had instructed the government to “provide all medical and treatment care for the victims of the tragic accident.” The Health Ministry said 30 ambulances were sent to the scene and took the casualties to hospitals. Aswan Provincial Governor Ashraf Attia said the injured were in stable condition. Footage that circulated online showed a tourist bus in flames with people trying to put out the fire. “A guest is dying inside,” one person was heard screaming. The bus in the video bore the logo of state-owned Misr Travel. The Cairo-based agency did not respond to a request for comment. Wednesday’s accident came five days after a bus crashed on a highway near the Red Sea, killing three people, including two Polish tourists. Deadly traffic accidents claim thousands of lives every year in Egypt, which has a poor transportation safety record. The crashes and collisions are mostly caused by speeding, bad roads or poor enforcement of traffic laws. Egypt’s official statistics agency says there were around 10,000 road accidents in 2019, the most recent year for which statistics are available, leaving over 3,480 dead. In 2018, there were 8,480 car accidents, causing over 3,080 deaths.





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Egyptian mission finds remains of Roman fort in Aswan
Egypt officials say 13 killed in Aswan road accident

[Palestinians wary of regional food and grain stockpile plan](#)

Tue, 2022-04-12 21:45

RAMALLAH: Authorities in Jordan and Israel are considering setting up a joint regional stockpile for food and wheat reserves against the backdrop of the war in Ukraine, according to Israeli media reports.

The KAN TV channel reported that King Abdullah of Jordan proposed the project during his meeting with Israeli President Isaac Herzog in Amman in late March. It is still in the early planning stages, the channel added, but Israel, Jordan, Egypt and the Palestinian Authority could be part of it and any country suffering from food shortages would be able to draw from the stockpile.

However, some observers have warned that the Palestinian Territories might benefit little from such an arrangement because they do not have the proper infrastructure required for storing wheat flour.

Wheat flour reserves in the Occupied Territories could be exhausted within three weeks, according to the charity Oxfam, and the cost of the food staple has soared by nearly 25 percent as a result of the war in Ukraine.

“Palestinian households are being hit hard by rising global food prices and many are struggling to meet their basic needs,” said Shane Stevenson, Oxfam’s country director in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and Israel.

“The reliance on imports and the constraints forced upon them by Israel’s continuing military occupation, settler violence and land grabs are compounding the food crisis.”

The Palestinian Authority has to import 95 percent of its wheat but owns no food-storage infrastructure and so is forced to rely instead on the Palestinian private sector and Israeli facilities. Meanwhile, Israel imports half of its grain and cereals from Ukraine.

According to the World Food Program, the Ukraine crisis has resulted in increased prices for grain and other food items in the Palestinian Territories. It said that the cost of wheat flour has risen by 23.6 percent, corn oil by 26.3 percent, lentils by 17.6 percent, and table salt by 30 percent, all of which is having a significant effect on Palestinians’

purchasing power.

The organization said that most families in Gaza are buying food on credit and eating lower-quality food in smaller quantities. As prices have risen they have cut back on purchases of more expensive food such as fruit, meat and chicken, which are essential components of a healthy diet.

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Food-insecure Arab countries rely heavily on Black Sea grain imported from Russia and Ukraine, who controlled 30 percent of global wheat exports in 2021, but with the two countries locked in conflict, concerns are growing.

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Meanwhile, an increase in feed prices of about 60 percent has added to the burden on Palestinian livestock breeders, who already face other challenges such as diseases affecting their animals, increasing attacks by settlers on Palestinian pastoral lands, and forced relocation due to Israeli annexation and expansion policies in the West Bank. Breeders have appealed to the Palestinian Authority to abolish the value-added tax on feed to offset rising prices.

Mazen Sinokrot, regional director of the Federation of Arab Food Industries, said that Palestine cannot rely on Israeli food reserves in times of crises.

Samir Hulileh, a Palestinian former deputy minister of economy, told Arab News: "The PA does not import wheat directly from Ukraine because the import is carried out in large quantities. Therefore, the import is carried out

through Israel, which makes the price higher and gives major Israeli importers the ability to control the price.

“And since Palestine does not have ports or suitable storage warehouses for grain, establishing warehouses near the crossings with Israel was proposed to store wheat and all kinds of grain but the project has not been implemented so far.”

He added: “What is stated in the Oxfam report is correct, as wheat and flour that is available for Palestinians is what is there in the stores of Palestinian merchants. As long as there is a stock of grain in Israel, the Palestinians who import from Israel and depend on it will not suffer. But if Israel faced a problem importing wheat and grains, the PA will inevitably suffer.”

Hulileh expressed concern about the Jordanian-Israeli regional stockpile proposal because it refers to the Palestinian Authority as a subordinate to Israel rather than an independent entity. He said it should be a tripartite agreement, not a bilateral deal, because the needs of the Palestinian Authority sometimes differ from the requirements of Israel.

“We must be an independent party to any agreement and not an affiliated party,” he told Arab News.

He urged the Palestinian Ministry of Agriculture to encourage Palestinian farmers to grow grain in Area C, which constitutes about 60 percent of the land in the West Bank, to meet at least part of the Palestinian demand at a reasonable price. He also suggested that the ministry buy crops from the farmers at a suitable price.

“The moment that Israel faces a crisis in importing wheat and grain, we will definitely face a crisis in the Palestinian territories,” Hulileh warned.

Oxfam has called on the international community to urgently adopt a joint, coordinated economic and diplomatic position that challenges Israel’s restrictive policies and allows Palestinians to invest in local food production and infrastructure development.

Abbas Melhem, the head of the Palestinian Farmers Union, said the livestock sector is being destroyed and needs support before it collapses entirely. The union has called on Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammed Shtayyeh to take urgent action to save the sector.



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plans to buy wheat outside tenders to ensure food security: Bloomberg

Jordan jobs safeguards fail to stop companies laying off staff, World Bank claims

Tue, 2022-04-12 21:02

AMMAN: Industrial companies in Jordaa have laid off staff to help cope with accumulated losses as a result of the global pandemic, despite government measures put in place to safeguard jobs, a World Bank report claims.

At the height of the coronavirus outbreak, the government introduced regulations to contain the virus and protect workers affected by nationwide lockdowns that have had a deep impact on the kingdom's economy.

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 SSC also offers incentives to economic sectors classified as the hardest hit by the pandemic under a list that it periodically updates.

Under the regulations, the SSC pays up to 70 percent of employees' salaries, with the remainder covered by the company. However, firms must have their employees covered under social security and also prove they have been badly affected by coronavirus measures.

Prime Minister Bisher Khasawneh has said that the regulations helped protect at least 100,000 jobs in various sectors.

During a recent meeting with industrialists in the northeastern city of Mafrag, Khasawneh said that the defense orders have ensured business sustainability for affected sectors through a range of lending and incentives opportunities.

Khasawneh stopped short of giving an exact date for the lifting of the regulations, saying only that they will remain in place as a social protection tool.

Some sectors have demanded that they be exempted from the regulations, especially those related to laying off staff.

Arab News learned that international firms working in the kingdom have lodged petitions to the government, asking for permission to lay off employees.

Meanwhile, the World Bank recently said that a survey it carried out on a

number of industrial firms in Jordan revealed that half had to lay off all their employees in order to cope with the “massive cash shock” experienced during the pandemic.

According to the bank, 94 percent of Jordan’s industrial companies claimed to have suffered from a liquidity crisis during the pandemic, while 64 percent said that they failed to pay their financial dues to the government and other parties.

The survey was conducted in December last year.

According to economists, lifting the defense orders would increase the unemployment rate, which reached 23.3 percent in 2021.

The government has allocated 20 million Jordanian dinars (\$28.2 million) for the Social Security Corporation’s Estidama program, which targets sectors hit hardest by the pandemic.

The relief program, which was launched last year under a defense order, helps affected institutions pay the full wages of workers.

The Jordan national defense law came into force in mid-March 2020 following a royal decree. The law gives the prime minister wide powers to combat the COVID-19 outbreak in the kingdom.



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Jordan records second day without a COVID-19 death for the first time
Jordan records \$1.4bn rise in local revenue in 2021

Khamenei says Iran's future should not be tied to nuclear talks with world powers

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DUBAI: Iran's supreme leader said on Tuesday that his country's future should not be tied to the success or collapse of nuclear talks with world powers, Iranian state media reported.

He also added that the negotiations to revive a 2015 nuclear deal "are progressing well."

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who has the last say on all state matters such as Iran's nuclear program, made the comments about a month after almost a year of indirect talks between Iran and the United States stalled. Both countries blame each other for lack of "political will" to settle remaining issues.

"Absolutely do not wait for nuclear negotiations in planning for the country and move forward," Khamenei told a gathering of senior officials, state TV reported.

"Do not let your work be disrupted whether the negotiations reach positive or semi-positive or negative results."

In 2018, then-US President Donald Trump left the nuclear deal and reimposed sanctions that have crippled Iran's economy. A year later, Iran started to violate the limits imposed on its nuclear program by the 2015 agreement to make it harder to develop a bomb. Iran says its nuclear program is for peaceful use only.

"The United States broke its promises (by exiting the deal) and now they have reached a dead end while Iran is not in such a situation," Khamenei said, while calling on Iran's nuclear negotiators to continue "resisting Americas' excessive demands."

One of the unresolved issues is whether Washington would remove Iran's elite Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) from the US Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) list, as demanded by Tehran in order for the deal to be revived.

Critics of dropping the IRGC from the list, as well as those open to the idea, say doing so will have little economic effect because other US sanctions force foreign actors to shun the group.

The IRGC, created by the Islamic Republic's late founder Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, is more than just a military force and has enormous political clout. It was placed under sanctions in 2017 and put on the FTO list in April of 2019.

After the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks in the United States, the IRGC was sanctioned as a "specially designated global terrorist" (SDGT) on a separate US list.



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