

Israeli leader talks to Biden about Daesh, Iran

Sun, 2022-02-06 21:23

JERUSALEM: Israel's prime minister on Sunday congratulated President Joe Biden for last week's deadly raid in Syria that killed the leader of Daesh, the Israeli premier's office announced.

In a phone call with the president, Naftali Bennett told Biden that "the world is now a safer place thanks to the courageous operation of the US forces," his office said.

Bennett and Biden also discussed Iranian military activity across the Middle East and efforts to block Iran's nuclear program, it said.

Israel and Iran are arch-enemies, and Israel has raised vocal concerns about US-led efforts to revive the 2015 international nuclear deal between Iran and world powers.

The deal unraveled after President Donald Trump withdrew from it in 2018.

Israel objected to the initial deal and believes any attempts to restore it will not include sufficient safeguards to prevent Iran from developing a nuclear weapons capability.

Israel also says any deal should address Iranian military activity across the region as well as its development of long-range missiles capable of striking Israel.

Earlier Sunday, Bennett said Israel is closely watching world powers' negotiations with Iran in Vienna, but reiterated his position that Israel is not bound by any agreement reached by them.

Israel has repeatedly threatened to strike Iran if it believes it is necessary to halt the country's nuclear program.

Iran says its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes only.

"Anyone who thinks such an agreement will increase stability is wrong," Bennett told his Cabinet early Sunday. "Israel reserves its right to act in any case, with or without an agreement."



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[Iraq receives hundreds of trafficked antiquities from Lebanon](#)

Author:

Sun, 2022-02-06 21:16

BEIRUT: Iraq on Sunday received hundreds of trafficked antiquities from Lebanon.

The artifacts had been in Nabu Museum, a private institution in Lebanon's Byblos region, and the handover took place at the National Museum, with the items given to Iraq's embassy in Lebanon.

"A total of 337 artifacts were handed over, 331 of which are cuneiform and six others that were among 32 disputed pieces," said Lebanese Culture Minister Mohammed Wissam Al-Murtada. "Iraqi, Syrian and Lebanese committees verified that the six pieces belong to Iraq, so it was decided that they should be handed over as well."

Al-Murtada described the handover as "a gesture embodying cooperation between Lebanon and Iraq in the cultural field."

Speaking about whether or not these disputed artifacts had been smuggled from Iraq, he said: "Lebanon's General Directorate of Antiquities had previously revealed in a 2018 report that some pieces may have Iraqi origins."

He added that the ministry "consequently assigned a committee of technical specialists to look into these disputed pieces."

Archeology expert Dr. Jaafar Fadlalah told Arab News: "The owner of the Nabu Museum, who is a well-known businessman, obtained the antiquities displayed in his museum either by buying them from markets specialized in antiques or from auctions. When they were displayed in the museum, some of these pieces were found to belong to either Syria or Iraq."

"These artifacts should thus be returned to their rightful owners, while the disputed pieces remain in place until their ownership is proven. This is a rule followed in all museums around the world."

"During the wars in Lebanon, Iraq and Syria, a large number of antiquities were lost, and some of them were seized later, either during smuggling operations or found in antique shops."

"However, several artifacts may still be stored by those who acquired them but never displayed them, so it is impossible to know where they are and who their rightful owners are."

"The ceremony that was held at the National Museum to hand over the pieces to the Iraqi authorities is to encourage collectors to preserve the antiquities."

He said that Lebanon had previously returned many pieces "without any celebrations" because they had been seized either during smuggling operations or found in local markets.

Nabu Museum owner Jawad Adra emphasized the "ongoing communication" with countries of the region to revive and preserve heritage, and that this understanding "annoys smugglers because we embarrass them."

The General Directorate of the Internal Security Forces announced on Sunday the recovery of 300-year-old antiquities belonging to the ancient Saint John Church in Byblos, after they were stolen in late January.

It said that three people had been arrested. One was Lebanese, another was Syrian, and the third was Egyptian.



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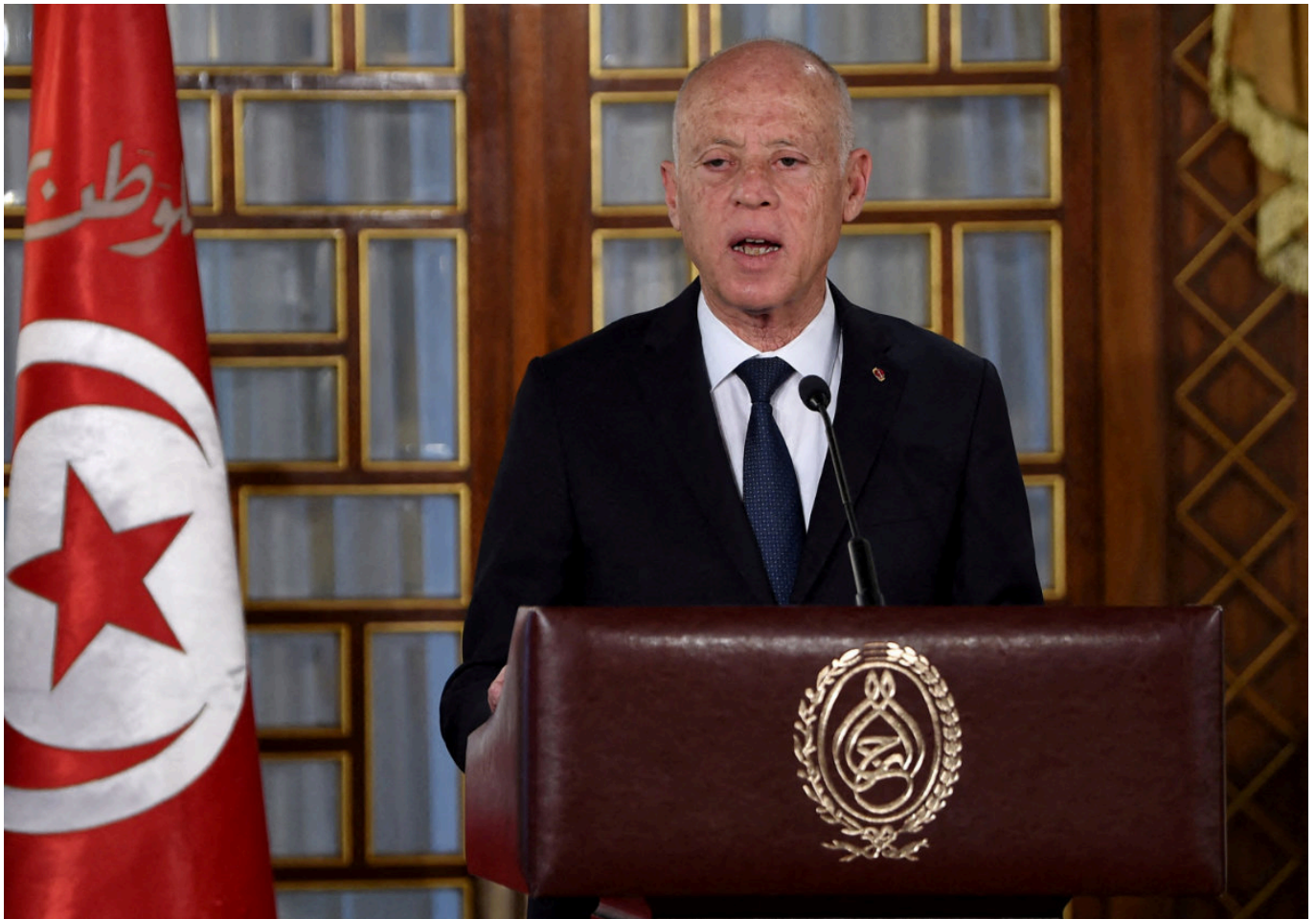
Enhanced agreement between US and Egypt to prevent antiquities trafficking
Iraq gets back looted ancient artifacts from US, others

[Tunisian president dissolves supreme judicial council](#)

Sun, 2022-02-06 03:08

TUNIS: Tunisia President Kais Saied said on Sunday he has decided to dissolve the Supreme Judicial Council, the body that deals with judicial independence, a controversial move that will spark a struggle over the judiciary. Saied said the council has become a thing of the past, adding that he will issue a temporary decree to the council. He gave no other details about the decree.

(Developing story)



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Tunisia's president says constitution must be amended
Tunisia ruling party suspends PM as rift deepens

[Abu Dhabi crown prince, Egyptian president meet China's Xi Jinping in Beijing](#)

Author:

Sun, 2022-02-06 01:36

LONDON: Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed on Saturday held talks with Chinese President Xi Jinping to discuss ways of developing ties and opportunities for increasing joint cooperation, especially in investment

and economy.

The two leaders also discussed the latest regional and global issues of common concern, Emirates state news agency WAM reported.

Sheikh Mohammed arrived in China on Friday to attend the opening ceremony of the Beijing 2022 Olympic Winter Games, following an invitation from Xi. Sheikh Mohammed congratulated the president on the Chinese New Year, and thanked him for the invitation to attend the Olympic games.

I had the pleasure of meeting with President Xi Jinping in Beijing today. We discussed the robust partnership between our two nations & ways to strengthen these growing ties. Our talks covered areas of mutual interest including ways to promote peace & stability in the Middle East pic.twitter.com/bGl4vSg9U3

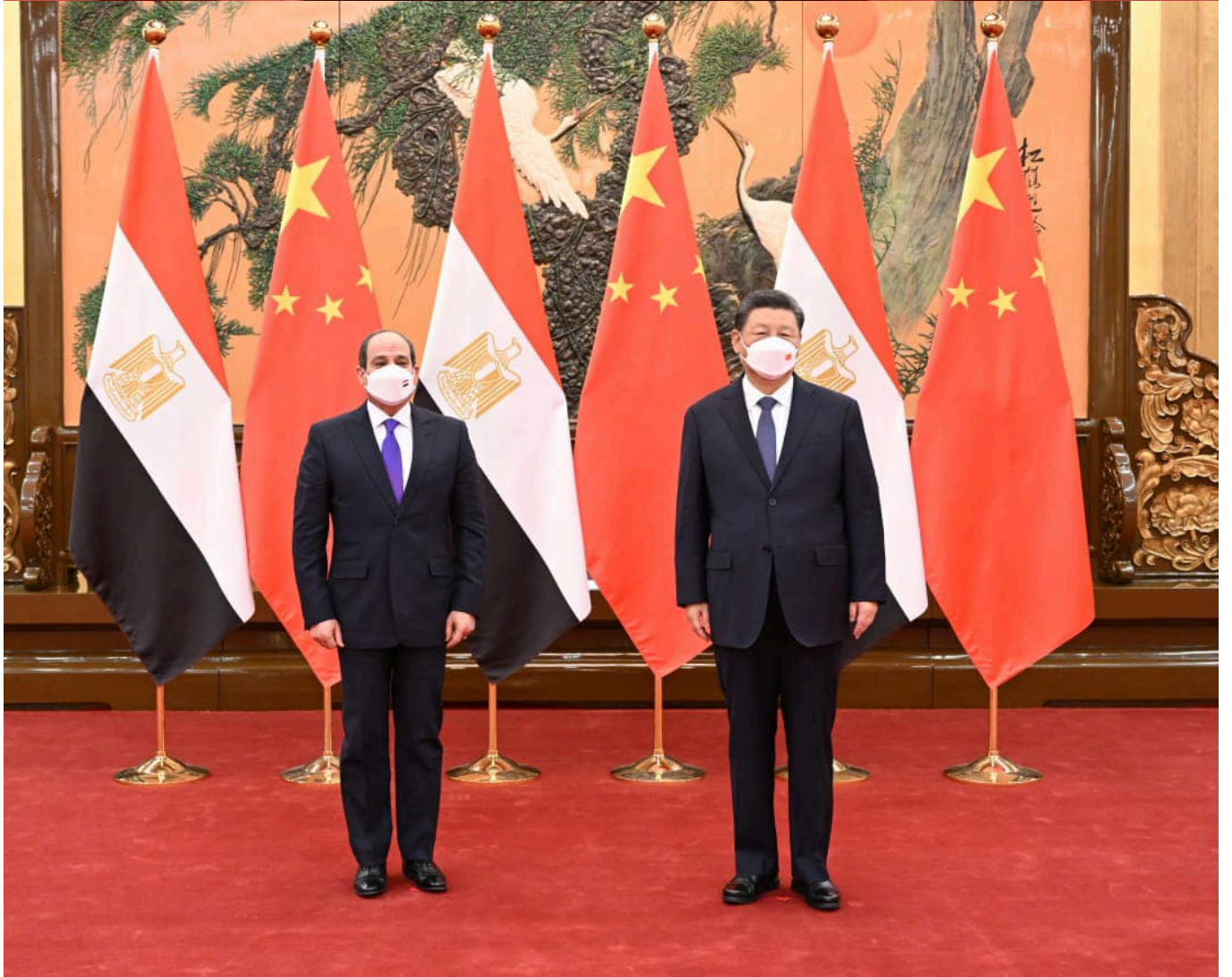
– محمد بن زايد (@MohamedBinZayed) [February 5, 2022](#)

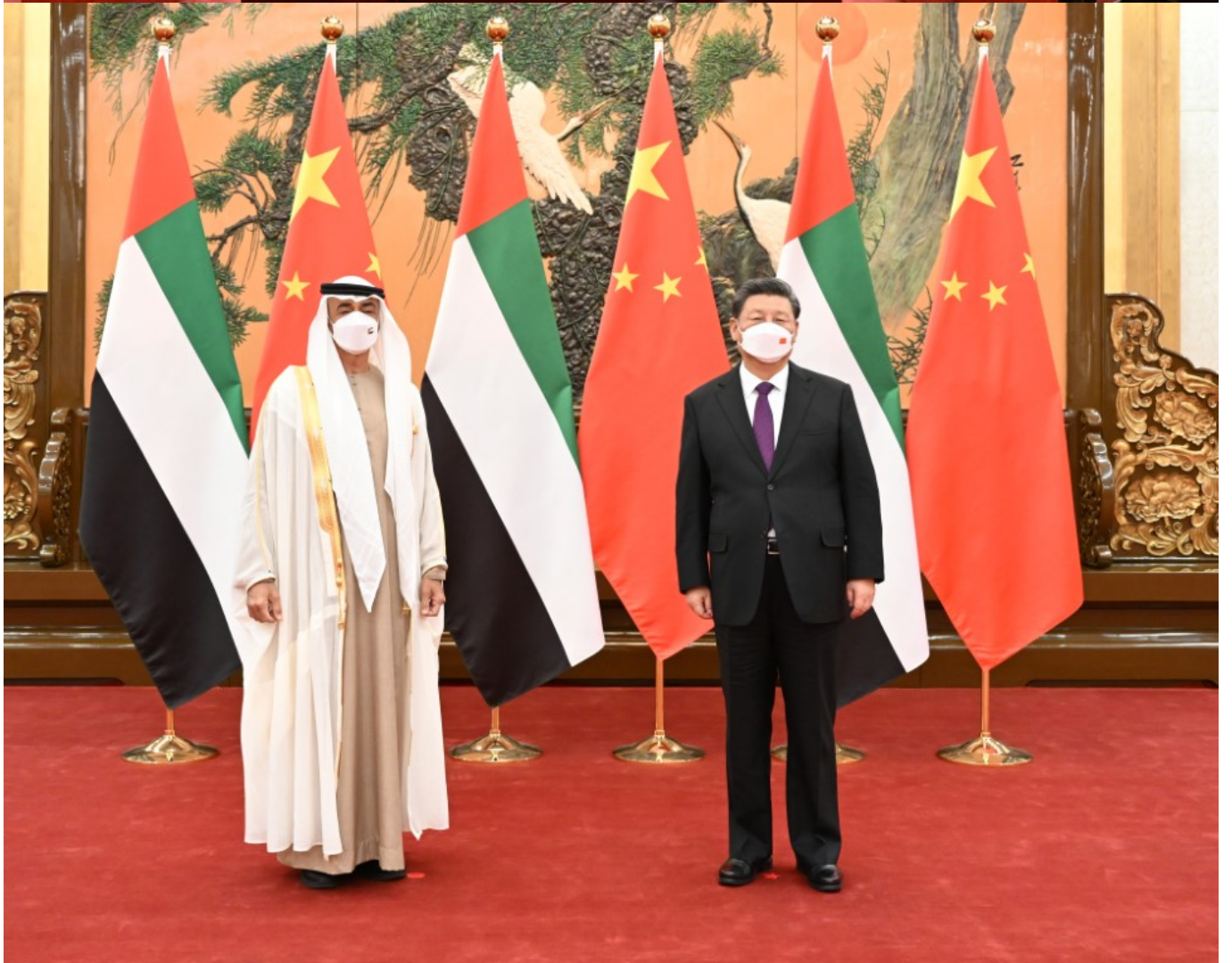
Meanwhile, Xi also met with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing to discuss strengthening communication and political consultation between the two countries on regional and international issues.

The Chinese leader said his country attaches special importance to its relations with Egypt in view of its pivotal role in the Middle East, Africa and Eastern Mediterranean, El-Sisi's spokesman Bassam Rady said.

"In the context of the comprehensive strategic partnership between the two countries, the (Egyptian) president affirmed Egypt's keenness to build on the momentum reached in bilateral meetings" and develop bilateral cooperation in many fields, especially development, economic and trade, and to attract more Chinese investments to take advantage of the promising opportunities available in Egypt in various sectors.

Rady said both sides discussed enhancing cooperation in scientific research activities, technology transfer in the pharmaceutical industries, manufacturing COVID-19 vaccines, industrial technologies, communications and information technology, electric vehicles and health care.





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UAE's Sheikh Mohammed, Saudi Arabia's Princess Reema attend Beijing Winter Olympics opening ceremony
France to provide UAE with military support to protect airspace

[Some 50 Iranian MPs test positive for COVID-19 as Omicron rages](#)

Author:

Sun, 2022-02-06 01:13

TEHRAN: Some 50 members of Iran's 290-seat parliament have contracted COVID-19, a senior MP said on Saturday as the omicron variant spreads unabated across the county.

MP Alireza Salimi, speaking to YJC, a news agency linked to Iran's state TV, said this week's parliamentary session would be held in accordance with health regulations.

Parliament was suspended for two weeks last April due to an outbreak among MPs. In the early days of the pandemic, several lawmakers died from the virus.

Iran has seen a surge in cases after a brief respite following mass vaccinations. In recent days it has reported an average of more than 30,000 new infections a day. However, the number of cases over the previous 24 hours was 23,130, the Health Ministry said on Saturday.

Iran, with a population of about 85 million, has reported more than 6.5 million infections and more than 132,500 coronavirus-related deaths since the pandemic began.

More than 50 million people have received two doses of coronavirus vaccine, and more than 19 million have received three doses.



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