

# Report: Lebanon could turn into 'Venezuela of the Mediterranean'

Wed, 2021-07-21 22:30

BEIRUT: The cost of food in Lebanon has skyrocketed 700 percent over the past two years, and more importantly, the increase has picked up pace in recent weeks, according to a Crisis Observatory report released on Wednesday.

The Crisis Observatory is an interdisciplinary research program launched by the American University of Beirut (AUB) to track the repercussions of the economic crisis in Lebanon.

The report reflected the current state of the country as malls and shops, usually bustling with Eid Al-Adha celebrations, were empty and stagnant this week as much of Lebanon's middle class can no longer afford to go shopping due to the dramatic increase in prices.

All of this is amid the country's inability to form a government as Lebanon is teetering on the edge of social and economic collapse.

While the AUB Crisis Observatory report revealed staggering financial shortcomings, it also concluded that Lebanon could turn into the "Venezuela of the Mediterranean" and it predicted a majority of the Lebanese people would struggle to secure their minimum needs without the help of relief institutions.

The report said the exponential and weekly increase of basic food prices is an indicator that the country is "slipping into hyperinflation."



The price of a basic food basket increased by more than 50 percent in less than a month, Crisis Observatory at the American University of Beirut said. (AFP)

The price of a basic food basket increased by more than 50 percent in less than a month, it said, while clothing has become somewhat of a luxury. Families complained about their inability to buy new clothes for their children on Eid Al-Adha because, as one mother put it, the pants she used to buy at 30,000 pounds are now sold for 400,000 pounds.

## **FASTFACT**

**The American University of Beirut Crisis Observatory report concluded that Lebanon could turn into the ‘Venezuela of the Mediterranean’ and it predicted a majority of the Lebanese people would struggle to secure their minimum needs without the help of relief institutions.**

“We were expecting to see more customers on Eid Al-Adha, but people’s purchasing power has plummeted,” Therese, owner of a bar in Beirut, said.

“Lebanese expatriates who came to summer in Lebanon have helped revive the tourism a little bit, but we are afraid of what will happen once they leave.”

The report, accessed by Arab News, said the price of basic food items “have dramatically increased in the first half of July,” according to the price lists of Lebanon’s economy ministry and the price courses conducted regularly by the observatory’s researchers.

According to the observatory, “the prices for basic food items, including

vegetables, grains, dairy products, beef, eggs, and oil, have soared by more than 700 percent since July 2019, before the financial and economic collapse.”

The price of local bread, which is supposed to be subsidized with a wheat and flour import at the official exchange rate, has increased by 233 percent since May 2020, the report said.

Based on food prices in the first half of July, a family of five was spending more than 3.5 million pounds on food per month. That figure does not take into account the additional costs for water, electricity or cooking gas.

“According to these prices, a family’s budget just for food is around five times the minimum wage, which stands at 675,000 pounds,” the report said. “That was once worth almost \$450, but today barely fetches \$30 on the black market.”

The observatory linked the inflation of food prices to the devaluation of the Lebanese pound against the US dollar, where the Lebanese currency has lost more than 90 percent of its value in the past two years. According to the report, the inflation “is expected to continue with the projected additional decline in the Lebanese pound’s value in the coming months.”

The fate of Lebanon remains unknown amid the collapse of state institutions.

The country’s politicians have failed to form a government, almost a year after the resignation of Hassan Diab’s government in the aftermath of the catastrophic Beirut blast on Aug. 4, 2020, which killed 211 people and injured more than 6,000.

Nine months after he was designated as prime minister, Saad Hariri announced his inability to form a government on July 15 and stepped down. He failed to reach an agreement with Lebanon President Michel Aoun over a second lineup that Hariri had presented to him.

The parliamentary consultations, aimed at designating a new Sunni figure to form a government, are set to take place on Monday. All of this despite a Sunni resentment against the Lebanese president and his political party’s way of dealing with the prime minister’s constitutional powers.

Imams and khatibs heavily criticized Lebanese politicians in their Eid khutbahs. Some of them even mentioned Aoun by name in an attempt to hold all politicians responsible for the poverty, shortages, and struggles that Lebanon has been grappling with for months.



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Israeli shells southern Lebanon, escalating military tension

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## [German woman caught Covid in Iran jail, daughter says](#)

Author:

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Wed, 2021-07-21 22:24

BERLIN: The daughter of a German-Iranian woman held in Iran said Wednesday that her mother has contracted Covid-19 in prison and her life is in "imminent danger."

Nahid Taghavi was arrested at her Tehran apartment in October after years fighting for human rights in Iran, in particular for women's rights and freedom of expression, according to the human rights group IGMF. According to Taghavi's daughter, Mariam Claren, the 66-year-old architect is being held in Tehran's notorious Evin prison, where she is awaiting sentencing on a "security charge."

“At the beginning of this month, a Covid-19 outbreak started in the women’s wing” of the prison and “authorities have not implemented the required hygiene measures,” Claren said in a statement.

Taghavi has tested positive for the virus and her condition is “very bad,” Claren said.

“She is suffering from a fever, chills and severe pain in her limbs,” she said, noting that her mother suffers from pre-existing conditions including high blood pressure and diabetes.

“For someone at her age with pre-existing health conditions and now testing positive for Covid-19, her life is in imminent danger,” she said, calling for her mother’s immediate release.

Germany’s foreign ministry said in October that it was aware of the arrest of a German-Iranian woman in Iran, but did not name the detained citizen.

Iran is rushing to contain a new record surge in Covid cases, with government offices, banks and many businesses shut in the capital Tehran on Tuesday.

Already hit by the deadliest outbreak in the Middle East, the Islamic republic has been gripped by what authorities warned would be a “fifth wave” driven by the aggressive Delta variant.



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Iranian-German rights activist Nahid Taghavi arrested in Tehran Video shows Iranian police opening fire during water protest

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## Freed Guantanamo inmate reunites with Moroccan family after 19 years

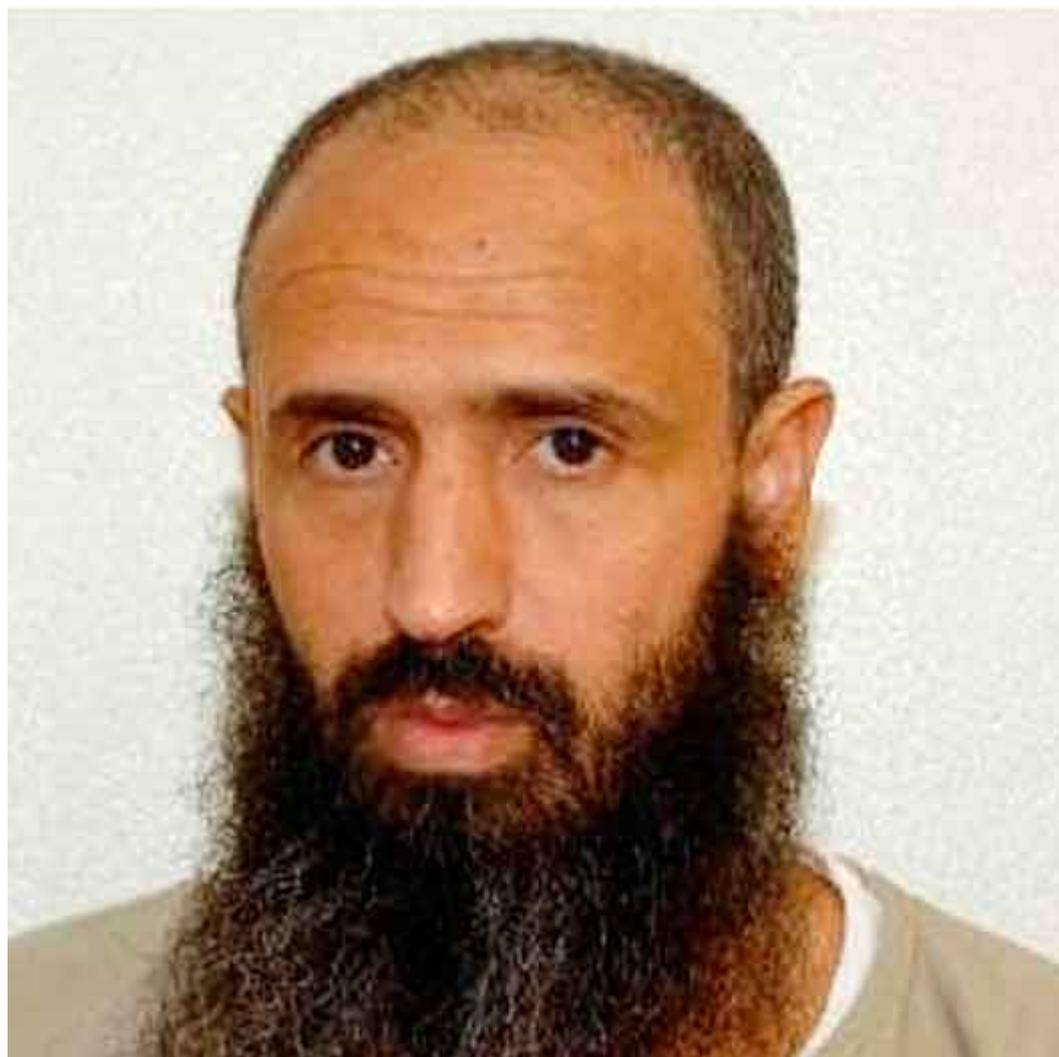
Wed, 2021-07-21 01:01

RABAT: A Moroccan held for 19 years without charges at the US detention facility for terror suspects at Guantanamo Bay has rejoined his family after questioning by police in this North African kingdom, his lawyer said on Tuesday.

Abdullatif Nasser, now 56, is the first detainee at the Guantanamo Bay center to be transferred into the custody of his home country under the administration of President Joe Biden. Upon his arrival on Monday, he was questioned by the National Division of the Judicial Police in Casablanca “on suspicion of committing terrorist acts” before being set free.

“He is now with his family whom he hadn’t seen in almost two decades,” Nasser’s Moroccan attorney, Khalil Idrissi, said.

Nasser, who was not available for comment, wants only to catch up with his old life, his attorney said.



Abdullatif Nasser. (AP)

No further action against his client is expected, he added. Nasser had been a member of a nonviolent but illegal Moroccan group in the 1980s, according to his Pentagon file.

He had been recruited to fight in Chechnya but ended up in Afghanistan, training at an Al-Qaeda camp. He was captured after fighting US forces and sent to Guantanamo in May 2002.

A review board had recommended repatriation for Nasser in July 2016, but he remained in the detention center at a US naval base in Cuba throughout the presidency of Donald Trump, who opposed closing the site.

In announcing Nasser's transfer home, the Pentagon cited the board's determination that his detention was no longer necessary to protect US national security.

Almost 800 detainees have passed through Guantanamo. Of the 39 remaining, 10 are eligible for transfers out. They are from Yemen, Pakistan, Tunisia and Algeria.



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Blinken says Guantanamo prison should close

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# Muslims mark Eid Al-Adha holiday in pandemic's shadow

Wed, 2021-07-21 00:42

CAIRO: Muslims around the world were observing on Tuesday yet another major holiday in the shadow of the pandemic and amid growing concerns about the highly infectious delta variant of the coronavirus.

This year, the Eid Al-Adha holiday comes as many countries battle the delta variant first identified in India, prompting some to impose new restrictions or appeal for people to avoid congregating and follow safety protocols.

Indonesia marked a grim Eid Al-Adha amid a devastating new wave of coronavirus cases in the nation.

Vice President Ma'ruf Amin, also an influential religious leader, appealed to people to perform holiday prayers at home with their families.

"Don't do crowds," Amin said in televised remarks ahead of the start of the holiday.

"Protecting oneself from the COVID-19 pandemic is obligatory."

The surge is believed to have been fueled by travel during another holiday – the Eid Al-Fitr festival in May – and by the rapid spread of the delta variant.

In Malaysia, measures have been tightened after a sharp spike in infections despite a national lockdown since June 1 – people are banned from traveling back to their hometowns or crossing districts to celebrate. House visits and customary trips to graveyards are also banned.

Healthy worshippers are allowed to gather for prayers in mosques, with strict social distancing and no physical contact. Ritual animal sacrifice is limited to mosques and other approved areas.

Health Director-General Noor Hisham Abdullah has urged Malaysians not to "repeat irresponsible behavior," adding that travel and celebrations during Eid Al-Fitr and another festival on the island of Borneo led to new clusters of cases.



A girl smiles as she takes part in the Eid Al-Adha prayer on Tuesday in Al-Madras neighborhood of Sudan's capital Khartoum. (AFP)

"Let us not in the excitement of celebrating the Feast of Sacrifice cause us all to perish because of COVID-19," he said in a statement.

Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin urged Muslims to stay home.

"I appeal to you all to be patient and abide by the rules," he said in a televised speech on the eve of the festival.

The World Health Organization has reported that globally, COVID-19 deaths had climbed after a period of decline. The reversal has been attributed to low vaccination rates, relaxed mask rules and other precautions, and the delta variant.

Lockdowns severely curtailed Eid Al-Adha festivities in Sydney and Melbourne, Australia's two largest cities.

Sydney resident Jihad Dib, a New South Wales state government lawmaker, said the city's Muslims were sad but understood why they would be confined to their homes with no visitors allowed.

"It's going to be the first Eid in my life I don't hug and kiss my mum and dad," Dib told Australian Broadcasting Corp.

Iran on Monday imposed a week-long lockdown on the capital, Tehran, and the surrounding region as the country struggles with another surge in the coronavirus pandemic, state media reported. The lockdown begins on Tuesday. Not everyone is imposing new restrictions. In Bangladesh, authorities have allowed an eight-day pause in the country's strict lockdown for the holiday that health experts say could be dangerous.

In Egypt, Essam Shaban traveled to the southern province of Sohag to spend Eid Al-Adha with his family.

He said ahead of the start of the holiday that he planned to pray at a mosque there on Tuesday while taking precautions such as bringing his own prayer rug and wearing a mask.

"We want this Eid to pass by peacefully without any infections," he said. "We must follow instructions."

Shaban had been looking forward to pitching in with his brothers to buy a buffalo for slaughtering, going door-to-door to give some of the meat to the poor and to the traditional festive meal later in the day with his extended family.

"It's usually boisterous with laughter and bickering with the kids," he said. "It's great."

But others will be without loved ones.

In India, where Eid Al-Adha starts on Wednesday, Tahir Qureshi would always go with his father for prayers and then to visit family and friends. His father died in June after contracting the virus during a surge that devastated the country, and the thought of having to spend the holiday without him is heartbreaking.

"It will be difficult without him," he said.

India's religious scholars have been urging people to exercise restraint and adhere to health protocols.

Some states have restricted large gatherings and are asking people to observe the holiday at home.

Meanwhile, the pandemic's economic fallout, which threw millions of Indians into financial hardship, has many saying they cannot afford to buy sacrificial livestock.

In Kashmir, a disputed, businessman Ghulam Hassan Wani is among those cutting back.

"I used to sacrifice three or four sheep, but this year we can hardly afford one," Wani said.





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## [Jordan should continue with economic reforms, US Treasury's Yellen tells king](#)

Author:

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1626814683459481500

Tue, 2021-07-20 20:54

WASHINGTON: US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen encouraged Jordan's King Abdullah on Tuesday to continue to implement economic reforms to boost sustainable growth and job creation, the Treasury said in a statement. During a meeting with King Abdullah in Washington, Yellen noted the challenges that Jordan faces, complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic and "underscored the broad partnership between the United States and Jordan" including efforts to combat the financing of Middle East terrorism, the Treasury said.





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