

France's Le Drian to head to Lebanon May 5-6 for crisis talks

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PARIS/BEIRUT: French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian will visit Lebanon next week to discuss the political crisis there with senior officials, two sources aware of the matter said on Friday.

The trip comes after Paris said it had started putting in place measures to restrict entry to France for some Lebanese officials on the grounds that they were blocking efforts to find a solution to Lebanon's political and economic crisis.

The two sources said Le Drian would travel on May 5 and hold meetings on May 6.

He has requested meetings with President Michel Aoun and Shiite Hezbollah ally and Speaker of the Parliament Nabih Berri, according to a note sent by the embassy.

Le Drian has also asked to meet Gebran Bassil, the leader of Lebanon's biggest Christian political bloc and Aoun's son-in-law, who is under US sanctions for alleged corruption and his ties to Hezbollah.

France has spearheaded international efforts to rescue Lebanon from its deepest crisis since the 1975-1990 civil war, but after eight months has failed so far to persuade squabbling politicians to adopt a reform roadmap or form a new government to unlock international aid.

France's foreign ministry did not confirm or deny Le Drian's planned trip. With the European Union, Paris has been working on creating a sanctions regime for Lebanon that could ultimately see asset freezes and travel bans. However, that is likely to take time. As part of efforts to raise pressure on key Lebanese actors, France intends to stop issuing visas to certain officials, diplomats have said.

Diplomatic sources have said that Bassil could be one of those targeted, although he has no specific ties to France.



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Lebanon's collapse is like the Titanic's sinking, only without the music – Le Drian
France's Le Drian urges EU to help steady Lebanon

[Iran 'toying with life' of dissident filmmaker: Amnesty](#)

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Fri, 2021-04-30 18:07

PARIS: Iran is "toying with the life" of dissident filmmaker Mohammad Nourizad who is seriously ill in prison after torture which allegedly included multiple injections of an unknown substance into his genitals, Amnesty International charged on Friday.

Nourizad, who has written and directed several films, has been serving since

August 2019 a prison sentence totalling over 17 years on charges of insulting supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, according to Amnesty.

Amnesty said his health has been deteriorating in Tehran's Evin prison due to "prolonged denial of access to adequate specialized medical care for his heart disease and diabetes."

Doctors have urged that he be admitted to hospital for treatment of a heart condition but the authorities have refused this so far, the rights group added.

"The Iranian authorities are cruelly toying with the life of" Nourizad, it said.

Amnesty cited a letter which it said Nourizad had written from Evin in April where he described how he had been injected with an unknown substance "eight times into my penis."

"I immediately wrote a letter to the head of the prison requesting that I urgently be sent to the Legal Medicine Organization for examination in order to reveal what substance I was injected with eight times. I have not heard from him since," it quoted him as saying.

Amnesty International said it was horrified that "he has been subjected to torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, including sexual violence and forced administration of chemical substances."

It also said that the lack of attention from the authorities had resulted in Nourizad resorting to self-harm in a plea for his demands to be answered.

His daughter said in a recording posted online that at the end of their prison visit in March 2021 her father made cuts to his face, head and neck with a razor, resulting in heavy bleeding.

Meanwhile, the authorities have also arrested his son, Ali Nourizad and have sentenced him to three and a half years in prison, Amnesty said, denouncing "an attempt to place further pressure on Mohammad Nourizad."



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Amnesty director slams Turkey over rights abuses
Amnesty slams 'inhumanity of Iran's criminal justice system'

Prince Muhammad bin Talal of Jordan passes away aged 80

Thu, 2021-04-29 21:35

AMMAN: Jordan's Prince Muhammad bin Talal has passed away at the age of 80, the Royal Hashemite Court announced on Thursday.

Born in Amman on October 2, 1940, he was the second son of King Talal of Jordan and the younger brother of King Hussein of Jordan, and served as Crown Prince from 1952 until 1962.

"The Royal Hashemite Court mourns the passing of His Royal Highness Prince Muhammed bin Talal, the personal representative of His Majesty. Prince Muhammed, may his soul rest in peace, passed away on Thursday, 29 April 2021," a statement said.

The statement added that Prince Muhammad will be buried after prayers on Friday in the royal shrines at the Royal Guard Command Mosque.



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King Abdullah II declares Jordan 'strong' as defendants in 'sedition' case released
Jordanian government to announce details of arrests

[Turkish opposition slams government for mismanaging vaccine supply](#)

Thu, 2021-04-29 20:29

ANKARA: Turkey is battling an acute shortage of vaccines as the country enters an 18-day lockdown to curb the highest coronavirus disease (COVID-19) infection rates in Europe.

Despite the shortage, which is expected to last for two months, Ankara is still sending vaccines to Libya, sparking opposition anger. It claims that the ruling Justice and Development Party cannot manage the pandemic effectively.

Meral Danis Bestas, group deputy chairwoman of pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party, said Turkey has been sending COVID-19 vaccines to the Free Syrian Army (FSA) militants, who have been deployed to Libya since early 2020 to fight alongside the Government of National Accord.

“Even when it is impossible to get vaccinated in exchange for a fee, the limited amount of vaccines are being sent the FSA in Libya,” she said.

Turkey has received 28 million doses so far, and only 8 million doses are left, which does not meet the needs of those waiting for a second dose.

Opposition parties have blamed the critical shortage of vaccines on the over-dependence on China. They accuse Beijing of using vaccine procurement as a bargaining chip to convince Turkey to extradite Uighurs who fled to the country.

The slightest disagreement between the two countries has led to occasional halts in vaccine supply.

“The negotiations about the vaccine were carried out by the foreign minister and not the health minister. Therefore, the failures in foreign policy have reached such a point that public safety is threatened,” Bestas said.

Turkey had only relied on using vaccines developed by China’s Sinovac. Ankara recently approved vaccines from Pfizer-BioNTech.

The country also increased intervals between two doses for Pfizer-BioNTech vaccines from four to eight weeks.

Elsewhere, in a long-awaited move, Turkey has signed a deal for 50 million doses of Russia’s Sputnik V vaccine, which will start arriving next month and should help address a short-term fall in supply. But it has been revealed that the Turkish company which signed the agreement with Russia is owned by a former AKP local official.

On Thursday, the Ankara office of Turkey’s Healthcare and Social Service Laborers Union advised Health Minister Fahrettin Koca to stop giving promises about vaccinations in the country and criticized him for being distanced from science and reality.

In September 2020, Koca publicly announced that 50 million doses of Chinese vaccines were coming, but a fall in supply soon followed.



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Doctors say Turkish COVID-19 outbreak worse than reported as hospitalizations swell

[Our warplanes can reach Iran, Israeli minister warns amid nuclear talks](#)

Author:

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Thu, 2021-04-29 17:00

JERUSALEM: An Israeli cabinet minister sharpened his country's warnings

against what it would deem a bad new nuclear deal between Iran and world powers, saying war with Tehran would be sure to follow.

As President Joe Biden explores a possible US return to the 2015 deal to contain Iran's nuclear program that his predecessor Donald Trump abandoned, Israel has stepped up calls for more sweeping curbs to be imposed on sensitive Iranian technologies and projects.

Iran, which this week resumed indirect talks with US envoys in Vienna on reversing its retaliatory violations of the deal in exchange for the removal of sanctions reimposed by Trump, has ruled out any further limitations on Iranian actions.

Reiterating Israel's position that it does not consider itself bound by the diplomacy, Intelligence Minister Eli Cohen said: "A bad deal will send the region spiralling into war."

"Anyone seeking short-term benefits should be mindful of the longer-term," he told Reuters. "Israel will not allow Iran to attain nuclear arms. Iran has no immunity anywhere. Our planes can reach everywhere in the Middle East – and certainly Iran."

Iran says its nuclear ambitions are peaceful.

Cohen said that in addition to denying Iran the means of enriching uranium and developing ballistic missiles, world powers should make it stop "destabilising other countries" and funding militants.

The Vienna talks have been overshadowed by what appeared to be mutual sabotage attacks on Israeli and Iranian ships, as well as an explosion at Iran's Natanz enrichment plant that Tehran blamed on Israel.

Cohen, in keeping with Israeli policy, declined all comment.

Israel sent senior delegates to Washington this week to discuss Iran with US counterparts. The White House said the allies agreed on the "significant threat" posed by Iran's regional behavior.

The Israeli ambassador to the United States, Gilad Erdan, said the Biden administration would consult with Israel about any new nuclear deal – the prospects for which he deemed hazy.

"We assess, to our regret, that the Iranians will refuse such a discussion," he told Israel's public radio station Kan, alluding to Iran's insistence on restoring the original deal, which Trump called too limited in scope and duration.

"But if it emerges that we were mistaken, and the Americans succeed in securing a discussion of a different, better deal, we will certainly be part of that discussion. We made that clear and the (Biden) administration welcomes this, of course."



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Shakeup in Iran's presidential office after leaked tapeIran's Zarif holds talks with Houthi leader in Oman