

Jordan demands Israel end Al-Aqsa 'provocations'

Author:

Tue, 2021-01-26 00:54

AMMAN: Jordan urged Israel on Monday to stop blocking restoration work at Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa mosque compound, Islam's third holiest site. Jordanian foreign ministry spokesman Daifallah Alfayez said he had sent a "protest note" demanding Israel "refrain from such violations and provocations, and respect the mandate of Jordan in administering Muslim holy sites."

There was no immediate response from Israel.

Under a 1994 peace deal, the Jewish state recognizes Jordan's oversight of Muslim holy sites in east Jerusalem, the Palestinian sector of the city occupied and annexed by Israel since 1967.

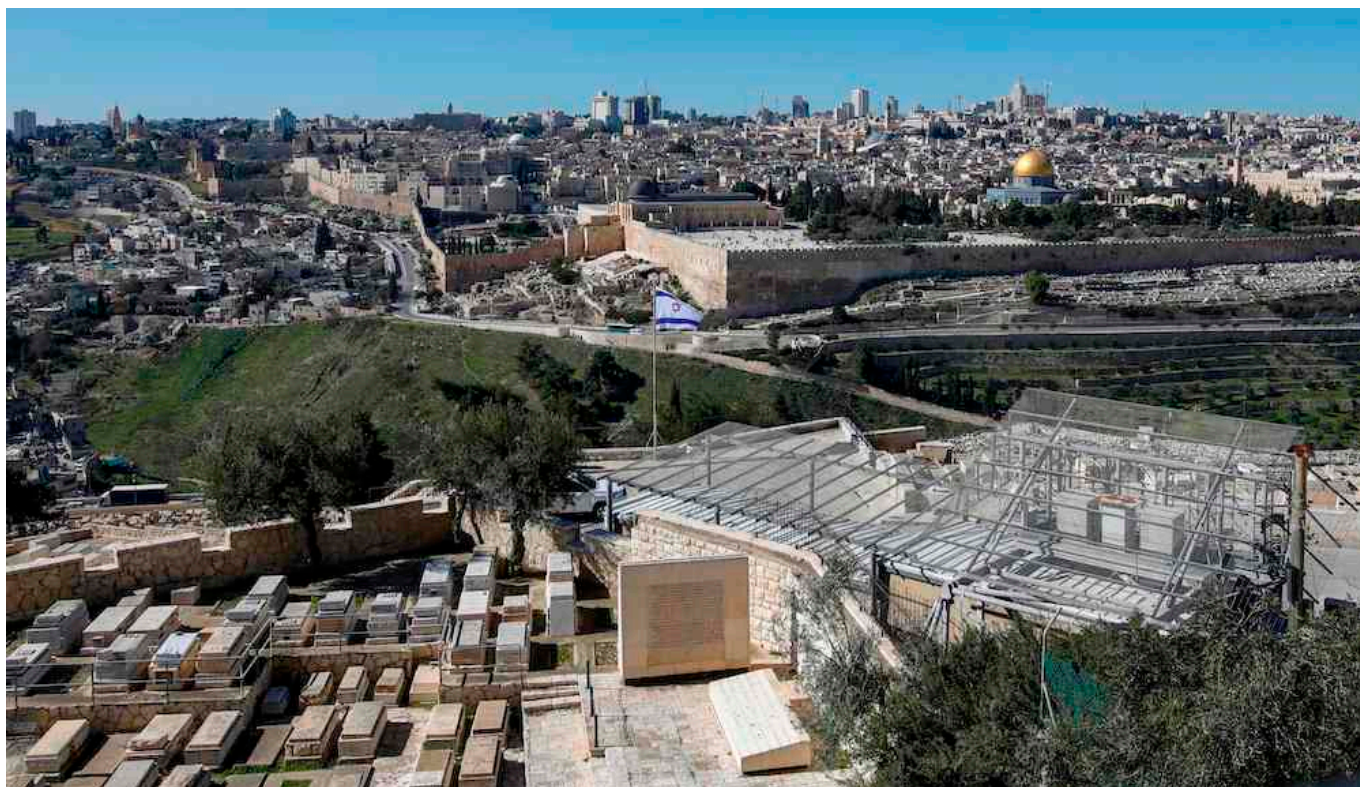
Known by Muslims as the Haram Al-Sharif, or Holy Sanctuary, and as the Temple Mount by Jews, the compound houses the golden Dome of the Rock shrine and Al-Aqsa mosque.

Jordan, which said Israel's police had interrupted restoration work on the Dome of the Rock," stressed that the Waqf, the Islamic endowments authority, was "the sole authority responsible for the supervision and maintenance of Al-Aqsa."

On Sunday, the Waqf accused Israeli police of blocking "all reconstruction projects in the compound," including stopping building supplies and "the entry of basic materials necessary for maintenance."

The Waqf said maintenance teams were "unable to maintain or repair the most basic facilities of the mosque and its employees are exposed to prosecution, threats of arrest and expulsion."

On Saturday, the Waqf said police stopped work by "photocopying the identity cards of workers and technicians, preventing them from working and threatening them with arrest if work continues."



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Israeli police prevent Dome of the Rock repairs
Israeli warplanes strike Syria, kill 4, including children

[Iraq hangs three convicted of 'terrorism': security source](#)

Author:

Tue, 2021-01-26 00:36

NASIRIYAH: Three Iraqis convicted of "terrorism" were hanged on Monday, a security source said, days after a deadly double suicide attack in a crowded Baghdad marketplace killed over 30 people. The reported hangings came after rights groups warned Iraq may authorize a spree of such executions in a show of strength following the bombings on

Thursday, which were claimed by the Daesh group.

"Three people convicted under Article 4 of the anti-terror law were executed on Monday at the Nasiriyah central prison," the security source told AFP, on condition of anonymity.

On Sunday, an official from Iraq's presidency told AFP more than 340 execution orders "for terrorism or criminal acts" were ready to be carried out.

"We are continuing to sign off on more," that official said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Another official from Iraq's presidency said Monday that all the orders were signed after 2014, most of them under ex-president Fuad Massum and at a time when IS occupied a third of the country.

Thursday's attack, which killed at least 32 people, was a jolting reminder of the persistent threat posed by IS, despite the government declaring victory over the jihadists in late 2017.

A 2005 law carries the death penalty for anyone convicted of "terrorism," which can include membership of an extremist group even if they are not convicted of any specific acts.

Rights groups have warned that executions were being used for political reasons.

"Leaders resort to announcements of mass executions simply to signal to the public that they're taking... (these issues) seriously," said Belkis Wille, senior crisis and conflict researcher at Human Rights Watch.

"The death penalty is used as a political tool more than anything else," she told AFP on Sunday.

Since Baghdad officially declared victory over IS, Iraqi courts have sentenced hundreds to death for crimes perpetrated during the jihadists' 2014 seizure of swathes of the country and their brutal three-year hold over cities including Mosul.

Only a small proportion of the sentences have been carried out, as they must be approved by the president.

Barham Saleh, who has held the post since 2018, is known to be personally against capital punishment, and has resisted signing execution orders in the past.

Some Iraqis took to social media to demand tougher action from Saleh after Thursday's attack, accusing him of "not carrying out the sentences" and risking a prison break.

A protest is planned to take place on Tuesday in Nasiriyah, demanding that jihadists be executed in revenge for last week's double suicide attack in the capital.

Despite Saleh's moderating influence, Iraq in 2019 carried out the fourth highest number of executions among nations worldwide, after China, Iran and Saudi Arabia, according to Amnesty International.

Judicial sources told AFP at least 30 executions took place in 2020.

They include 21 men convicted of "terrorism" and executed at Nasiriyah prison in November.

The move sparked condemnations from the United Nations, which described the news as "deeply troubling" and called on Iraq to halt any further planned executions.

Rights groups accuse Iraq's justice system of corruption, carrying out rushed trials on circumstantial evidence and failing to allow the accused a proper

defense.

UN Human Rights Commissioner Michelle Bachelet said late last year that given such gaps in Iraq's legal system, implementing capital punishment "may amount to an arbitrary deprivation of life by the State."



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Fears of Iraq execution spree after Daesh attack

[Three Russians attacked by knifeman in Istanbul](#)

Author:

Mon, 2021-01-25 23:22

LONDON: A man suspected of attacking three Russians with a knife in Istanbul has been detained by police.

According to Russian news service Sputnik, a local garbage collector attacked the man and two women late on Sunday night. They were in hospital but their

injuries were not life threatening.

The attack was caught on camera and widely shared online.

Sputnik reported a source as saying: "The suspect has been detained. According to preliminary data, he is mentally ill. The wounded Russians are still in the hospital: these are two women and a man."

Turkey continues to grapple with high rates of violent crime, particularly murder and attempted murder.

According to data from the World Bank, it has a homicide rate of 2.6 per 100,000 people – double that of Saudi Arabia.

Last month, Arab News reported that security concerns meant Saudis were no longer considering Turkey as a tourist destination.

In October, the US Embassy in Turkey said it had received reports of potential terrorist attacks and kidnappings against foreign nationals in Istanbul.

The British Foreign Office, on its website, warns that street robbery is common in parts of Istanbul, and urges tourists to be "extra vigilant" when visiting Turkey.



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Greece, France to sign \$2.8 billion fighter jet deal amid Turkey tensions
Turkey and Greece resume talks to resolve maritime disputes

[New round of talks on Syria's constitution begins in Geneva](#)

Author:

Associated Press

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Mon, 2021-01-25 15:16

GENEVA: Delegations from Syria's government, opposition and civil society began a new round of meetings in Geneva on Monday aimed at revising the constitution of the war-torn country.

The fifth round of the so-called Constitutional Committee came days after UN Special Envoy for Syria Geir Pedersen told the UN Security Council that many subjects have been discussed for more than a year and it's now time for the committee to ensure that "the meetings are better organized and more focused."

Syria's nearly 10-year conflict has killed more than half a million people and displaced half the country's pre-war 23 million population, including more than 5 million refugees mostly in neighboring countries.

"I believe that we need to ensure that the committee begins to move from 'preparing' a constitutional reform to 'drafting' one, as it is mandated to do," Pedersen said last week.

The United States and several Western allies have accused Syria's President Bashar Assad of deliberately delaying the drafting of a new constitution to waste time until presidential elections are held this year and avoid UN-supervised voting as called for by the UN Security Council.

According to Syria's elections law, presidential elections are scheduled to take place between April 16 and May 16, at least 90 days before Assad's seven-year term expires. Assad has been in power since 2000.

At a Russian-hosted Syrian peace conference in January 2018, an agreement was reached to form a 150-member committee to draft a new constitution, which took until September 2019. A 45-member committee known as the "Small Body" started its meetings in Geneva on Monday.

Monday's meeting involved 15 people from each delegation and was taking place amid measures to prevent the spread of coronavirus.



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Three Syrian soldiers killed in bus ambush: state mediaUN envoy calls for greater sense of urgency in Syrian peace efforts

[Houthi, Iranian influence will 'reshape' Yemeni society, warns UK ambassador](#)

Author:

Mon, 2021-01-25 21:46

RIYADH: Yemeni society will be completely changed by Iranian influence and Houthi ideology, the British ambassador to Yemen has warned.

Michael Aron told Asharq Al-Awsat that Iran's grip on the north would become even tighter unless a solution to the war was found soon.

The Houthi militia, which sparked the war in Yemen when it seized the capital Sanaa in 2014, is armed and supported by Iran. It was designated as a foreign terrorist organization by the US earlier this month.

"Houthis are altering Yemeni society and curricula in schools," said Aron, who has held his post since early 2018. "They control and change universities, deploy children to battlefronts, and send students to study in Qom, Iran. The more time passes without a solution to stopping the war and beginning the rebuilding of Yemeni society, the more Iranian influence in the north. After five years, Yemeni society will be completely changed by Iranian influence and Houthi ideology and traditions."

Aron, who leaves his post in July, called for negotiations to resume for a political solution to the war.

Several attempts at UN-brokered talks have failed to bring the war to an end, however discussions between the two sides on a prisoner exchange started in Jordan on Sunday.

"Today there is a choice of continuing the war and this is very difficult, or sitting for negotiations. Even the Houthis, many of them want peace and an end to the war."

He condemned the militia's recent acts of aggression, including an attack on Aden airport last month as members of the newly formed internationally recognised government arrived in the city. The missile strikes killed 25 people.

"It was a failure and a crime, and we strongly condemned this attack," he added.

Aron was previously an ambassador to Sudan, Libya, Iraq and Kuwait.



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UK ambassador to Yemen urges Houthis to cease Marib operations, take UN envoy 'seriously'
Saudi cabinet welcomes US plan to designate Yemen's Houthis a terrorist organization