

Morocco, Israel to seal normalization with first direct flight

Author:

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RABAT: Jared Kushner, US President Donald Trump's son-in-law and advisor, is due to arrive Tuesday in Morocco from Israel on the first direct commercial flight between the two countries since they normalised ties.

The flight from Tel Aviv to Rabat is seen as highly symbolic after Morocco announced on December 10 a "resumption of relations" with Israel.

It also aims to showcase the achievements of the Trump administration in Middle East diplomacy, weeks before Trump is replaced at the White House by President-elect Joe Biden.

Morocco became the third Arab state this year, after the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, to normalise ties with Israel under US-brokered deals, while Sudan has pledged to follow suit.

In return, the US president fulfilled a decades-old goal of Morocco by backing its contested sovereignty in Western Sahara.

The move infuriated the Algerian-backed pro-independence Polisario Front, which controls about one fifth of the desert territory that once was a Spanish colony.

Kushner will be heading an American delegation, and during his visit to Rabat a series of agreements will be signed between Morocco and Israel, according to officials.

Negotiations leading to Morocco's resumption of ties with Israel included the opening of a US consulate in Western Sahara, and US investments which Moroccan media described as "colossal".

At the same time Israel and Morocco are due to reopen diplomatic offices and activate economic cooperation between them.

Morocco closed its liaison office in Tel Aviv in 2000, at the start of the second Palestinian intifada, or uprising.

King Mohammed VI has said Morocco will remain an advocate for the Palestinians, but the Palestinians like the Polisario have cried foul and condemned the normalisation announcement.

Morocco has sought to temper the anger by insisting that relations with Israel are not new.

"The new agreement is merely the formalisation of a de facto partnership between Morocco and Israel dating back 60 years," said Moroccan media boss Ahmed Charai.

In a commentary published earlier this month in the Jerusalem Post, he said the two countries had a "shared history", adding that he was "overcome with pride and gratitude" when the deal was announced.

"It is indeed the case that the two states have assisted each other vitally for decades," Charai wrote.

"Not only did intelligence and security cooperation help Israel defend itself in the 1967 Six-Day War and Morocco win its Sahara war a few years later, quiet Moroccan diplomacy proved instrumental in fostering peace between Egypt and Israel," he added.

Morocco is home to North Africa's largest Jewish community, which has been there since ancient times and grew with the arrival of Jews expelled from Spain by Catholic kings from 1492.

It reached about 250,000 in the late 1940s, 10 percent of the national population, but many Jews left after the creation of Israel in 1948.

About 3,000 Jews remain in Morocco, and the Casablanca community is one of the country's most active.

Israel meanwhile is home to 700,000 Jews of Moroccan origin.

Although ties between the two countries were suspended in the year 2000, trade between Israel and Morocco was not.

Between 2014 and 2017 the volume of trade exchanges stood at \$149 million, according to statistics published by Moroccan newspapers.



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Kushner to lead US delegation to Israel, Morocco

[US nuclear submarine passes through Strait of Hormuz](#)

Mon, 2020-12-21 19:49

LONDON: A US Navy nuclear submarine passed through the Strait of Hormuz on Monday and entered the Arabian Gulf in the latest show of military strength from Washington in the region.

The USS Georgia, which can carry dozens of land-attack cruise missiles, was

accompanied by two guided-missile cruisers, the US Navy said.

The narrow waters of the Strait of Hormuz separate Iran from the Arabian Peninsula and are the route through which a large quantity of the world's crude oil supplies pass on ships. The strait has often been a flashpoint of regional tensions with Iran, with Tehran threatening to close the passage in previous escalations with the US and its allies in the Gulf.

JUST IN: [#USNavy](#)'s [#USSGeorgia](#) transits [#StraitofHormuz](#) with cruisers [#USSPortRoyal](#) and [#USSPhilippineSea](#). Georgia's presence in [@US5thFleet](#) demonstrates the fleet's ability to operate wherever international law allows. [#forcetobereckonedwith](#)

DETAILS <https://t.co/P0bIHE2XC6> pic.twitter.com/ys8cBbnm7k

– U.S. Navy (@USNavy) [December 21, 2020](#)

“As an inherently flexible maneuver force, capable of supporting routine and contingency operations, Georgia's presence demonstrates the United States' commitment to regional partners and maritime security with a full spectrum of capabilities to remain ready to defend against any threat at any time,” the US Navy said.

The US has flexed its military muscles in the Gulf in recent weeks to warn Iran and reassure America's Gulf allies at a time of transition in Washington. The aircraft carrier USS Nimitz arrived in the Gulf in late November, and two B-52 bombers recently flew over the Middle East.

On Sunday, the head of US Central Command (Centcom), which oversees US forces in the region, said Washington is “prepared to react” if Iran carries out an attack to mark one year since the killing of Iranian commander Gen. Qassem Soleimani.

“We are prepared to defend ourselves, our friends and partners in the region, and we’re prepared to react if necessary,” Gen. Kenneth McKenzie said.

*With AFP



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US B-52H bombers fly to Middle East in mission to deter IranUS Navy official says ‘uneasy deterrence’ reached with Iran

[Yemeni riyal on rebound as people voice optimism over new government](#)

Author:

Sun, 2020-12-20 22:01

AL-MUKALLA: The Yemeni riyal has recovered by 20 percent after positive news about the implementation of the Riyadh Agreement and the formation of a new government, giving a long-awaited boost to the chaotic exchange market.

Local moneychangers told Arab News on Sunday that the Yemeni riyal bounced to 750 against the US dollar in the government-controlled areas, rising from 925 about 10 days ago, and reviving hopes about bringing the market under the government's control.

The riyal's rebound began on Dec. 11 when the Arab coalition announced the Yemen's internationally recognized government and the separatist Southern Transitional Council agreed to withdraw their forces from Aden and Abyan.

The exchange market was given another positive boost last week when Yemeni President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi issued a presidential decree announcing the formation of a new government of 24 ministers, equally represented by southerners and northerners, including the separatists.

The formation of the government has ended more than a year of political wrangling and deadlock related to the implementation of the Riyadh Agreement, which was designed to defuse hostilities between the Yemeni government and the separatists.

The devolution of the Yemeni riyal during the past couple of years has pushed up prices of basic commodities and fueled public anger against the country's political establishment that had failed to address the problem.

At the same time, Yemen's new prime minister, Maeen Abdul Malik Saeed, said on Sunday that his government would return to Aden within a week after swearing in before the Yemeni president and winning a vote of confidence from parliament. Saeed told Al-Ayyam daily newspaper that his government would work "as hard as it could" to alleviate the suffering of the Yemenis and bring to life crumbled government bodies.

In southern Yemen, local officials and military commanders said on Sunday that government troops and separatists that had withdrawn from contested areas in Abyan and Aden began trickling into battlefields with the Iran-backed Houthis in the southern provinces of Abyan, Dhale and Lahj.

Fuad Jabari, Dhale front spokesperson, told Arab News that military forces that withdrew from Abyan have joined flashpoints in the province to reinforce fighters who fight off relentless attacks by the Houthis.

"The withdrawing forces have entered Dhale province accompanied by Saudi military officers. More military forces are on their way to the battlefields," Jabari said, adding that the Houthis have escalated attacks on southern resistance forces in the province since warring sides agreed to pull out of Aden and Abyan.

"The Houthis are using more advanced weapons nowadays. They replaced bomb drones with modern drones that fire missiles and moved back to their areas," he said.

People in Aden, the Yemeni city that had borne the brunt of sporadic deadly fighting between government troops and separatists, and other Yemeni cities voiced their optimism with the formation of a new government and urged new ministers to fix services and create jobs.

Hanan Al-Ameri, an activist from Aden, told Arab News that the new government should immediately return to Aden to address corruption in state bodies, long power cuts, severe shortages of drinking water and skyrocketing prices.

“Regarding our demands, we want the government to fix services and then give jobs to young people and empower them in local authorities. We demand a decent life, services and protecting our violated rights,” Hanan said.

Yemeni politicians and experts echoed the same optimism about the implantation of the Riyadh Agreement and the formation of a new government, arguing that the government has unified the Yemeni forces against the Houthis and ended enmities that ruined anti-Houthi forces.

Najeeb Ghallab, undersecretary at Yemen’s Information Ministry and a political analyst, told Arab News on Sunday that the Riyadh Agreement has managed to turn antagonism between warring factions into partnership.

“Riyadh Agreement has rebuilt the forces and sent reassurances to political parties that they would not be left out. It enables the Yemeni government to assert its control over the land, have unified military forces and speak with one voice with the international community,” Ghallab said, adding that the Riyadh Agreement proved that the Arab coalition is able to bring Yemenis together if they cut off ties with foreign forces such as Iran.

“It sends a message that Saudi Arabia and the UAE can bring peace to Yemen provided the Houthis sever ties with Iran,” he said.



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Prince Khalid bin Salman: Saudi Arabia continuing its policy to establish stability in Yemen
EU welcomes formation of Yemeni government, praises role of Saudi Arabia

Survey reveals alienation of Kurdish youth in Turkey

Author:

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ANKARA: A survey conducted by YADA Foundation, Kurdish Studies Center and Rawest Research Company reveals the growing alienation of the Kurdish youth in Turkey.

The survey, which was carried out with support of the British Embassy and the Heinrich Boll Stiftung, was conducted in Istanbul, Izmir, southern Mersin and Adana, southeastern Diyarbakir, Mardin, Sanliurfa and eastern Van provinces with more than 1,500 young people between 15 to 29 ages.

Kurdish youth appeared pessimistic, with a lower rate of happiness and life satisfaction compared to the rest of the society. Those who live in the western half of Turkey feel much more pessimistic due to the discrimination they face.

Besides supporting the national team, they feel strongly attached to Amedspor, the football team of Kurdish-majority Diyarbakir province, as a symbol of their identity.

Over half of Kurdish youth have been internally displaced in Turkey generally with their families whether in search of employment, fleeing fighting between the state and the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and/or for education purposes.

Almost 70 percent of the Kurdish respondents say they have been subject to occasional or frequent discrimination because of their Kurdish identity. Those who are voters of the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) experienced more discrimination than supporters of other political parties.

Some of the respondents said that they were prevented from renting a house when they were asked about their city of origin, or they couldn't buy even a bottle of water when they attended an Amedspor match in a western province of the country.

In a similar pattern, players of Amedspor have been frequently exposed to harassment by rival fans, while the team's Kurdish supporters were occasionally banned from attending matches.

Kurdish youth increasingly use Turkish in their daily communication with friends and family members after years of crackdown on cultural rights and after failed attempts to make Kurdish language as part of the educational system.

Kurdish respondents say they cannot even dream in Kurdish.

According to another survey, only about 18 percent of the 600 young Kurds surveyed could speak, read and write in Kurdish.

Kurds make up about 20 percent of Turkey's population of 82 million. But the survey found that only a third of Kurdish youth are employed, while a quarter are working as unskilled labourers and the rest are unemployed.

Their mother tongue is the top priority issue (38.4 percent) among Kurdish youth, followed by discrimination (24 percent), education (12.5 percent), unemployment (9.8 percent), freedom of speech (7.4 percent), injustice (5.5 percent) and identity (2.4 percent).

Regarding the failure of the short-lived "Kurdish peace talks" between the Turkish state and the PKK in 2015, Kurdish youth who are pro-HDP blame both their party and the PKK for the failed peace attempts, while 65 percent think that the infighting will never end.

The survey also found that the majority of Kurdish youth is inclined to de-radicalize while they consolidate their cultural identities as Kurds.

Roj Girasun, director of Diyarbakir-based Rawest Research, thinks that Kurdish youth is being de-radicalized because they are satisfied with the increased visibility of the HDP on the political arena as a legal actor.

"However, they mostly think that the current government is not able to resolve the decades-long Kurdish conflict in the country," he told Arab News.

A new party looking to appeal to Kurdish conservative youth is launching soon, although the opposition claims it intends to divide Kurdish votes in Turkey.

The survey also found that, given the chance, the majority of Kurdish youth would emigrate to Western countries out of pessimism over both freedom of expression and employment.

While Twitter is a source of information for about 30 percent nationally, it increases to 44 percent among Kurdish youth.

"It shows that Kurdish youth feels disappointed by the mainstream media which doesn't give enough space and visibility to their problems, and they refer to the alternative news channels to fill this gap," Girasun said.

Although the use of Kurdish is on the decrease among Kurdish youth, they are still holding on to their political identity and demanding more cultural rights from the state authorities to keep their mother tongue alive because those living in the western provinces are increasingly forgetting their

Kurdish.

Kurdish culture has generally been demonized over the years, with Kurdish language being categorized as “unknown language” in the judicial system.

“This atmosphere affects their romantic relationships. 44 percent of Kurdish respondents do not want to marry a Turkish girl. They are building very high walls around their Kurdishness vis-à-vis Turks,” Girasun said.

Apart from such social distancing, the restriction of academia and arts in Kurdish fuels disappointment among Kurdish youth. In July, Turkey’s Council of Higher Education banned students studying Kurdish language and literature at Turkish universities from writing their dissertations in Kurdish, and obliged all dissertations at Kurdish language departments to be written in Turkish.

In October, the Turkish authorities banned a play performed in Kurdish in Istanbul by the Nobel prize-winning Italian writer Dario Fo over the allegations of terror propaganda.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan recently claimed that “Turkey has no Kurdish issue.”



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[Egypt cancels New Year's Eve celebrations due to coronavirus](#)

Author:

Sun, 2020-12-20 21:29

CAIRO: Egypt's Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities has canceled New Year's celebrations to avoid mass gatherings.

The decision came in response to Prime Minister Mostafa Madbouly's directions, which were taken during the meeting of the Supreme Committee for the Management of the Coronavirus Crisis.

Assistant Minister of Tourism and Antiquities Abdel Fattah Al-Assy underlined the need to ban all "cultural" and "touristic" events or any celebrations on New Year's Eve to avoid mass gatherings.

He also called for "the strict implementation of the precautionary measures previously taken in the past period, while taking punitive measures against restaurants, cafes and hotels that do not adhere to implementing such measures."

Prime Minister Dr. Mostafa Madbouly earlier headed the meeting, during which ministers and officials discussed efforts to counter the coronavirus as well as ways of providing the vaccine.

The Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities renewed its warnings to the Chamber of Tourist Establishments to adhere to the opening and closing of tourist restaurants and cafes in accordance with the times set by the Cabinet. The ministry said that nightclubs would remain closed until a decision was made by Minister of Tourism and Antiquities Dr. Khaled El-Anany in light of the measures taken by the state to control the spread of the coronavirus.

Singing stars had already announced when they would be performing on New Year's Eve so the latest decision put organizers and singers in a difficult position. Many organizers called for refunds for people who had reserved tables for New Year's Eve parties.

Singers had set almost impossible conditions to perform at parties. Such conditions included a 50 percent deposit of their fees – often as much as half a million Egyptian pounds – non-refundable if the party was canceled.

Al-Assy said that the ministry had issued recommendations for tourist establishments to ban gatherings on New Year's Eve. "We do not want to disturb people, but the whole world is implementing measures to prevent the

spread of the coronavirus. Such measures include banning gatherings and shutting down hotels,” he said.

“The ministry had issued recommendations for tourist establishments by banning gatherings on New Year’s Eve. The ministry’s teams are following-up on the implementation of the measures in such establishments.”

Al-Assy confirmed that nightclubs would remain closed until further a decision by the ministry in light of the measures taken by the state to counter the spread of the coronavirus.

The ministry stressed that weddings, parties, special occasions and gatherings would continue to be banned from being held in closed halls until a decision to reopen the halls was issued.



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Al-Azhar decrees prohibition of joining Muslim Brotherhood Egyptian government denies privatizing spinning and weaving factories