

Egypt demands Italy hands over ex-diplomats who smuggled antiquities

Author:

Sat, 2020-12-19 22:25

CAIRO: Egyptian Interpol has asked the Italian government to hand over former members of its embassy in Cairo after they were convicted of smuggling Egyptian artifacts.

Interpol demanded the extradition of Ladislav Otakar Skakal, former honorary consul in Luxor, who was sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment in absentia and a fine of 1 million Egyptian pounds for the smuggling of nearly 22,000 artifacts to Italy from 2016 to 2018 through the containers of the diplomatic mission, with the participation of Massimiliano Sponzilli, former trade commissioner to Egypt.

The case involves other defendants, including the brother of former Finance Minister Youssef Botros Ghaly, who was sentenced in February to 30 years in prison and given a 6 million Egyptian pound fine.

The Egyptian Public Prosecution had ordered the referral of Ghali and others to the International Criminal Court, with the speedy arrest and summoning of the Italian consul and his inclusion on the Interpol Red Notice.

The case dates to May 2018, when Italian media revealed that antiquities found in diplomatic containers in the port of Salerno, Italy, were from Egypt, and Egyptian officials were suspected of smuggling them.

The artifacts consisted of a group of pottery vessels from different periods, parts of coffins and coins, and a few pieces belonging to the Islamic civilization.

The Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs said the Italian side revealed that their contacts with the Customs Department at Alexandria Port indicated that the antiquities and the shipment were not of an Egyptian diplomat but rather related to an Italian citizen who later turned out to be Skakal.

The public prosecutor ordered that all the accused – Medhat Michel Gerges Salib, his wife Sahar Zaki Ragheb, and Boutros Raouf Ghali – be prevented from disposing of their money, and issued a decision to include Skakal on watch lists.

Egypt recovered the smuggled pieces, which consisted of 21,000 coins, 195 artifacts, 11 pottery vessels, 5 mummy masks – some of them gilded – a wooden coffin, two small wooden compounds, two canopy heads and three colored ceramic tiles from the Islamic era.



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Egypt ministry halves workforce to curb virus surge
Egyptian designer creates bold looks for modest fashion lovers

[Lebanon police scuffle with students protesting tuition hikes](#)

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Sat, 2020-12-19 17:48

BEIRUT: Lebanese riot police on Saturday scuffled with students protesting a decision by top universities to adopt a new dollar exchange rate to price tuition – equivalent to a major fee hike.

Near the entrance of the American University of Beirut (AUB) in the city's Hamra district, security forces fired tear gas to disperse protesters who were trying to approach the main gate.

Students responded by throwing water bottles and other objects at riot police blocking their path.

It was not immediately clear if there were any injuries.

The protest came in response to a decision by AUB and the Lebanese American University (LAU), another top private institution, to price tuition based on an exchange rate of 3,900 Lebanese pounds to the dollar.

The nosediving currency is still officially pegged at around 1,500 pounds to the greenback.

The move has prompted fears that other universities could follow suit, potentially leading to an exodus of students from private institutions while public universities remain underfunded and overstretched.

Hundreds of students had gathered in Hamra earlier Saturday in a protest they billed a "student day of rage."

They chanted anti-government slogans and called for affordable education in a country mired in its worst economic crisis since the 1975-1990 civil war.

Later in the evening, some torched dumpsters to block the street and vandalized banks before security forces pushed them out.

Over the past year, the Lebanese pound has lost up to 80 percent of its value on the black market, where on Saturday the dollar was selling for at least 8,200 pounds.

Universities have struggled to adapt to the de facto devaluation as prices nationwide have soared.

Commercial banks have halted dollar transactions and restricted withdrawals of Lebanese pounds, in moves that have starved many of their savings.

According to the United Nations, more than half of Lebanon's population is now living in poverty.





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[Egyptian designer creates bold looks for modest fashion lovers](#)

Fri, 2020-12-18 23:08

DUBAI: The story of the self-made designer and entrepreneur behind the e-store Nomad Story began while she was in high school. Tired of being dressed like everyone else, Shay Jaffar started sketching modest designs.

"Despite being an Egyptian growing up in the UAE, I still couldn't find clothes that spoke to me as a conservative teen who liked to dress modestly," Jaffar said. "I remember getting a lot of compliments in college on my chic modest wear to the extent that I teamed up with a bespoke tailor in my neighborhood and started creating designs for friends and family."

Having studied computer science and later pursued a master's degree in entrepreneurship at Babson College in the US, Jaffar decided to start an eponymous clothing brand for modest evening gowns made in New York and sold worldwide.



Despite being in the business for only six months, Jaffar has learned a lot

more than she expected. (Supplied)

“Shay Jaffar the brand catered to a very niche market. At the time, the brand was made in New York at a small scale; the price point was suitable only for a certain high-paying segment, so we weren’t really quite known back then,” she said.

“After I graduated from Babson, I joined the Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT) in New York to study fashion styling. I wanted to combine entrepreneurship, fashion and technology in one career, which empowered me to start Nomad Story.”

Having the necessary technical knowledge and a multicultural background helped Jaffar launch Nomad Story in December 2019. It brings enchanting designs and bold looks to modest fashion lovers all over the world. “We called it Nomad Story because we wanted to make it a platform that sells modest styles but also tells the stories of women who break barriers and embrace the world,” Jaffar said.

According to Edited, the retail-market intelligence platform, the demand for modest fashion “is expanding outside of the UAE and seeing growth in the Western world with a 15 percent increase since 2017.”

THE NUMBER

8,000

*** Monthly Google searches in the US for ‘modest clothing.’**

The data analytics company notes in a report that “modest clothing” receives about 8,000 Google searches monthly in the US. According to the researchers, “Religion isn’t the only reason women are opting to cover up. For some, it’s a personal preference; they find modesty empowering. With the #MeToo movement, women are dressing for themselves rather than for the male gaze.”

Nomad Story had that vision, too. “Our goal is to be the online go-to place for girls who love versatile, contemporary, exquisite modest looks, irrespective of their religion, background or beliefs,” Jaffar said. “Now is the time for these girls to find one place that represents their persona and understands their needs. We also want to take our customers on a journey of discovery by exploring new emerging designers brought to them from around the world.”

While luxury and high-street brands shifted towards more modest looks and created serious competition in this market niche, Jaffar saw it as “education to the world about diversity and inclusion.”

“These brands helped remove the stigma that modest fashion has to be old and dowdy,” she said. “In fact, they showed that modesty is also stylish and fashion-forward like every other style. Because of that, these brands

actually helped us deliver our message.”



Having studied computer science, Jaffar decided to start an eponymous clothing brand for modest evening gowns made in New York and sold worldwide. (Supplied)

Despite being in the business for only six months, Jaffar has learned a lot more than she expected. “Although it looks like a short period of time (especially with the coronavirus and all), we learned a number of things about our business and our customers,” he said.

“Most girls need help in their overall modest style. It is not only about selling them one or two items but also putting together a full modest look that fits their budget, aesthetic and the occasion they’re shopping for.”

“This is mainly what we have in mind as the next step for Nomad Story. We want to help our customers put together full modest looks and find their own true style. Moreover, since we carry emerging brands, we’re thinking up of ways for customers to try before they commit.”

Choices for modest wear have always been there, but they have never been compiled in a way where it is easily accessible for women and girls, especially in the West. Luckily, brands like Nomad Story aim to make modest fashion available to women around the world.

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discuss Iranian threat

Author:

Fri, 2020-12-18 23:34

LONDON: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu met Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the US joint chiefs of staff, on Friday to discuss regional threats, especially Iranian aggression.

They also “discussed the ongoing military cooperation between the two countries and the opportunities that currently lie in the region,” Ofir Gendelman, the premier’s spokesperson, told the Arab media.

Netanyahu thanked Milley for the military cooperation, which has deepened in recent years, and expressed his desire to continue to deepen it, Gendelman added in a tweet.

Earlier on Friday, Netanyahu held a video conference with Milley, who is currently on a two-day visit to Israel.

The top army official said “on behalf of the entire US military, we thank Israel for their strong commitment to our partnership.”

Milley is on a whirlwind world tour, visiting Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Afghanistan to discuss the threats from Iran.

On Friday he met Defense Minister Benny Gantz, where they stressed the importance of continued pressure on the Iranian regime to halt its nuclear program.

“During the meeting, they (also) discussed the challenges and different changes in the operational situation in the Middle East,” the defense minister’s office said.

During his visit, Milley also met the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) Chief of Staff Aviv Kohavi and other defense and military officials.



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[Algerians impatient for change with president still out sick](#)

Fri, 2020-12-18 23:18

ALGIERS: Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune's first appearance since

being hospitalized in Germany with COVID-19 in October was intended to reassure a country where big political decisions are long overdue. But on the streets of Algiers, people voiced growing impatience after the five-minute video message he gave on Sunday saying he would still be away for up to three weeks.

"Most of our demands are still awaiting a response," said Ahmed Abbachi, a member of the leaderless protest movement known as Hirak.

The major energy producer has been in turmoil since early last year when mass protests pushed the old president, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, from power along with many of his clique, but left much of the ruling elite at the helm.

The period of unrest, and this year's pandemic, have delayed Algeria's efforts to address systemic frailties looming over the economy as declining oil and gas revenue threaten lavish social spending.

The 75-year-old, a heavy smoker, appeared gaunt in his video message, the first sight that Algerians had had of their president since he went to Germany.

The absence of any photographs or videos spurred rumors that his condition was worse than the official news bulletins proclaiming his good health were letting on.

It reminded many Algerians of the long years when Bouteflika was incapacitated by illness, leaving the government largely rudderless while rival power blocs in the ruling elite jostled for influence.

HIGHLIGHT

The absence of any photographs or videos spurred rumors that his condition was worse than the official news bulletins proclaiming his good health were letting on.

"Bouteflika was completely unable to speak, to walk, and we were told over and over again that he was capable of leading the country," said plumber Antar Aissaoui, before Tebboune's video appearance.

The president will have a full in-tray when he finally returns to Algiers. The government is pushing a program of economic reforms seen as necessary to avert a looming fiscal crunch after burning through more than half its foreign currency reserves in five years.

The Hirak street protest movement remains unconvinced by Tebboune's efforts to turn a page on last year's unrest.

While demonstrations have not taken place since a COVID-19 lockdown began in March, the referendum he pushed in November on constitutional changes had turnout of only a quarter of registered voters.

"Algeria faces one of the most difficult periods of its history. Threats are surrounding us from all directions," said schoolteacher Rachid Chalabi, referring to the internal political crisis, looming economic threats and conflicts in neighboring countries.

"Tebboune will face his biggest challenges after recovering. Everything indicates that the path to stability is still long," said 37-year-old engineer Djamel Taibi.



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