

# Oman's sultan names new foreign minister

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MUSCAT: Oman's Sultan Haitham on Tuesday appointed a new top diplomat, replacing the long-serving Yusuf bin Alawi bin Abdullah in a government reshuffle.

Sultan Haitham, since his accession in January, has vowed to maintain Oman's policy of neutrality and non-interference.

Badr Albusaidi, 60, was named foreign minister, a title held by the late Sultan Qaboos himself but with Alawi responsible for foreign affairs for the past two decades.

Albusaidi has been in the diplomatic service since the 1980s and held a number of posts, including foreign ministry secretary-general.

Sultan bin Salem bin Saeed Al-Habsi was appointed finance minister, a post also held by the sultan, and new faces were named to other key ministries, state media said.

Haitham bin Tariq was sworn in after modern Oman's founding father, Sultan Qaboos, died at the age of 79.

Yusuf bin Alawi played a key role in maintaining Oman's neutrality and as a regional mediator.

On Monday, he spoke with Israeli Foreign Minister Gabi Ashkenazi on the phone to stress Oman's support of "a comprehensive, just and lasting peace," Oman's foreign ministry said on Twitter.

It was the first public contact between Oman and Israel since US President Donald Trump's announcement last week that the Jewish state and the UAE, Oman's neighbor, have agreed to normalize ties.

In October 2018, Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu held surprise talks with Qaboos in Muscat, which does not officially recognize the Jewish state but maintains good ties with both Washington and Tehran.



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## [Egyptian parliament approves law to protect sexual harassment victims](#)

Author:

Tue, 2020-08-18 21:37

CAIRO: A draft law to protect sexual harassment victims has been approved by Egypt's parliament.

The draft law aims to protect them by not revealing their identities in crimes related to indecent assault, corruption of morals, exposure to others, and harassment.

Egyptian women can be reluctant to share their experience of sexual harassment for fear that they will be attacked if their statements are revealed.

The country has in recent months witnessed several celebrities complain on social media about verbal abuse.

Egyptian actress Rania Youssef shared photos of messages that she had received, threatening to prosecute those responsible for the messages. Last month actress Hana Zahid revealed that she had been harassed, and a writer accused the owner of a famous publishing house of harassing her.

The National Council for Women publishes statistics about women's exposure to harassment. It received 283 complaints about harassment that took place during the Eid al-Adha holidays. Amal Abdel Moneim, director of the Complaints Office at the council, said the complaints were mostly about sexual harassment, blackmail and threats. The office received 149 complaints from girls who had been subjected to these acts and wished to submit reports.

Monemim said that social and legal support was provided to women making the complaints, that they were made aware of the legal measures to be taken, and that there was also the possibility of providing a volunteer lawyer free of charge to file the case according to the case.

Nihad Abu Al-Qumsan, head of the Egyptian Center for Women's Rights, said the draft law was a positive step in the face of harassment.

"The law will be an encouraging and motivating factor for girls who are subjected to harassment and are too afraid of having their private information leaked to file reports against harassers," Abu Al-Qumsan said in a press statement.

The draft law authorized the investigating judge not to provide the victim's information, stressing there was a need for a sub-file with the victim's complete data to be presented to the court, the accused and the defence upon request. But this aspect was rejected by the parliament speaker as it had a touch of unconstitutionality.

Ali Abdel-Aal, house of representative speaker, suggested amending the text to read: "It is not permissible for the arrest warrant or investigating authorities to disclose the victim's information in the crimes of indecent assault, corruption of morals, exposure to others and harassment contained in the Penal Code and Child Law, except to those concerned."

According to Abdel-Aal's proposal, the concerned parties are the accused, the victim, and their lawyers.

"We do not need a sub-file," he said.



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Egyptian Parliament approves maritime agreement with Greece

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## [EU-Italy delegation in Tunisia to discuss slowing migration](#)

Author:

Tue, 2020-08-18 00:55

TUNIS: Top Italian and European Union officials are holding talks in Tunisia on Monday to try to stem the growing numbers of migrants crossing from the North African country to Europe.

Tunisia's president, whose young democracy is struggling economically, said he wants the talks to focus not only on security measures to curb migration but also on broader European aid to fight the poverty and joblessness that fuels it.

The number of migrants leaving Tunisia has grown as much as fivefold this year compared to last year, for a total of about 5,700 people, according to estimates from the Tunisian Forum of Economic and Social Rights, an aid group following migration flows.



More migrants landing in Italy now came from Tunisia than departed from neighboring lawless Libya, according to Italian government figures released Saturday. A total of 16,347 migrants reached Italian shores over the past year, a 149 percent increase compared to the previous 12-month period, but still a number much lower than in several other recent years.

Italian Interior Minister Luciana Lamorgese, Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio, EU Home Affairs Commissioner Ylva Johansson and the EU's commissioner for neighboring countries Oliver Varhelyi were scheduled to meet Monday with Tunisian President Kais Saied and other top Tunisian officials.

Lamorgese, who visited Tunisia just two weeks ago for similar talks, said the trip is aimed at boosting Europe-wide solidarity with Tunisia.

Tunisia's leader said he wants to broaden the migration discussion with Italy to make it more European, according to the official news agency TAP.

"Now is the time to act together to contain the (migratory) pressure and tackle the root causes ... to help change the perception of young people of their reality and of their country and give them hope for a better life in their own country, rather than venturing into an unknown future," Saied said in a statement.

## **HIGHLIGHTS**

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- **Tunisia's unemployment rate stood at 15 percent before the coronavirus pandemic and has since climbed to 21 percent.**

Tunisia's unemployment rate stood at 15 percent before the coronavirus pandemic and has since climbed to 21 percent. The country has struggled to restore prosperity since protesters overthrew a longtime autocrat in 2011, unleashing Arab Spring uprisings around the world.

The Italian and EU delegation is also expected to visit the Bardo Museum in Tunis, to honor victims of a 2015 extremist attack there that killed 21 people of various nationalities. The attack on one of the country's prime tourist sites damaged Tunisia's tourism industry.

Meanwhile in North Macedonia, a major transit point for migrants entering the EU, police said Monday a car carrying a dozen migrants from Syria crashed into a stationary police truck, killing two of the car passengers and injuring the other 10 as well as a police officer.

Police said the accident occurred Sunday night near the town of Radovis, about 100 kilometers (63 miles) southeast of the capital Skopje.

The Greek border with North Macedonia was closed earlier this year due to the coronavirus pandemic. But trafficking networks remain active, ferrying migrants who make their way from Turkey into Greece and then attempt to head north to more prosperous European countries.

Police said that in July alone they had detained a total of 567 migrants attempting to illegally transit North Macedonia.



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Italy defense ministry seeks closer ties with Libya

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## [Pandemic starts to surge in conflict-hit Libya](#)

Tue, 2020-08-18 00:51

TRIPOLI/BENGHAZI: As coronavirus cases surge in Libya, medics and officials working with a health system wrecked by years of division and war are warning that the pandemic could be slipping out of their control.

The conflict has also restricted movement within Libya, and confirmed cases remained low during the first months of the outbreak. Now, infections are jumping by up to several hundred per day to reach a total of nearly 8,200, including more than 150 deaths.

Hotspots include the capital Tripoli and the large port city of Misrata in the west, and the city of Sabha in the south.

Medics say the virus is spreading because people have carried on attending large gatherings including weddings and funerals, and are not practicing

physical distancing.

Ahmed Al-Hasi, spokesman for the state medical committee responsible for countering the virus in eastern Libya, said the public needed to take precautions, or else medical staff with limited resources would become overwhelmed.

"They need to know that the virus is real, the casualties are real, the deaths are real," Hasi said.

In Hay Al-Andalus, an upscale suburb of Tripoli, Mayor Mohamed Al-Fataisi told reporters the situation had become "dangerous," adding: "We are unable to contain the disease."

Nighttime curfews across the country are often not respected, and there is a requirement to wear face masks in public spaces in western Libya but not in the east. The two parts of the country are run by separate administrations. A sharp fall in living standards has anyway left many struggling to afford even minor expenses, including masks.

"People are asked to wear masks and use (sanitizing) alcohol, but no one knows that they have not been paid salaries," said Abduladeem Mohamed, a Tripoli taxi driver. "I prefer to buy bread for my children."

Libya's National Center for Disease Control, which operates across the country, could not be reached for comment.

Libya's health facilities have long been weak. But a stop-start conflict that has split the country into rival camps has destroyed or damaged some medical facilities and left others struggling to function. Frequent power cuts during summer months add to the challenges.

Rick Brennan, the World Health Organization's regional emergency director in the Middle East, said the agency had faced serious logistical constraints in Libya, including "major challenges bringing the PPE in, the testing kits."

"I think there's a reasonable understanding of what's needed, it's just having the capacities to deliver that's the problem," he said.

Marwa Abdulkader Alhudhairy, a resident of Sabha, said her 70-year-old father started developing coronavirus symptoms on July 8, but was only able to find a PCR swab test on July 23.

Despite suffering from heart problems, he self-treated at home because "he is well aware of the lack of protective equipment and means available to deal with coronavirus," she said.

Though he eventually recovered, "we went through very difficult moments as we almost lost him," Alhudhairy said.

In eastern Libya, controlled by rival authorities to the internationally recognized government in Tripoli, officials fear they will be unable to cope with a surge in serious cases.

"We worry that there will come a time, and that time is not far away, when the health care system is unable to receive patients that need ventilators," said Fadi Farag Al-Fortas, a doctor at the Benghazi Medical Center.



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## [Gaza rapper, 11, strikes chord with rhymes about war and hardship](#)

Author:

Tue, 2020-08-18 00:44

GAZA: Gaza rapper Abdel-Rahman Al-Shantti may only be 11 years old but his rhymes on war and hardship in the Palestinian enclave have reached thousands of people, conveying in English what he calls "a message of peace and humanity."

A video of Al-Shantti rapping outside his school in Gaza City, surrounded by classmates wearing matching uniforms, has garnered hundreds of thousands of views on social media and was even shared by the popular British rapper Lowkey.

"I am here to tell you our lives are hard. We got broken streets and bombs in the yard," go the lyrics of his song "Gaza messenger," alluding to three devastating wars fought between Israel and Hamas.



Though Arabic is his first language, Shantti raps in fluent, unaccented English – a skill he says he honed by listening to American rappers including Eminem, Tupac and DJ Khaled.

“I want to be like Eminem – not to copy his style, I have my own style. But he is my favorite rapper, my idol,” he told Reuters in English as he wrote lyrics and composed rap beats through an app on his cellphone.

In another one of his songs, “Peace,” Al-Shantti evokes moments from a war with Israel in 2008-2009. “I was born in Gaza City, and the first thing I heard was a gunshot. In my first breath, I tasted gunpowder,” the lyrics say. Al-Shantti says he hopes to shine a light on the challenges wrought on Gaza by an Israeli-led blockade, which economists blame for soaring poverty in the coastal territory. Israel cites threats from Hamas for the restrictions.



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