

Egypt's sovereign fund to revamp historic area under citadel

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Wed, 2019-12-18 18:37

CAIRO: Egypt approved a plan on Wednesday to turn over an abandoned historic area under Cairo's towering 12th-century Islamic citadel to its new sovereign wealth fund to develop for tourism and culture, a cabinet statement said.

The 56,000-square-meter Bab Al-Azab area lies within the citadel's walls behind the ornate Azab gate, built in 1754. It contains early-19th-century warehouses, some with traditional wind scoops for cooling ventilation, built by the Ottoman ruler of Egypt at the time, Mohamed Ali.

"The aim of the project is to revive the area so that visitors find fun and entertainment by creating a mixed-use cultural center," the statement quoted Antiquities Minister Khaled Al-Anani as saying.

The area, controlled by the Antiquities Ministry, will be leased to the fund to develop and operate under a 49-year concession. Final approval depended on a more detailed plan, including finances, Anani said.

The preliminary proposal includes spaces for a museum, a spice market, a plaza for traditional foods, a crafts market, hotels, shops, a performances and events center and a hammam.

The citadel was built by Salah Al-Din, also known as Saladin, a Muslim warrior who wrested control of Jerusalem from the Crusaders in the late 12th century.

An ancient path through the concessionary area, from Bab Al-Azab to the citadel, was the site of a famous massacre in 1811 of Mamluk officers by Mohamed Ali that allowed him to consolidate his control of Egypt.

Ayman Soliman, CEO of the Sovereign Fund of Egypt, told Reuters last week that the fund was looking to Egyptian businessman Samih Sawiris, chairman of Orascom Development Holding, to help develop the area. Between them they plan to invest 2 billion Egyptian pounds (\$125 million) in the project.

"It is a very old and neglected area. It has been used for storage, Islamic art storage, military museum storage," Soliman said. "They've erected ugly warehouse buildings there so it impacts lots of land. So now we're going to clean it up."

He said they would remove the modern construction and restore what remains of the historical buildings and walls.

The new sovereign fund says it plans to take control of some of the government's most promising assets in industries such as power and real estate, to bring in private investors to develop them.



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For \$250,000 you, too, can be an Egyptian Egyptian officials unveil new archaeological finds

[Saad Hariri rules out returning as Lebanon's PM](#)

Author:

AFP

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1576672675828785800

Wed, 2019-12-18 12:26

BEIRUT: Lebanon's Saad Al-Hariri said on Wednesday he was not a candidate to be prime minister of a new government, leaving no obvious alternative to head a cabinet that must tackle the worst economic crisis since the 1975-90 civil

war.

Hariri, the outgoing prime minister and Lebanon's leading Sunni politician, made the statement on the eve of formal consultations to designate the new prime minister, a post reserved for a Sunni in Lebanon's sectarian system. The consultations have been postponed twice already.

"I announce that I will not be a candidate to form the coming government," Hariri said in a statement.

"I am heading tomorrow to take part in the consultations ... on this basis, insisting that they not be delayed for any reason," he said.

Hariri did not say who he would nominate for the post in the consultations which President Michel Aoun is due to host on Thursday. Aoun, a Maronite Christian, is required to designate the candidate with the most support among Lebanon's 128 MPs.

The only candidate with the support of Lebanon's Sunni Muslim religious establishment, Hariri had appeared the only candidate for the job earlier this week despite political tension with adversaries including Aoun.

But the picture was complicated when the Christian Lebanese Forces said it would name neither Hariri nor anyone else in the consultations, meaning his candidacy would not enjoy the support of either of Lebanon's two main Christian parties.

Hariri resigned as prime minister on Oct. 29, prompted by protests against a political elite accused of overseeing rampant state corruption.

Meanwhile, Lebanon increased security around protest centers in central Beirut Wednesday, after several nights of violence disrupted two months of largely peaceful anti-government demonstrations.

Barricades were erected overnight to block or control access to protest sites in the capital where counter demonstrators have previously tried to attack protesters, AFP journalists said.

An officer who spoke to AFP on condition of anonymity said the concrete barriers were intended to help security forces better control the sites and prevent further clashes.

After violence between protesters and security forces in Beirut on Saturday and Sunday night, and between counter demonstrators and police on Monday night, the capital remained calm on Tuesday.

But tensions were recorded elsewhere in the country, as Lebanon awaits scheduled parliamentary meetings to name a new premier on Thursday, a required step to form a cabinet.

The unprecedented protests started on Oct. 17 against a political elite deemed inept and corrupt. Protesters demand a complete overhaul of the ruling class and a new government formed of independent experts.

On Tuesday night, young supporters of the Shiite Amal movement threw stones at anti-government protesters in the southern Shiite stronghold of Nabatieh, a witness said.

Unknown perpetrators set fire to a Christmas tree in the northern city of Tripoli, an AFP correspondent said.

On Monday night, dozens of supporters of the country's two main Shiite political parties set fire to cars and clashed with security forces trying to prevent them from reaching Beirut's main protest square.

Pressure to form a new government is compounded by the near collapse of the economy, already weakened by years of political deadlock and the impact of the eight-year-old war in neighboring Syria.

The World Bank estimates that Lebanon is in recession, and has warned that the number living in poverty could increase from a third to half the population.

(With AFP and Reuters)



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New protests in Lebanon as probe begins into 10-hour 'battle of Beirut'54 injured as Lebanese security forces and Hezbollah supporters clash in central Beirut

[UN Security Council set for showdown over Syria cross-border aid deliveries](#)

Author:

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1576663128378179200

Tue, 2019-12-17 23:55

UNITED NATIONS: For the past six years the United Nations and other aid groups have been crossing into Syria from Turkey, Iraq and Jordan at four places authorized by the UN Security Council to deliver humanitarian assistance to millions of people.

The 15-member council is aiming to extend approval for those operations this week, which UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres describes as essential. Russia, however, wants to cut the number of border crossings in half.

A resolution drafted by Belgium, Kuwait and Germany proposes increasing the authorized border crossings to five – by adding a third from Turkey – but Russia has put forward a rival text that would only approve current operations at two Turkish crossings.

When asked on Tuesday if Russia could veto the draft resolution by Belgium, Kuwait and Germany, Russian UN Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia described that text as “unacceptable and inviable.”

“If it so happens that our draft does not pass, this will mean that the mechanism that we have proposed to extend will not be extended,” he told reporters.

A resolution needs nine votes to pass and no vetoes by Russia, China, the United States, France or Britain. Last year Russia and China abstained in the council vote to extend approval for the cross-border humanitarian aid deliveries.

Russia has vetoed 13 council resolutions on Syria since a crackdown by Syrian President Bashar Assad on pro-democracy protesters in 2011 led to civil war. Daesh militants then used the chaos to seize territory in Syria and Iraq. In a joint statement on Tuesday, Belgium, Kuwait and Germany and their seven elected counterparts on the Security Council expressed support for their draft resolution.

“The consequences of a non-renewal of the mechanism would be disastrous,” the 10 Security Council members, who are each serving two year terms, said. “This is a mechanism that enables life-saving assistance to reach 4 million people in Syria.”

In a Dec. 16 report to the Council, Guterres urged members to extend authorization of the cross-border aid deliveries.

“This aid has staved off an even larger humanitarian crisis inside Syria,” Guterres wrote.

“While I welcome ongoing efforts to scale up humanitarian assistance delivered from inside the Syrian Arab Republic, I reiterate that the United Nations does not have an alternative means of reaching people in the areas in which cross-border assistance is being provided,” he said.



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Russia, Syrian regime enter troubled waters of East MedRussia to invest \$500m in Syrian port, build grain hub -Interfax

[Russia to invest \\$500 mln in Syrian port, build grain hub -Interfax](#)

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Tue, 2019-12-17 16:27

MOSCOW: Russia plans to invest \$500 million in the Syrian port of Tartus and build a grain hub there to boost its presence on Middle East markets, Interfax news agency cited Deputy Prime Minister Yury Borisov as saying on

Tuesday.

Russia, the world's largest wheat exporter, has stepped up grain supplies to support Syrian President Bashar Assad in recent years since Moscow's 2015 military intervention on his behalf in Syria's civil war.

Construction of the necessary infrastructure at the port, which Russia rented out for 49 years from Syrian authorities in 2017, could begin next year, Borisov was quoted as saying.

Syria's Mediterranean coastal region has remained under firm government control throughout the war.

"Russia intends to organize the work of the old port and to build a new commercial port. The sum of investment for the next four years is valued at \$500 million," Borisov was quoted as saying.

Moscow will also begin delivering 100,000 tons of grain in humanitarian aid to Syria by the end of December – supplies that will continue until the second quarter, he said.

Ports in Crimea, which Russia annexed from Ukraine in 2014, have exported the Black Sea peninsula's surplus of grain to the port of Tartus in recent years to ensure Assad's Syria has a reliable source of food.

The Russian Navy also operates a military facility at Tartus, Russia's only naval foothold in the Mediterranean, and Moscow has previously said it plans to expand and modernize the port's facilities for its fleet.

Earlier on Tuesday, the Russian Defense Ministry's Zvezda TV channel said Russia and Syria had carried out their first joint military drills near Tartus. The drill involved more than 2,000 Russian and Syrian troops, 10 naval vessels as well as Russian aviation, the Zvezda report said.

Russia also has an air base in Syria's coastal Latakia province which it has used for air strikes against forces opposed to Assad. Last month, Moscow said it had set up a helicopter base at an airport in northeastern Syria.



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Regime bombardment kills 14 civilians in northwest Syria: monitor

[**Suspected drug lord, 'Angels of Death' cartel leader Ridouan Taghi arrested in Dubai**](#)

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Tue, 2019-12-17 18:53

LONDON: A suspected drug lord believed to be the Netherlands' most wanted man has been arrested in Dubai, police said on Tuesday.

Dubai Police announced the arrest of 41-year old Ridouan Taghi, who is alleged to be the leader of the "Angels of Death" cartel operating across Europe and Africa.

Taghi had been living in Dubai since 2016 and was arrested at a villa that he rarely left, director of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of Dubai Police Jamal Salem Al-Jallaf told Dutch media.

Al-Jallaf added that the Moroccan-born Taghi had been "careful, very careful," adding: "The curtains of the house were always closed, no light came out. You could not see from outside if there was someone inside."

The suspect also attracted international attention in September after a Dutch lawyer for a state witness in a major case against him was shot dead outside his home in Amsterdam.

Dubai Police said several international arrest warrants had been issued against Taghi last year on charges of ordering a series of murders, drug trafficking and of belonging to a criminal cartel, adding that his arrest was made possible through cooperation between Dubai Police, Dutch officers and INTERPOL, according to Emirates News Agency (WAM).

The Commander-in-Chief of Dubai Police, Major General Abdullah Khalifa Al-Marri, said the suspect entered the country through Dubai International Airport using official documents, which included a passport and a visa that were not his own, and that coming from the Netherlands the suspect was able to enter the UAE before a notification regarding him was issued by authorities in his own country.

He added that the suspect lived in one of Dubai's residential areas without engaging in any criminal activity and managed his daily affairs with the help of his acquaintances of various nationalities.

In connection with Taghi's arrest, Dutch police have arrested six people in a series of raids across the Netherlands.

"Following this arrest, eight house searches were made on Monday evening and six suspects were arrested. This concerns five men and a woman between the ages of 29 and 45," Dutch police said in a statement.

"The suspects have been arrested for money laundering, possession of weapons and possession of drugs."



Dutch officials speak to the press after the announcement of the arrest of Ridouan Taghi. (AFP)

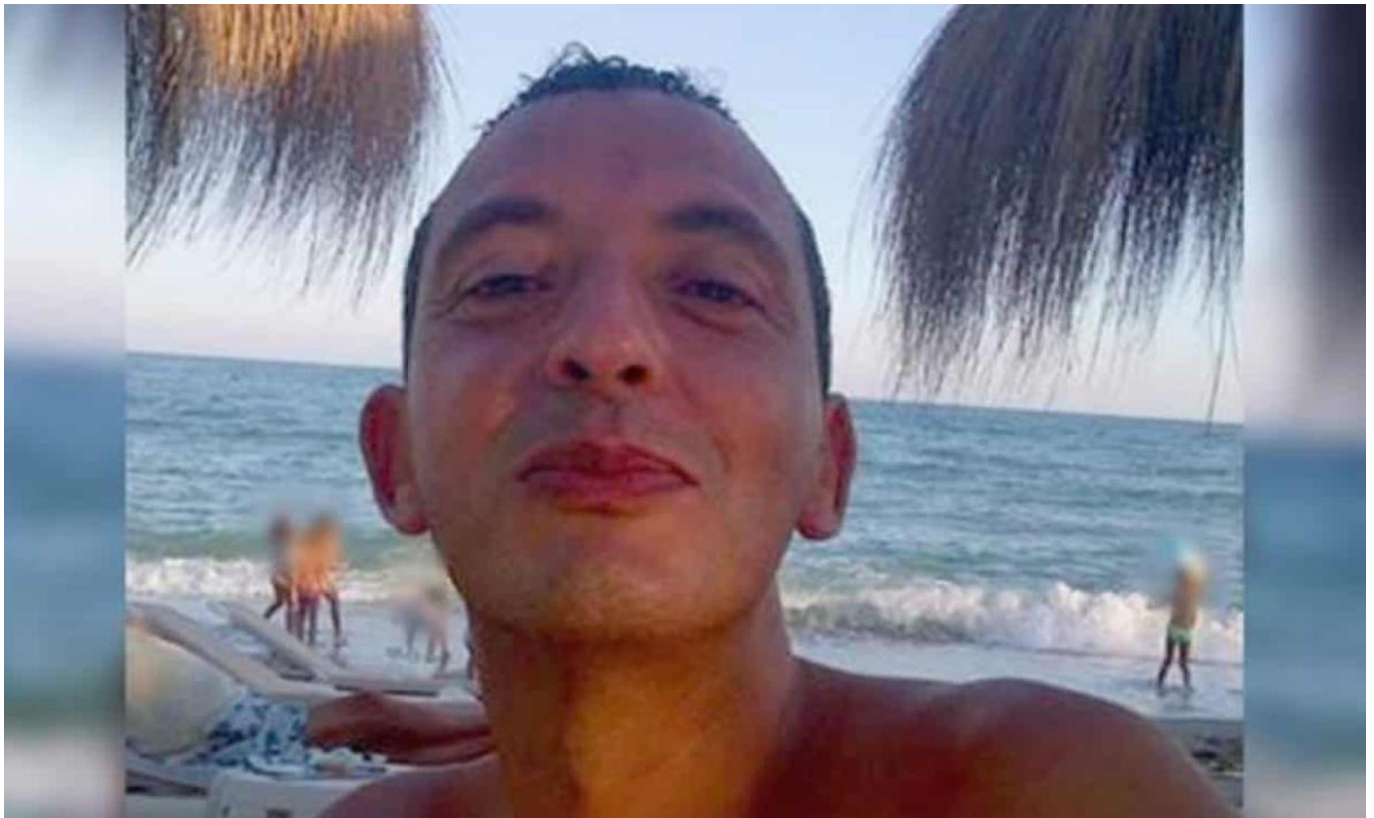
The searches were in various locations including the capital Amsterdam and the central city of Utrecht.

Erik Akerboom, Commissioner of Netherlands Police, thanked the UAE authorities and Dubai Police for their cooperation and efforts to track down the accused, WAM reported.

He said that Dubai Police's help was of "vital importance" in making the arrest possible. The Commissioner further said that Dubai Police had "set an example for cooperation between authorities in combating organized crime around the world."

Dutch media reported that the Netherlands and Dubai have no extradition treaty but authorities in both countries were working on transferring Taghi possibly by the end of February.

(With AFP)



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