

Feminist icon blasts Israel PM over travel ban

Author:

Sun, 2019-08-18 23:21

JERUSALEM: Feminist icon Gloria Steinem has called Israel's prime minister a "bully" and says she will not visit as long as he remains the country's leader.

In a statement posted online on Saturday, she said Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's decision to bar a visit by two Democratic congresswomen was "a welcome sign that I never have to enter any country or place under your authority."

Israel denied entry to Reps. Rashida Tlaib and Ilhan Omar last week over their support for the Palestinian-led boycott movement. The two are outspoken critics of Trump and of Israel's treatment of the Palestinians. They were subjected to a series of racist tweets from Trump last month, in which he told them to "go back" to their "broken" countries. Both are US citizens.

"I know that Donald Trump, the accidental occupant of the White House, is drawn to successful bullies," Steinem wrote, addressing Netanyahu. "If you and Trump continue to imitate each other, you will eventually be alone together at the table. I could wish both of you no greater punishment than that."

Israel later granted permission for Tlaib to visit her grandmother in the occupied West Bank on humanitarian grounds, and released a letter purportedly signed by Tlaib in which she promised not to advocate boycotts during her visit.

Tlaib declined to come, saying Israel's "oppressive" conditions were designed to humiliate her.

Israel accused her of staging a provocation.

Tlaib tweeted that she could not allow Israel to "use my love for my sitty to bow down to their oppressive & racist policies."

"Sitty," spelled different ways in English, is an Arabic term of endearment for one's grandmother.

Online supporters have rallied under the hashtag #MyPalestinianSitty, posting pictures of their grandmothers and descriptions of their struggles under Israeli occupation. Many were said to have lived through what the Palestinians refer to as the "Nakba," or "Catastrophe," when hundreds of thousands fled or were forced from their homes in what is now Israel during the 1948 Arab-Israeli war.

"#MyPalestinianSitty is trending and I am overcome with emotions realizing

how we are finally humanizing one of the world's most dehumanized peoples," Omar tweeted.



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[Benjamin Netanyahu](#)

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Family backs Rashida Tlaib's decision not to visit IsraelUS's Rashida Tlaib to avoid West Bank trip under Israel's 'oppressive conditions', despite reprieve

[Facelift of Cairo's Baron Palace sparks outcry](#)

Author:

AFP

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Sun, 2019-08-18 18:03

CAIRO: Egyptian authorities have defended renovation works at a historic Cairo palace after the site's new look sparked mockery on social media. The site, dubbed the Baron Palace, was built between 1907 and 1911 by wealthy Belgian industrialist Edouard Empain.

The baron also spearheaded the development of the surrounding upmarket neighborhood of Heliopolis.

Built in a style reminiscent of the Cambodian Hindu temple of Angkor Wat, the striking building set amid lush gardens has long since fallen into disrepair. But work to restore the building has sparked outcry.

Many have taken issue with white marble additions to the building's rosy pink stone exterior, saying the materials are of poor quality and not in keeping with the original style.

One Twitter user asked: "Who is the fool behind the restoration of Egypt's palaces? Our heritage is being systematically destroyed."

A Facebook page called Egyptian Historians chided officials for the "warped" restoration.

"Be honest with yourselves and admit that you ruined it... you are literally demolishing our monuments," a post on the group's page said.

Antiquities Minister Khaled El-Enany dismissed online criticisms as "fake news."

"I didn't hear one word of truth in all these social media comments," he said in a statement.

His ministry said the colors of the palace had faded from weather damage over many years.

"The restoration is a real dream and we will breathe life into this abandoned landmark," Enany added.

General Hisham Samir, who heads up the ministry's engineering branch, said the colors were "correct and are backed up by historical sources."

The works began in July 2017 in cooperation with the Belgian government and will cost 100 million Egyptian pounds (over \$6 million), the statement added. Samir told AFP that the work is expected to be completed by year's end with plans to open the building to the public by early 2020.

Egypt's multitude of historical monuments and buildings are a major draw for tourists, though the country has often faced accusations of neglecting these sites.

The government has recently launched various restoration projects to stimulate tourism, a key sector that has suffered in recent years due to political insecurity and sporadic militant attacks.





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Sun, sea and privacy at Egypt's 'only for women' beaches

[Lebanon's Aoun vows to tend to economic, financial reforms](#)

Author:

Reuters

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Sun, 2019-08-18 16:12

BEIRUT: Lebanon is expected to begin implementing in October a set of economic and financial measures agreed by its top leadership that will boost economic growth, President Michel Aoun said on Sunday, vowing that he would tend to this himself.

He was referring to decisions taken at a top-level meeting earlier this month with the aim of reviving an economy that has been growing slowly for years and is struggling with one of the world's heaviest public debt burdens.

After the Aug. 9 meeting, Prime Minister Saad Al-Hariri said agreed steps included finishing the 2020 budget on time, drawing up a plan to start \$3.3 billion of projects approved by parliament, full implementation of a power sector reform plan, and laws to fight tax evasion and regulate public tenders.

"I will personally tend to the implementation path of the decisions of the financial and economic meeting" in cooperation with Prime Minister Saad Al-Hariri, Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri and other parties in government, Aoun said.

In written comments to Reuters, Aoun said this aimed "to guarantee political stability in cabinet and outside it and to secure the greatest amount of productivity," including in the implementation of the 2019 budget and its reforms.

Aoun said he expected "the implementation path" to begin "with the start of October after the conclusion of the current preparations ... which will lead to lifting of the growth rates, reflecting positively on the economic and financial situations."

After years of backsliding on economic reform, the impetus to act has grown due to economic stagnation and a slowdown in the flow of dollars into Lebanon's banks from abroad. Lebanon has depended on such flows from its diaspora to finance the current account and the state budget deficits.

Foreign governments and donor institutions last year pledged \$11 billion in financing to Lebanon for major infrastructure at the so-called Cedre conference in Paris, on condition that it carries out reforms.

Measures to reduce the budget deficit and reform the power sector, which

bleeds public funds while inflicting daily power cuts on Lebanese, are seen as two vital tests of the government's ability to reform. The International Monetary Fund said in July this year's deficit is likely to be well above a targeted 7.6% of national output. It said the power reform plan and a budget to reduce the deficit were "very welcome first steps" and "further substantial fiscal adjustment and structural reforms" were needed. Aoun said work was underway to approve the 2020 budget in the constitutional timeframe. It would include "new, resolute reforms" agreed at the Aug. 9 meeting to reduce the power sector deficit, improve tax collection and fight customs and tax evasion. Aoun also said frameworks must be put in place for implementing a plan drawn up by management consulting firm McKinsey for revamping the economy and this should coincide with the start of projects outlined at the Cedre conference.



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[Kuwait's emir in good condition after medical setback](#)

Author:

Sun, 2019-08-18 20:52

JEDDAH: Kuwait's emir has recovered from a "medical setback" and is in good condition, the state KUNA news agency reported Sunday.

Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah underwent medical tests that turned out well, acting minister of the Amiri Diwan Mohammad Dhaifallah Sharar said.



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Kuwait committed to implement accord to reduce oil output, says oil minister
Kuwaiti authorities arrest militant cell linked to Muslim Brotherhood

Sudan names ruling council after landmark signing

Author:

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Sun, 2019-08-18 15:14

KHARTOUM: Sudan's opposition coalition on Sunday named five people as civilian members of the country's sovereign council to be sworn in on Monday, a source within the coalition told Reuters.

A power-sharing agreement signed on Saturday paves the way for a transitional government and eventual elections. It provides for a sovereign council as the highest authority in the country but largely delegates executive powers to the Cabinet of ministers.

According to the agreement, the opposition coalition is allowed to choose five members of the council and the military another five, with the two sides jointly choosing a civilian as an eleventh member.

The Forces of Freedom and Change (FFC) chose Aisha Mousa, Siddig Tower, Mohamed Elfaki Suleiman, Hassan Sheikh Idris and Taha Othman Ishaq, the coalition source said.

The spokesman for the Transitional Military Council (TMC) said that TMC head Lt. Gen. Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan, his deputy Gen. Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo and Lt. Gen. Yasser Al-Atta will serve as three of the five military members. It has yet to announce the other two chosen members.

The military members will select the head of the council for the first 21 months of the transition period, which lasts three years and three months, according to the agreement.

The FFC has nominated a former UN economist Abdalla Hamdok as prime minister. He is expected to be appointed on Tuesday and sworn in on Wednesday.

A Cabinet is then to be formed before Sudan's new institutions can tackle the main challenges that lie ahead, first among them measures to rescue a moribund economy.

According to the green book of documents signed on Saturday, several key steps will be taken before embarking on the long and obstacle-ridden road to 2022 polls.

The first is set to come with the planned announcement of the composition of

a ruling sovereign council comprised of six civilians and five members of the military.

The signing ceremony in a hall by the Nile River was attended by several high-ranking foreign officials, the biggest such event in years to be held in the once-pariah state. Worldwide congratulations poured in after the signing, which revellers and officials alike hailed as the beginning of a “new Sudan” after 30 years of rule by the now-detained Omar Al-Bashir.

“I welcome this historic moment for Sudan. This agreement responds to the demands of the Sudanese people who have tirelessly called for change and a better future,” said Britain’s Minister for Africa Andrew Stephenson.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo vowed his country would support the establishment of “a government that protects the rights of all Sudanese citizens and leads to free and fair elections.”

Jubilation

Rare scenes of jubilation filled the streets of the capital after generals and opposition leaders signed the documents that will govern Sudan’s three-year transition to civilian rule.

Making the most of a new freedom acquired during eight months of protests that left at least 250 people dead, Sudanese families took to the streets for wild celebrations.

Youths spilling out of honking cars drag-raced down the main Nile-side road deep into the night, while groups sang and danced – the same two words echoing across the entire city: “Madaniya, Madaniya.”

It loosely translates as “civilian rule” and one would be hard-pressed to find somebody on the streets of Khartoum publicly opposing that goal.

Some members of the opposition alliance that organized the protests however fear that the euphoria could be short-lived and deep distrust remains between the incoming sovereign council’s main players.

While the power-sharing compromise reached earlier this month was widely hailed as the best Sudan could hope for, some members of the protest camp feel it short-changed their revolution.

Sudanese analyst Abdel Latif Al-Buni stressed however that one of the most immediate perils facing the transition was divisions within the civilian camp.

“A spirit of revenge against the former regime is dangerous,” he said. “It will lead to a clash between the former regime and the new rulers.”

The former Sudanese president faces trial on corruption charges but his fate remains unclear.



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