

Baghdad's Green Zone reopens to the public after 16 years

Tue, 2019-06-04 20:40

BAGHDAD: Baghdad's Green Zone area, the heavily fortified strip on the west bank of the Tigris River, reopened to the public Tuesday after 16 years – a move meant to portray increased confidence in the country's overall security situation after years of war.

Maj. Gen. Jassim Yahya Abd Ali told The Associated Press that the area, which houses the US Embassy and Iraqi government offices, is now open "twenty-four hours a day without any exceptions or conditions."

The 10-square kilometer (4-square mile) with its palm trees and monuments has been off limits to the public since the 2003 US invasion of Iraq to topple dictator Saddam Hussein.

"I feel that Baghdad is bigger than before," said Assir Assem, a 25-year-old who drove his car inside the Green Zone for the first time in his life on Tuesday. He said his generation didn't know anything about the Green Zone and felt that people there lived in another country.

"Now there is no difference, and this is beautiful," he said.

The area was home to Saddam Hussein's palaces before the war. It then became known as "Little America" following the 2003 US invasion that toppled him, after it was seized by US military forces. In later years, the walled off area surrounded by cement blast walks became a hated symbol of the country's inequality, fueling the perception among Iraqis that their government is out of touch.

Only Iraqis with special security badges could enter the area.

Various attempts and promises by the Iraqi government to open the Green Zone to traffic over the past years have failed to materialize, because of persistent security concerns.

Earlier this year, the government began easing restrictions in the area.

Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi said the Green Zone will be fully open to the public on Eid Al-Fitr, the holiday that marks the end of Ramadan.

Ali said authorities removed 12,000 concrete walls from the area.

"Thank God the opening of the Green Zone happened during the Eid. ... It is a very good initiative and will ease transportation in Baghdad," said Abdullah Mouhamed, a taxi driver.





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In the eye of the storm, Baghdad's Green Zone remains sealed Partial reopening

[Divorced at 11, Yemeni filmmaker uses camera to fight for girls' rights](#)

Author:

Tue, 2019-06-04 18:41

LONDON: At two years old, Yemeni filmmaker Khadija Al-Salami witnessed her father beating her mother so violently she was rushed to the emergency room at hospital.

When her father was not punished, and Al-Salami was married off at the age of 11, she rebelled and started using a camera to expose girls' suffering in Yemen, where one in three are wed before they turn 18, campaign group Girls Not Brides data shows.

"I use the camera as a tool to fight," Al-Salami, now 48, said in a phone interview with the Thomson Reuters Foundation from Paris, where she is now based, ahead of her appearance at Fortune Most Powerful Women International Summit.

"When you grow up in a very conservative society, where the weight of tradition marginalizes human rights, and the personal freedom of women doesn't exist ... you're only left with one choice: and that's to revolt against it."

One of almost 50 accomplished women speaking at the London event, Al-Salami is feted as one of Yemen's first female filmmakers, with her stories of girls who have refused to wear the veil, faced trial for murder and marched on the streets.

In Yemen, one of the poorest countries in the Middle East, 32% of girls become wives before their 18th birthday, and almost 10% are married by the time they turn 15, according to Girls Not Brides.

"Women unfortunately are abused everywhere in a different way. We need everybody's help, to get together and fight these bad traditions," award-winning Al-Salami said.

"I was able to overcome all these difficulties. That's given me a lot of force to do something for other people who are afraid to speak up."

Al-Salami was granted a divorce after attempting suicide, disowned by her family for shaming them, and moved to the United States when she was 16 to study.

But she regularly returns to her home country to make films – mostly in secret – to spotlight taboo women's rights issues.

Al-Salami shared a stage at the summit with Helle Thorning-Schmidt, head of the charity Save the Children, who called for an end to Yemen's ongoing conflict, which began in late 2014.

"Yemen is perhaps the worst place to be a child right now," Thorning-Schmidt, who was Denmark's first female prime minister, told the audience.

"Children in Yemen are dying from hunger. I sat with one of those children in

my arms, she was eight months old but she had the weight of a newborn.” More than 12 million children in Yemen need aid, and 360,000 of those under five are severely malnourished, according to the United Nations’ children’s agency, UNICEF.

“What’s going on now with Yemen and with the war for the last five years, my heart is broken. The whole population is under bombs and they’re just trying to find shelter and the most basic thing in order to survive,” said Al-Salami.

Despite the violence, Thorning-Schmidt said the children she met in Yemen last year still dreamed of change.

“Little girls ... they always say, ‘I want to go to school, I don’t want to marry’. Whatever they’d been through, there’s still that glimmer of hope in their eyes,” she said.



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Houthis an ‘arm of Iran that threatens Yemen’s existence’ Saudi Arabia and UAE agree to fight disease, malnutrition in Yemen at high-level WHO meeting in Riyadh

May and Trump determined to stop 'terrorist supporting' Iran gaining nuclear weapon

Tue, 2019-06-04 17:23

LONDON: Donald Trump and Theresa May discussed tackling "Iran's destabilizing activity" in the Middle East during the US president's state visit to the UK.

The two countries will work to ensure "Tehran can not acquire a nuclear weapon," May said at a joint press conference in London.

The British prime minister, who will leave her job on Friday, acknowledged that the US and the UK had differed in their approaches on how to reach those goals. The UK, along with European nations, has stuck by the 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and world powers after Trump withdrew the US from the accord last year.

But the two leaders made sure that their joint concern over the threat from Iran was a key foreign policy issue on the agenda during Trump's visit.

"The UK continues to stand by the nuclear deal," May said. "It is clear that we both want to reach the same goal. It is important that Iran meets its obligation and we do everything to prevent escalation, which is in no one's interests."

Trump last month beefed up America's military presence in the Middle East, deploying an aircraft carrier, long-range bombers and Patriot missiles to the Arabian Gulf region.

"The United States and the United Kingdom are determined to ensure that Iran never develops nuclear weapons and stops supporting and engaging in terrorism," Trump said.

Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei hit back later Tuesday, saying Tehran would not be "deceived" by Trump's recent offer of negotiations and would not give up its missile program.

"The U.S. president recently said Iran can achieve development with its current leaders. That means they do not seek regime change ... But this political trick will not deceive Iranian officials and the Iranian nation," Khamenei said in a televised address.

"In the missile programme, they know we have reached a point of deterrence and stability. They want to deprive us from it, but they will never succeed."

Trump also thanked the UK for the role played in defeating Daesh in Iraq and Syria.

During the press conference Trump also promised Britain a "phenomenal" post-Brexit trade deal and pledged to work out any differences with London on the

role of China's Huawei in building 5G networks.

Speaking on the second day of his visit, he congratulated May for her time as prime minister and singled out two of her potential successors for praise.

Trump mentioned Boris Johnson, who has said the UK should leave the European Union on Oct. 31, deal or no deal, and Jeremy Hunt, Britain's foreign minister who has warned against leaving without a deal.

Trump's state visit, promised by May back in January 2017 when she became the first foreign leader to meet him after he took office, has been cast as a chance to celebrate Britain's "special relationship" with the US, boost trade links and reaffirm security cooperation.

*With Reuters



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Trump Middle East adviser Kushner holds talks with EU leaders on peace plan 'Trump baby' balloon flies outside British parliament as big protests expected

Militant attack kills two police, one soldier in Lebanon's Tripoli

Tue, 2019-06-04 00:15

BEIRUT: A militant attacked a patrol of Lebanon's Internal Security Forces (ISF) in the northern city of Tripoli on Monday night, killing two police officers and one army soldier, state news agency NNA said.

Two security sources told Reuters the police and army have the shooter encircled in a building after he threw a bomb at security forces in a government building and fired at a patrol.

One of the sources said the gunman had been in jail before on charges of belonging to Islamic State.

The Lebanese military confirmed the attack and the death of the soldier, and said the attacker also fired at the security forces center.

Lebanese authorities say they have foiled numerous attacks in recent years, including some tied to the conflict across the border in Syria. From 2013 to 2016, militants struck parts of Lebanon repeatedly with bomb attacks, but officials have since said that security has improved.



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Lebanon denies forcing Syrians home from Beirut airport

Crop-destroying insect reported in Egypt

Author:

Mon, 2019-06-03 22:35

CAIRO: Fall armyworms have been reported in Egypt's Aswan governorate, putting agricultural crops, particularly maize, at high risk.

The announcement was made by the Agricultural Pesticide Committee (APC) of the Ministry of Agriculture, which said the insects were found in the town of Kom Ombo.

"The insect destroys more than 80 different agricultural crops, most notably maize and broomcorn, sugarcane, rice, cotton, vegetables and fruits," Hassan Abdel Rahman, head of the Farmers' Syndicate, said in a statement.

"Due to its short lifecycle, which does not exceed a month and a half, this larval insect is difficult to be killed with pesticide."

Abdel Rahman urged the ministry and farmers to take immediate action against the infestation.

The APC urged farmers to follow a list of measures to help eliminate the pests, and provided categories of insecticides that could be used.

The fall armyworm first made its way to Africa in 2016 on a ship or plane, according to the UN Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO). It has since spread across more than 40 countries on the continent.

A training program was held in April to teach farmers how to observe and deal with the insect.

Additionally, the FAO is organizing a training course for engineers and researchers from Upper Egypt.

"This is very scary," Cairo resident Hourig Gabeyan told Arab News. "I hope the government is trying to find solutions. Egypt already has enough problems as it is."

The country's economy relies heavily on agriculture, which comprises up to 14.5 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) and 28 percent of the labor force. Maize is the second most important field crop in Egypt.



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Crop-destroying Armyworm caterpillar detected in AsiaSatellite images show crops on fire in Syria rebel enclave