

[Plane catches fire at Tehran airport; 100 passengers evacuated unhurt](#)

Tue, 2019-03-19 21:33

LONDON: An airliner caught fire on landing at Tehran's Mehrabad airport on Tuesday but all 100 passengers were evacuated without injury, the head of Iran's emergency department said on state television.

Pir-Hossein Kolivand said the fire broke out after the aircraft's landing gear did not open properly, and was later brought under control.

More to follow.



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Investigators probe Ethiopian plane fire at London Heathrow
Pakistan plane carrying 47 crashes, bursts into flames

UN presents new plan for Yemen pullback from Hodeidah

Tue, 2019-03-19 19:24

UNITED NATIONS: The United Nations will present a new plan for the pullback of forces from Yemen's flashpoint city of Hodeidah following talks with the government and the Houthis, a UN envoy said Tuesday.

The redeployment of forces was agreed in December under a ceasefire deal reached in Sweden that offered the best hope in years of moving toward an end to the war that has pushed Yemen to the brink of famine.

"Following constructive discussions with both parties, there is significant progress towards an agreement to implement phase one of the redeployments of the Hodeida agreement," said a statement from Martin Griffiths, the UN envoy for Yemen.

"Operational details will be presented to the parties in the Redeployment Coordination Committee (RCC) for endorsement shortly," he added.

The UN envoy's statement did not give a date for the start of the pullback, which would mark the first step towards de-escalation.

Griffiths said he "looks forward to the swift endorsement of the plan."

The United Nations announced a deal on the two-stage pullback from Hodeidah city and its ports on February 17, but the redeployment failed to materialize on the ground.

UN diplomats said the Houthis were refusing to pull away from the ports as part of the first stage.

Griffiths and head of the RCC, Danish General Michael Lollesgaard, have been holding talks with all sides to overcome the final hurdles.

The Red Sea port of Hodeidah is the entry point for the bulk of imported goods and relief aid to Yemen.

The conflict in Yemen has unleashed the world's worst humanitarian conflict.



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Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi militants threaten to target Riyadh and Abu Dhabi
US should not curb aid to Saudi-led coalition in Yemen, says Pompeo

[Syrian businessman linked to Assad arrested in Kuwait](#)

Author:

AFP

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Tue, 2019-03-19 11:40

KUWAIT CITY: A prominent Syrian businessman with close ties to Syrian President Bashar Assad has been arrested in Kuwait, his lawyer said Tuesday. Mazen Al-Tarazi was arrested late Monday at his offices, his lawyer Badr Al-Yacoub told AFP.

He said that he did not yet know the reasons behind his client's arrest. Local authorities did not immediately release the charges against Tarazi. But Kuwaiti newspaper Al-Qabas, citing unnamed informed sources, reported that the businessman is accused of money laundering and printing texts without authorization.

A longtime resident of Kuwait, Tarazi owns a publishing and advertising firm in partnership with a high-profile local businessman, Ahmad Al-Jarallah. Jarallah confirmed to AFP that police had raided his offices on Monday night and arrested Tarazi's secretary and two Al-Hadaf magazine employees. Tarazi is on an EU blacklist of Syrian nationals who have been banned from entry to European states and whose assets have been frozen over their role in the Syria war.



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Kuwaiti victim of New Zealand mosque shootings was 'very brave':
friendSyria's Kurds criticise Damascus 'threats'

Jumblatt expresses concern over torture of Syrian refugees

Author:

Mon, 2019-03-18 22:10

BEIRUT: Lebanese Progressive Socialist Party leader Walid Jumblatt has expressed concern about reports that Syrian refugees returning to their country from Lebanon face torture and murder.

This coincides with a debate in Lebanon about whether Syrian refugees should return without waiting for a political solution to the conflict in their country.

UN Special Coordinator Jan Kubis stressed after meeting with Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri on Monday the “urgent need to ensure the safe, voluntary and dignified return of Syrian refugees home, according to international humanitarian norms.”

Kubis added: “The UN and the humanitarian community will continue to facilitate these returns as much as possible. Another very important message was also to support the host communities here in Lebanon.”

Mireille Girard, representative of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), on Monday said: “The reconstruction process in Syria may not be enough to attract refugees to return. We are working to identify the reasons that will help them to return.”

She added: “The arrival of aid to the refugees is an element of trust that helps them to return. Their dignity and peaceful living must be ensured.”

Social Affairs Minister Richard Kouyoumdjian said the Lebanese General Security “issued lists containing the names of refugees wishing to return to their homes, but the Syrian regime accepted only about 20 percent of them.”

He added: “The solution is to call on the international community to put pressure on Russia, so that Moscow can exert pressure on (Syrian President) Bashar Assad’s regime to show goodwill and invite Syrian refugees to return to their land without conditions, procedures, obstacles and laws that steal property and land from them.”

Lebanese Education Minister Akram Chehayeb said: “The problem is not reconstruction and infrastructure, nor the economic and social situation. The main obstacle is the climate of fear and injustice in Syria.”

He added: “There are 215,000 Syrian students enrolled in public education in Lebanon, 60,000 in private education, and there are informal education programs for those who have not yet attended school to accommodate all children under the age of 18.”

Cheyayeb said: “As long as the displacement crisis continues, and as long as

the (Assad) regime's decision to prevent the (refugees') return stands ... work must continue to absorb the children of displaced Syrians who are outside education to protect Lebanon today and Syria in the future."



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Lebanese president pledges safe return of Syrian refugees
Syrian refugees wade through their worst Lebanese winter

[Syria vows to bring Kurdish-held areas back under control](#)

Mon, 2019-03-18 22:20

DAMASCUS: Syrian regime forces will reclaim control of northeastern areas controlled by the US-backed Kurds, whether by force or through reconciliation, the defense minister warned Monday.

Marginalized for decades, Syria's minority Kurds have carved out a de-facto

autonomous region across some 30 percent of the nation's territory since the devastating war broke out in 2011.

Backed by a US-led coalition, Kurdish forces have spearheaded an offensive in Syria against Daesh.

Washington's shock December announcement that it would withdraw its troops from Syria has sent the Kurds scrambling to rebuild ties with the Damascus regime, but talks so far have failed to reach a compromise.

Syrian Defense Minister Ali Abdullah Ayoub said the Syrian regime will recapture territory controlled by Kurdish-led forces in the same way it "liberated" other parts of Syria.

"The only card that remains in the hands of the Americans and their allies is" the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), he said, referring to the force leading the battle to wipe out the last remnant of the Daesh's "caliphate."

"The Syrian government will deal with this issue in one of two ways: A reconciliation agreement or liberating the territory they control by force," he said at a joint press conference with the military chiefs of staff of Iran and Iraq.

His comments come as the SDF, backed by the US-led coalition, battle militants in their last patch of territory in the village of Baghouz near the Iraqi border.

Eight years into a war that has killed more than 370,000 people and displaced millions, Syrian regime forces control almost two-thirds of the country.

Just two areas remain beyond their control: The militant-held northwestern region of Idlib, and the third of the country under the control of the SDF.

Ayoub on Monday said Idlib will also be recaptured by regime forces.

"The Syrian government will reassert its complete control over all Syrian territory sooner or later," he said. "Idlib is no exception."

The Idlib region borders Turkey and is dominated by an alliance led by Syria's former Al-Qaeda affiliate, Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham.

Idlib has been protected from a massive offensive by Bashar Assad's regime since September, thanks to a buffer zone deal agreed by Damascus's ally Russia and rebel backer Turkey.

But it has been hit by sporadic regime shelling. The defense minister's comments come after a rare meeting with the military chiefs of staff of Iraq and Iran in Damascus.

Ayoub stressed the importance of cooperation and coordination between the three militaries to combat mutual threats.

He said what emerged from talks "will help us to continue to confront

challenges, dangers and threats” posed by terrorism.

Daesh seized large parts of Syria and neighboring Iraq in 2014, but has since lost most of that to various offensives, including by the Russia-backed regime.

US-backers forces said they are facing difficulties defeating Daesh. A spokesman said their effort is being slowed by mines, tunnels, and the possibility of harming women and children still in the village.

Dozens of men and women were seen walking around the besieged Daesh encampment in Baghouz on Sunday, as Kurdish fighters watched from a hilltop close by.

SDF spokesman Kino Gabriel said the camp was approximately 250 km in size – much the same area it was five weeks ago, when the SDF said it was going to finally conclude the battle.

“We are facing several difficulties regarding the operations,” Gabriel told reporters outside Baghouz Sunday.



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US-backed forces take positions in last Daesh enclaveUS-backed forces admit to 'difficulties' beating Daesh in Syria