

American hostage Danny Burch freed in Yemen

Mon, 2019-02-25 23:37

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump announced Monday that an American had been freed after being held hostage in Yemen for 18 months. Danny Burch has been “recovered and reunited with his wife and children,” Trump said in a tweet.

It is my honor today to announce that Danny Burch, a United States citizen who has been held hostage in Yemen for 18 months, has been recovered and reunited with his wife and children. I appreciate the support of the United Arab Emirates in bringing Danny home...

– Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump) [February 25, 2019](#)

Trump did not say who had been holding Burch but he expressed appreciation for the “support of the United Arab Emirates in bringing Danny home.” According to Burch’s family, the Texas native, who has lived in Yemen for more than two decades, was kidnapped in the capital Sanaa in September 2017. A number of foreigners have been abducted in Yemen by the country’s heavily armed tribes for use as bargaining chips in local disputes and there have also been some kidnappings by Al-Qaeda. In a telephone call with AFP at the time of his kidnapping, Burch’s wife, Nadia Forsa Al-Harazi, urged Houthi Shiite rebels to secure the release of her husband. She said her husband had lived in the capital for more than 20 years and the couple had three children. Trump said “recovering American hostages is a priority of my (administration).” “With Danny’s release, we have now secured freedom for 20 American captives since my election victory,” he said. “We will not rest as we continue our work to bring the remaining American hostages back home!”



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'Houthis are our only enemy' says Yemeni army chief
British minister emphasizes Saudi Arabia's important role in Yemen peace process

[Harry and Meghan meet horses that heal in Morocco](#)

Author:

AFP

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Mon, 2019-02-25 15:50

RABAT: Britain's Prince Harry and his wife Meghan on Monday visited a stables in Morocco where horses provide a source of therapy for disabled youths,

before sampling local cuisine at a project for underprivileged children. The royal couple, on their last official foreign tour before becoming parents, petted the horses and strolled hand in hand through the equestrian club in Sale in the outskirts of Rabat.

The Duke and Duchess of Sussex, as they are formally known, met workers and disabled young people grooming horses to hear how spending time with the animals helps them to face their challenges.

Meghan chatted with several children and young adults including Zakaria, a 20-year-old with mobility issues who became an IT instructor with help from equine therapy.

The American former actress also spoke to Driss, a 24-year-old with speech difficulties, and Ikram, a 19-year-old with Down syndrome.

The couple, who married last year, appeared relaxed as they stroked horses poking their heads out of the stable doors in the morning sunshine.

A joking Harry asked if anyone had any carrots to feed to them and confided that he missed his own horses.



[View this post on Instagram](#)



A post shared by Kensington Palace (@kensingtonroyal) on Feb 25, 2019 at 5:30am PST

A heavily pregnant Meghan, wearing her hair in a pony tail, swapped her flowing beige dress of the previous evening for casual black jeans, a Breton striped shirt, green jacket and ankle boots.

Harry also dressed down with grey jeans, a light blue shirt and a black padded jacket for the visit to the Moroccan Royal Federation of Equestrian Sports.

At a later event the couple sampled Moroccan cuisine – which Meghan declared “delicious” – and heard how cooking is being used to help disadvantaged children.

They met renowned Moroccan chef Moha and tasted harira – a traditional Moroccan soup – as well as tajines, salads and couscous among other dishes. The children also made Moroccan pancakes using a recipe from a cookbook launched by Meghan last year in her first solo charity project in support of families affected by the Grenfell Tower fire disaster in London.

They joked with a group of orphans visibly daunted by their presence in the gardens of the Villa des Ambassadors hotel in Rabat.

Meghan later changed into a black pleated dress and white jacket while Harry wore a grey suit to visit the Kasbah of the Udayas, a fortress at the mouth of the Bou Regreg river.

They met artisans in the Andalusian Gardens and received gifts including a pendant, a wooden jewelry box and a leather pouf.

The couple were due to meet King Mohammed VI on Monday afternoon during what is the first British royal visit to Morocco since Prince Charles and Camilla visited the kingdom in 2011.

The focus of the three-day trip is on initiatives promoting girls’ education, women’s empowerment and the inclusion of people with disabilities.

On Sunday the couple traveled to the foothills of the High Atlas mountains to visit a project that provides free accommodation for girls to give them access to education.

Meghan received a henna tattoo during a traditional ceremony for pregnant women in the North African country.

The royals watched students playing a football match and spoke to teachers before returning to the capital to attend a reception at which they met several female entrepreneurs.









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[Khartoum protesters rally against Sudan emergency laws banning protests and regulating foreign currency](#)

Author:

Mon, 2019-02-25 20:48

KHARTOUM: Sudanese police fired tear gas Monday at hundreds protesting in the capital Khartoum against a state of emergency imposed by President Omar Al-Bashir to end rallies against his rule, witnesses said.

Deadly protests have rocked Sudan for more than two months, and Bashir on Friday declared a year-long nationwide state of emergency to rein in the

protest campaign.

The veteran leader, who came to power in a 1989 coup, also dissolved Sudan's federal and provincial governments as part of a major shake-up of his administration.

But protests have carried on, with demonstrators undeterred on Monday despite riot police firing tear gas at the crowds.

Chanting "freedom, peace, justice" – the rallying cry of the campaign – hundreds demonstrated in downtown Khartoum, witnesses said.

"We are challenging the regime and we are not scared of the state of emergency," said protester Erij who gave only her first name for security reasons.

"We have only one aim and that is to make the president step down."

Later on Monday, protesters also took to the streets in the Khartoum districts of Burri, Shambat and Al-Deim, witnesses said.

Burri has become a site of almost daily rallies, with protesters blocking streets and burning tyres and tree trunks.

Protest organisers, an umbrella group called Alliance for Freedom and Change, had called for Monday's "rally to challenge the emergency".

Riot police also fired tear gas into the compound of Ahfad University for Women after students staged a sit-in, witnesses said.

"Police fired tear gas when some students stepped out of the campus and began chanting slogans, that's when some canisters hit the compound," a witness said.

Protests first erupted in the town of Atbara on December 19 against a government decision to triple the price of bread.

They quickly escalated into demonstrations against Bashir's iron-fisted rule as protesters called on him to step down.

Officials say 31 people have died in protest-related violence since then, while Human Rights Watch has put the death toll at 51.

The 75-year-old leader has remained defiant, but has launched top-level changes in his administration.

He even sacked his long time ally and first vice president, Bakri Hassan Saleh.

On Sunday, he swore in a new prime minister and appointed 16 army officers and two others from the feared National Intelligence and Security Service as governors for Sudan's 18 provinces.

Sudan's financial woes have worsened amid a lack of foreign currency since South Sudan became independent in 2011, taking with it the bulk of oil earnings.

The resulting shortages in basic goods have fuelled spiralling inflation that has devastated the purchasing power and living standards of ordinary Sudanese, from agricultural labourers to middle-class professionals.



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Sudan President Omar Al-Bashir calls state of emergency, names new PM Sudan government arrests opposition leaders ahead of protest

[Exodus from last Daesh enclave overwhelms Syria force](#)

Author:

Sun, 2019-02-24 21:48

OMAR OIL FIELD, Syria: US-backed Syrian forces warned on Sunday they were struggling to cope with an outpouring of foreigners from Daesh's imploding reign, urging governments to take responsibility for their citizens.

The Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) have evacuated nearly 5,000 men, women and children from the militant redoubt since Wednesday, moving

closer to retaking the last sliver of territory under Daesh control.

"The numbers of foreign fighters and their relatives that we are holding is increasing drastically," Kurdish foreign affairs official Abdel Karim Omar told AFP.

"Our current infrastructure can't handle the mass influx," he said.

Syria's Kurds have repeatedly called on foreign countries to repatriate their citizens, but most have been reluctant to allow battle-hardened militants and their relatives back home due to security concerns.

But more than four years after Daesh declared a cross-border proto-state, the militants have lost all but a tiny patch of land in the village of Baghouz near the Iraqi border.

After years of fighting Daesh, Syria's Kurds say they hold hundreds of suspected Daesh fighters and their relatives.

"As thousands of foreigners flee Daesh's crumbling caliphate, the burden which is already too heavy for us to handle is getting even heavier," SDF spokesman Mustafa Bali said on Twitter late Saturday.

"This will remain as the biggest challenge awaiting us unless governments take action and fulfill their responsibilities for their citizens," he said.

No evacuations were reported from the enclave on Saturday, but the two batches that left on Wednesday and Friday included Europeans, Iraqis and nationals of former Soviet countries, according to the SDF.

Around 46,000 people, including a large number of foreigners, have streamed out of Daesh's shrinking territory since early December, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based war monitor.

While civilians are trucked north to Kurdish-run camps for the displaced, suspected militants are sent to SDF-controlled prisons.

Omar said SDF "detention centers can't accommodate all the fighters" coming out of the last Daesh pocket.

The evacuation of men, women and children has put a strain on Kurdish-run camps for the displaced, especially the Al Hol camp, which now shelters more than 40,000 people.

"There is a lot of pressure on us, especially in Al Hol, where in addition to the relatives of IS fighters you have a large displaced population," Omar said.

On Thursday, nearly 2,500 evacuees arrived at Al Hol, compounding already dire conditions inside the crammed settlement, the UN's humanitarian coordination office OCHA said.

"Thousands more are expected in coming hours/days at Al-Hol camp, putting a

further strain on basic services,” it tweeted Friday.

“This sudden influx presents huge challenges to the response – additional tents, non-food items, water and sanitation and health supplies are urgently needed.”

The International Rescue Committee on Friday said 69 people, mostly children, had died on the way to Al-Hol, or shortly after arriving in past weeks.

The battle for Baghouz is now the only live front in Syria’s war, which has killed more than 360,000 people and displaced millions since 2011.

The SDF say they are trying to evacuate remaining civilians through a corridor before pressing on with a battle to crush the militants unless holdout fighters surrender.

Some 2,000 people are believed to remain inside Baghouz, including foreigners, according to the US-backed force.

Many European countries are now confronted with the dilemma of whether to bring back their citizens who traveled to join the group and prosecute them at home, or bar them from entry over security concerns.

On Friday, the family of Shamima Begum, 19, said it would challenge the British government’s decision to revoke her citizenship.

Begum, who traveled to Syria in 2015 aged just 15, faced being left stateless after Britain revoked her citizenship, and Bangladesh, where her parents are from, said it did not want her.

On Thursday, the father of Hoda Muthana, 24, sued to bring her home after President Donald Trump’s administration declared she was not a US citizen.



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Erdogan at odds with Russia over control of Syria-Turkey safe zone
Syrian Democratic Forces to save more civilians from last Daesh pocket

[Egypt denounces UN over executions criticism](#)

Sun, 2019-02-24 21:23

CAIRO: Egypt's Foreign Ministry on Sunday condemned the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) for criticizing trials that led to the execution of nine people last week.

Nine men were executed on Wednesday over the 2015 killing of the country's chief prosecutor amid a surge in the number of death sentences carried out this month.

The OHCHR voiced concern on Friday that trials that led to the executions of 15 people in Egypt this month may have been unfair amid allegations that torture was used to obtain confessions.

“Egypt rejects any reference to allegations that confessions were extracted,” the ministry said in a statement, adding that it “rejects any infringement upon the Egyptian judiciary.”

Since 2013, when the military under then-army chief and now President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi ousted President Mohammad Mursi, Egyptian courts have issued hundreds of death sentences.

Only a small proportion have been carried out, though the rate of executions has risen since 2015, rights activists say.

Turkey reaction

A day earlier, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan sharply criticized his Egyptian counterpart El-Sisi after the recent execution of nine people in Egypt, saying he refused to talk to “someone like him.”

“They killed nine young people recently. This is not something we can accept,” Erdogan said in an interview with Turkish TV channels CNN-Turk and Kanal D, referring to the execution on Wednesday of nine men sentenced for the murder of the Egyptian prosecutor general in 2015.

“Of course, we are going to be told that it is a decision of the judiciary, but there, justice, elections, all that, are codswallop. There is an authoritarian system, even totalitarian,” Erdogan added.

“Now, I am answering those who wonder why Tayyip Erdogan does not speak to El-Sisi, because there are mediators who come here sometimes, but I will never talk to someone like him,” he said.

Relations between Turkey and Egypt have been virtually nonexistent since the Egyptian military, then led by El-Sisi, in 2013 ousted Mursi, a close ally of Erdogan.

Mursi’s Muslim Brotherhood is outlawed in Egypt but members of the group have sought refuge in Turkey. Erdogan, who denounced Mursi’s ouster, sometimes draws a parallel with the failed coup against himself in 2016.

The Turkish president also called for the release of Muslim Brotherhood prisoners in Egypt.

“First of all, he should release all those imprisoned with a general amnesty. As long as these people have not been released, we will not be able to talk with El-Sisi,” he said.

Erdogan also attacked Western countries which, according to him, “roll out the red carpet” for El-Sisi and turn a blind eye to the latest executions in Egypt.

“Where are the Westerners? Have you heard their voices?” he said. “On the other hand, when it comes to people imprisoned in our country (Turkey), they

scream bloody murder.”

Amnesty International condemned the executions of the men, who it said were convicted in trials marred by torture allegations.



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Turkish President Erdogan lashes out at El-Sisi over Egypt executions
Egypt executes 9 men convicted for killing public prosecutor