

Qatar Airways announces more flights to Iran weeks after US sanctions reimposed on Tehran

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ID:

1543260486240151300

Mon, 2018-11-26 15:51

DUBAI: Qatar Airways will add more flights to Iran from January, the state-owned Gulf airline announced on Monday just weeks after the United States reimposed sanctions aimed at crippling Tehran's economy.

President Donald Trump has threatened to bar companies that continue to do business with Iran from the US market.

Qatar Airways will add two weekly flights to its existing Doha-Tehran route and add three weekly flights on its Shiraz service in January. It will also launch two weekly flights to Isfahan in February.

"These latest launches are further evidence of Qatar Airways' commitment to Iran, as well as the expansion of our network in this thriving market ...," Qatar Airways Chief Executive Akbar Al-Baker said in a statement.

European carriers Air France and British Airways halted flights to Iran this year. Abu Dhabi's Etihad Airways has also stopped flying to Iran, while Dubai's Emirates and flydubai have consolidated some routes as part of a partnership led by their shared state owner.

Washington announced on Nov. 5 a series of sanctions targeting Iran's banks, oil and shipping sectors, national airline and 200 individuals after Trump pulled the United States out of an international nuclear deal with Tehran.

The sanctions are aimed at forcing Iran to further curb its nuclear work, to suspend its ballistic missile program and its influence in the Middle East.

Qatar has forged closer economic ties with Iran since June 2017. Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt cut political and economic ties with Doha, accusing it of supporting terrorism.



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Qatar Airways commits to Iran flights despite sanctions
Passenger: Qatar Airways mishandled assault

[After rescue, Gaza's only grand piano makes public comeback](#)

Author:

Mon, 2018-11-26 21:35

GAZA CITY: The only grand piano in the Gaza Strip was played in public for the first time in a decade, following a complicated international restoration effort to fix the instrument after it was nearly destroyed in an Israeli airstrike.

Some 300 fans attended the performance on Sunday, staring in awed silence as Japanese and local artists performed for them. For many, it was the first

time they had ever heard a piano performed live.

“Playing this piano is feeling like playing history,” said Japanese pianist Kaoru Imahigashi. “It’s amazing. I felt the prayer of peace for many people.”

The piano’s story goes back many years, mirroring in many ways the story of Gaza. The Japanese government donated the piano some 20 years ago, following interim peace accords between Israel and the Palestinians. At the time, Gaza was envisioned as becoming the Singapore of the Middle East.

Fayez Sersawi, a Culture Ministry official, said he was responsible for receiving the piano, which was placed at a large theater in the newly built Al-Nawras resort in northern Gaza. He said music festivals were a regular activity before the beginning of the second Palestinian uprising against Israeli occupation in 2000.

In 2007, the resort closed the theater and the swimming pool and scaled down most activities after Hamas, an Islamic militant group, took control of Gaza by force after winning legislative elections. Under Hamas rule, many forms of public entertainment, including bars, movie theaters and concert halls, have been shuttered.

An ensuing Israeli-Egyptian blockade, meant to weaken Hamas, and severe damage after a three-week war with Israel in January 2009 closed the resort altogether.

The piano was silenced and sat unused until 2014, when an Israeli airstrike during a third war with Hamas destroyed the Al-Nawras hall. The piano was miraculously found unscathed, but rickety and unplayable.

After the piano was discovered, the Japan International Cooperation Agency, which sponsors development programs in Gaza, got involved.

The Japanese Foreign Ministry confirmed that a piano was donated to the Palestinian Authority in 1998. Workers from the cooperation agency took the serial number and contacted Yamaha, its producer. The company confirmed that the instrument had been manufactured between 1997 and 1998.

“Everything matched,” said Yuko Mitzui, a representative of the cooperation agency.

The Belgian nonprofit group Music Fund, which supports music instruction in the Palestinian areas, sent a French expert in 2015 to restore the piano.

Another Belgium restorer visited Gaza last month and put the final touches on the instrument. A limited, private concert was held as a trial.

On Sunday evening, all 300 seats of the theater hall at the Palestine Red Crescent Society were occupied with fans of all ages, as the rapt audience listened eagerly and clapped in applause at the end of each performance.

Kaoru, the pianist, stroked the keys smoothly as opera singer Fujiko Hirai performed the Japanese folk song “Fantasy on Sakura Sakura.”

It was the first time that Yasmin Elian, 22, attended a piano concert. “I liked how people interacted” with the artists, she said. “This encourages me to learn piano.”

Gaza has one music school, the Edward Said Conservatory, with 180 students. It suffers a lack of funding and operates in several rented rooms at the rescue services’ main ambulance station.

A group of students from the conservatory partnered with the Japanese artists and played the Palestinian national anthem, drawing huge applause from the audience.

Ismail Daoud, a conductor who heads the school, said it is hard to bring pianos to Gaza because of their weight and their prices, but that his school “desperately needs them.”

In 2009, Washington-based aid group Anera bought two upright pianos to Gaza and helped coordinate their crossing through Israel’s then strictly closed border.

Now, the Culture Ministry has given the piano to the conservatory – “to the place where it belongs and where it should be,” Daoud said. “The revival of the piano is like the revival of the Palestinian people.”



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Palestinian film festival opens in Gaza
Gaza gets its first proper cinema in three decades

[Emergency workers in Iraq struggle to help flood victims](#)

Mon, 2018-11-26 21:22

BAGHDAD: Aid agencies and government workers in Iraq scrambled on Tuesday to support tens of thousands of displaced people caught in flooding that killed at least 21 people.

Hundreds more were injured when rising waters swept several Iraqi provinces in the south and north over the past few days. Hundreds of homes were destroyed and tens of thousands of families displaced to safer areas, Iraqi officials and international humanitarian missions to Iraq said on Monday.

Villages near the town of Shirqat, 250 kilometers north of Baghdad and camps for the displaced in Qiyara and Jaddaa south of Mosul were the hardest hit. All three sites are near the Tigris river.

Civil defense teams, army and police forces across the country have been placed on high alert with the floods expected to continue as water continues to flow downstream from Syria and Iran.

Baghdad is also expected to be affected as the water works its way down the Tigris.

Water levels started to rise significantly on Friday after heavy rain hit all Iraq's provinces and lasted three days. The villages located on the bank of the river near Shirqat were swamped. Eight people were killed, another eight are missing and scores were injured when flash floods covered streets and swept houses in Khadraniya and Houriya, local officials told Arab News.

At least 1,200 houses were destroyed and more than 3,000 families displaced to other areas within the town.

The bridge linking the two villages to the other parts of the town was destroyed and hundreds of families were trapped in the flooded villages.

Iraqi army forces and Shiite armed factions used their equipment and facilities to help transfer families to safer areas.

In the south, Iraqi towns on the border with Iran border were the hardest hit, with seven people killed when their homes collapsed after flood waters flowed downstream from Iran.

Two others were killed due to electric shocks, the High Commissioner for

Human Rights in Iraq told Arab News.

The Iraq Ministry of Water Resources has been working with local municipalities to redirect flood water to the lakes of Tharthar, northwest of Baghdad and Al-Shwija Marshes, south of Baghdad to limit its impact, officials told Arab News.

The UN mission in Iraq said more than 10,000 people in Saladin and 15,000 people in Nineveh are in urgent need of assistance, including thousands of families living in displacement camps.

Tens of thousands of families have lost all their belongings and are in dire need of food, drinking water medicine and hygiene kits, the World Health Organization (WHO) delegation in Iraq said on Monday.

“A slight increase” in the number of upper respiratory tract infection cases were reported in the visited camps, WHO said.

“The situation requires a collective humanitarian effort and a quick reaction to minimize risks and contain the damage,” Ahmed Rashad, acting WHO representative in Iraq said.



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Iraq floods leave 21 dead in two days: health ministry
Several dead, thousands flee homes in Iraq floods

Jordanian army kills four smugglers crossing border from Syria

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1543169813701589800

Sun, 2018-11-25 17:40

AMMAN: Jordanian border guards killed four people and detained two others attempting to sneak into the Kingdom Sunday, the army said, adding that it had also foiled two bids to smuggle drugs.

"An infiltration operation was foiled after watching six people attempt to cross the Jordanian (border)," an unnamed military official said in a statement.

"The rules of engagement were implemented leading to the death of four and the wounding of two others who were transported to the relevant authorities." Separately, the army said "two bids to smuggle a large quantity of drugs" had been thwarted.

In the first operation, border guards confiscated 362,000 tablets of Captagon, a popular amphetamine, and 50,000 tablets of Tramadol, a powerful opiate-based painkiller.

In the second, they seized 28 bricks of hashish and 72,000 Captagon tablets. The statement did not specify which neighboring country the smugglers or the infiltrators were coming from.

Jordan's army regularly announces that it has foiled attempts to infiltrate or smuggle drugs into the Kingdom from neighboring Syria.

Some 650,000 Syrian refugees have registered with the United Nations in Jordan since fleeing their country's seven-year war, which started with anti-government protests in 2011.

Amman estimates the true number of refugees is closer to 1.3 million.

Jordanian authorities have arrested and imprisoned dozens of jihadists trying to sneak across the border to fight in Syria.

Captagon is one of the most commonly used drugs among fighters in the Syrian war.

But dozens of drug traffickers have also been detained by Jordanian authorities.

Jordan's interior ministry estimates 85 percent of the drugs it seizes have been earmarked for smuggling outside the Kingdom.



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Syria regime and rebels swap prisoners, Turkey says Jordan, Iraq move forward with border industrial zone

[Iranian earthquake leaves 200 injured, tremors felt in Baghdad and other Iraqi provinces](#)

Sun, 2018-11-25 19:52

BAGHDAD: A magnitude 6.3 earthquake struck western Iran near its border with Iraq on Sunday night, with Baghdad and other Iraqi provinces feeling the tremors. It struck in the same area where another quake last year killed over 600 people.

Iran said on Sunday that no fatalities had been reported but that about 200 people were injured after an earthquake of magnitude 6.3 struck near its western border with Iraq, Iranian state TV reported.

Sunday night's earthquake struck near Sarpol-e Zahab in Iran's Kermanshah province, which suffered half of the casualties from last year's quake and

where some still remain homeless.

State television in Iran reported the quake. Authorities said six rescue teams were immediately deployed after the quake stopped.

Morteza Salimi of Iran's Red Crescent told state TV that since the area was reconstructed after the last year's quake, officials hope there won't be casualties.

The earthquake had a depth of 10 kilometers (6.2 miles), making it very shallow. Shallow earthquakes have broader damage.

The earthquake was felt in the Iraqi capital of Baghdad, and various provinces in Iraq, according to reports.

Iran is located on major seismic faults and experiences an earthquake per day on average. In 2003, a magnitude 6.6 earthquake flattened the historic city of Bam in southern Iran, killing 26,000 people.

Last year's earthquake near Sarpol-e Zahab, a predominantly Kurdish town, had a magnitude of 7.3.



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Indonesia receives foreign aid a week after powerful earthquake4.0 magnitude earthquake hits southeastern Saudi cities