

Loggerhead turtles freed in Tunisia with tracking monitor

Sun, 2022-05-22 23:20

SFAX, Tunisia: Three rescued loggerhead turtles were released into the Mediterranean off Tunisia on Sunday, one with a tracking beacon glued to its shell to help researchers better protect the threatened species.

The main risks to sea turtles in Tunisia are linked to fisheries, since they become entangled in nets – including the three that were released into the wild.

The migratory species, which can live to as old as 45, are listed as “vulnerable” in the Red List of threatened species of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).



A scientist checks a sea turtle before releasing it into the sea on May 21, 2022, in the Tunisian coastal city of Sfax, about 270km southeast of the capital Tunis. (AFP)

The turtles’ release was watched by a crowd of some 50 people, many of them children, carried out by a specialized care center in Tunisia’s eastern port of Sfax.

Some 35 turtles have been cared for at the center in the past year as part of the Mediterranean-wide Life Med Turtle project.

Environmental activists helped carry the heavy turtles down the beach, before the animals crawled the final distance toward the sea.

All of them were tagged, but one of them also had a phone-sized tracking beacon glued to its hard shell, which will track its progress as it moves across the sea.



A scientist checks an electronic tag placed on the shell of a sea turtle before releasing it into the sea on May 21, 2022, in the Tunisian coastal city of Sfax, about 270km southeast of the capital Tunis. (AFP)

“This beacon, given to us by the University of Primorska in Slovenia, will allow us to follow this turtle in its movements,” said Imed Jribi, a science professor from the University of Sfax and a coordinator of the Life Med Turtle project.

“Identifying wintering, grazing and migration routes plays an important role in protecting this endangered species,” Jribi said.

As well as loggerhead turtles, two other turtle species are found in the Mediterranean, the green and leatherback turtle.



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Turtles dying from eating trash show plastics scourge

[Israeli Arab lawmaker rejoins coalition days after quitting](#)

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Sun, 2022-05-22 15:38

JERUSALEM: An Arab Israeli lawmaker who quit the ruling coalition said Sunday that she was returning to Prime Minister Naftali Bennett's 60-member alliance, ending a crisis that lasted just a few days.

Ghaida Rinawie Zoabi said Thursday that she was quitting Bennett's coalition, leaving it with with just 59 members in Israel's 120-seat parliament. She

cited the government's hard-line policies in Jerusalem and West Bank settlement construction that she said have alienated her constituents, fellow Palestinian citizens of Israel.

Two other legislators from Bennett's own party have already broken ranks and joined the opposition, headed by former leader Benjamin Netanyahu. Rinawie Zoabi's departure had raised the possibility of new parliamentary elections less than a year after Bennett's broad coalition government took office. But even with a 60-member coalition that's deadlocked with the opposition, passing legislation will remain difficult.

Recent Israeli-Palestinian tensions, set off by several deadly Palestinian attacks against Israel and Israeli arrest raids in the occupied West Bank, and fueled by repeated clashes between Israeli police and Palestinian protesters at a flashpoint Jerusalem holy site, have shaken the coalition's stability.

But on Sunday Rinawie Zoabi reversed course, saying that her main concern was securing "achievements for the needs of Arab society" in Israel, and preventing an ultranationalist extremist in the opposition from becoming the next minister in charge of police.

She made the announcement of her return to the coalition's ranks after meeting with Foreign Minister Yair Lapid, who wrote on Twitter that the two had "an open and reasonable conversation about the real needs of Arab society" and put aside their disagreements.

As leader of a small nationalist party Bennett heads an unwieldy coalition of eight diverse parties – from dovish factions supporting Palestinian statehood to ultranationalists and, for the first time in Israel's history, an Islamist Arab party. They joined forces in June after four consecutive deadlocked elections with the aim of ousting longtime prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who is on trial for corruption.

As part of their union, the parties agreed to set aside divisive issues, like Palestinian statehood, and focus instead on topics such as the coronavirus pandemic and the economy. Despite its internal divisions, it has managed to pass a budget, navigate the pandemic and strengthen relations with both the Biden administration and Israel's Arab allies.



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[Naftali Bennett](#)

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[Benjamin Netanyahu](#)

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Israel PM 'driving a wedge between Arab Israelis' Arab Israelis rally against Jewish nation-state law

[Israel reports monkeypox case as virus spreads to ME](#)

Sat, 2022-05-21 23:36

JERUSALEM: Israel confirmed its first case of monkeypox on Saturday, joining several European and North American countries in detecting the disease endemic to parts of Africa.

A spokesman for Tel Aviv's Ichilov hospital said that a 30-year-old man, who recently returned from western Europe with monkeypox symptoms, had tested positive for the virus.

The virus, which causes distinctive pustules but is rarely fatal, is endemic to parts of central and west Africa.

In recent weeks, cases have been detected in Britain, France, Germany, Belgium, Italy, Portugal, Spain and Sweden as well as in the US, Canada and Australia, raising fears the virus may be spreading.

Symptoms of the rare disease include fever, muscle aches, swollen lymph nodes, chills, exhaustion and a chickenpox-like rash on the hands and face. The virus can be transmitted through contact with skin lesions or droplets from a contaminated person, as well as through shared items such as bedding or towels.



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Switzerland reports first monkeypox case WHO working on more monkeypox guidance as cases rise – senior adviser

[Ex-Tehran hostage: ‘Blundering’ IRGC is ‘Iranian](#)

Sat, 2022-05-21 23:46

LONDON: A former dual national prisoner jailed by Iran has said that the

country's elite Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps are "blundering and brainwashed idiots."

British Australian academic Kylie Moore-Gilbert, 35, who was jailed for almost three years on trumped-up charges of spying, told The Telegraph that her captors were incompetent and were "not well versed in security, geopolitics or counter-espionage."

While detained in Evin Prison in Tehran, Moore-Gilbert was accused of operating as a spy in the country before her arrival, thanks to a mistake on the part of the IRGC, who used the wrong calendar in reference to her account.

After her ordeal and release in late 2020, Moore-Gilbert began writing a book, "The Uncaged Sky," which details her treatment in Iran. It was released in April this year.

BACKGROUND

British Australian academic Kylie Moore-Gilbert was arrested in 2018 after leaving a conference but realized that she was being used as a pawn to extract concessions and funding from Western countries.

She said: "They're not necessarily talented or skilled. Some of them are smart but they're brainwashed.

"I watched the movie about Johnny English in Farsi in my cell, and I thought, that is the Revolutionary Guard – the Iranian Johnny English. Most of the time, they are blundering around arresting innocent people because of brainwashing and conspiracy theories."

The IRGC is Iran's elite fighting force and answers directly to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

But critics argue that in the case of Moore-Gilbert and other dual nationals arrested and jailed by the force – including Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe – the IRGC uses hostage-taking as a means to generate funds.

Moore-Gilbert was arrested in 2018 after leaving a conference but realized that she was being used as a pawn to extract concessions and funding from Western countries.

She said: "I had been calling for my case to be made public from the first few months of my arrest. I was telling my family on the phone – go to the media, get it out there, don't keep it a secret. But unfortunately that wasn't listened to.

"I don't blame my family for it at all, the advice they were getting from the government was it's better to keep quiet."

The academic urged families of hostages taken by Iran to go public through media campaigns. "I don't see any evidence of hostages being treated worse in prison (after going public)," she said. "I noticed that great attention was placed on my medical situation after the arrest became public."

And to make matters worse, the academic discovered that her husband, Ruslan Hodorov, a Russian Israeli dual national, had been having an affair in Australia during her time in jail.

But Moore-Gilbert described the discovery as a "blessing in disguise." The two have since divorced.

She said: "Whilst it doesn't reflect well on his character that he abandoned me in my darkest moment, I'm better off without him."



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[Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps \(IRGC\)](#)

[Kylie Moore-Gilbert](#)

[Iran](#)

Iranian Americans urge Biden to keep IRGC on terror list
What terrorist delisting of Iran's IRGC would mean for US interests, allies in Middle East

Lebanese government goes into caretaker mode amid calls to expedite economic recovery plan

Sat, 2022-05-21 22:21

BEIRUT: The mandate of the newly elected Lebanese parliament begins on Sunday amid warnings that any delay in the country's economic recovery plan would have a high cost. The term of the previous parliament expired on Saturday.

Lebanese President Michel Aoun said the government of Najib Mikati was considered to have resigned based on the constitution.

Aoun expressed his appreciation to the prime minister and ministers, asking the government to act in caretaker mode until a new government was formed.

The Cabinet held its final session on Friday fraught with last-minute decisions, including the approval of the economic recovery plan, amid objection from the ministers of Hezbollah and the Amal movement.

FASTFACT

The Cabinet held its final session on Friday fraught with last-minute decisions, including the approval of Lebanon's economic recovery plan.

Mikati said: "Deposits of up to \$100,000 will be fully protected," stressing at the same time that there was "no economy without banks."

The financial strategy in the plan includes a program to restore financial solvency "as a priority to enhance confidence in the state."

In the medium and long term, it aims to put the debt on a regressive path through the introduction of gradual financial adjustments accompanied by permanent and strategic debt restructuring reforms.

The government also expects to cancel a large part of the Central Bank's foreign currency obligations to commercial banks.

The Cabinet approved an increase in the telecommunications tariff, starting July, accompanied by the formation of a ministerial committee to review the remarks from the communications minister's plan.

It did not approve the item related to the customs dollar after the finance minister withdrew it from the agenda "to avoid public anger."

The Cabinet approved allocating \$35 million for chronic diseases and cancer drugs, provided that the amount was secured by the Housing Bank in US dollars, which would be enough for four months.

Mikati warned: "Any delay in the recovery plan will have a high cost. Had we resolved this two years ago, the cost would have been much lower."

He stressed that rescue opportunities were only available through the International Monetary Fund, and the Central Bank should set the necessary standards to ensure the growth of the economy.

He criticized the attempts of some to prioritize their interest over the public interest, indirectly finding fault in how the Free Patriotic Movement had handled the electricity crisis.

"I personally received two offers from companies willing to operate the Al-Zahrani and Deir Ammar plants to produce electricity on gas at excellent prices. A consulting office was assigned to study the two offers, but unfortunately, the minister of energy withdrew this item from the Cabinet's agenda to be further discussed."

MP Ashraf Rifi, commenting on the electricity issue, said on Saturday: "What Mikati said about withdrawing these offers from the Cabinet's agenda constitutes a continuation of a major crime committed against the Lebanese immersed in darkness. Hezbollah-backed Gebran Bassil is the one to blame."

Bassil, he added, had taken over the Ministry of Energy since 2008 "as if it were his personal property, with all the failures, waste, and corruption practiced within it, and the Lebanese are paying the price."

Rifi called on sovereign and reformist MPs to make the electricity issue their priority, agree on a plan of action, and hold those involved accountable.

The International Support Group for Lebanon has called on adopting the necessary legislation to secure economic stability in Lebanon, strengthen governance, and implement the reforms that Lebanon and its people urgently need to bring the country back up on its feet.

The ISG also called on all concerned parties to move quickly to form a government that can implement the vital reforms that are long overdue and to continue working with the IMF, including implementing the prior measures that Lebanon committed to in the staff-level agreement on April 7 to lay solid foundations for the sustainable social and economic recovery of Lebanon.

The US State Department urged the elected MPs and political leaders to respond to the Lebanese people's call for change and to work seriously and urgently to take the necessary measures to save the economy.

It called for the rapid formation of a government that was capable and

committed to carrying out the serious work required to restore the confidence of the Lebanese people and the international community.

The elected parliament is meanwhile preparing to elect a speaker and deputy speaker.

The Development and Liberation bloc announced Najib Berri's nomination for the parliament speaker position at the end of a meeting headed by him. He has headed parliament since 1992 and nobody is running against him.

If Berri is elected by acclamation, this will be his seventh term.

The bloc stressed the need for the caretaker government to carry out its duties in the transitional period and follow up on issues that concerned people and their economic and social problems, especially controlling the exchange rate and securing fuel, bread, and other needs.

The FPM, the Lebanese Forces Party, and independent and reformist MPs are against Berri's nomination.

Member of the Development and Liberation bloc, Dr. Michel Moussa, told Arab News: "In this defining stage, parliamentary blocs communicate with one another to voice their positions on Berri's candidacy, while it is only natural for him to be running."

He explained that the blocs would hold their meetings next week. "But in Lebanon, everything is decided at the last minute."

As of Sunday evening, the elected MPs will have 15 days to elect the speaker, said Moussa.

Otherwise, the process of assigning a new prime minister to form the next government would be disrupted, provided the caretaker government continued to function until a decree to form the new government was issued.

"All these things will become clear next week."



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