

US returns smuggled ancient artifacts to Libya

Author:

By YOUSEF MURAD | AP

ID:

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TRIPOLI, Libya: The United States on Thursday returned a cache of smuggled ancient artifacts to Libya as the oil-rich Mediterranean country struggles to protect its heritage against the backdrop of years of war, turmoil and unrest.

The repatriated items include two sculptures dating to the 4th century B.C. from the ancient city of Cyrene.

One, named the "Veiled Head of a Female," was previously in the hands of a private collector of other illegal artifacts, according to a statement from the US Embassy in Libya. The other, also a Hellenic bust, had been at the Metropolitan Museum of New York since 1998, the statement said. Both were displayed by Libyan antiquities officials at a reception ceremony in the country's capital, Tripoli.

Libyan antiquities authorities thanked American officials and law enforcement for the returned items and said that they looked forward to future cooperation. The embassy credited the work of the Manhattan District Attorney's office and Homeland Security Investigations officials for the recovery of the artifacts.

"Although these antiquities were brought illegally to the United States by traffickers, legal efforts have succeeded in returning them to their country of origin," the embassy statement read.

Libya boasts many ancient Greek and Roman structures, along with a wealth of ancient artifacts in its major museum in the capital of Tripoli and in other museums countrywide, though its archaeological sites have been plundered for decades.

Libya has been wrecked by chaos since a NATO-backed uprising toppled and killed longtime dictator Muammar Qaddafi in 2011. The country was after that split for years between rival administrations in the east and the west, each supported by an array of militias and foreign governments.

Large-scale fighting has only stopped in the past year, but Libyans have yet to unite under a single political leadership, despite strenuous UN-led efforts.

The Greeks founded the settlement of Cyrene, close to the modern town of Shahat, in the 4th century B.C. It was later incorporated into the Roman empire. The United Nations added Cyrene to the list of UNESCO World Heritage sites in 1982 and it has been classified as a location that is particularly endangered due to neglect and looting since 2016.



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Iraq receives hundreds of trafficked antiquities from Lebanon Enhanced agreement between US and Egypt to prevent antiquities trafficking

[Three Palestinians killed as Israeli extremist visits Al-Aqsa in 'provocation'](#)

Thu, 2022-03-31 20:30

RAMALLAH: Two Palestinians were killed by Israeli security forces in Jenin on Thursday, and 14 more were injured, according to Palestinian medical sources. Yazid Saedi, 27, and Sanad Abu Attyiah, 17, were killed in Jenin, in the northern West Bank, during a large-scale operation by Israeli forces. An Israeli settler, meanwhile, killed another Palestinian on a bus in

southern Bethlehem after the Palestinian allegedly stabbed another passenger. The Palestinian Ministry of Health confirmed that Nidal Juma'a Ja'fara, 30, was killed south of the town.

The violence coincided with an extremist member of the Knesset, Itamar Ben-Gvir, visiting Al-Aqsa Mosque on Thursday morning, where he photographed some areas with his mobile phone.

Jenin Gov. Maj. Gen. Akram Rajoub described to Arab News the situation in the city and refugee camp as "very tense," adding that people there were angry. "The Israeli occupation army's incursion into the camp and the city this morning had no justification as they did not arrest anyone and did not enter a house as in the previous incursions. They deliberately shot with the aim of killing and wounding, perhaps to satisfy Israeli public opinion," he added. Videos circulated online showed smoke rising from the center of the Jenin refugee camp as gunfire echoed in the background. Others appeared to show Israeli soldiers and Palestinian gunmen moving through the narrow streets. Israeli soldiers also fired tear gas in the vicinity of Jenin Government Hospital and entered its emergency department.

Rajoub said the Israeli forces, which stayed for a short time in the camp and the city, opened fire indiscriminately at civilians in the streets, injuring them and preventing ambulances from giving them treatment.

The camp was the scene of one of the deadliest battles of the Second Intifada. In April 2002, Israeli forces fought Palestinian fighters in the camp for nearly three weeks. Twenty-three Israeli soldiers and at least 52 Palestinians, including civilians, were killed, according to the UN. Ziyad Al-Nakhala, secretary-general of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad movement, called on the members of the group's military wing, Al-Quds Brigades, to mobilize.

"In light of the invasion of Jenin camp by the Zionist enemy army, the secretary-general of the Islamic Jihad Movement announces the general mobilization of Al-Quds Brigades in all their locations," he said.

Meanwhile, the Israel Defense Force launched a spate of arrests across the West Bank early on Thursday that targeted more than 17 people.

On March 30 the Israeli Cabinet decided to cancel work permits for the relatives of Palestinians involved in violent attacks.

Israeli authorities agreed not to impose a closure on the West Bank despite various warnings of more impending attacks to coincide with the start of Ramadan on April 2.

Meanwhile, witnesses said police deployed at Al-Aqsa searched young men and prevented them from getting near extremist leader Ben-Gvir. They also stopped the Jerusalemite activist Mohammed Abu Al-Hummus and prevented him from moving into Al-Aqsa until Ben-Gvir left.

Bin-Gvir, who had announced two days ago his intention to visit Al-Aqsa every month, said during his tour: "I am here in Al-Aqsa, defying Hamas."

The Palestinian presidency strongly condemned the killing of Palestinians and the provocative act at Al-Aqsa.

"The Israeli provocations, represented by the continuation of the incursions, the daily killings and crimes by the Israeli army and settlers will draw the region into more tension and escalation which is inconsistent with the efforts made at all levels to make the month of Ramadan, coinciding with the holidays, a quiet month," it said in a statement.

The presidency held the occupation government fully responsible for this

escalation and its repercussions, calling on the international community to take immediate action to restrain Israel and hold it accountable for its crimes.

Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh also warned of the dangerous repercussions of the crimes of the Israeli occupation in Jenin and Bethlehem, and of allowing settlers to storm Al-Aqsa Mosque, calling it a violation and provocation to hurt Muslims.

Tariq Ezz El-Din, the official spokesman for Islamic Jihad in the West Bank, called Ben-Gvir's tour of Al-Aqsa "a severe violation of the mosque's sanctity," and a move that "heralds a new uprising among our people." He warned Israeli leaders of the repercussions of such dangerous steps, and urged Palestinians in Jerusalem, the West Bank, and inside Israel to confront these attempts with all force, and "travel to Al-Aqsa to defend and protect the mosque."

The cycle of violence has continued despite efforts by King Abdullah II of Jordan to prevent it.

The king paid a visit earlier this week to Ramallah to meet Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and senior political and security officials.

Later he received Israeli Defense Minister Benny Gantz and President Yitzhak Herzog in Amman.



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Shock and fear after gun attack in Israeli city leaves five dead
On Land Day, Palestinians vow to continue their struggle against Israeli occupation

Tunisia speaker rejects president's dissolution of parliament

Author:

AFP

ID:

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Thu, 2022-03-31 20:06

TUNIS: The speaker of Tunisia's parliament on Thursday rejected President Kais Saied's dissolution of the assembly the previous day.

"We consider that the parliament remains operational," Rached Ghannouchi told AFP in an interview.

"The president does not have the constitutional right to dissolve parliament."

Saied had dissolved the chamber on Wednesday, dealing another blow to the political system in place since the North African country's 2011 revolt which sparked the Arab Spring.

It came eight months after he sacked the government, froze parliament and seized sweeping powers, later moving to rule by decree in moves opponents have dubbed a "coup."

The president's announcement on Wednesday evening came hours after parliamentarians held a plenary session online – their first since Saied's power grab – and voted through a bill against his "exceptional measures." Addressing his National Security Council, Saied said MPs who had taken part would be prosecuted.

But Ghannouchi, who heads the Islamist-inspired Ennahdha party that has dominated Tunisia's post-revolution politics, Saied's decision was "null and void because it contradicts the constitution."

Many Tunisians welcomed Saied's moves against political parties seen as self-serving and corrupt, but his moves have prompted accusations that he is moving the country back toward autocracy.



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Parliament dissolved, investigation launched after Tunisian MPs convene online
Tunisian union warns of public sector strike over reforms

[Russian invasion of Ukraine drives property boom in Turkey](#)

Thu, 2022-03-31 19:18

ANKARA: Russians looking to bypass Western sanctions and Ukrainians seeking to flee the war are driving a property boom in Turkey, with prices in some areas more than trebling in recent weeks.

As part of the sanctions imposed on Russia, several banks in the country have been excluded from the SWIFT messaging system. Oligarchs close to President Vladimir Putin have also been targeted.

But Ankara is not party to the Western financial sanctions and has not halted direct flights with Russia. That means Russians have the opportunity to build a new life in Turkey, and can take their cash, gold and cryptocurrencies with them.

After Iranians and Iraqis, Russians are the third-largest buyers of Turkish property. According to official figures, in February alone, they bought 509 houses, almost doubling the figure for the same period of last year. Ukrainians bought 111 properties in the month.

The spike in interest was noted by Turkish property website Emlakjet.com.

“Searches by Russians rose by 61 percent compared to the previous month,” its CEO Tolga Idikat told Arab News.

“The highest number of property searches by Ukrainians occurred in February when the political crisis reached its peak. Their demand is mostly concentrated in the Mediterranean resort town of Antalya, while they prefer villas and single-family houses.”

The number of searches by Russians in March more than doubled year on year, while those made by Ukrainians rose by 30 percent, Idikat said.

The increase in demand has driven up prices by at least threefold and made them euro-denominated, while real estate agents are predicting a supply shortage in the months ahead, he added.

“The number of houses cannot match the demand, which increases day by day. The currency advantage that foreign investors have also pushes prices up,” Idikat said.

Unlike Russians, who mostly want to live in Turkey, Ukrainians are looking for short-term deals, usually for about three or four months, as they expect to return home after the war, he added.

Russians’ preferred destinations are Istanbul, Antalya, the western city of Izmir and the northwestern city of Bursa. They are looking for properties both to buy and rent.

Under Turkish law, Russians who buy a property worth \$250,000 and keep it for at least three years are entitled to a Turkish passport. The slump in the value of the Turkish lira is also a draw for buyers.

There are currently about 30,000 Russians and 9,000 Ukrainians living in Antalya, mostly in Konyaalti and Manavgat districts.

In response to the spike in demand, several real estate websites, including Emlakjet, are now promoting their properties directly to Russian buyers.

“Although we haven’t yet offered a special content for Russian and Ukrainian house-seekers, some of our members have begun publishing notices in the Russian language,” Idikat said.

The housing spike is a boon for Turkey, which is set to lose out on tourism revenue as a result of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Tourism accounts for about 3.8 percent of the country's GDP, and more than a quarter of all visitors last year were from Russia and Ukraine – 4.7 million from the former and 2.1 million from the latter.

“Turkey is quite exposed to the economic shocks caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine,” Robert Moglewicz, a senior resident scholar at the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington, told Arab News.

So a short-term boost to real estate markets could help to soften the economic blow, he said.



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Europe's Russian gas in jeopardy, Ukraine braces for new assaults

Lebanon's wheat crisis worsened by funding delays

Wed, 2022-03-30 21:13

BEIRUT: Lebanon's wheat crisis is being exacerbated by bureaucracy, as the price of the grain continues to soar, according to a senior official.

More than two weeks ago, the Cabinet granted the General Directorate of Grains and Sugar Beets an advance of 36 billion Lebanese pounds (\$1.6 million) to buy 50,000 tons of wheat, which would have been sufficient to meet the country's needs for a month. But the advance was never received as a decree was not issued.

"Since no decree was issued to allow the directorate to ask the central bank to convert the 36 billion Lebanese pounds into dollars, the minister of economy resorted to requesting exceptional approval from the Cabinet, which convened on Wednesday to obtain an additional amount," Georges Berbari, the general director of grains and sugar beets, said.

"The administrative measures for the process of buying wheat take a long time. Meanwhile, international prices are rising. The amount allocated two weeks ago is no longer sufficient to purchase 50,000 tons of wheat," he said.

"The situation is very stressful amid the decreasing wheat stocks. The important thing is to get any amount quickly, even if it will only secure 30,000 or 40,000 tons of wheat."

Ahmad Hoteit, the president of the Association of Mills in Lebanon, said: "The Ukrainian crisis has begun to have repercussions on Lebanon. Wheat shipments may arrive next week at higher prices, and given the high demand, the country that pays more gets the wheat. We asked Prime Minister Najib Mikati and the central bank not to delay securing the credits."

Lebanon consumes about 600,000 tons of wheat a year, of which 80 percent is imported from countries like Ukraine and Russia. But it is facing a severe financial crisis, prompting the state to gradually lift subsidies on dozens of vital materials, including fuel, medicine and flour.

Despite the problems, Agriculture Minister Abbas Hajj Hassan dismisses claims the country is facing a wheat crisis.

"The minister of economy has communicated with the U.S., Canada, Australia, India and other markets to import wheat from them," he said.

"We are waiting for the central bank to open credits, and the ministry's agricultural research department has warehouses ready for storage."

The silos at Beirut port were traditionally used to hold Lebanon's wheat and grain stocks but they were destroyed by an explosion in August 2020. As an alternative storage facility has yet to be found, imported wheat is now

transferred directly from the port to mills.

Hoteit said he expected the price of a bundle of bread to rise in line with the increase in the cost of imported wheat and in the event that subsidies on flour were completely lifted.

The bread crisis is one of many being faced by the Lebanese people amid a financial collapse and lack of social protection. Even the planned Capital Control law, which is supposed to protect what is left of citizens' money in banks, has become subject to a political tug-of-war.

Parliamentary committees removed the legislation from the agenda on Tuesday after numerous MPs rejected the draft.

Meanwhile, an International Monetary Fund delegation headed by Ernesto Ramirez, the IMF head of mission for Pakistan, the Middle East and Central Asia, is currently in Beirut waiting to complete negotiations with Lebanon.

"We hope that a preliminary deal will be reached after two weeks of discussions," Deputy Prime Minister Saade Chami, who heads Lebanon's delegation to the IMF, told AFP.



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