

800 Iraqi refugees return home from Syria

Author:

AFP

ID:

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QAMISHLI: Eight hundred Iraqi refugees returned home from northeast Syria on Thursday and hundreds more are to follow, a Syrian official in the region's Kurdish semi-autonomous administration said.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the first group left on buses via the Al-Yarubiyah border crossing.

The Iraqi government has "agreed to the return of (a total of) 800 families," the Syrian Kurdish source told AFP, adding that many of them had sought refuge in Syria after the Daesh group expanded its presence in Iraq.

They had been living in villages bordering Iraq, under the control of the Kurdish-led forces that rule regions of north and northeast Syria.

A senior Iraqi security source said: "We have been checking their identities for security reasons for the past year.

"They've been suffering from the difficult economic conditions in Syria."

Relatives of jihadists, including children, are held in Kurdish-controlled camps in Syria's northeast, the largest of which is Al-Hol with around 56,000 displaced people and refugees.

Since last year, Iraqi authorities have repatriated hundreds of Iraqi families from Al-Hol.

The Daesh group ruled large swathes of Iraq between 2014 and 2017.

Kurdish-led forces backed by the United States seized the group's last territorial bastion in Syria in 2019.



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[Houthis condemned for storing weapons in housing complex as blasts kill residents](#)

Thu, 2022-03-03 22:42

AL-MUKALLA: Yemen's military has accused the Iran-backed Houthis of storing weapons and ammunition inside or near residential areas, after large explosions ripped through several buildings in a housing compound in the southern city of Taiz.

Abdul Basit Al-Baher, a military officer, told Arab News on Thursday that the blasts that shook Houthi-controlled Huban district in Taiz early on Tuesday were caused by weapons and ammunition stored in the basements and lower floors of several buildings in Al-Saleh residential complex.

"The Houthi militia sealed off the area and even prevented ambulances from reaching the wounded," he said. "Many civilians were killed or wounded in the explosions as fragments of bombs hit their houses outside the complex."

An amateur video posted online showed explosions and large balls of fire rising from the ground floor of three buildings in Al-Saleh.

Other images showed three buildings that had been badly damaged by the blasts.

Yemeni army officials said the Houthis moved weapons, ammunition and drones from military bases in Dhamar and other areas to the residential area in Taiz, and turned the upper floors of Al-Saleh buildings into secret detention centers.

"The ground floors are workshops for assembling and booby-trapping drones, and weapons depots," Al-Baher said, adding that the Houthis had endangered the lives of thousands of people who live in areas of Taiz under their control.

"This is a criminal and terrorist organization that does not care about the lives of civilians."

The Houthis told residents that the explosions were caused by fireworks lit during a wedding in Huban.

A Yemeni news agency reported on Thursday that the Houthis were holding more than 3,000 people who had been abducted from Taiz and other areas at secret prisons in Al-Saleh, and had also turned some flats there into command rooms and hiding places for their leaders.

The explosions in the city are not the first to be linked to secret Houthi weapons dumps. Similar blasts have been reported in densely populated areas of Houthi-held Sanaa, Dhamar and Jouf.

Officials say the Houthis hide weapons and drones in civilian facilities that are on the no-target list of the Coalition to Restore Legitimacy in Yemen.

In May 2019, Human Rights Watch and the Sanaa-based Mwatana for Human Rights said an explosion in April that killed at least 15 children and wounded more than 100 people in Sanaa's Sawan neighborhood was caused by a fire at a Houthi weapons storage facility.

Also on Thursday, in Sanaa, relatives of Yemeni abductees held at Houthi jails organized a rare protest to denounce the sentences handed down to their loved ones by a Houthi-controlled court.

The Mothers of Abductees Association, an umbrella organization for thousands of female relatives of war prisoners, staged the protest outside the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. The women demanded the release of 13 prisoners who had earlier been sentenced to death or jail terms by Sanaa's Specialized Criminal Court.

“We hold Houthi armed groups fully responsible for our sons’ lives as such crimes are imprescriptible,” read one of the posters carried by the women.

The organization said the abductees had been brutally tortured by the Houthis into confessing to crimes and that the father of one of the convicted men died of shock after hearing the court’s ruling.

Meanwhile, dozens of Houthis were killed in more than 23 air raids by coalition warplanes in the provinces of Marib and Hajjah, which have witnessed bloody fighting between government troops and the Houthis over the past 24 hours.

The Arab coalition said on Thursday that the strikes also destroyed 17 Houthi military vehicles.



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Egypt lauds UNSC resolution on Houthis

Syrian woman arrested in Lebanon on suspicion of killing husband over plans for second wife

Author:

Thu, 2022-03-03 21:15

BEIRUT: A Syrian woman arrested on suspicion of murdering her husband planned the killing after learning about his plans to marry a second wife in the east of Lebanon, police allege.

The 33-year-old woman is accused of murdering her 35-year-old Syrian husband and disposing of his body in a grave dug in the rugged Bekaa Valley region in eastern Lebanon.

The woman's 19-year-old brother has also been charged over his alleged involvement in the killing.

Lebanon's Internal Security Forces said on Thursday that the woman walked into a police station in Zahle on Feb. 25 and claimed that her husband had been missing for five days.

Detectives launched an investigation before uncovering the woman and her brother's involvement.

On Tuesday, an ISF squad arrested the brother in a camp in Barr Elias and the woman at her home in Al Ma'allaga.

An ISF official told Arab News: "Investigators suspected her alleged connection after inspecting phone data that also exposed the involvement of her brother."

A prosecutor at the Bekaa attorney-general's office told Arab News that preliminary investigations "indicate that the brother helped his sister to kill the husband over a family dispute."

According to the ISF, the suspects admitted stabbing the victim while he was sleeping before disposing of his body in a makeshift grave they had dug earlier.

The woman claimed she killed her husband because he planned to marry again and accused him of abusing his children, according to the ISF.



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[Egyptian minister discusses clean energy plans with EU bank VP](#)

Thu, 2022-03-03 17:37

CAIRO: Tarek El-Molla, the Egyptian minister of petroleum and mineral resources, has met with Mark Bowman, the vice president of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, to enhance cooperation in reducing carbon emissions and promoting clean energy.

The two sides also covered global oil and natural gas prices – which are significantly rising due to several political crises – and reviewed the ongoing preparations for Egypt's hosting of the COP27 World Climate Summit.

El-Molla stressed that Egypt is committed to international agreements for preserving the environment and reducing emissions, foremost of which is the

Paris Climate Agreement, adding that Cairo has adopted an ambitious strategy that supports the transition to cleaner energy use by reducing carbon emissions as part of its “Egypt 2030” vision for sustainable development.

The minister said that Egypt is developing an ambitious plan to use hydrogen as a low-hydrocarbon fuel source, focusing on producing blue hydrogen in the short- and medium-term as well as the production of green hydrogen.

He noted the importance of natural gas as a transitional fuel, as it has the fewest fossil fuel emissions, adding that several countries have adopted it as they move towards cleaner energy.

El-Molla said that modern, advanced technologies have provided a great opportunity to not only reduce carbon emissions but to also capture, store and exploit them, which was not possible until a few years ago.

The minister said that the petroleum sector is working on several projects to reduce emissions, foremost of which is the plan to produce wooden panels from rice straw.

He also referred to the pilot project being implemented in partnership with Italian company Eni in the Meleiha fields of Agiba in the Western Desert to capture and store carbon with new technologies.

He added: “This is besides the projects to benefit from flare gasses instead of burning them in oil fields, which contributes to reducing carbon dioxide emissions by more than 800,000 tonnes.”

During the meeting, the two sides agreed to form a joint working group to identify clean energy projects and reduce emissions. It will prepare for an initiative following studies on the low-carbon opportunities that will be launched during the COP27 climate summit hosted by Egypt this year.

Bowman affirmed the European Bank’s appreciation of the relationship with Egypt and its aspiration to expand cooperation with Cairo.

He noted the bank’s full readiness to support Egypt’s efforts to preserve the environment and participate strongly in the upcoming World Climate Summit.

Bowman also praised Egypt’s important role in the region and the world and its transformation – in cooperation with neighboring countries – into a key regional hub for trade and the circulation of gas and oil, and a gateway to Africa in the energy sector.



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[US returns billionaire's plundered artifacts to Jordan](#)

Author:

Wed, 2022-03-02 23:40

JERUSALEM: American authorities have returned nine looted artifacts to Jordan that were seized from a US billionaire collector as part of a landmark deal announced in December.

The artifacts were among 180 items seized by the Manhattan District Attorney's office as part of an agreement with collector Michael Steinhardt to surrender trafficked artifacts and avoid prosecution. The deal capped a four-year investigation into Steinhardt's possession of looted antiquities.

The Jordanian Antiquities Ministry and the US Embassy in Jordan held a ceremony in Jordan's capital, Amman, on Tuesday showcasing the objects that

were “illegally smuggled from Jordan and obtained by an antiquities collector in the United States,” the embassy said in a statement.

“This is a testament to the United States’ commitment to help protect Jordan’s cultural heritage. With today’s repatriation of Jordanian antiquities, we are keeping this promise,” Ambassador Henry T. Wooster said.

The American and Jordanian authorities’ press statements did not mention Steinhardt by name, but seven of the artifacts that appeared in photos published by the ministry matched the description of Jordanian items in court documents.

Two ancient Jewish tombstones that were plundered from Jordan and bought by Steinhardt from an Israeli antiquities dealer did not appear in photos from the press conference. The director of the Jordanian Antiquities Ministry did not respond to a request for comment.

Since the Manhattan District Attorney’s office announced the agreement in December, US authorities have returned Steinhardt’s plundered artifacts to Turkey, Greece, Bulgaria, Libya, Iraq, and now Jordan. Steinhardt was not accused of plundering any items himself and has said he did not commit any crime. But the DA’s office said he “knew, or should have ascertained by reasonable inquiry” that the antiquities were stolen.

More than two dozen artifacts that had been plundered from Israel and the occupied West Bank are expected to be returned to Israeli authorities later this month, the Israeli Antiquities Authority said.

Of the 40 artifacts being repatriated to Israel as part of the deal, at least 22 are believed to have been plundered from West Bank sites, according to court documents. Steinhardt “has been unable to locate” nine of those pieces, and another three are on display at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem.

The museum recently removed Steinhardt’s name from the display label for two Neolithic masks he had loaned.

The DA’s office said the artifacts from the occupied West Bank will be returned to the Israeli government “pursuant to the Oslo Accords,” the 1995 interim agreement between Israel and the Palestinians, which says the return of West Bank artifacts to the Palestinians should be resolved in a still-elusive final peace deal.

Jihad Yassin, a Palestinian Tourism and Antiquities Ministry official, said that the materials that came from the West Bank should be returned to the Palestinians, and that his department was preparing to submit a report to UNESCO about the issue.

Steinhardt, 81, is a hedge fund founder and philanthropist who chairs the Steinhardt Foundation for Jewish Life. He is also co-founder of Birthright Israel, an organization that sends young Jews on free trips to Israel and a prominent patron of the Israel Museum and other institutions in the country.



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Egypt to probe alleged Pharaonic artifacts in Afghanistan