

# UN fears for Lebanon's children amid poverty and violence

Author:

Fri, 2021-12-17 22:56

BEIRUT: UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres will travel to Lebanon on Sunday for an official visit to the country.

The UN Information Office in Beirut said the visit was a gesture of solidarity, and that the secretary-general "will reiterate the support of all the UN family, the political mission, the peacekeeping forces and the humanitarian and relief workers to Lebanon and its people."

Two days before the visit, the special representative of the secretary-general on violence against children, Najat Maalla M'jid, conducted a tour of Lebanon, discussing "the huge impact of the economic, social and pandemic crises on children, especially the poor ones, in addition to all forms of violence against them.

"We looked into ways to support and accelerate the activation of national policies for social coverage and protection of children against all forms of violence, especially the fight of child labor, within the framework of an integrative approach to a series of very important services," M'jid said on Friday.

Her remarks came after meetings with Lebanon's President Michel Aoun and Prime Minister Najib Mikati.

"The UN supports the Lebanese government in the field of children's protection from violence, discrimination and poverty," she added.

A UNICEF report warned that "children in Lebanon are in danger, as 15 percent of families stopped their children's education, and 30 percent of children do not receive the needed primary healthcare."

By Thursday, 239,000 people in Lebanon had registered on the platform of the Poorest Families Program, Mikati said.

Among those registered, 166,000 applications met the required specifications, which indicates the extent of social pressures, he added.

In the first stage, he said, \$125 will be paid to each family per month for a year, through funds secured by the World Bank.

There is also the issue of the ration card that will adopt the same platform for registration, which covers more than 500,000 families, he added,

"We have agreed with the World Bank that once the relief project begins and two months of credits are paid for the ration card at an acceptable cost from the funds of special withdrawals in the central bank, the World Bank will

secure financing for the project for a period of one year, estimated at about \$500 million," he said.

Mikati assured the Lebanese people that "there is an international decision not to let Lebanon collapse," adding: "There is an external and internal umbrella that protects the government's work."

The prime minister stressed that the government would not hesitate to resign if it led to a solution, but said he felt the move would "cause a further deterioration in the situation, and may lead to the postponement of the parliamentary elections."

Mikati also said talks were ongoing to resume Cabinet sessions.

Lebanon faces an economic crisis described by the World Bank as "one of the worst crises on Earth since the middle of the 19th century." Around 80 percent of the Lebanese people live in poverty.

UNICEF estimated in a report published November that "more than 30 percent of families have at least one child who skipped a meal, while 77 percent of families say they lack sufficient food and 60 percent of them buy food by accumulating unpaid bills or borrowing money."

The dollar rate was about to reach 29,000 Lebanese pounds in the middle of the week, but the intervention of the Lebanese Central Bank reduced it to around 26,000 pounds.



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Lebanon to set up more checkpoints to clamp down on thefts IMF examines extent of Lebanon's financial sector losses

# [Digitized war records of Indian troops killed in WWI Iraq highlight long forgotten siege](#)

Fri, 2021-12-17 22:22

LONDON: The beautifully handwritten note on the yellowing service record, compiled by the Punjab government in 1919 and now over a century old, is as brief as it is poignant.

In faded ink, the entry for Wasawa Singh, the son of Shera, a Jat from the village of Gaike in northeast Punjab, tells the story of a young life cut short in the service of an alien empire.

There are no dates, merely a rank – havildar, equivalent to sergeant – and the name of a unit, the 30th Punjabis.

Paperwork documenting the military service of more than 300,000 men from Punjab was recently unearthed in the Lahore Museum in Pakistan. (Supplied)

An infantry regiment first raised by the British Indian Army in 1857, the

30th saw action in the Indian mutiny (1857-58), the Bhutan War (1864-66), the Second Afghan War (1878-80) and, finally, the First World War.

It was in this last conflict, in which over 1 million Indian soldiers fought in almost every theater of the war for the British Empire, that Singh died, along with more than 70,000 of his countrymen.

The surviving paperwork documenting his service, and that of more than 300,000 other men from Punjab, has been unearthed in the depths of Lahore Museum in Pakistan. Discovered after languishing forgotten for over 100 years, all 26,000 pages have been digitized and can now be searched online, by the name of the soldier, his father, or their village.

Although a priceless treasure trove for both historians and descendants of the old warriors, the documents contain only limited information. They do not reveal, for example, how old Singh was when he was killed, how he met his end, or even when and where he died.

A terse entry in the neat handwriting of some forgotten civil servant does, however, record that after his death, Singh's nameless and doubtless grief-stricken mother was awarded a small pension.



For four long years, British and Indian soldiers fought side by side to oust the Ottoman Empire from what is now modern-day Iraq. (Alamy)

According to the records of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, 153 men called Singh died while serving with the 30th Punjabis. Wasawa, service number 3902, fell on Jan. 15, 1917, while fighting the Germans in East Africa. Although fated to perish 5,000 km from his Punjab home, he was, at

least, spared the horrors of Gallipoli or the western front in France, where so many Indians fought and suffered in horrendous conditions.

Death was to be his lot, however. He was killed in fierce fighting which saw the Germans finally defeated at Mahenge, near the Rufiji river in modern-day Tanzania.

Wasawa Singh's final resting place is unknown. His name, and those of more than 1,200 British and Indian officers and men "to whom the fortune of war denied the known and honored burial given to their comrades in death," is recorded on the British and Indian Memorial wall at Nairobi South Cemetery in Kenya.

## **FASTFACTS**

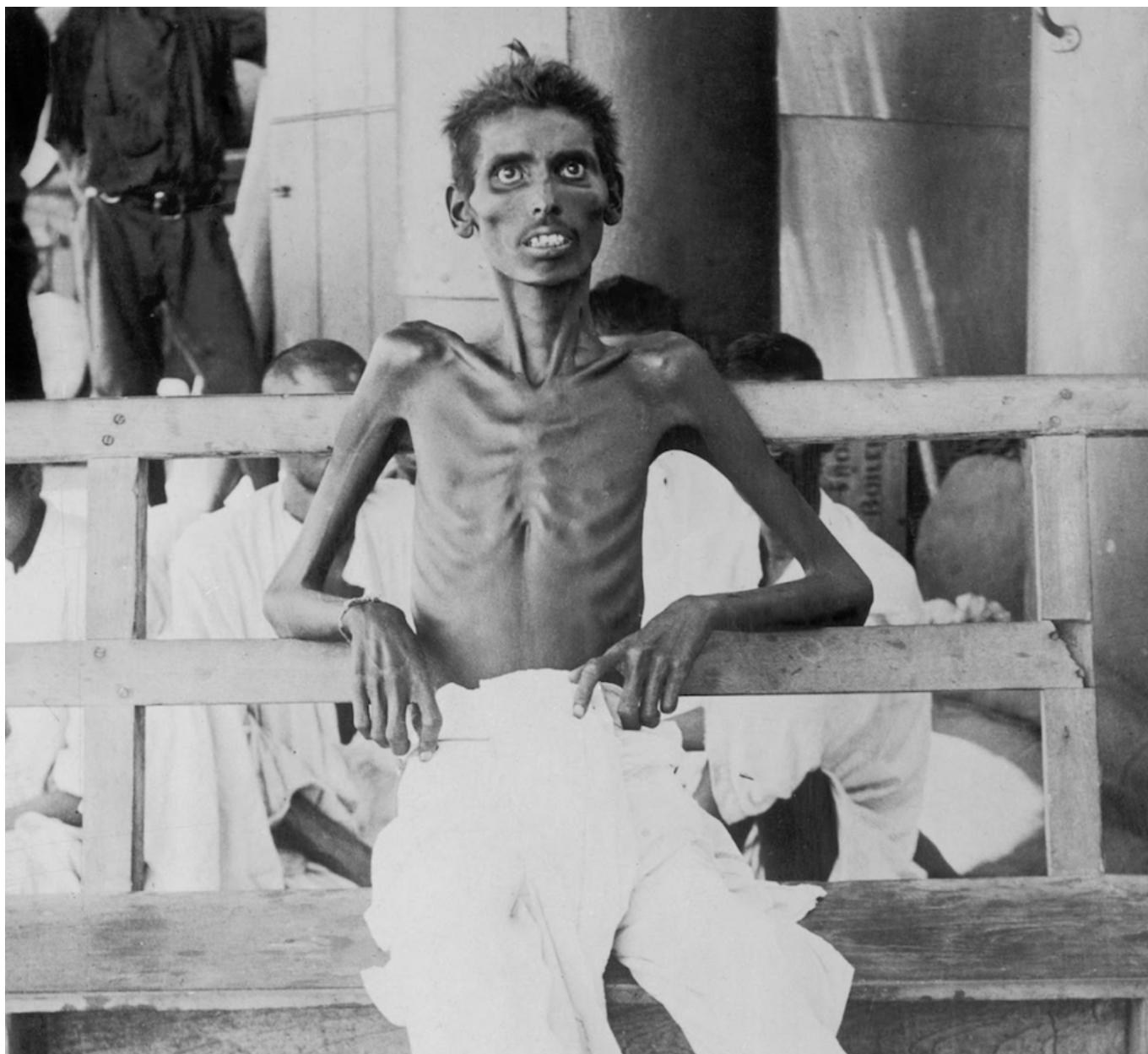
**\* The siege of Kut Al-Amara, a town 160 km southeast of Baghdad, lasted four months, ending on April 29, 1916.**

**\* Around 4,000 men died in the siege, while 23,000 more were killed or wounded attempting to relieve the besieged force.**

For the hundreds of thousands of families in India and Pakistan today whose grandfathers and great-grandfathers took up arms for the British cause in the 1914-1918 war, the emergence of the Lahore Museum papers is one more step toward a long-overdue recognition of the sacrifices made by so many from the subcontinent.

In Britain, every year, the nation still observes a minute's silence on Armistice Day: At the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month, the time and date the guns fell silent on the western front in France in 1918.

But although in recent years efforts have been made to ensure that the Armistice Day commemorations are inclusive of all the nations of the British Empire whose young men lost their lives, it was not until 2002 – 84 years after the end of the war – that a solemn memorial dedicated "In memory of the 5 million volunteers from the Indian subcontinent, Africa and the Caribbean who fought with Britain in the two world wars" was unveiled on Constitution Hill in London.



One of the Indian soldiers after being held by the Turks in a Mesopotamian prison following the fall of Kut. June 28, 1917. (Daily Mirror/Mirrorpix/Mirrorpix via Getty Images)

It was almost as if, for all those years, the sacrifices made by the subcontinent's soldiers on behalf of the empire had been taken for granted.

That, certainly, was the only conclusion that could be drawn from a report by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, which in 2019 set up a committee "to probe the early history of the Imperial War Graves Commission to identify inequalities in the way the organization commemorated the dead of the British Empire."

Founded over a century ago as the Imperial War Graves Commission, initially to commemorate the empire's First World War dead, the organization was charged at the outset with treating all the fallen with equal dignity. In a paper prepared for the commission in 1918, Lt. Col. Sir Frederic Kenyon, director of the British Museum, wrote that "no less honor should be paid to the last resting places of Indian and other non-Christian members of the

empire than to those of our British soldiers.”

In its report, published earlier this year, the committee concluded that, “although the organization upheld its promise of equality of treatment in Europe, this was not always the case for certain ethnic groups elsewhere.”

It found that, “in conflict with the organization’s founding principles,” between 45,000 and 54,000 casualties – predominantly Indian, East African, West African, Egyptian and Somali – “were commemorated unequally.”



Memorial Gates at the end of Constitution Hill in London. (Shutterstock)

Even more shocking, as many as 350,000 others “were not commemorated by name or possibly not commemorated at all.”

In all the conflicts in which Indian troops fought and died with barely any recognition, few are as little known, certainly in Britain, as the Mesopotamian campaign, to which India made its greatest contribution in the First World War. As British Col. Patrick Cowley, a veteran of a later conflict in Iraq, wrote in his 2009 book “Kut 1916: Courage and Failure,” the “campaign in Mesopotamia is a ‘forgotten war’ and the Kut story was overshadowed by events elsewhere.”

For four long years, British and Indian soldiers fought side by side to oust the Ottoman Empire from what is now Iraq. It was a brutal, bloody affair, ultimately successful, but marred by the disaster of the siege of Kut Al-Amara, a town nestled in a bend in the Tigris, 160 km southeast of Baghdad.

The siege lasted four months. It ended on April 29, 1916, with the surrender

of 12,000 mainly Indian troops. Outnumbered, outgunned and poorly led, after four desperate months they were starving, weakened by illness and cut off from any hope of relief.

The day before the surrender, one British officer wrote in his journal: "We are a sick army, a skeleton army rocking with cholera and disease."

In all, about 4,000 men were killed during the siege. Astonishingly, 23,000 more soldiers – again, mainly Indian – were killed or wounded during attempts to relieve the besieged force.



British casualty being brought down the gangway from a steamer by Indian Army orderlies at Falariyeh, Mesopotamia. The Indian Expeditionary Force, consisting of both British and Indian units, advanced along the Tigris towards Baghdad in Summer 1915. (Alamy)

Among the defenders were men of the 22nd, 24th, 66th, 67th and 76th Punjabis. Several other Indian units suffered alongside them, including the 117th Mahrattas, the 103rd Mahratta Light Infantry, the 120th Rajputana Infantry and a squadron of the 7th Haryana Lancers.

More Punjabi regiments, including the 28th and 92nd, were part of the relief force that failed to fight its way through to Kut in time, suffering a high percentage of casualties, alongside other Indian units, including the 51st

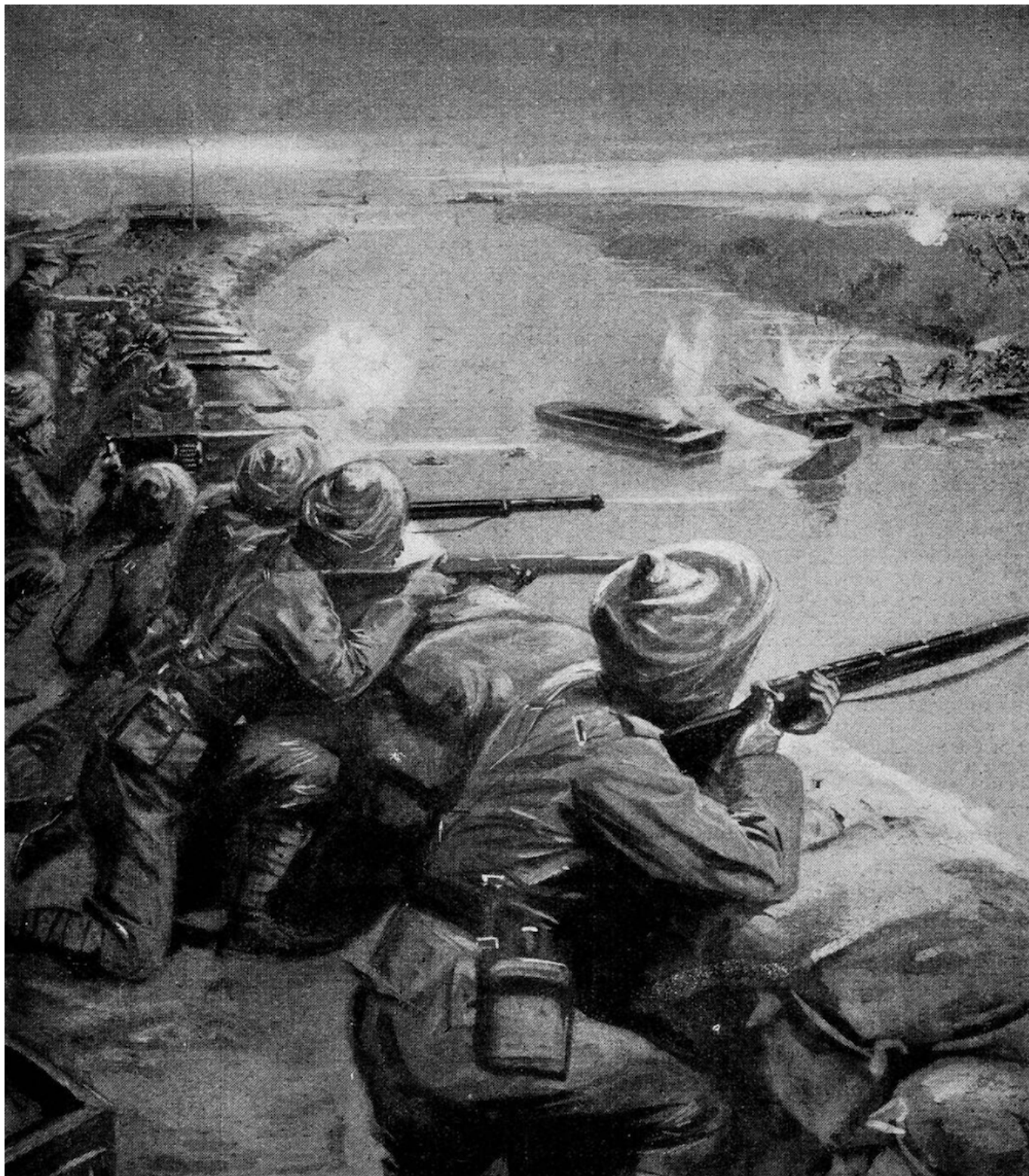


and 53rd Sikhs and the 9th Bhopal Infantry.

Of the 12,000 men marched into captivity in Anatolia, Turkey, at least one-third died. Some succumbed to disease and starvation, while others were shot or beaten to death for falling behind on the march, or simply left to die where they fell after collapsing, exhausted, by the roadside. At one point on the march, bodies were thrown into a ravine, where skulls were found later in the war.

Ottoman cruelty extended to the local Arabs who had helped the British. About 250 were shot after the surrender, while a number of interpreters were hanged in Kut's town square.

Today, the siege remains virtually unknown, certainly in Britain. It is, however, acknowledged as one of the greatest catastrophes ever to befall a British army. To this day Kut is studied by military strategists around the world as an example of the danger to an invading army of overstretching its supply lines.



According to the records of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, 153 men called Singh died while serving with the 30th Punjabis. (Alamy)

Most of the Indians who fell at Kut or died in captivity have no known grave. Many are recorded on the Basra Memorial, which was constructed in 1929 and originally was located at Maqil, on the west bank of the Shatt-al-Arab. In 1997, by order of Saddam Hussein, it was taken apart and reconstructed 32 km along the road to Nasiriyah, in the middle of what was a major battleground during the First Gulf War.

Today, the memorial is in poor repair. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission

said that "while the current climate of political instability persists, it is extremely challenging for it to manage or maintain its cemeteries and memorials located within Iraq."

But when it does finally feel able to renovate the Basra Memorial, the CWGC will have more than mere masonry and marble to repair.

As the report of the Special Committee to Review Historical Inequalities in Commemoration noted, "known issues with memorials to the missing include 38,696 Indian casualties who were or are still commemorated (only) numerically on memorials," with their names missing.

Subsequently, names have been added to the Port Tewfik memorial in Egypt and the combined British and Indian memorials at Nairobi and Dar es Salaam. But "a decision is yet to be made regarding the Basra Memorial, primarily due to ongoing instability in Iraq."

On the panels of the memorial can be found the names of the 7,385 British personnel and the Indian officers who lost their lives in Mesopotamia.

But for the 33,256 noncommissioned officers and other ranks of the British Indian army who remain numbered but unnamed on the Basra Memorial, the insult of anonymity has yet to be expunged.



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## [Cyprus, Jordan sign bilateral agreements](#)

Author:

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Fri, 2021-12-17 21:52

NICOSIA: Jordan's King Abdullah II paid an official visit to Cyprus on Friday for talks with President Nicos Anastasiades, during which several bilateral accords were signed, officials said.

The agreements covered issues including double taxation and the extradition of fugitives.

Following a military guard of honor, Anastasiades and Abdullah held a private meeting and exchanged gifts.

"President Anastasiades bestowed upon the king of Jordan the highest honor of the Republic of Cyprus... and King Abdullah II bestowed upon the president the highest honor of Jordan," the presidency said.

The two leaders discussed bilateral relations and regional developments, as well as climate change and efforts to combat Covid-19.

Abdullah was also briefed on efforts to resume United Nations-backed Cyprus reunification talks and Turkish warnings against Nicosia over oil and gas exploration in the region.

Jordan has joined a burgeoning regional alliance that includes Egypt, Greece and Israel, based on shared energy interests.



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## [Tunisia navy rescues 78 migrants, one dead](#)

Author:

Fri, 2021-12-17 00:22

BEN GUERDANE, Tunisia: Tunisia's navy rescued 78 migrants and retrieved the body of another after their boat sank off the country's coast during a bid to reach Europe, the Defense Ministry said.

The migrants, mostly Bangladeshis and Egyptians aged from 12-45, had set off the previous night from Abu Kammash just across the border in neighboring Libya near Zawara, it said. A decade of lawlessness in Libya has turned it

into a major launchpad for migrants attempting to reach Europe by sea.

The latest rescue follows a string of similar Tunisian operations to thwart sea crossings or to save migrants in unseaworthy boats.

They had “intended to slip across the maritime border in the direction of Europe,” but their boat ran into trouble 20 km off the coast south of Tunisia’s second city of Sfax, the ministry said.

It said the migrants had been taken to the port of El-Ketef and handed to the national guard.

## **BACKGROUND**

A decade of lawlessness in Libya has turned it into a major launchpad for migrants attempting to reach Europe by sea.

The body of the dead migrant, an Egyptian, was handed to municipal authorities, it said.

The Tunisian Red Crescent told AFP another migrant was missing.

Tunisia is also a key departure point, just 140 km from the Italian island of Lampedusa.

According to the FTDES rights group, the Tunisian coast guard intercepted about 19,500 people attempting to cross the Mediterranean in the first nine months of this year.

It said the trend had accelerated since the establishment in June of a direct line of communication between Rome and Tunis to coordinate efforts against illegal immigration and share information.



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## [Iran-linked hackers attack Israeli targets](#)

Fri, 2021-12-17 00:37

JERUSALEM: An Iran-linked hacking group attacked seven Israeli targets over a 24-hour period this week, an Israeli cyber-security firm said, in the latest episode of cyber warfare between the rival states.

The targets of the attack by the group called "Charming Kitten" included the Israeli "government and business sector," Tel Aviv-based Check Point said in a statement late Wednesday, without providing specifics.

"Check Point has blocked these attacks, as we witnessed communications between a server used by this group and the targets in Israel," said the firm.

“Our reports of the last 48 hours prove that both criminal hacking groups and nation-state actors are engaged in the exploration of this vulnerability.”

Allegations of cyberwar between Iran and Israel have escalated in recent months.

Israel has been blamed for a series of cyberattacks on Iranian infrastructure, including the country’s fuel distribution system in October.

Another purportedly Iran-linked hacking group called “Black Shadow” claimed an October cyberattack on an Israeli internet service provider.

One of the targets in that incident was Israel’s largest LGBTQ dating site, with the hackers demanding ransom payments under threat of releasing sensitive private information, like the HIV status of the site’s users.

Israel, which bills itself as a leader in cybersecurity, last week held “an international cyber financial war game,” according to the finance ministry.

Participants included the US, Britain and the UAE, which established diplomatic ties with Israel last year.

Other participants were Germany, Switzerland and the International Monetary Fund, the ministry said in a statement.

The drill, which Israel described as the first of its kind, was designed to simulate an international cyber-financial attack.

Chief economist at the Israeli Finance Ministry, Shira Greenberg, said the exercise demonstrated “the importance of coordinated global action by governments together with central banks in the face of cyber-financial threats.”





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Middle East faced wave of cybersecurity threats since start of pandemicUS to work with Big Tech, finance sector on new cybersecurity guidelines