[Geneva sisters repatriated from Syrian desert camp](#)

Wed, 2021-12-08 00:27

GENEVA: Two Swiss half-sisters whose mother took them out of the country with her when she joined the Daesh militant group in the Middle East in 2016 have been repatriated from a desert camp in northeastern Syria, the Swiss Foreign Ministry said on Tuesday.

The older girl, now 15, had suffered a severe shrapnel wound to her leg, requiring three operations, while the younger was said to be in poor health.

The ministry confirmed that it had repatriated the two minors from the Al-Roj camp in northeast Syria.

"The children arrived on Swiss soil on Dec. 6 at Geneva airport, having passed through Iraq," it said in a statement.

FASTFACT

The Al-Hol and Al-Roj camps hold nationals from some 60 countries who fled from Daesh's last enclaves.

The repatriation, believed to be the first of its kind to Switzerland, was carried out with the consent of their mother.

The government has previously said she was still in the camp and has several nationalities, although her Swiss citizenship had been withdrawn for security reasons. The girls have different fathers in Geneva.

The case had been raised by UN human rights experts in April.

The experts said then that the girls had been allegedly abducted in 2016 by their mother who joined Daesh. A senior Swiss official said at the time that it was working hard to have the girls sent home.

More than 60,000 people, two-thirds of them children, are held in camps for families associated with Daesh. The International Committee of the Red Cross, which visits the camps, has described them as a "tragedy in plain sight."

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[Bethlehem is not just for Christmas, Palestinian creatives say](#)

Author:
Wed, 2021-12-08 00:17

BETHLEHEM: A giant Christmas tree takes pride of place in Bethlehem's Manger Square, between the Church of the Nativity and a mosque adorned with lights cascading down its walls.

But there is more to the Palestinian city than its biblical significance, say organizers of the Bethlehem Cultural Festival, which promotes other aspects of the place revered as the traditional birthplace of Jesus.

The annual festival features dance, music, art and culinary events in a city

whose main source of income — overseas tourists — has been decimated by the coronavirus pandemic.

"Around Christmas, the world prays to Bethlehem, but actually most people don't know that Bethlehem is in Palestine," said festival participant and chef Fadi Kattan as he selected fresh mint from a vegetable market.

"I cook, Umm Nabil sells herbs, there are dance troops, there are artists."

Bethlehem lies five miles south of Jerusalem in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, which Israel captured in a 1967 war along with the Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem.

The city is cut off from Jerusalem by an Israel wall, which Palestinians condemn as a land grab but Israel defends as a security measure to protect itself from attack. Talks between the sides collapsed in 2014.

For festival co-founder, Abdelfattah Abusrour, its aim is to show the world that Bethlehem exists as a living city outside the pages of history and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

"It's not just a religious place," Abusrour said. "It's full of life, culture, art, beauty, hospitality and generosity of people — despite living under occupation."

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Hoping virus won't wreck Christmas, Bethlehem lights up giant treeChristmas

cheer at Gaza Catholic school as war damage repairs go on

Unvaccinated Lebanese face $165 fine for spreading COVID-19

Author:
Tue, 2021-12-07 22:28

BEIRUT: Unvaccinated individuals who spread the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in Lebanon could be fined 250,000 Lebanese pounds ($165, or a black-market rate of around $10) under a new law ratified by the country's parliamentarians on Tuesday.

The penalty charge sees an increase on the previous fee of 50,000 Lebanese pounds imposed on people who had not been jabbed but had passed on the virus, the National News Agency reported.

However, the updated legislation did not make vaccination against COVID-19 obligatory.

Lebanese health officials have been urging the public to get inoculated amid a surge in daily infections with 1,707 new cases and 10 virus-related deaths recorded on Tuesday.

On whether citizens would take notice of the fine, Health Minister Dr. Firas Abiad told Arab News: "Within the economic financial situation in Lebanon, and the poverty level, it will certainly have an impact."

However, Lebanese business manager, Hania Michele, criticized lawmakers for what she described as a "purposeless and meaningless law."

She told Arab News: "It is not my fault if someone contaminates me with COVID-19 which will keep on spreading anyway. I don't know if they are doing it purposely, to indirectly force the unvaccinated to get vaccinated.

"Even those who are vaccinated, they could still get infected and spread the virus. That's why it's impractical."

Barber Yousef said less than 40 percent of Lebanon's population had been vaccinated. "I am unsure if people, who are already bankrupt, would be able to afford paying 250,000 Lebanese pounds. So, why are people not getting vaccinated?

"It is not wrong to fine those who spread the virus, but people are broke and don't have the money to pay for PCR (polymerase chain reaction) tests," he said.

Banker, Ghalia Khalil, said that due to the country's economic crisis the

majority of people living in Lebanon could not afford to buy a facemask, never mind pay a hefty fine.

"Many parents and children aren't complying with health restrictions and remain unmasked … they think if they're vaccinated, they won't get infected. The challenge will be in the implementation of the law rather than the stipulation."

Shop owner, Mohammed Itani, said the lawmakers' move was inefficient and too late.

"Increasing the fine from 50,000 to 250,000 pounds came very late. We are facing a fourth wave of COVID-19 and the daily infections are scary. Fines should have been made high to force citizens to wear masks and get vaccinated when the outbreak started," he added.

One Lebanese educational consultant, who would only give her name as Nisreen C., said she would not be getting vaccinated and would rather protect herself by wearing a mask. "I am not getting vaccinated no matter how much it costs or what it takes," she added.

Schoolteacher, Marwa E., said: "This is a good step, though late. I believe that this steep fine, no matter how harsh it may sound amid our financial downfall, will eventually encourage people to getting vaccinated and wear masks."

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Ravaged Lebanon on the brink of third COVID-19 surge, health officials warnLebanon reintroduces some COVID-19 prevention measures

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[Israel targets Syria's port city of Latakia — state tv](#)

Tue, 2021-12-07 03:05

Several explosions heard in Syria's port city of Latakia, according to media.

— more to follow..

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[Palestinian teenager shot dead by Israeli guard](#)

Author:
Tue, 2021-12-07 01:06

RAMALLAH: A Palestinian teenager who drove his car into an Israeli security checkpoint in the occupied West Bank was shot dead on Monday by a security guard at the scene, officials said.

The car-ramming occurred after 1 a.m. at the Te'enim checkpoint near the Palestinian city of Tulkarem, an Israeli Defense Ministry statement said, adding that the assailant had been "neutralized."

It was not immediately clear if the alleged attacker was killed, but the official Palestinian news agency Wafa later reported that 15-year-old Mohammed Nidal Yunes died from injuries after being fired on at a checkpoint.

An Israeli security official confirmed to AFP that the driver of the vehicle was killed.

The Defense Ministry said that a security guard was "seriously injured" in the attack.

Israel's Sheba Hospital said the guard's injuries were not life threatening.

Israel has occupied the West Bank since 1967 and the Palestinian territory is now home to roughly 475,000 Jewish settlers living in communities widely considered illegal under international law.

Attacks on checkpoints are common, often carried out by individual Palestinians armed with knives, as well as attempted car-rammings and occasional shootings.

Monday's incident came after a Palestinian assailant stabbed an Israeli civilian and attempted to attack police on Saturday near the Damascus Gate entry to the Old City in Israeli-annexed East Jerusalem.

The assailant was shot dead by officers who appeared to fire on the suspect after he was on the ground, stirring debate about excessive force.

Israeli authorities have insisted the officers acted appropriately.

BACKGROUND

Israel has occupied the West Bank since 1967 and the Palestinian territory is now home to roughly 475,000 Jewish settlers living in communities widely considered illegal under international law.

On Sunday, Israeli authorities freed a prominent Palestinian prisoner, two weeks after striking a release deal that ended his marathon 131-day hunger strike.

Kayed Fasfous, 32, had remained in an Israeli hospital since ending his strike on Nov. 23.

He was the symbolic figurehead of six hunger strikers protesting Israel's controversial policy of "administrative detention," which allows suspects to be held indefinitely without charge.

Israel claims the policy is necessary to keep dangerous suspects locked away without disclosing sensitive information that could expose valuable sources.

Palestinians and rights groups say the practice denies the right of due process, allowing Israel to hold prisoners for months or even years without seeing the evidence against them. The law is rarely applied to Israelis.

The Palestinian Prisoners Club, a group representing former and current prisoners, confirmed Fasfous had returned home to the occupied West Bank through a military checkpoint near the southern city of Hebron on Sunday afternoon.

Online footage showed the former prisoner in a wheelchair celebrating his return to his southern hometown of Dura before being taken to a hospital in the West Bank city of Ramallah.

The plight of the six hunger strikers ignited solidarity demonstrations across the Israeli-occupied West Bank and Gaza in November mounting pressure on Israel to release the detainees.

At least four of the five other hunger strikers have since ended their protests after reaching similar deals with Israeli authorities. They are expected to be released in the coming months.

Hunger strikes are common among Palestinian prisoners and have helped secure numerous concessions from Israeli authorities.

The nature of these strikes vary from individuals protesting detention without charge to groups calling for improved cell conditions.

Around 500 of the 4,600 Palestinians detained by Israel are held in administrative detention according to Addameer, a Palestinian prisoner rights group.

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Israel: Palestinian car-rammer wounds guard, is shot deadPalestinian seriously hurt after settlers hurl stones at car