

[Rockets strike near Baghdad Int'l airport, no casualties](#)

Sun, 2021-05-02 21:23

CAIRO: At least two rockets landed within the perimeter of Baghdad International Airport on Sunday, security officials said. The officials said the rockets were launched from an area close to the airport and there were no reports of damage or casualties. There was no immediate claim of responsibility.

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Lebanon arrests two brothers suspected in Saudi drug haul

Author:

Reuters

ID:

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Sun, 2021-05-02 15:53

BEIRUT: Lebanon has detained two brothers suspected of being involved in a foiled attempt to smuggle amphetamines into Saudi Arabia that prompted the Saudi authorities to impose a ban on importing Lebanese produce, the caretaker government said on Sunday.

Saudi Arabia announced the ban on April 23 after the discovery of 5.3 million Captagon pills, a type of amphetamine, hidden in pomegranate shipments from Lebanon.

The measure compounds Lebanon's severe economic problems.

Interior minister in the caretaker government, Mohamed Fahmy, was speaking in an interview with Lebanon's MTV broadcaster during a tour of the border area from the north to the Bekaa valley where there is rampant smuggling across the border with Syria, of goods from drugs to fuel and subsidised food.

"We have uncovered those complicit and a follow-up of the case is ongoing," Fahmy said.

Lebanon was in contact with Saudi authorities on the course of the investigations.



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Saudi Arabia bans fruits, vegetables from Lebanon after drug busts
Lebanon, Israel expected to resume talks on maritime border next week

[Washington denies Iran state media report saying prisoner swap agreed](#)

Sun, 2021-05-02 16:44

DUBAI: Iranian state television said on Sunday that Tehran would free four Americans accused of spying in exchange for four Iranians held in the United States and the release of \$7 billion in frozen Iranian funds. However the US government denied that an exchange was in the works.

The state TV, quoting an Iranian official, also said British-Iranian national Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe would be released once Britain had paid off a debt on military equipment owed to Tehran.

A British Foreign Office official played down that report.

Iran and world powers are holding talks to revive the 2015 nuclear accord that Washington abandoned three years ago.

Iranian officials told Reuters last month that an interim deal could be a way to gain time for a lasting settlement that involved unfreezing Iranian funds blocked under US sanctions.

"Informed source says Biden administration has agreed to release four Iranian prisoners jailed for bypassing US sanctions in exchange for four American 'spies'," the Iranian state TV report said on Sunday.

"Release of Nazanin Zaghari in exchange for UK's payment of its 400 million pound debt to Iran has also been finalized. The source also said the Biden administration has agreed to pay Iran \$7 billion," it said.

In Washington, State Department spokesman Ned Price told Reuters: "Reports that a prisoner swap deal has been reached are not true."

"As we have said, we always raise the cases of Americans detained or missing in Iran. We will not stop until we are able to reunite them with their families."

Ron Klain, White House chief of staff, also denied the report.

"Unfortunately, that report is untrue. There is no agreement to release these four Americans," Klain said on CBS "Face the Nation."

Tehran and the powers have been meeting in Vienna since early April to work on steps that must be taken, touching on US sanctions and Iran's alleged breaches of the 2015 deal, to bring Tehran and Washington back into full compliance with the accord.

Iran says \$20 billion of its oil revenue has been frozen in countries like South Korea, Iraq and China under the US sanctions since 2018.

US national security adviser Jake Sullivan, speaking on ABC's "This Week" on Sunday, said no deal had been reached with Iran in Vienna.

"There is still a fair distance to travel to close the remaining gaps," he said. "And those gaps are over what sanctions the United States and other countries will roll back. They are over what nuclear restrictions Iran will accept on its program to ensure that they can never get a nuclear weapon."



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Husband of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe says detention 'blot on British diplomacy' ahead of scheduled release Iranian foreign minister apologizes for leaked comments

[Egypt president endorses harsher punishment for female genital mutilation](#)

Author:

Sat, 2021-05-01 21:48

CAIRO: Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi has ratified amendments to the penal code submitted by the House of Representatives that introduce harsher penalties for the crime of female genital mutilation.

According to the new amendment, whoever performs the procedure by partially or completely removing any part of a female's external genitalia, or inflicts injuries to those organs, shall be punished by five to seven years of imprisonment.

But the penalty will be imprisonment with hard labor for a period of no less than 10 years if the procedure results in death.

If a doctor or nurse performs the procedure and it results in a permanent disability, they will face prison time with hard labor of no less than 10 years.

They will face 15 to 20 years of prison time with hard labor if the procedure results in death.

In addition to the previous penalties, doctors and nurses will be prohibited from practicing their professions for a period of between three and five years, which begins following the punishment.

Authorities will also close down private facilities in which procedures are performed for the duration in which the doctors or nurses will be prevented from practicing their profession.

A person who requests the procedure of female genital mutilation be performed will also face prison time if the request is fulfilled.

Anyone who promotes, encourages or advocates, in one of the methods set forth in Article 171 of this law, to commit the crime of female genital mutilation will face prison time even if their actions have no effect.



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What is female genital mutilation and where does it happen?Female genital mutilation continues as change comes slowly

As they observe Ramadan, Gazans hope COVID-19 measures will end soon

Sat, 2021-05-01 22:01

GAZA CITY: Palestinians have traditionally called on their relatives during Ramadan, especially brothers and fathers visiting their sisters and daughters, and married sons visiting their fathers and mothers.

In Ramadan, after iftar, Palestinian families spend their time together, eating Palestinian sweets, especially qatayef, and drinking juices such as hibiscus, carob and tamarind.

But this year's Ramadan was different in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, prompting Palestinian authorities in the Gaza Strip to impose a curfew from sunset until dawn, which has prevented many from visiting their relatives.

Khalil Al-Asali, 67, expressed his anger at the conditions that the Gaza Strip is experiencing.

Al-Asali said that the curfew has "deprived us of visits. We spend most of the time inside the house."

He added: "For decades, I used to visit my sisters, brothers and daughters every year after their marriage, starting on the second day of Ramadan.

"But this year I did not visit anyone, especially since they live in areas far from my place of residence, and I cannot go on foot."

The Gaza Strip is witnessing the peak of the spread of the coronavirus during its second wave.

The Hamas-controlled authorities imposed a complete curfew on Friday and Saturday, and a curfew throughout the week from sunset until dawn.

The Gaza Strip has recorded the infection of more than 100,000 Palestinians since the outbreak of coronavirus in the enclave. The Ministry of Health has recorded the deaths of nearly 900 people.

Catching up with relatives is considered one of the customs associated with culture as well as Islam among Palestinians as visiting the so-called "Silat

Alraham" is one of the positive customs encouraged by the religion.

Al-Asali said: "We visit our relatives periodically, but without specific dates. But on some occasions, such as Ramadan and Eid, we must visit women in their homes, offer them congratulations, and take gifts."

He added: "This is part of our Islamic customs, in which women are happy to visit their father, brothers and uncles. I learned them from my father and I taught them to my sons."

Women decorate their homes every Ramadan, whether with lights, special posters or lanterns, to celebrate the month and prepare to receive guests.

Palestinians may spend some of their time together gathering for Ramadan iftar, after which they spend their time staying up late, whether inside the house or in the open parks, especially in the spring and summer seasons.

Dareen Al-Sousi, 44, expressed her dissatisfaction with the current situation.

Al-Sousi said Ramadan this year "is not like any previous Ramadan I lived in my life."

She added: "Every Ramadan, I prepare the house with Ramadan decorations to receive guests daily, whether from my father and mother, as well as my brothers who are married with their wives, uncles, and some of my husband's relatives, but this year no one has come."

She said: "My brothers came during the day to visit me for a short time, and during fasting. We could not talk for long because the family considers visiting the sisters an essential part that cannot be dispensed with even in the most difficult circumstances."

Al-Sousi, like the rest of the Palestinians in Gaza, hopes that measures to tackle the coronavirus will be eased so that people can spend time with their relatives and make up for what they have missed since the beginning of the holy month.



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