

# Emirates Suspends Pilot for Refusing to Fly to Occupied Territories

DUBAI (Dispatches) – The United Arab Emirates' flag carrier has suspended a Tunisian pilot for refusing to fly a plane to the Israeli-occupied territories.

Monem Sahib al-Taba, who works for Emirates airline, revealed that his activity as a pilot was suspended due to his refusal to participate in a trip to the occupied territories.

In a post on his Facebook page, al-Taba wrote: "My activity as a pilot in Emirates Airlines was suspended due to my refusal to participate in a flight to Tel Aviv ... God is only who takes care of me ... I do not regret it."

Emirates Airlines announced last year it will begin operating daily direct flights to Tel Aviv in March 2021 following the normalization of ties between the UAE and the Zionist regime last August.

In statements made to the local press, al-Taba said his suspension



An Emirates Airbus A380-842 aircraft is pictured grounded at Dubai international Airport in Dubai.

is pending his appearance before the disciplinary committee.

He also closed his Facebook account, he said, after being pressured by Emirates, due to his last post.

Arab activists denounced the

suspension, and praised al-Taba for his "heroic stance" to refuse to recognize the Zionist regime despite Abu Dhabi's normalization of ties with the occupying regime. "Whoever leaves something for God, God will compensate him

with something better," said Palestinian activist Tamer Almisshal.

"This honorable free pilot and many others like him are the obstacle to normalization with the Israeli entity that the occupiers fear," wrote another activist, Chibeb Eddinne Mellouli.

Abu Dhabi signed an agreement to normalize diplomatic relations with the Zionist regime last year. Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco later announced normalization agreements of their own with the regime.

All Palestinian factions have condemned the normalization deals, calling them a betrayal of their cause.

Tunisia has made it clear that it will not follow suit in normalizing relations with the regime, and that its position on the Palestinians' legitimate rights will not be affected by any international developments.

## Kuwait's Cabinet Submits Resignation in Standoff With Parl't

KUWAIT CITY (Reuters) – Kuwait's Prime Minister Sabah al-Khalid al-Sabah presented the resignation of his cabinet to the country's ruler on Wednesday, days before the premier was due to be questioned in parliament over his choice of ministers and other issues.

The standoff between the government and parliament less than a month after the cabinet was appointed poses the first big challenge to Emir Sheikh Nawaf al-Ahmed al-Sabah, who assumed power in September.

It complicates government efforts to tackle the OPEC state's deepest economic crisis in decades, caused by low oil prices and the coronavirus crisis.

Ministers had submitted their resignations on Tuesday to Sheikh Sabah, a move the government said was related to "developments in the relationship between the National Assembly (parliament) and the government".

It was not immediately clear if the emir, who has the final say in matters of state, would accept the cabinet's resignation.

The motion to question Sheikh Sabah, who has been prime minister since late 2019, was submitted by three lawmakers on Jan. 5 in the first regular session of the new assembly, in which the opposition made gains in last year's election.

More than 30 other MPs in the assembly, which has 50 elected

members, supported the request to question him. The motion referred to a cabinet that did not reflect the poll result and government "interference" in electing the speaker and members of parliamentary committees.

In addition to its elected members, cabinet ministers also sit in parliament.

Sabah was first appointed as premier on November 19, 2019, after the resignation of his predecessor Jaber al-Mubarak al-Hamad Al Sabah. He was reappointed as prime minister on December 8, 2020, following general elections that saw the opposition win almost half of the parliament's seats.

Sheikh Nawaf al-Ahmed Al Sa-

bah was sworn in as the new emir of Kuwait on September 30 after Emir Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad Al Sabah passed away at the age of 91.

Members of the Al Sabah ruling family retain full control over key government and executive posts in the Arab country. They have been in power for the past 250 years.

Under the Kuwaiti constitution, the emir has the final say in state matters and can dissolve the parliament at the recommendation of the government.

The prime minister traditionally helps navigate the often tense relationship between the government and the parliament in Kuwait.

## Iraq's Sadr Warns Against Postponing Early Elections

BAGHDAD (Xinhua) – Iraqi cleric Moqtada al-Sadr warned on Wednesday of postponing the early parliamentary elections slated for June 6, after local media reports said that some political blocs are seeking to delay the early elections.

"There are some voices raised to cancel or postpone early elections, but we warn against postponing them, and we hope that everyone shows wisdom and works together for the success of these elections," Haider al-Jaberi, head of al-Sadr's media office, said in a statement.

Al-Sadr called on citizens to expedite the updates of voter registration records in registration centers across the country, the statement added.

Al-Sadr's statement came in response to local media reports, which said earlier that some Iraqi political parties are seeking to delay early elections from June 6 to November.

Meanwhile, the Iraqi Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC)

confirmed its commitment to holding the early elections as stated on June 6. "The commission is working continuously for the elections, and Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi directed the state institutions as well as international and local organizations to work together to help the electoral commission," the official Iraqi News Agency quoted Jumana al-Ghalai, an IHEC member, as saying.

She pointed out that the electoral commission had set a timetable until June 6, 2021, for holding the elections.

Last July, Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi set June 6, 2021, as the date for the early elections, which came in response to the anti-government protests and was designed to make it easier for independent politicians to win a seat in the parliament.

The previous parliamentary elections in Iraq were held on May 12, 2018, and the next elections were originally scheduled to take place in 2022.

With...  
(Continued From Page One)

biggest trading partners and the Arab country's large consumer market is ideally suited to Iran's non-oil trade plans.

U.S. President Donald Trump's decision in May 2018 to pull out of a landmark nuclear deal with Iran has pushed the Islamic Republic to try to expand commercial ties with neighbors.

However, Iran's forays into the Iraqi market where products from the eastern neighbor are deemed better suited to the tastes and standards of the Iraqis have faced mulish pushbacks from the United States.

Washington has especially a beef with Iran's gas exports on which Iraq relies to feed its power grid.

While having to extend waivers to Iraq to continue importing Iranian gas since Trump restored sanctions on Iran's vital energy sector in November 2018, the U.S. has tried to enlist its companies and regional allies to replace the Islamic Republic as the source of energy.

Iraqi officials, however, say there is no easy substitute to imports from Iran because it will take years to adequately build up Iraq's energy infrastructure.

Iraq's economy has been battered by years of wars, U.S. sanctions and a subsequent invasion of the country and a foreign-backed takfiri insurgency. It is further in dire straits as a consequence of global oil price slump.

Iraqi leaders say American demand acknowledges neither Iraq's energy needs nor the complex relations between Baghdad and Tehran. After all, Iran ties cannot be compared to Iraq's relations with an occupying country like America.

Jubouri on Tuesday stated that much of Iraq's energy needs come from Iran as he ruled out any immediate plans for gas imports from other sources, including Turkey where oil and gas pipelines from the Caspian Sea meet.

"We do not currently have any plans to import gas from Turkey," the Iraqi trade minister said.

Experts say the Iraqis are more than glad to see the back of Trump who made scuttling Tehran's vital relationship with Baghdad a centerpiece of his gung-ho policy.

Iran's iconic anti-terror commander General Qassem Soleimani was on an official visit to Iraq when his convoy was targeted at Baghdad airport a year ago, killing him and his Iraqi fellow commander Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis.

The new diplomatic rendezvous in Tehran sounds like a celebration of Trump's imminent departure from the White House with a new push to buttress trade relations between Iran and Iraq.

"The presence of a high-ranking Iraqi delegation at the Tehran meeting demonstrates our seriousness in cooperating with the Islamic Republic of Iran in order to eliminate the existing obstacles and identify technical needs of Iraq, and to take the necessary measures in an operational manner," Jubouri said.

He said the coronavirus pandemic has created a new climate in global relations, which calls for a revision of economic agreements according to the current situation.

"Countries dependent on oil revenues under the coronavirus epidemic are facing challenges, and those relying on non-oil resources are more successful than others," Jubouri said.

The pandemic has led to border closures and disruptions to trade and visits by millions of pilgrims and tourists.

Last month, the Iraqi government allowed travel of passengers from Iran just two days after it announced borders would close for two weeks over fears about the spread of a new variant of the coronavirus.

Head of the Iran-Iraq joint chamber of commerce Yahya Ale Es'haq said in April exports of Iranian goods and services to Iraq were down at \$11 billion year on year in February from \$13 billion in 2019, affected by the coronavirus.

Ardakanian said, "In the field of energy, electricity and gas, as well as water resources, we are ready to operationalize agreements reached before and formulate new agreements within the framework of existing legal agreements."

The minister also announced Tehran's readiness to establish a joint investment fund to support supply of engineering and technical services to Iraq.

Preposterous...  
(Continued From Page One)

in less than 10 hours, Pompeo rehashed earlier claims about "advocating for the Iranian people", but made no mention of the devastating impact of Washington's "maximum pressure" on ordinary people.

He also alleged that the world is "awakening to the threat posed" by Iran thanks to his State Department's "clear-eyed and aggressive" diplomacy.

Pompeo also boasted about the impact of sanctions, saying the U.S. had deprived Iran of \$70 billion in assets and revenues by blacklisting "1,500 individuals and entities".

While Pompeo was posting the anti-Iran tweets, the U.S. Treasury imposed even further sanctions on five people it tied to Iran, labeling them each as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT).

The Iranian foreign ministry spokesman said Pompeo's tweets are the result of his "hysterical anger" at the end of his embarrassing term in office.

"As martyr Beheshti [former Iranian Judiciary chief] aptly put it, Mr. Pompeo, be angry and die of this anger," Saeed Khatibzadeh said.

Foreign Minister Muhammad Javad Zarif called Obama "Mr. 'we lie, cheat, steal,'" who was "pathetically ending his disastrous career with more warmongering lies."

The Iranian official went on to say, "No one is fooled. All 9/11 terrorists came from @SecPompeo's favorite ME destinations; NONE from Iran."

Zarif was referring to Saudi Arabia and its widely-known financial and ideological sponsorship of the terrorist outfit, which was created by Saudi citizen Osama bin Laden in 1980.

Russia also dismissed the accusation. "This is absolutely unsubstantiated and unreasonable. There is absolutely no information" supporting such a claim, Foreign Ministry Spokesman Zamir Kabulov said in a statement on Wednesday.

"It seems that Mr. Pompeo, at the end, wants to do something else to hurt Iran."

## Egyptians Condemn 'Seven-Star Prison' for Mubarak Officials

CAIRO (Middle East Eye) – Revelations about the luxury detention enjoyed by the jailed sons and aides of the late Egyptian autocrat Hosni Mubarak have sparked anger online, given the majority of political prisoners in Egypt are incarcerated in squalid conditions.

In an interview broadcast on Nogoum FM radio, Egyptian musician Hani Mehanna recounted his experience in prison with Mubarak's two sons, Gamal and Alaa, as well as top businessmen and ministers imprisoned after the January 2011 revolution.

Mehanna, a supporter of the ousted president, said he was held for six months in 2014 in the Tora Agricultural Prison, part of the Tora Prison Complex where many prominent opposition figures and human rights advocates are also held.

According to Mehanna, Mubarak's sons, his interior minister Habib al-Adly, and business tycoons Ahmed Ezz and Hisham Talaat Mustafa were held in two exclusive buildings in the complex, where only 16 people

were jailed. The officials were imprisoned for charges ranging from financial corruption to the killing of protesters.

The two Mubarak sons were released in 2015.

"We were 16 people staying in two buildings that could accommodate 3,000 people," he told the radio host, Youssef al-Husseini.

"Hisham Talaat Mustafa built a huge mosque, and Ahmed Ezz built a gym and spa equipped with the latest technology, and there were ping-pong and snooker tables," he recalled.

"I was shocked at the beginning. But then Alaa got me a TV and Gamal got me a fridge.

"I played football with them. Me and Alaa had a team, and Gamal had a team with some jailed officers. Habib al-Adly sometimes was the referee."

The revelations came as a stark contrast to what detainees suffer in the maximum-security Scorpion Prison, which is located in the same complex as the Tora Agricultural Prison.

A report by Human Rights Watch, published

last month, cited a leaked video recording showing dire conditions in the jail, "which almost completely deprive inmates of adequate ventilation, electricity, and hot water".

The prison holds nearly 800 political prisoners, most of them in solitary confinement. At least 14 prisoners have died in Scorpion Prison since 2015, due to various reasons, including medical negligence and torture, according to several rights groups.

Egyptian authorities do not allow any independent oversight of places of detention in the country, and the government deals with prison issues in extreme secrecy.

The state-sponsored National Council for Human Rights said in May 2015 that police stations were 300 percent over capacity, and prisons 160 percent overcapacity.

Human rights groups estimate that at least 60,000 political prisoners are being held in Egyptian jails under general-turned-president Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, who seized power in 2013.