

BAHRAIN COURT DENIES BAIL FOR SHIITE OPPOSITION CHIEF

DUBAI: Bahrain's appeals court refused bail yesterday for Shiite opposition chief Ali Salman pending its review of his conviction for inciting disobedience and hatred, while the prosecution demanded his four-year sentence be stiffened.

Salman was convicted of those two charges in June, but acquitted of the more serious one of seeking to topple

the monarchy and change the political system in the Sunni-ruled Gulf state.

Cleric Salman was dressed in a grey prison uniform, instead of his usual cloak, and was escorted by a large number of police when he was taken out of court in handcuffs, the source said.

The court rejected a request for

bail by Salman's defence team. And the prosecution called for annulling Salman's acquittal for plotting to overthrow the regime, demanding a tougher sentence.

The court adjourned the case until October 14. Salman heads the Al-Wefaq Shiite political association, which once held the most seats in parliament. Its 18 MPs walked out in

2011 to protest violence against demonstrators during nationwide pro-democracy protests.

The group boycotted the last election, held in November. Yesterday Wefaq denounced the court's denial of bail for Salman. "Bahrain continues to turn its back on international calls to abolish trials that lack international standards of a fair trial," a statement

said. Tiny but strategic Bahrain, which is home to the US Navy's Fifth Fleet, has been rocked by unrest since a 2011 Shiite-led uprising demanding a constitutional monarchy and more representative government.

Despite a widespread crackdown, protesters continue to clash frequently with security forces in Shiite villages outside Manama. — AFP

MEXICO FM HEADS TO CAIRO FOR ANSWERS ON TOURIST KILLINGS

SIX OTHER MEXICANS ARE STILL UNACCOUNTED FOR

CAIRO: Mexico's foreign minister was headed to Cairo yesterday with relatives of tourists mistakenly killed by Egyptian security forces, after demanding an urgent investigation into what she branded the "unjustified attack".

Before leaving for Egypt, Claudia Ruiz Massieu said she would seek answers on the attack that killed 12 people, including at least two Mexicans. Six other Mexicans are still unaccounted for.

Egypt said the tourists entered a restricted area in the vast Western Desert and were "mistakenly"

in Cairo after midnight (2200 GMT), a Mexican foreign ministry official told AFP.

She said she would talk to top Egyptian officials to "clear up the circumstances of this deplorable event, which has cost the lives of innocent Mexican tourists".

The incident has proven embarrassing to the Egyptian security forces which regularly claim to have killed dozens of militants in air strikes, tolls that are difficult to independently verify.

Egypt had pledged to create an investigatory

tourist stop, Nahla said later on television. "I don't blame anyone but I ask who is responsible for coordination, and why was it absent?"

"If the military is dealing with terrorists, why were the authorities who issue permits not notified? Why was the tourism ministry not notified so it could coordinate with the tourism companies?" Nahla said. Nahla told AFP the area they had camped in had never been a restricted zone. "There was no notification on the ground, and no coordination," he said of the security operation.

The incident is likely to raise further fears for Egypt's vital tourism industry, which has struggled to recover from years of turmoil. About 10 million tourists visited Egypt in 2014, down sharply from almost 15 million in 2010. Many Egyptians on social media have criticised the government for suggesting the tourists were at fault for straying into a restricted zone. The Western Desert is popular with tour groups, but is also a militant hideout, with Western embassies warning against non-essential travel there.

Scaring off tourists

Last month, Egypt's branch of the Islamic State group beheaded a Croatian oil worker who was abducted near Cairo, at the edge of the Western Desert. IS in Egypt said on Sunday it had "resisted a military operation in the Western Desert" and published pictures of its fighters apparently engaging the military and of the beheaded Egyptian.

Egypt has been struggling to quell a jihadist insurgency since the military overthrew Islamist president Mohamed Morsi in 2013, focused mainly on their primary holdout in the Sinai Peninsula in the east. The military launched last week a wide-scale campaign to uproot militants in the peninsula, claiming to have already killed more than 200 jihadists. Nine soldiers, including one killed in a roadside bombing Monday, have died in the operation, it said.

Egypt has one of the region's most powerful and well-equipped militaries, which was further boosted by recent deliveries of warplanes from the US and France.

It says hundreds of police and soldiers have been killed, many in attacks claimed by IS's Sinai Province affiliate which pledged allegiance to the main group in Iraq and Syria last year. In July, it claimed an attack on the Italian consulate in Cairo that killed one civilian. It also took responsibility for the killing of an American oil worker last year in the Western Desert.

The beheading in July of Croatian engineer Tomislav Salopek, claimed by IS, appeared aimed at scaring off tourists and foreign employees of Western firms two cornerstones of an economy battered by years of unrest since the 2011 uprising that ousted Hosni Mubarak. — AFP



GUADALAJARA: Jalisco State Governor Aristoteles Sandoval speaks to the press after a meeting with relatives of Mexican tourists attacked in Egypt in Guadalajara, Mexico on Monday. Egyptian security forces have mistakenly killed 12 people including Mexican tourists while chasing jihadists in the vast Western Desert, sparking condemnation of what Mexico called a "deplorable" air attack. — AFP

killed while security forces chased jihadists who had abducted and beheaded an Egyptian they said worked for the army. Ruiz Massieu said six Mexican survivors told their ambassador they had "suffered an aerial attack with bombs launched by a plane and helicopters" after stopping for a roadside lunch.

A Mexican man and woman were confirmed dead, the ambassador said. Ten other people were wounded, including six Mexicans.

"We face a terrible loss of human lives and an unjustified attack that obligates us to make the protection of our citizens the priority," Ruiz Massieu said before departing Mexico with relatives of those killed and doctors. The minister is expected

committee headed by the prime minister, Ruiz Massieu said.

The State Department said US embassy staff were checking "reports of a potential US citizen involved," without elaborating.

'Who is responsible?'

Hassan al-Nahla, the head of the union for tour guides in Egypt, said the tourist group had received all the required permits and set off with a police escort from Cairo to Bahariya oasis, roughly 350 kilometres (220 miles). About 80 kilometres from their hotel, they veered two kilometres into the desert to have lunch, he said in a statement. The scenic place they chose to have a picnic was a regu-

DOZENS PROTESTERS RALLY OUTSIDE LEBANON MINISTRY

BEIRUT: Dozens of Lebanese activists held a protest yesterday outside a Finance Ministry building in the country's capital, after failing to storm it - part of a recent series of anti-government rallies stemming from a trash collection crisis.

The protesters attempted to enter the building earlier in the day, as employees were arriving. But security forces quickly prevented them, closing the doors to the protesters and other arriving staffers.

The protesters chanted against corruption in state institutions. They said they are taking their protests to the Finance Ministry, asking that it

stop paying salaries for lawmakers who have been unable to convene. The protesters complain the parliament, elected in 2009, is illegitimate.

Members of parliament have illegally extended their term twice and the legislature remains deadlocked over an election law and choosing a president. Lebanon has been without a president for over a year.

"There are 182 lawmakers and they have not been doing their job," Neamat Bader al-Deen, an activist with a group called "We Want Accountability" told local TV channels during the protest. She estimated that millions of dollars

went to the lawmakers who have not convened to review government policies, approve a budget or elect a president because of political bickering. "Why should people not doing their job get paid, while others are not getting their salaries," she asked.

Teachers and public sector employees have been demanding the parliament approve a salary scale for over three years.

What started as protests against trash piling in the streets because of government dysfunction is turning into Lebanon's largest protest movement in years, targeting an entire political class. — AP



BEIRUT: Lebanese activists overturn garbage containers and throw waste in front of the ministry of Environment demanding the resignation of the Minister in downtown Beirut, yesterday. Lebanon's cabinet approved a plan on September 10 to end a trash crisis that sparked unprecedented protests targeting the country's stagnant political class. — AFP



JERUSALEM: Palestinians clean the damage at the entrance of Al Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem's Old City following clashes with Israeli riot police yesterday. Palestinians and Israeli police clashed at Jerusalem's flashpoint Al-Aqsa mosque compound for a third straight day as Jews celebrated their new year and protesters vowed to protect Islam's third-holiest site. — AFP

CLASHES ROCK JERUSALEM MOSQUE FOR THIRD DAY

JERUSALEM: Palestinian and Israeli security forces clashed in Jerusalem's flashpoint Al-Aqsa mosque compound and the surrounding Old City for a third straight day yesterday despite international calls for calm. Young demonstrators gathered around the mosque threw stones at police who had entered the compound in large numbers and responded with stun grenades, an AFP journalist said. Police said they cleared debris from the entrance of the mosque and closed the door on those inside who had been throwing stones, fireworks and other objects at security forces.

The Jordanian organisation that administers the site, the Waqf, said that police entered deep inside the mosque and caused damage.

The new flare-up came despite calls for restraint from both the United Nations and the United States. Jordan, which has custodianship rights over Muslim holy places in Jerusalem under its 1994 peace treaty with Israel, warned that relations were on the line. The protesters fear Israel is seeking to change rules governing the site which allow Jews to visit but not pray, although Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said the status quo will be preserved.

The site is the third-holiest in Islam but also venerated by Jews as the Temple Mount.

According to Israeli police, youths barricaded themselves inside the mosque overnight as they

had over the two previous days with the aim of disrupting visits by Jews to the compound.

Masked protesters threw stones towards the gate when regular visits to the site began yesterday morning, police said.

After security forces entered the compound, "masked assailants fled inside the mosque and began throwing dozens of stones" and other objects, including fireworks, police said.

There were at least four arrests, while clashes also broke out in the Old City surrounding the compound. Limited visits to the site were later allowed to go ahead.

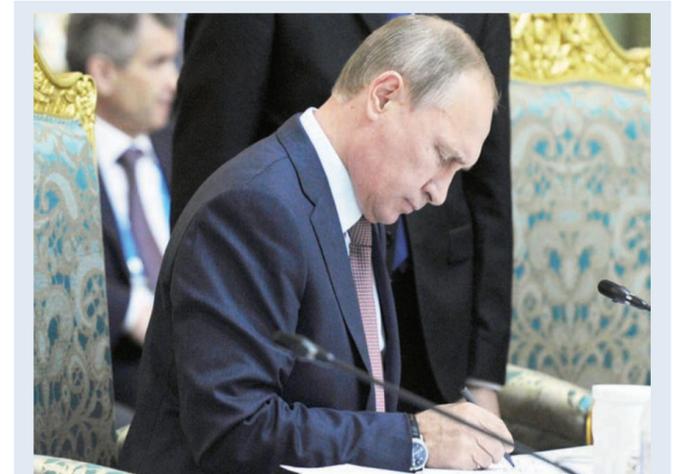
The Palestinian Red Crescent said 26 people were wounded, of whom two were hospitalised. Israeli police said five officers were lightly injured.

Old City clashes

Police spokeswoman Luba Samri said security forces shut the door on protesters inside the mosque in a tactic they have used in the past to restore calm. Previous such incidents have seen police briefly enter the mosque to close the door.

"Police forces did not penetrate into the interior of Al-Aqsa mosque," Samri said in a statement.

Waqf spokesman Firas al-Dibs said "police stormed the Al-Aqsa mosque and went inside" as far as the minbar, or imam's pulpit. He said police fired rubber bullets and stun grenades that caused fires. — AFP



DUSHANBE: Russian President Vladimir Putin signs papers at the meeting of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, yesterday. Russian President Vladimir Putin yesterday strongly defended Moscow's military assistance to the Syrian government, saying it's impossible to defeat the Islamic State group without cooperating with the Syrian government. — AP

PUTIN DEFENDS RUSSIA MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO SYRIAN REGIME

DUSHANBE: Russian President Vladimir Putin yesterday strongly defended Moscow's military assistance to the Syrian government, saying it's impossible to defeat the Islamic State group without cooperating with Damascus. Putin's statement comes amid the signs of an ongoing Russian military buildup in Syria, which the US says signals Moscow's intention to set up an air base there. Speaking at a meeting of heads of states at a Moscow-dominated security alliance of ex-Soviet nations in Tajikistan, Putin urged other nations to follow Russia's example and offer military support to Syrian President Bashar Assad's government.

"We are supporting the government of Syria in the fight against a terrorist aggression, are offering and will continue to offer it necessary military-technical assistance," Putin said in televised remarks. "Without an active participation of the Syrian authorities and the military, it would be impossible to expel the terrorists from that country and the region as a whole, and to protect the multi-ethnic and multi-confessional Syrian people from destruction."

He said that Assad was ready to conduct political transformations and engage a "healthy part of the opposition," but added that "pooling

forces in the fight against terror takes the priority now."

Russia has staunchly backed up Assad throughout Syria's devastating civil war that has killed about 250,000 people and turned millions into refugees, shielding him from United Nations sanctions and continuing to provide him with weapons despite Western criticism.

Putin shrugged off allegations that Moscow's support for Assad has sparked a flow of refugees, saying that without Russia's support for Assad's regime the number of Syrian refugees heading to Europe would have been even bigger.

"People are fleeing Syria primarily to escape fighting that has been fueled from the outside with supplies of weapons and hardware, they are fleeing to escape terrorist atrocities," he said. "Without Russia's support for Syria, the situation in the country would have been worse than in Libya, and the flow of refugees would have been even bigger." The Pentagon says that Russia is in the midst of a steady military buildup at an airport in Syria's coastal province of Latakia, indicating Moscow intends to create a forward air operations base there, although no fighter jets or helicopters have arrived yet. — AP