



This aerial photo taken yesterday shows a farmer drying wheat with a tractor during harvest season in Lianyungang in China's eastern Jiangsu province. — AFP

Israeli court finalizes Jerusalem church land sale to settler group

JERUSALEM: Israel's top court gave final approval yesterday for the 2004 sale of properties by the Greek Orthodox Church to a Jewish pro-settlement organization in mainly Palestinian areas of annexed east Jerusalem. In its Monday decision, the supreme court rejected the church's appeal against a district court's 2017 approval of the same deal. Three companies linked to a group named Ateret Cohanim in 2004 secured the long-term lease of three buildings owned by the Greek Orthodox Church—the Petra hostel and the New Imperial Hotel, both located by the Jaffa Gate, and a residential building in the Muslim Quarter.

Ateret Cohanim works to "Judaize" east Jerusalem in its entirety by purchasing real estate in the city's Palestinian areas through front companies. The deal made Ateret Cohanim the owner of the majority of the properties between the Old City's Jaffa Gate and Arab market. A source close to the Greek Orthodox patriarchy of the early 2000s told AFP in 2017 that the church was unaware of the land sale. The sale triggered Palestinian anger and led to the 2005 dismissal of Patriarch Irineos I.

In a statement yesterday, Palestinian Greek Orthodox Archbishop Atallah Hanna described the

Supreme Court's decision as "illegal and illegitimate". "The seizure of the historic Jaffa Gate properties by extremist settler organizations is a new catastrophe to the misfortunes suffered by the Christians in this Holy City," he said, calling for the deal to be cancelled in a lawful manner.

The Greek Orthodox Church is the largest and wealthiest church in the Holy Land. Its Jerusalem patriarchate commands massive wealth, largely in land portfolios in Israel, the occupied West Bank and Jordan, with Palestinians often accusing it of selling or leasing properties to Israel. Israel took over mainly Palestinian east Jerusalem in the 1967 Six-Day War and later annexed it in a move never recognized by the international community. It now considers the entire city its capital, citing the Jewish historical and biblical connection there.

The Palestinians see east Jerusalem, which includes the Old City, as the capital of their future state. Some 320,000 Palestinians live in east Jerusalem, while the Israeli settler population there has grown to 210,000. The Jerusalem district court had dealt with claims against the deal for nine years before approving it. The supreme court said the earlier ruling was sound and "the appeal is rejected". — AFP



JERUSALEM: This picture taken yesterday shows a view of the Petra Hostel (right) and the New Imperial Hotel (left) in the Old City of Jerusalem near Jaffa Gate. — AFP

First electric scooter death in Paris as controversy rages

PARIS: A man died in Paris after his electric scooter collided with a lorry, sources said yesterday, the first such fatality involving the increasingly-popular devices in the French capital as concern grows over their safety. The 25-year-old was riding the scooter in the bustling Goutte d'Or neighbourhood in the north of the city when the accident happened late Monday. He was rushed to hospital where he died of his injuries, the Paris emergency services said.

The lorry driver has been detained with prosecutors opening an investigation into "involuntary homicide". A source close to the case, who asked not to be named, said the lorry driver had priority on the road at the time. It was the first deadly accident involving an electric scooter within the city limits, police and the mayor's office confirmed. According to press reports, an 81-year-old man died in April in Levallois-Perret outside Paris, days after being knocked over by an electric scooter.

Just a year after they first appeared on the Paris streets, mushrooming electric scooters have become a gigantic headache for the Paris authorities who are now rushing to implement some kind of framework for their use. Monday's deadly accident has "underlined the need to emphasize the elementary rules that users must respect," deputy mayor Emmanuel Gregoire told AFP.

"The police need to act to penalize users who, for example, cross a red light," he said.

Mayor Anne Hidalgo had on Thursday announced a ban on parking electric scooters on the pavement and said their speed on roads should be limited to 20 km per hour. Paris has already introduced fines of €135 for riding electric scooters on the pavement. Fans have embraced scooters as a quick and cheap way to get around since the "dockless" devices are unlocked with a phone app and can be left anywhere when a ride is finished.

But critics say they are a grave safety risk both for users and pedestrians while scooters strewn randomly across the city have also become an eyesore. French Transport Minister Elisabeth Borne yesterday said she was in favor of new mobility options but admitted the development of the scooter market was "totally anarchic, and this poses safety problems". She said legislation would be in the pipeline later this year to provide a framework on rules for scooter usage.

But the government was still against making it obligatory to wear a helmet on a scooter or on a bicycle for the over 12s, she said. "The French are tired of having obligations imposed on them. What we recommend is a helmet is worn and everyone takes their responsibility," she said. The mobility benefits of scooters, as well as the dangers inherent in using them, is making their increasing popularity an issue not just in France but across Europe. Germany in May authorized battery-powered scooters on its streets and cycle paths but banned them from pavements to protect pedestrians. Also in May, a young man aged 27 died after being hit by a car while riding an electric scooter just after they were launched in the Swedish city of Helsingborg. — AFP

value of inventories has been reduced from some KD 8.6 billion to around KD 4.5 billion, adding that transfers between chapters of the budget are mainly to finance the employment of Kuwaitis.

The two lawmakers had charged that the ministry of finance is responsible for losses of billions of dollars in Kuwaiti investments abroad and locally, some of them very suspicious. MP Adasani said hundreds of millions of dinars were lost by the social security institution by not taking timely action against its former managing director who fled the country, claiming the ministry has not taken proper legal action against him.

He highlighted a corruption case in port investments, alleging an organized gang was stealing public funds through some fake companies, charging that some overseas interference has taken place to protect those involved. Adasani also said some KD 290 million was lost by the Touristic Enterprises Co. MP Mulla claimed the government keeps investment information confidential because it does not want anyone to see its management failures.

Indian toddler dies after 110...

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lawmaker, told AFP. The toddler, who had oxygen supplies but no food or water, was flown in an air ambulance to a hospital in the capital Chandigarh where he was declared dead. Authorities had dug a hole parallel to the well and inserted a 36-inch wide pipe into it, in an attempt to reach the trapped toddler.

Villagers angry about the failed rescue mission gathered at the site Tuesday and shouted slogans against the state government. Protesters also blocked a main road briefly before police were deployed to prevent further trouble. The rescue operation was "delayed due

to lack of required technical assistance," resident Kultar Singh was quoted as saying by local media.

The bore well was dug by the child's family in 1984. They used to draw water from it to irrigate the fields but stopped using it after 1991. Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh has ordered a crackdown on open wells across the state. "Very sad to hear about the tragic death of young Fatehveer," he tweeted yesterday. "Have sought reports from all DCs (deputy commissioners) regarding any open bore well so that such terrible accidents can be prevented in the future."

The tragedy underscored the dangers of uncovered wells which are common across northern India. A one-and-a-half-year-old child was rescued in March, in Haryana state, after being trapped for two days. In 2006, a six-year-old child was recovered safely in the same state after being stuck in a well for 48 hours. — AFP

UK and Canada co-host world's first...

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Media freedom is also under threat from increasing intolerance of independent reporting, widespread and growing corruption, and the breakdown of law and order. We must work together to stop the alarming increase in attacks on journalists and the media. Next month's conference is an important milestone in our two governments' wider media freedom campaign. It is a response to the UN Secretary-General's call "to protect journalists and media workers and to create the conditions they need to do their essential work, and to investigate and prosecute the perpetrators of attacks".

Canada and the UK want to see a renewed and strengthened commitment from the international community to the safety and protection of journalists. The conference itself will seek to arrive at commitments and a joint pledge along four main themes:

First, participants will discuss measures to enhance the safety of journalists, with particular focus on female journalists, activating international mechanisms, and ways of ending impunity through more prosecutions of those abusing journalists' rights.

Second, the conference will look at national legal and professional frameworks for protecting journalists and safeguarding media freedom. We anticipate in particular the launch of Joint Declarations by Special Rapporteurs on Media Freedom.

Third, there will be a focus on rebuilding trust in the media and countering disinformation.

Fourth, we will look at media ownership and its impact on media independence, with a view to coming up with recommendations on media sustainability.

Our joint expectation is that the London Conference will inspire common action worldwide. All participants will be invited to make a solemn pledge and specific commitments. Countries will also be encouraged to design National Action Plans on journalists' safety, supported by an international task force. We also plan to hold the first meeting of the High Level Panel of Legal Experts on Media Freedom, to be convened by the Foreign Secretary's Special Envoy Amal Clooney, and to launch a global Media Freedom Defence Fund to support follow-up.

As the British Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt said in a recent speech, "We want to build a coalition of governments committed to a stronger diplomatic response when media freedom is curtailed, and to ensure greater support when countries do the right thing, remove restrictions and push out the frontiers of free expression.... A free media is not an optional extra, still less a 'Western' value: it forms one pillar of a thriving society, benefiting people in every corner of the world."

The Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs Hon. Chrystia Freeland, PC, MP said:

In any democracy, journalists must have the ability to report facts freely, to defend, expose and advance the truth without fear of retaliation, reprisal, violence or imprisonment. Canada will always defend this right. We are very pleased to co-host this conference with the United Kingdom, and we look forward to joining all participants in London later this year."

Finance minister defends foreign...

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Hajraf said more than 95 percent of the issues raised in the grilling were from long before he became a minister, which means that raising these issues involves a constitutional violation. He said the state's finances and investments have improved, saying this will be illustrated when the country's financial status is discussed in the Assembly, adding that such finances and those of defense will be kept confidential.

The minister declined to explain what is happening in the Philippines with regards to Kuwaiti investment in order to safeguard measures being taken by the investment authorities. Hajraf said it is not possible that "all our investments everywhere will be successful, because investments are subject to loss and profit". He said the