

Meet Gaza's first woman taxi driver

Author:

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GAZA: Palestinian mother-of-five Nayla Abu Jubbah launched a small revolution this week by becoming the first female taxi driver in the deeply conservative Gaza Strip.

In the impoverished Palestinian territory, women have the same legal rights as men to drive a vehicle, but in practice the trade of taxi driver has been exclusively male – until now.

“One day I was talking with a friend who works as a hairdresser and I said to her: ‘What would you say if we started a taxi service for women?’ She said it was a crazy idea,” the 39-year-old told AFP.

The Israeli-blockaded territory was suffering 50 percent unemployment even before the COVID-19 pandemic.

After drinking a steaming cup of tea in her home, the social work graduate in a headscarf puts on a face mask and marches to her car parked outside.

After slotting her smartphone into its holder and giving a toot on the horn for show, she starts the engine and is off on the roads of Gaza, where the Islamist Hamas movement has ruled for more than 13 years.

Abu Jubbah does not cruise the streets for fares, taking only advance bookings.

“I leave my home and I will pick up my clients, to bring them for example from the hairdressing salon to a wedding,” she says.

She bought the vehicle with her inheritance when her father died.

“I said to myself one day that I needed to take advantage of the car, to put it to work,” she said. “Hence the project of a taxi service entirely for women, to put them at ease.”

Today she is driving through the streets of Gaza City to pick up 27-year-old Aya Saleem for a shopping trip.

“We live in a conservative society. So when I saw that there was a taxi company especially for women ... I felt a kind of freedom,” says Saleem.

She wears a long brown tunic, beige headscarf and a pale blue mask and carries a stylish bag.

“When I’m with a woman, I feel comfortable ... I feel freer and then we can talk,” she says, adding that women’s taxi services are in line with sharia, the Islamic code which Hamas promotes in the Gaza Strip.

Saleem is delighted with the idea and hopes to see more female taxi drivers on Gaza's roads soon.

Abu Jubbah says she wants to expand her business.

"A woman called me recently to tell me that she wanted to work as a taxi driver by my side," she said.

"I told her that we would talk again but I already have the feeling that the project will gain momentum."



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'Made-in-Gaza' device fights coronavirus spread Gazans left stranded abroad by Israeli-Palestinian standoff

[Crime boss threatens Turkey's opposition leader](#)

Author:

Wed, 2020-11-18 23:16

ANKARA: Turkey's notorious mafia boss Alaattin Cakici, who was recently released from jail under an amnesty law pushed through by the government and its coalition partner MHP, has publicly threatened the country's opposition leader, Kemal Kilicdaroglu, telling him to "watch his step."

The threat has yet to be condemned by any government figure, while opposition counterparts, including Istanbul Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu, demand an end to the silence surrounding threats and insults.

"To threaten the head of the Republican People's Party (CHP) is to threaten millions, to threaten the republic. Everybody should know their limits," Ozgur Ozel, CHP group deputy chair, tweeted.

In June, a deputy from the MHP threw a punch at Ozel during a parliamentary session as tensions ran high over the removal of an opposition MP's parliamentary status.

Opposition district mayors and CHP Istanbul Provincial Chair Canan Kaftancioglu released a joint press statement on Nov. 18, saying: "We aren't afraid of you or of your shadow. We will follow this case which will show the sincerity of the government."

Cakici was convicted of instigating the killing of his ex-wife – the daughter of another well-known Turkish criminal – in 1995. He is politically affiliated with the nationalistic MHP.

On Tuesday, Cakici told Kilicdaroglu: "You and your party's executives are saying that there is no democracy in Turkey and talking against the president. If there had been a dictatorial regime in our country, you would have all been impaled."

The threat follows Kilicdaroglu's criticism of the government on Nov. 17 over its amnesty law.

"Will you stop releasing mafia leaders, drug traffickers and jailing thought criminals?" the opposition leader asked during his parliamentary speech.

Journalists and political prisoners were excluded from the controversial amnesty law adopted in April.

CHP lawmaker Alpay Antmen said the mafia boss' challenge to the head of the main opposition party shows "the rule of law has been destroyed in Turkey."

Antmen told Arab News: "Cakici doesn't proceed by himself; he gets the support from higher levels; he has some partners in crime who encourage him. He is only the spokesperson for a widespread gang."

More than 36,000 people have been investigated in the past year for "insulting" President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, according to official figures.

"I am wondering whether those who arrest people just because they criticized Erdogan will do the same for that mafia boss? Those who threatened Kilicdaroglu also threatened millions of the party's supporters," Antmen

said.

Meanwhile, a court ruling in the southeastern province of Diyarbakir added to Turkey's already weak record on accountability.

A court acquitted a suspected police officer over the killing of Kemal Kurkut, a 23-year-old Kurdish man who was trying to attend Newroz celebrations in 2017.

Kurkut, who was shot by a police officer, was suspected of being a suicide bomber and carrying explosives. However, he was not wearing a shirt at the time.

Authorities opened a criminal complaint against 72 other police officers in the case, which remains unresolved after three years. However, a local journalist who recorded the moment of the killing faces up to 20 years in jail for "making terrorist propaganda."

Sidar Avsar, a lawyer at the Diyarbakir Bar Association who has followed the case, said the latest ruling showed excessive force against civilians could be carried out with impunity.

He warned that this case is unlikely to be the last.

"Similar cases involving citizens in Turkey are undermining public trust in the security forces and the state in general. It weakens people's perception of justice in the country," he said.



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[Restoration of ties with Israel sparks anger in Palestine](#)

Author:

Wed, 2020-11-18 23:07

GAZA CITY: The Palestinian Authority (PA) announced on Tuesday that it will restore coordination with Israel – a move that has been met with widespread

factional rejection in the country, with the PA accused of “undermining” internal reconciliation efforts.

Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas announced a halt to coordination with Israel – including security cooperation – in May, in response to Israeli plans to annex 30 percent of the West Bank.

Hussein Al-Sheikh, the PA’s civil affairs minister, announced late Tuesday on Twitter that the PA had decided to restore relations with Israel to “where they were before May 19, after confirming that Israel would abide by signed agreements.”

Al-Sheikh told Palestine’s official TV network that the PA recently sent an official letter to the Israelis inquiring about their commitment to the agreements signed with the Palestine Liberation Organization. On Tuesday, it received a written response declaring Israel’s commitment to those agreements.

Al-Sheikh said: “The recognition of the signed agreements means that (US President Donald Trump’s) ‘Deal of the Century’ is no longer on the table.” He described this as “a great victory and the fruit of the steadfastness of the Palestinians and their leadership.”

However, observers have questioned the timing of the PA’s unexpected announcement, which coincides with talks between Fatah and Hamas in Cairo as Palestine’s two main political factions attempt to negotiate a path forward. Hamas issued a statement describing the PA’s decision as “a stab in the back” for this process.

A political analyst close to Hamas, Ibrahim Al-Madhoun, told Arab News the PA’s announcement of the resumption of its relationship with Israel was expected, but that the way it was announced was “disregarding the Palestinian people.”

“After this decision, the path of reconciliation is at stake,” he said.

Others noted that the Israeli response to the PA was signed by the “coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories” Kamil Abu Rukun rather than Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Palestinian MP Hassan Khreisheh was one of those who played down the importance of the Israeli message, saying it fails to formalize any political commitment. He described the PA’s decision as part of “a struggle of wings and currents within the PA and Fatah to succeed President Abbas.”

Gal Berger, an analyst for Palestinian affairs at the Israeli Public Broadcasting Corporation, expressed similar sentiments in an article about the decision. “The circle surrounding Abbas, including Hussein Al-Sheikh and (General Intelligence chief) Majed Faraj, did not like the level of progress in the reconciliation efforts,” he wrote, explaining that they oppose the promotion of Fatah Central Committee Member Jibril Rajoub as a possible successor to Abbas.

He also suggested that the announcement coinciding with the Hamas-Fatah talks in Cairo was not “just a coincidence.”

“One of them could have wanted to embarrass Rajoub, who rushed towards reconciliation with Hamas at a time when Abbas and his close circle had another plan,” Berger said. “Reconciliation with Hamas was not an option for Abbas, but rather a message to Israel and the international community, and the opportunity came to retreat after (Joe) Biden’s victory (in the US presidential election).”

US-Palestinian relations had collapsed under Trump’s administration, but there are hopes the situation will improve once Biden takes office.

Israeli journalist Daniel Serotti suggested the PA is trying to “improve its image” and is sending “a message to the Biden administration that the Palestinian boycott of America will not continue during his term.”

Serotti also noted that a major driver behind the PA’s decision is the fact that it has stopped accepting the transfer of taxes Israel had collected on its behalf since May, meaning a deficit of hundreds of millions of shekels. The PA had been forced to cut civil servants’ salaries just at the time that the COVID-19 pandemic’s devastating effects on the Palestinian economy were becoming apparent.

Ismat Mansour, a writer specializing in Israeli affairs, told Arab News that Biden’s statements about a “two-state solution” to the Israel-Palestine issue had given the PA “an appropriate way out to receive tax revenues from Israel.”

That, at least, was news that some Palestinians celebrated, with many civil servants taking to social media to express their joy that some relief of their financial hardship may be in sight.



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Palestinian Authority to resume coordination with Israel Palestine's Mahmoud Abbas asks UN for international peace conference next year

[Activists protest against total closure in Lebanon](#)

Author:

Wed, 2020-11-18 22:48

BEIRUT: Activists from civil movement groups staged a sit-in outside the Ministry of Interior in Beirut on Wednesday afternoon to protest the deteriorating economic situation in light of the lockdown imposed until the end of November.

The activists carried the Lebanese flag and chanted slogans, including "the revolution will go on." A large number of Internal Security Forces (ISF) personnel were deployed in the vicinity of the ministry to prevent protesters from entering its premises.

The protesters said they were not against the decision to close businesses due to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, but were calling on the state and authorities to help the most impoverished people in light of deteriorating difficult living conditions.

Khalid Abu-Ismaïl, head of economic development and poverty at the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), said a few days ago that Lebanon's ranking had dropped and poverty rates had doubled, hitting 55 percent of the total population.

Abu-Ismaïl said that there was a loss of food security, most pronounced in the poorest areas in northern and southern Lebanon, especially among workers with daily wages.

Just as the protests took place, Nicolas Chammas, president of the Beirut Traders Association, conveyed to Caretaker Interior Minister Brig. Gen. Mohammed Fahmy that "traders are angry due to the decision to completely close businesses, the disparity in the implementation of this decision in different regions, and the impact of the closure on traders in light of the deteriorating economic situation." He asked the minister to reconsider the decision.

Chammas told Arab News: "Hunger can spur riots that lead to dangerous consequences. We are fully aware of the decisions taken to protect the public's health, but there is also hunger (to take into consideration). Some of those affected (by the closure) are calling for civil disobedience or the violation of the closure decision."

Tony Eid, head of Achrafieh's Merchants Association, told Arab News: "Traders are demanding greater discipline during the period of complete closure, and we are keen to implement the measures to contain the spread of the virus.

"We hope that things will improve next month as it is full of holidays, and we count on this to compensate for our losses," he added.

On Wednesday the civil movement groups denounced the arrest of Makram Rabah, a political activist and lecturer at the American University of Beirut, at Rafic Hariri International Airport in Beirut as he was leaving for Dubai on Monday.

The groups, affiliated with Liqaa Teshrin (the October Meeting), condemned "the security practices, the suppression of freedoms, and the negativity adopted by the corrupt system to impede the prospects of achieving the desired reforms to save the country."

On Wednesday Rabah expressed his concerns about "tyrannical practices and the fabrication of files" against him.

He explained in a statement to the Central News Agency (Al-Markazia) that he was arrested without a judicial warrant, and a security file was fabricated against him due to his political stances.

Rabah said: "I am against any person or party that violates Lebanese

sovereignty, and the first of these are Israel and Hezbollah because, in my view, they are equal in their violation of Lebanon's sovereignty.

"My political position is very clear, and even if I raised any suspicions, there are standard procedures that are supposed to be implemented," he said. "However, in my case, I am a lecturer at the American University of Beirut and a consultant, and my father is a former member of the Supreme Judicial Council, and all my stances are known. Therefore, whoever wants to obtain the contents of my phone can access my social media pages and follow my media appearances, but requesting the confiscation of my passport is not acceptable."

He added: "If there is a reason for my arrest, the decision must be issued by the Public Prosecutor at the Court of Cassation, not by an officer in the security services."



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Lebanon begins 2-week lockdown as COVID-19 cases surge
Lebanon reinstates lockdown amid economic crisis

Amnesty International urges Qatar to crack down on abusive employers

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LONDON: Qatar should crack down on abusive employers and strengthen enforcement of its labor reforms if the state is to deliver on promises to protect workers' rights, Amnesty International said on Wednesday. The human rights group warned in a report that further action needed to be taken to guarantee that migrant workers receive wages, have access to justice and are protected from exploitation.

The report said that although the country has introduced a series of major reforms which include better pay and access to justice, little has been done to enforce them.

"Qatar needs to do much more to ensure legislation has a tangible impact on people's lives," said the head of economic and social justice at Amnesty International, Steve Cockburn.

Cockburn said that many migrant workers had not benefitted from the reforms and will remain trapped in an exploitation cycle.

"Positive reforms have too often been undermined by weak implementation and an unwillingness to hold abusive employers to account. Inspection systems are inadequate to detect abuse, and it remains challenging for workers to lodge complaints without risking their income and legal status."

The report, which was released two years ahead of the 2022 FIFA World Cup, urged Qatar to respect the right of migrant workers to form trade unions and strengthen mechanisms to spot and put an end to abuses.

Although the 2022 World Cup host nation introduced a number of reforms aimed at bettering the conditions of migrant workers since 2017, thousands of workers in Qatar still face labor abuses.

A separate Amnesty report showed how many domestic workers in Qatar continue to work around 16 hours a day without a day off, despite a law being introduced to limit shifts to ten hours and stipulating one day off every week.



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