

Hamas, Israel agree to cease-fire over border violence

Author:

Wed, 2020-09-02 02:10

GAZA CITY: Hamas and Israel on Tuesday agreed to a cease-fire in the Gaza Strip following three weeks of border violence.

The sides committed to implementing the terms of a truce brokered by Egypt, Qatar, and the UN in October 2018.

Observers said the agreement would allow Israel to switch its focus to fighting the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak in the country where 117,241 cases had so far been recorded.

In a statement issued immediately after the cease-fire was announced, the head of Hamas' political office in Gaza, Yahya Sinwar, said the agreement would contribute to "containing escalation and stopping the Israeli aggression" on Gaza.

Hamas added that a number of projects aimed at alleviating the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in Gaza would soon be announced.

Following the truce agreement, Israel reopened the only commercial crossing through which goods and fuel can pass to the enclave at Kerem Shalom, after restrictions had been imposed three weeks ago stopping fuel supplies, which resulted in power cuts throughout Gaza.

The Israelis also allowed the resumption of fishing for a distance of 15 nautical miles (28 km) out to sea.

Factions in Gaza agreed to stop launching rockets and incendiary balloons into Israeli communities, and to end night protests.

Hamas officials were understood to have been mainly calling for a return to the terms of the 2018 accord and the suspension of Great Return March activities. At the time, the understandings included vital projects funded by Qatar in relation to resolving Gaza's long-running electricity supply crisis, the opening of an industrial zone at the Erez border crossing, the creation of job opportunities, and the easing of restrictions on exports and imports.

Hamas' political bureau member, Osama Hamdan, said: "The resistance is in scoring stage, and it has not come out of this confrontation losing, and what it has achieved is appropriate in the context of the continuation of the confrontation that aims to completely break the siege.

"The leadership of the resistance factions was interested in achieving an agreement that would allow our people to confront the (COVID-19) pandemic, and that the occupation would not benefit from this crisis to put pressure on our people."

Adnan Abu Amer, a columnist specializing in Israeli affairs, said that the agreement had been a point-scoring exercise for both sides but a victory for neither.

He added that Hamas was faced with deteriorating humanitarian and economic conditions in Gaza and the deal would allow vital projects to go ahead while giving Israel peace of mind over the threat of border attacks.

Amer noted that the COVID-19 outbreak in Gaza had heaped further pressure on Hamas.

However, journalist Fathi Sabah, felt that the agreement had achieved nothing for Hamas and Gaza and only carried “promises” to implement projects that had already been agreed on, but Israel had refused to implement since 2018.

Sabah told Arab News: “Hamas found itself obliged to respond to the efforts to calm down, as it is more aware than others that the situation in Gaza does not allow things to deteriorate into a war, as 2 million Palestinians are in exhausted conditions, and the (COVID-19) pandemic has made the situation worse.”



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Israel, Hamas agree to restore calm along Gaza border
Israel strikes Hamas in Gaza over rockets, fire balloons

Houthi attacks on Saudi Arabia 'aimed at stopping coalition airstrikes'

Author:

Wed, 2020-09-02 01:59

AL-MUKALLA: A surge in drone, missile and explosive-laden boat attacks on Saudi Arabia by the Houthi militia is seeking to pressure the Kingdom into stopping airstrikes that have killed dozens of their senior commanders in Yemen, Yemeni military officials and experts said on Tuesday.

The Arab coalition has announced intercepting explosive-laden drones and boats and ballistic missiles fired by the rebels at Saudi civilian and military targets in the Kingdom and Yemen.

Airstrikes by coalition warplanes have targeted senior Houthi commanders mainly in the central provinces of Marib and Al-Bayda, and in the northern province of Jawf. The Houthis also want to force the Kingdom to stop its massive military logistics with the Yemeni army, the experts said.

"The coalition (warplanes) targeted their fortifications, military equipment, trenches, gatherings, command rooms as well as military reinforcements," Brig. Gen. Abdu Abdullah Majili, a Yemeni army spokesman, told Arab News.

He said that the Houthis had suffered heavy losses over the last couple of weeks as a result of counterattacks by government forces and allied tribesmen under heavy air cover from coalition warplanes.

Houthi official media broadcast images of long convoys carrying bodies of rebel fighters. Local military officers told Arab News that many of those Houthis were killed in smart airstrikes by Saudi-led coalition warplanes in Jawf and Marib.

The Houthis, after failing to make a major military breakthrough with ground assaults, have turned to attacking Saudi Arabia to end their rising death count.

"The Houthis suffered fatal blows and a huge depletion of fighters during the current raging battles," Majili added.

Coalition warplanes have been credited for tilting the balance of the war in favor of government forces and curbing the Houthis' military expansion.

Houthi deaths have risen since the militia's push to take control of the central city of Marib in the last couple of months, one Yemeni army officer said.

"The Houthis put their entire eggs in Marib's basket, it is a 'To be or not

to be' battle for them," Col. Abdul Basit Al-Baher, a Yemeni army spokesman in the southern city of Taiz, told Arab News. "The Houthis are hungry for money and resources so they keep escalating pressure on Marib. Due to land and air surveillance, the coalition's airstrikes have become more precise and can locate and target Houthi commanders on the battlefields."

The internationally recognized government of Yemen said that hundreds of attacks by Houthis in the western province of Hodeidah killed almost 100 civilians and wounded dozens of others in July, as the rebels continue to obstruct the movement of UN monitors.



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Houthis in constant violation of de-escalation deals, Yemeni speaker says
IC condemns Houthi attacks on Saudi Arabia

[Sudan's Omar Bashir's trial adjourned to Sept. 15](#)

Author:

Wed, 2020-09-02 01:55

KHARTOUM: Sudan's trial of ousted President Omar Bashir over the 1989 coup that brought him to power was adjourned Tuesday to Sept. 15, the presiding judge said.

The session, which was broadcast on Sudan TV, was held amid tight security as Bashir, 76, and other co-accused regime figures stood behind bars in the courtroom.

After procedural questions and debate about coronavirus precautions in the courtroom, the presiding judge declared the hearing was "adjourned to September 15."

Giving his profession as "former president of the republic," Bashir seemed in good physical condition as he appeared in a metal courtroom cage wearing white prison-issue clothes and a medical face mask that he lowered to identify himself.

In footage carried by Sudanese state TV he said he was resident in Khartoum's Kober Prison, 76 years old, and had two wives.

Some of Bashir's former associates appeared alongside him at the trial, which had been postponed because of overcrowding at the scheduled opening last month.

Military officers ousted Bashir in April 2019 after months of street protests, leading to a power-sharing agreement between the military and civilian groups.

Bashir is separately facing prosecution over his alleged role in the repression of protests against his rule, and in December was sentenced at another trial to 2 years in prison on corruption charges.

He is also wanted by the International Criminal Court on charges of alleged genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity in Darfur.

Tuesday's court hearing came a day after Sudan's transitional leadership signed a peace deal with some of the rebel groups that had battled Bashir's military and allied militias in Darfur.

Three major groups signed the deal, including factions from Darfur where more than 300,000 people are estimated to have been killed and 2.5 million displaced since 2003, and one from southern regions which say they were also marginalized.

But two factions with the biggest presence on the ground in Darfur and the south did not sign, and the cash-strapped transitional government will struggle to pay for the return of millions of displaced people and regional development promised in the deal.

"The main challenge facing us now is the implementation of the peace agreement, and finding donations to do that," Jibril Ibrahim, leader of Darfur's Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), said after he and the other rebel leaders signed the agreement.

Sudan has been riven by regional conflicts for decades. After the oil-rich south became independent in 2011, a gradual economic decline fueled the protests which pushed Bashir from power last year.

Civilian and military leaders who have shared power since then say ending internal conflicts is a top priority in the path to democracy for the once-pariah state. Analysts said Monday's deal, signed in the South Sudanese capital Juba, was very important but left big gaps.



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Sudan government and rebel groups agree peace deal
Sudan rebels agree to key peace deal with government

[Egypt to try ex-student for sexual assault, blackmail in #MeToo case](#)

Tue, 2020-09-01 21:48

CAIRO: Egypt's chief prosecutor Tuesday referred a former student of an elite university to the criminal court for trial on charges of sexual assault of three minors, in a case that added fuel to the #MeToo movement in the Arab

world's most populous country.

Public Prosecutor Hamada El-Sawy said former student Ahmed Bassam Zaki is also charged with blackmailing and sexually harassing the women, who were minors at the time the alleged crimes took place.

No date has been set for trial. The suspect could face up to life in prison if convicted.

Zaki was arrested in July after the allegations against him went viral, resulting in a firestorm on social media. The #MeToo movement aims to hold accountable those involved in sexual misconduct and those who cover it up. Several attempts at the time by The Associated Press to contact his family or his lawyer were unsuccessful.

According to accusations posted on social media, the former student would mine the pool of mutual friends on Facebook, online groups or school clubs. He would start with flattery, then pressure the women and girls to share intimate photos that he later used to blackmail them with to have sex with him, according to these accusations. If they did not, he would threaten to send the pictures to their family.

The former student hails from a wealthy family and studied at the American International School, one of Egypt's most expensive private high schools, and the American University in Cairo. AUC officials said he left the university in 2018.

Claims against 22-year-old Zaki erupted online in July in the form of testimonies including an alleged rape and instances of assault against dozens of girls and women, some involving blackmail.

Some alleged incidents involved girls as young as 14.

Zaki, a former student of some of Egypt's most elite schools and the American University in Cairo, was arrested on July 4 and confessed to assaulting several girls, according to the prosecution.

The case kickstarted a #MeToo campaign in Egypt, where women complain of rampant sexual harassment, an offense that was only criminalized since 2014. United Nations surveys say most women in the conservative country have been subject to harassment ranging from catcalling, pinching, groping or worse. Women are often reluctant to speak out fearing public shame and being blamed for dressing or acting "provocatively."

Egypt's parliament last month approved amendments to the criminal code granting victims of sexual assault the right to anonymity.

Zaki's case, activists say, shows that misogyny cuts across the country's stark class lines. Many in Egypt have previously portrayed sexual harassment as a problem of poor urban youth.

Sexual assault and harassment are deep-seated problems in Egypt, where victims must also fight the undercurrent of a conservative culture that typically ties female chastity to a family's reputation. In courts, the burden of proof lies heavily on the victims of such crimes.

The allegations against the former student were collected by the Instagram account @assaultpolice. Since then, the account has played a crucial role in revealing an alleged gang rape that shook Egyptian society in recent weeks. Allegations of sexual misconduct also emerged against several rights activists.

The alleged gang rape took place at a five-star Cairo hotel in 2014, but word of the assault surfaced only in July after the former student's case was made public.

Last week, prosecutors said seven suspects left the country after allegations of the gang rape went viral. Five of the suspects arrived in Lebanon, according to Lebanese authorities. Acting on a request from Egypt, three were arrested late Friday in a village north of Beirut, while the other two apparently left Lebanon.

Another nine suspects were arrested in Egypt, including one last week as he attempted to flee the country. Prosecutors ordered five suspects to remain in custody for four days pending investigations. They ordered the release of four others, three of them on bail of 100,000 Egyptian pounds (\$6,315).

(With AP and AFP)



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Lebanon arrests 3 Egyptian suspects in Cairo gang rape case
Egypt kills 77 extremist militants in anti-terror operations

'National hero' Iranian wrestling champion sentenced to death

Author:

Tue, 2020-09-01 23:51

LONDON: An Iranian wrestling champion has been sentenced to death for his role in anti-regime protests in 2018.

The Supreme Court confirmed that Navid Akfari would receive two death sentences, six and a half years in jail and 74 lashes, according to Persian-language broadcaster Iran International.

Saqeb Saba, editor of Iran International, told Arab News that Akfari's brothers Vahid and Habib were spared the death penalty but received prison sentences of 54 and 27 years respectively, as well as 74 lashes each.

The siblings allegedly participated in protests in 2018 that were triggered by the deteriorating economic situation in the country but morphed into an anti-regime movement.

The judiciary charged the brothers with 20 different crimes, including "attending illegal gatherings, assembly and conspiracy to commit crimes against national security, and insulting the supreme leader."

Akfari's case "is really, really upsetting for everybody," Saba said. "He was a national hero, and we don't even know the circumstances of his participation in the demonstrations."

Saba said Akfari was tortured into making false confessions against his brothers, and their lawyer has since said their confessions have no value in any court because of this.

Saba said the regime violently suppresses anyone who expresses dissatisfaction with it, even those who do so peacefully.

"The worst thing Akfari could've done was sympathizing with his friends', family's and compatriots' economic situations, but the way the regime has responded to these demonstrations is horrible – pure brutality," Saba added.

"This is the action of a regime that's frightened. The only way it can deal with a situation like this is brute force."

Iran is notorious for its extensive use of the death penalty, particularly against protestors and political detainees.

According to rights group Amnesty International, Iran is behind only China in executions carried out per year, and killed at least 251 people in 2019 alone.

Many of those executions are carried out publicly, and much like in the case

of the Akfari brothers, defendants are regularly subject to “systematic violations of fair trial rights,” Amnesty said.



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Iran must quash death sentences against protesters: UN experts
Internet access in Iran disrupted as anger at protesters' death sentences grows