

# Families seek justice for Sudan's slain anti-Bashir coup plotters

Sat, 2020-08-01 01:08

KHARTOUM/CAIRO: After decades of searching for their loved ones' remains, the families of slain Sudanese officers who attempted a coup against strongman Omar Bashir are demanding the killers be held accountable.

Since the 1990 attempt, they have endured intimidation, arrests and beatings – but Bashir's ouster in April 2019 spurred hopes that they could finally receive justice.

Last week, investigators looking into crimes during the strongman's 30-year rule found the bodies of the 28 officers dumped in a mass grave in the city of Omdurman.

The coup attempt came just months after Bashir overthrew the democratically elected government of Sadiq Al-Mahdi in 1989.

The attempt to oust him was thwarted and the officers were immediately executed.

"We have been searching for their graves for 30 years. It was a heinous crime. There was no trial, no investigation and they were executed only 24 hours after their arrest," said Awatef Mirghani, the sister of one of the officers, Esmat.

"They were all dumped in a single grave, still wearing their uniforms. It was a violation of human dignity," she said, choking back tears.

In her Khartoum house, Fathiya Kembal keeps at a framed photo of her husband, Bashir Abudeik, in uniform and flashing a broad smile.

The photo, taken as he attended training in the US, bears a black band on one side as a sign of mourning.

It was April 22, 1990 when the couple and their children gathered at a friend's house for iftar, an evening meal to break the fast during Ramadan. Abudeik later drove his family to her father's house, where "he said he would be busy for two days."

The following morning, she woke up to the news of a coup attempt.

## HIGHLIGHTS

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She rushed to a nearby military base to check on her husband. At the gate, she met some of her husband's colleagues, who avoided her gaze.

"They knew he would be killed," the 61-year-old lawyer said.

The news of her husband's execution, along with other coup plotters, was

announced on the official Radio Omdurman the next day.

“It was a massacre. (Abudeik’s killing) was an extrajudicial execution,” she said.

The families of the slain officers quickly united to call for justice and find the bodies of their loved ones.

“Our movement was formed in the spur of the moment and has never stopped since with women – wives, sisters, mothers – at its core,” said Kembal.

As they sought answers, they faced a heavy-handed crackdown.

Their protests outside government buildings were violently broken up by security forces.

Many were arrested or banned from civil service jobs. Some were forced into exile.

But their movement found a ray of hope as nationwide protests erupted against Bashir in December 2018, mainly triggered by economic hardship. The families joined the demonstrations, including the protest camp outside army headquarters in Khartoum.

They issued a booklet saying the officers had sought “to restore the democratic rule Bashir had overthrown, win the release of political detainees and bring those who undermined the constitutional order to trial.”

The officers’ bodies have yet to be exhumed, but the families hope their memories will be honored.



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# Turkey bans writing of university dissertations in Kurdish

Author:

Fri, 2020-07-31 22:37

ISTANBUL: Turkey's Council of Higher Education has banned students studying Kurdish language and literature at Turkish universities from writing their dissertations in Kurdish.

All dissertations at Kurdish language departments will now have to be written in Turkish.

The move is a step back from the government's previous efforts to provide Kurdish citizens, who make up about a fifth of Turkey's population, with an opportunity to receive an education in their mother tongue. State schools have been offering Kurdish as an elective language for the past seven years in a country where Turkish is the only constitutionally recognized language.

Since 2013, Kurdish studies were introduced at universities during the fragile and short-lived "Kurdish peace process" that aimed to increase Kurdish cultural and linguistic rights but which ended suddenly in 2015.

Kurdish language departments previously received thousands of applications from university students who wanted to have their education in Kurdish but numbers have now dropped dramatically.

The decision will influence four universities in Turkey that are allowed to open Kurdish language and literature departments: Dicle University in the southeastern province of Diyarbakir, Mardin Artuklu University, Bingol University and Mus University.

"The collapse of the peace process has resulted in such efforts to target Kurdish language whose use has turned into a political leverage and a means of criminalization in Turkey," Roj Girasun, the head of Diyarbakir-based Rawest Research Center, told Arab News. "However, education in the mother tongue was one of the core campaign topics of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in 2013 and in 2014 when he was reaching out to Kurdish citizens in the southeastern provinces," he said.

Girasun wrote his undergraduate thesis in the Kurdish language and on the topic of Judaism in the Kurdish oral culture at Mardin Artuklu University. However, he is now obliged to write his master's thesis in Turkish, which is not his mother tongue.

"As political tensions escalate domestically and regionally among Turks and Kurds, the crackdown on the universities is mounting. The government doesn't appoint teachers to the Kurdish language departments of the universities,

which naturally discourages citizens from applying to those universities due to the lack of qualified academic staff. What we are witnessing is the criminalization of the Kurdish language,” Girasun said.

Esat Sanli, a doctoral candidate at Dicle University, is another student who will be affected by the decision.

“The decision will directly target students willing to write history and culture-focused dissertations. On the other hand, it will also have international repercussions. Any dissertation that is written in Kurdish will be taken as a lack of capacity of the student in linguistic skills,” Sanli told Arab News.

According to Sanli, the decision will also be a disincentive for Kurdish students to continue their academic career in the Kurdish language.

“There was a significant interest in choosing these Kurdish departments simply for the opportunity to write academic dissertations in their mother tongue. But now these universities risk losing their appeal in the eyes of the students,” he said.

A recent study showed that only 18 percent of the 600 young Kurds surveyed – aged between 18 and 30 – could speak, read and write in Kurdish. The categorization of Kurdish language as an “unknown language” by the judicial system is another marginalization of the language, sometimes even criticized by government officials.

Max Hoffman, a Turkey analyst from the Washington-based Center for American Progress, said that the Kurdish language was another front in Turkey’s culture war.

“Erdogan and the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) lost most of their Kurdish support with the resumption of the PKK conflict and the accompanying harsh government repression. Since July 2015, they have only intensified the crackdown, including removing duly elected mayors from the HDP,” he told Arab News.

According to Hoffman, just as Erdogan drove the Hagia Sophia controversy in the hope that secular Turkey and the West would react – allowing him to pose as the defender of the faithful – he is trying to use Kurdish language and culture as another wedge to force the opposition to either defend Kurdish cultural rights, driving away nationalist voters, or abandon Kurdish cultural rights, driving away Kurdish voters.

“This move should be seen as a sign of political concern about his right-wing, as well as an attempt by the AKP to cause tension in the informal opposition electoral alliance,” he said.



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Syria Kurds set up first coronavirus hospital

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## [Jordan's crackdown on teachers condemned by HRW](#)

Author:

Fri, 2020-07-31 03:00

AMMAN: Jordan's government is facing criticism from human rights groups over its handling of a teachers' protest in the country.

The global watchdog Human Rights Watch (HRW) and the Jordanian Center for Human Rights condemned the government's response to the dispute shortly after teachers' union offices were shut down and a comprehensive gag order was placed on all reporting about the situation, including on social media or sharing social media comments.

Police raided the Jordan Teachers Syndicate headquarters in Amman, shuttered 11 of its branches across the country and arrested all 13 syndicate board members on July 25.

HRW issued a statement criticizing the government's handling of the conflict. "Shuttering one of Jordan's few independent labor unions following a

protracted dispute with the government and on dubious legal grounds raises serious concerns about the government's respect for the rule of law," said Michael Page, the group's deputy Middle East director.

"The lack of transparency and the ban on discussing this incident on social media only reinforces the conclusion that the authorities are violating citizens' rights."

Amjad Adaileh, minister for media affairs, told Arab News that the government respects the rights of citizens but must enforce Health Ministry orders to avoid large gatherings.

"While we can't comment on the proceedings of the judiciary and we commit to respect whatever decision it makes, the government is also responsible for executing the general health directives and related defense orders regarding social distancing in order to prevent the spread of the coronavirus."

Adaileh said the government will not permit any gatherings that threaten to block major traffic arteries or prevent access to essential services.

"However, we accept to help protect demonstrators who abide by health regulations and demonstrate with distance in outdoor settings."

Jordan's Center for Human Rights demanded the release of teachers' union leaders who were arrested on Saturday and called for the right to assemble to be preserved.

Asma Khader, a former Jordanian government spokeswoman, told Arab News that the escalation of tensions is unfortunate.

"The right to protest and to establish a union is a constitutional right as is the right to education," Khader said.

Protests in Amman drew global media attention amid claims that demonstrating teachers and journalists had been beaten by police.

However, local media was silent because of the official gag order.

Adam Coogle, HRW's deputy Middle East director, told Arab News that the ban on media reporting is aimed at halting public discussion on the teachers' union shutdown and the arrest of its leaders.

"Preventing press reporting raises questions about what the authorities may be trying to hide," he said.



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## [Eid in Lebanon overshadowed by virus lockdown, economic crisis](#)

Author:

Fri, 2020-07-31 02:49

BEIRUT: Eid Al-Adha celebrations in Lebanon were on Thursday overshadowed by economic gloom and the first day of lockdown to prevent the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak.

Any festive spirit was knocked flat as official figures showed the number of COVID-19 cases in the country having shot up to 4,250, with 55 deaths.

Streets in the capital Beirut were empty and shops and markets closed, as security patrols enforced a shutdown that will continue until Monday. The COVID-19 pandemic combined with the country's financial crisis has left many cash-strapped Lebanese unable to enjoy traditional Hajj season rituals.

Beirut butcher shop owner, Mohammed Oleylat, said: "I used to slaughter between 40 and 50 sheep (for Eid), however, I only had two clients today

asking to buy sheep. Each sheep costs \$300 now, which equates to 2.4 million Lebanese pounds on the black market.

“On the eve of Eid Al-Adha, customers neither ordered meat for barbecues nor lamb necks. Those used to be cooked for the festivities, but today, they are only ordering meat to add to dishes. Circumstances are difficult for everyone.

“I could not afford to buy any clothes for my children or sweets. I gave my wife 100,000 Lebanese pounds and I asked her to make do,” he added.

The owner of a children’s clothes shop in the Barbeer neighborhood of Beirut, who would only give their name as Sami, said: “We rely on Eid Al-Adha for sales. Last year, the situation was bad, but it seems worse this year.

“People are not buying clothes. Their priorities are now providing food and water if they can afford them. Prices have multiplied and resources diminished. There is no electricity. There is a pandemic and collapse of the Lebanese pound. People are frustrated.”

Mom-of-three Ghada Houweily said she normally bought new clothes for her children at Eid. “This is how I was brought up, and this is how I want to raise my children. However, I will not buy anything this year. A cotton T-shirt for a 6-year-old costs 169,000 Lebanese pounds. How is that possible? “We decided to go to the beach instead of buying new clothes, but due to the lockdown decision, we will have to stay at home. I have never experienced anything like this in my life.

“I consider myself middle-class, and some of my friends whose economic situation was better than mine are now at rock bottom. I am severely frustrated, and my kids are depressed. My husband is working hard to make ends meet but we do not know when this collective punishment will end,” Houweily added.

Lebanese Ministry of Tourism chiefs have allowed sweets shops to open during Eid for takeaway and delivery services only, with restaurants and fast-food outlets given the green light to trade under the same restrictions.

Nicolas Chammas, president of the Beirut Traders’ Association, told Arab News: “The situation is desperate. We waited for Eid Al-Adha and summer to make up for our losses on Eid Al-Fitr, Christmas, and last new year, but the situation has become worse. All factors have overlapped, and our losses have increased.”

He added that over the past nine months a quarter of businesses in Beirut had been forced to close due to the country’s crises, and he expected a similar proportion to go to the wall over the next six months.

Nassib Gemayel, president of Mount Lebanon Trade Association, called on the government to reconsider its lockdown decision given the “catastrophic damage” caused to the commercial sector.

In Tripoli, tour boat owners blocked the corniche and torched bins in protest at being banned from working over Eid.





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## [In West Bank, Eid sacrifices plummet as virus cases soar](#)

Author:

Fri, 2020-07-31 02:32

BETHLEHEM: Slaughterhouses typically crowded with Palestinian Muslims buying sheep for the annual Eid Al-Adha “feast of sacrifice” were nearly empty this week as coronavirus curbs weigh on the economy in the occupied West Bank.

The Palestinian Authority (PA) has imposed a partial lockdown over areas under its control to battle a surge in new cases, forcing many businesses to close and sending unemployment to an estimated 18 percent.

“Who exactly can afford (sheep) to sacrifice?,” livestock merchant Daoud Ebayat asked at a hillside market in Bethlehem. “People are unable to cover expenses for their children, there’s no work.”

Around 115,000 sheep and 10,000 calves were sold during Eid Al-Adha in the West Bank and in East Jerusalem last year, according to ministry data. But with many out of work, and public servants on reduced pay as the PA attempts to weather a financial crisis, local officials say sheep sales have plummeted.

"There will be a decrease, some are saying, of about 20 percent or more," said Tareq Abu Laban, an official at the Palestinian Agriculture Ministry, noting that final figures were not yet available.

In Bethlehem, several dozen customers haggled with merchants at the sparsely crowded market, hoping for a bargain on sheep that Ebayat says sell for around 2,000 shekels (\$588) each. The average monthly income in the West Bank is \$350.

Many buyers share larger animals, such as cows or camels, with their extended families to manage the cost ahead of the four-day Muslim festival, which begins on Friday.

Eyad Daraghmeh, who runs a slaughterhouse in Al-Bireh, pointed to empty animal pens at his sprawling facility as evidence of Palestinians' economic hardship.

"These sheds used to be full of livestock and sacrifices, at least 6,000 available for slaughter," Daraghmeh said. Behind him a lone calf walked around an otherwise empty pen.

## **SPEEDREAD**

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Fawzat Rayyan, a livestock breeder in the northern West Bank city of Nablus, said that by this point in a typical year he would have sold 120 animals. "This year it is hardly half that number ... the coronavirus is weighing down on us," he said.

Palestinians have reported 75 deaths and over 10,000 COVID-19 cases in the occupied West Bank, the majority of them in the last two months.

A second wave of infections sweeping the West Bank is fueling fears of a surge in overcrowded Palestinian refugee camps where social distancing is next to impossible.

At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in March, the Palestinian Authority quickly imposed a lockdown as it sought to contain infections.

But after Israel and later the PA eased restrictions in late April and May, the number of cases rose again, exacerbated by breaches of limits on public assembly and movement.

One major driver has been Palestinian workers going to and from jobs in neighboring Israel, according to the PA.

The Jewish state went into lockdown in mid-March, but after easing restrictions it started reporting 1,000 to 2,000 new coronavirus infections a day and reimposed some restrictions.

The Palestinian Health Ministry's Tuesday update logged more than 10,860 confirmed cases of infection since the start of the pandemic, including more

than 75 deaths.

That compares with an accumulated total of less than 2,700 infections and seven deaths as recently as July 1.

The growing health crisis is causing concern in the camps.

The UN defines about 5 million Palestinians as having refugee status. They are the survivors and descendants of the more than 700,000 who were expelled or fled their land over a few months in 1948 when Israel was founded.



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