

Jordan arrests leaders of teacher's union

Author:

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Sat, 2020-07-25 16:40

AMMAN: Jordan's deputy attorney-general has moved to stop the work of the elected teachers' union, closed its offices, arrested its leadership team and asked the education minister to create a temporary committee in its place.

Jordan's official news agency Petra quoted Hassan Abdallat as saying that the teachers' union offices would not be allowed to operate for two years.

Abdallat also said he had ordered the Media Commission to issue a gag order to prevent news of the case being published.

The deputy attorney-general said that union leaders would be questioned over alleged crimes – including financial misconduct – that were being investigated by the anti-corruption commission, and a number of cases of incitement by the deputy head of the union via social media videos.

The teacher's union leadership has been protesting the unilateral cancellation by the government of an agreed-to pay rise that came after a long struggle.

The government said that the suspension of salary raises was temporary due to COVID-19. Education Minister Tayseer Nuaimi told Petra news that pay rises suspended for civilian and military employees would be restored on Jan. 1, 2021.

Huda Etoom, a representative of the Jordanian parliament from the Islamic Islah block and a member of the teacher's union, told Arab News that the attack was political. "This is a political case, not a legal one. The government doesn't tolerate anyone who opposes them. If the government is unhappy with the Islamic movement they should go directly after the Islamic Action Front and the Islamic movement itself, not after teachers and their union."

Hala Ahed, a prominent Jordanian human rights lawyer who specializes in issues concerning unions and freedom of expression, told Arab News that the government could not simply stop the teacher's union from working. "The only parties that can stop the union are its own members or a final judicial decision. The attorney-general has no constitutional right to do that," she said.

Ahed also said that the education minister appointing himself the temporary head of the union was illegal. "If the courts decide to dissolve the current elected leadership then a temporary committee must be formed from its own

members.”

Ahmad Awad, director of the Phenix Center for Economics and Informatics, told Arab News that the decision against the union had no legal backing. “There is a gap between what the constitution and existing laws guarantee and this last decision,” he said.

Nedal Mansour, director of the Center for the Defense of the Freedom of Journalists, told Arab News that calls to stop publication of news about the case were a restriction on freedom of expression. “Such decisions must be restricted to ban the minutes of interrogations and widening the gag order or discussion about it is a violation of freedom of expression.”

Teachers throughout Jordan, including in the capital Amman, held impromptu demonstrations on Saturday protesting government decisions against their union. The teacher’s union was accredited in Jordan in 2011 after many years of struggle by public service teachers.



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UAE, Jordan royals discuss regional issues, cooperation Jordan to allow tourists from low-risk countries to visit in groups

Iranian president urges coronavirus caution during religious festivities

Author:

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Sat, 2020-07-25 12:40

TEHRAN: Iranian President Hassan Rouhani urged people on Saturday to observe health protocols and practice social distancing during upcoming Muslim festivities, as a health official said there had been a surge in coronavirus infections in a major holy city.

Muslims around the world mark the Eid Al-Adha feast, due to start at the end of the month. This year, Saudi Arabia is to limit the number of domestic pilgrims attending Hajj to prevent the spread of the coronavirus.

Most Iranians are Shi'ite Muslims, who also mark their most significant mourning ceremonies of Ashura in September.

"Let glorious festivities be held in mosques and religious centers by observing health protocols and social distancing," Rouhani said in a televised speech.

"Let masks this year be part of the glorious mourning of Muharram," Rouhani said, referring to Ashura, the 10th day of the lunar month of Muharram, when according to Islamic tradition Imam Hussein was killed in battle in 680.

One of the Eid Al-Adha rituals is the sacrificial slaughter of sheep and giving to the poor. Iranian health officials have urged the faithful to package the meat before distribution.

Deputy Health Minister Iraj Harirchi, speaking on state television, urged people not to visit the northeastern holy city of Mashad, which he said has seen an increase of 300% in coronavirus cases over a one month period.

Millions typically visit Mashad's Imam Reza shrine, which is Iran's largest Shi'ite religious complex.

Iran's total tally of coronavirus cases hit 288,839 on Saturday, with 15,485 deaths, Health Ministry spokeswoman Sima Sadat Lari said on television.

The country gradually lifted its COVID-19 restrictions from mid-April, but they have been reimposed in most areas after a sharp spike in cases. On Saturday, officials in the capital Tehran extended restrictions by another week.



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Iranian judiciary says passengers on 'harassed' airliner can sue US in Iran courts
Iran condemns US after warplane fly-by panics Iranian airliner passengers

[Sudan finds mass grave likely linked to foiled 1990 coup](#)

Author:

Sat, 2020-07-25 01:29

CAIRO: Sudanese authorities have found a mass grave believed to contain the bodies of 28 army officers shot in a foiled coup attempt against former President Omar Bashir in 1990, the public prosecutor said.

It was the second Bashir-era mass grave uncovered in as many months. Bashir's repressive rule collapsed last year, when the military ousted him

after months of street protests.

The transitional government, jointly led by civilians and army generals, is navigating a fraught path toward democratic elections and trying to hold Bashir's government accountable for crimes committed over the 30 years that he ruled Sudan with an iron fist.

"Evidence indicates that the mass grave is most likely where the bodies of the officers lay who were killed and buried in a ruthless manner," said the public prosecutor late on Thursday. A team of 23 experts took three weeks to identify and uncover the site, which remains heavily guarded, it added.

There was no immediate comment from Bashir's defense lawyers.

The 28 officers who sought to overthrow Bashir were arrested and executed in murky circumstances in the spring of 1990. Bashir had been a little-known general when he vaulted to power in a military-backed Islamist coup the year before, toppling the democratically elected government.

HIGHLIGHTS

• It was the second Bashir-era mass grave uncovered in as many months. • The 28 officers who sought to overthrow Bashir were arrested and executed in murky circumstances in the spring of 1990.

Bashir, 76, who is already imprisoned for corruption and facing several other trials, appeared in court earlier this week over charges of plotting the bloodless 1989 coup that brought him to power. The trial is seen as a rare attempt at historical reckoning in Sudan, long convulsed by military coups, tumultuous party politics and civil strife.

In the decades that followed, the government hosted Osama bin Laden, among other militants, rolled back personal freedoms, oversaw a bloody counterinsurgency campaign in the western Darfur region and brutally quashed protests.

The discovery of two mass graves, the one found earlier holding the bodies of student conscripts shot or beaten to death after trying to flee a military camp, were a reminder of the scale of alleged human rights violations during Bashir's rule.

"Such crimes will not pass without a fair trial," the public prosecutor said, addressing the families of victims.

Transitional authorities' attempts to dismantle Al-Bashir's legacy and call former officials to account have faced considerable headwinds, with the military retaining control over key portfolios.

The International Criminal Court (ICC) has sought to arrest Bashir on charges of war crimes and genocide linked to the Darfur conflict in the 2000s, when the government launched a scorched-earth assault of aerial bombings and unleashed militias known as the Janjaweed, who are accused of mass killings and rapes.

Sudan's transitional authorities announced earlier this year they had agreed to send Bashir to the ICC at The Hague.



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Sudan's Cabinet agrees emergency measures to adjust exchange rate
Sudan's Bashir back in court for trial over 1989 coup

[Top US general visits Israel amid heightened border tension](#)

Author:

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Fri, 2020-07-24 20:26

JERUSALEM: America's top general made an unannounced visit to Israel on Friday for talks on "Iran and regional security challenges," Israel's army said as it confirmed a reinforced presence on its northern border. General Mark Milley, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, held talks with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, alternate premier and Defense Minister Benny Gantz and Israel's army chief Aviv Kohavi. Earlier on Friday, explosions on the Syrian side of the security fence in the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights caused damage to a vehicle and a civilian building on the Israeli side, an army statement said.

The army said it was investigating the incident, and it was not immediately clear if there had been an attempted attack on Israeli positions from within Syria.

On Monday, five Iran-backed fighters were killed in an Israeli missile strike south of the Syrian capital Damascus, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

The Iran-backed Lebanese Shiite militant group Hezbollah, an ally of the Syrian regime, said one of its fighters was among the dead.

Israel has launched hundreds of strikes in Syria since the start of the country's civil war in 2011, but rarely comments on such operations.

The Israeli army then announced an initial reinforcement of the northern border on Thursday, with Israeli media reporting the move was made in response to threats of retaliation from Hezbollah.

A further troop reinforcement on the northern border was announced on Friday, with the army saying it had "elevated its readiness against various potential enemy actions."

"The Israel Defense Forces holds the Lebanese Government responsible for all actions emanating from Lebanon," the statement said, without making reference to Hezbollah.

Gantz said Milley's visit underscored the close security ties between Washington and the Jewish state and warned Israel was "ready for any scenario and any threat."

"I do not suggest our enemies to test us," Gantz said in the statement.



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Israel reinforces Lebanon border after Hezbollah threats
Hezbollah fighter killed in Israeli strike near Damascus

[An opposition group presents a secular alternative to Iran's clerical regime](#)

Fri, 2020-07-24 23:16

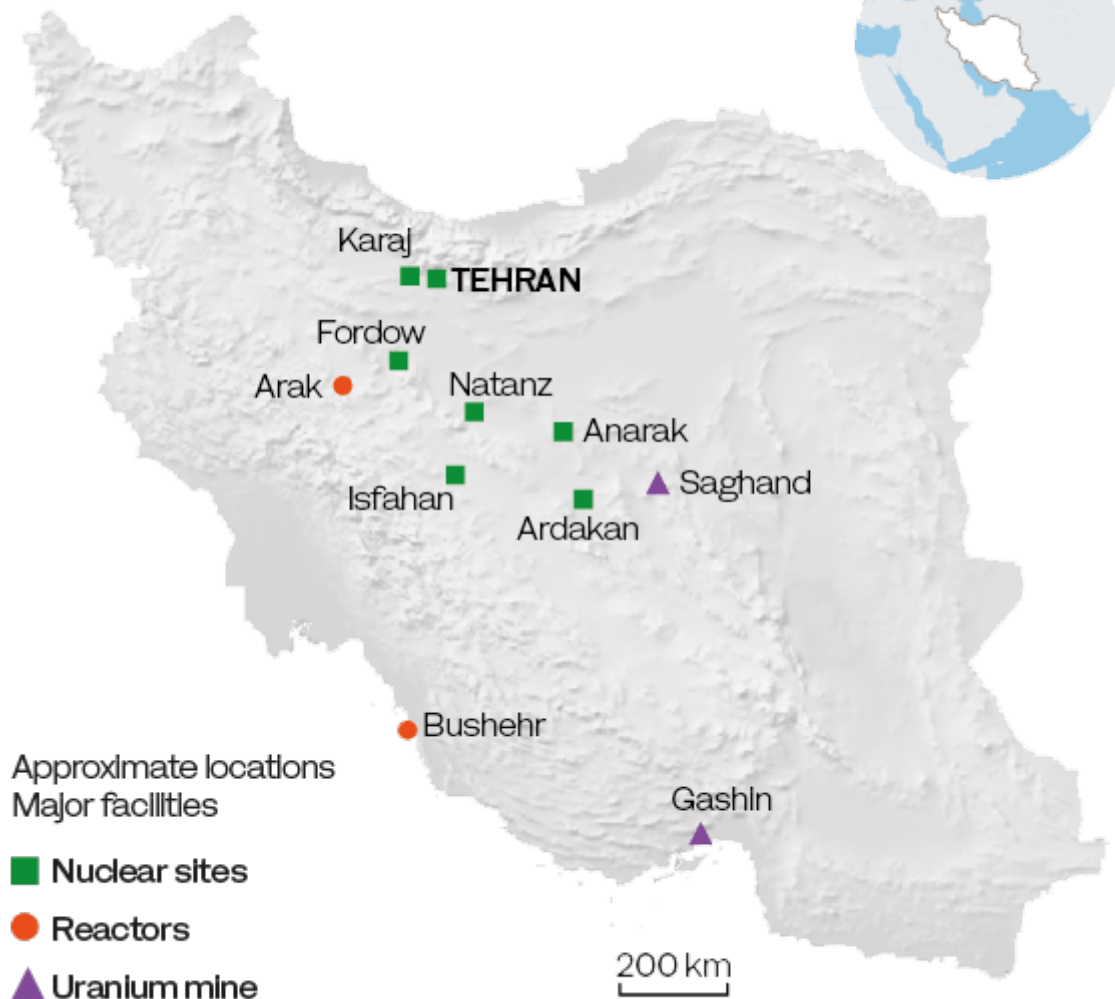
LONDON: "A force capable of overthrowing the regime is lurking in the heart of Iranian cities. From all indications, the ruling theocracy is at the point of being overthrown," the leader of the global Iranian resistance declared to an audience of thousands tuning in to the online Free Iran Global Summit on July 17.

Five years ago, this declaration might have sounded like empty rhetoric from a fringe group. Now, two years after Tehran's failed attempt at bombing the National Council of Resistance of Iran's (NCRI) annual rally in Paris, the words of Maryam Rajavi, a former militant commander and now the NCRI's president-elect, look much less like an empty threat and much more like a promise.

The NCRI is an umbrella group encompassing a broad spectrum of groups opposed to the Iranian regime, and is often described as the country's government in waiting.

IRAN'S NUCLEAR SITES

The NCRI was the first to reveal in 2002 that Iran had built nuclear-related facilities



SOURCES: IAEA, NTI, ISIS, USNRC, WORLD-NUCLEAR.ORG / AFP

With its charismatic leader at the helm and thousands of Iranian, Western and Arab supporters behind its cause, the NCRI is increasingly being recognized as the legitimate and progressive alternative to the supreme leader and the cohort currently in power.

The NCRI, also known as the Mojahedin-e Khalq (MEK) in Persian, has three aims for Iran: The demise of the clerical regime, universal suffrage and people's sovereignty, and social freedom and justice.

Its swelling legitimacy, and the credible alternative it presents for Iran's future, have not gone unnoticed among political and security establishments in the West.



Leader of the People's Mujahedin of Iran Maryam Rajavi speaks during a conference "120 Years of Struggle for Freedom Iran" at Ashraf-3 camp, which is a base for the People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran (MEK) in Albanian town of Manza, on July 13, 2019. (AFP/File Photo)

One long-time supporter of the NCRI, and a speaker at the 2020 Free Iran Global Summit, is Tom Ridge, who was the first ever US secretary of homeland security after the 9/11 attacks.

He is a former governor of Pennsylvania and an outspoken advocate for an Iran "free from tyranny."

Ridge spoke with Arab News during the summit, and explained his long-running support for the NCRI – despite its designation by the US as a terrorist organization until 2012.

While secretary of homeland security, he had never seen any credible reports that justified the group's terrorist designation, Ridge said.

"I began every day, for several years, in the Oval Office alongside President

George Bush being presented with a threat report. I never ever saw a reference to the MEK in any plot that threatened Americans or American interests,” he added.

Having been removed from the US list of terrorist organizations in 2012, the NCRI is increasingly being recognized as the most important player in the landscape of resistance to Tehran’s clerical regime – both at home and abroad.



Supporters of the People’s Mujahedeen Organisation of Iran (PMOI) also know as Mujahedeen-e-Khalq (MEK) wave the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI) party flag as they rally to protest against the Iranian regime on January 10, 2020 in Brussels. (AFP/File Photo)

“Within American political circles, these days there’s growing bipartisan recognition of the NCRI’s legitimacy,” Ridge said.

He argues that this consensus and recognition of the NCRI’s legitimacy are in the best interests of not just the Iranian people, but also of regional states and the US.

“Recognizing the existence of both an internal and external opposition group that rejects terrorism and embraces principles like gender equality and, most importantly, a non-nuclear Iran seems to be in everyone’s best interest in the globe, not to mention regional states such as Saudi Arabia,” he said.

Ridge spoke at the summit to highlight and denounce Iranian support for terrorism, and many other speakers did the same.

The issue of Iranian terrorism is central to the NCRI's campaigning, and it is an issue the group is tragically familiar with.

FASTFACT

NCRI

Was founded by Massoud Rajavi and former Iranian President Abolhassan Banisadr in 1981 after their joint escape from the country.

In 2013, Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) forces and their Iraqi militia proxies attacked and killed over 50 NCRI members, and kidnapped more, from their base in Ashraf, Iraq.

This brazen attack was mortifying for the NCRI, but looking further back, the persecution that members of the Iranian opposition have experienced at the hands of the regime becomes even more egregious.

Up to 30,000 of the NCRI's supporters and members were murdered by the regime in 1988, following a religious edict by hardline revolutionary Ruhollah Khomeini.



Iranian mourners attend the funeral of Morteza Ebrahimi, a commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, who was killed in violent demonstrations in November 2019. (AFP/File Photo)

Amnesty International has referred to these murders as “ongoing crimes

against humanity.” It continues to call for justice over the killings, and has implored the UN to set up an independent inquiry into the mass murders.

The most recent assault on the Iranian resistance – a bomb plot targeting its 2018 annual summit – was organized in part by an official Iranian diplomat, who just days ago began his trial in France for his role.

After 30 years of bombings, violence and targeted attacks, it is perhaps no surprise that the NCRI is so vehemently opposed to the regime’s use of terrorism as a tool of foreign policy.

These attacks, Ridge argues, are more than illegal and unjust. He believes that Tehran’s relentless assaults on the NCRI betray its fear of the movement’s popular appeal.



Leader of the People’s Mujahedin of Iran Maryam Rajavi during an event.
(Supplied)

“If an oppressive regime highlights an internal and external group as the enemy of the state, then there’s a pretty good justification to conclude that they’re fearful that their appeal is large,” he said.

NCRI members believe that Tehran is taking increasingly drastic measures against them because it knows that their appeal is increasing every year, and the West is starting to take notice of the credible, progressive alternative they present for Iran’s future.

Ali Safavi, a member of the NCRI’s foreign affairs committee, told Arab News that from the 2020 Free Iran Global Summit onward, its activities are only going to expand and intensify.

He said the group “aims to pave the way for more uprisings, like those witnessed in November 2019,” when huge anti-regime protests swept across

virtually every Iranian city and town.



Former US Secretary of Homeland Security Tom Ridge gestures as he speaks during a conference “120 Years of Struggle for Freedom Iran” at Ashraf-3 camp, which is a base for the People’s Mojahedin Organization of Iran (MEK) in Albanian town of Manza, on July 13, 2019. (AFP/File Photo)

Safavi added that the NCRI will “step up its campaign to hold the regime leaders accountable for their atrocities, first and foremost the 1988 massacre of 30,000 political prisoners,” and that it will continue to work on “breaking the climate of fear and repression” that Tehran has manufactured at home and pursues abroad through terrorism.

Rajavi, Safavi and their cohort in the NCRI were on the frontlines of the 1979 revolution, and it is looking increasingly likely that they will take leading roles in the next Iranian revolution.

This time, though, they say they will not allow their vision for Iran’s future to be distorted, as it was by Khomeini and his extremist ilk in 1979.

The next Iranian revolution will truly be of the people, and if the NCRI’s predictions are correct, it could be sooner than anyone expects.

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Iranian resistance: Terrorist designation of IRGC 'long overdue' Two years after failed bomb plot, Iranian opposition rallies backers online