

Egypt draws ire with artifacts' move to busy Tahrir Square

Author:

Tue, 2019-12-31 20:46

CAIRO: Egypt's recent decision to transport ancient Pharaonic artifacts to a traffic circle in the congested heart of Cairo has fueled fresh controversy over the government's handling of its archaeological heritage.

Cairo has some of the worst air pollution in the world, according to recent studies. Archaeologists and heritage experts fear vehicle exhaust will damage the four ram-headed sphinxes and an obelisk, currently en route to their new home in Tahrir Square.

Egypt's President Abdel-Fattah El-Sisi has weighed in to say that similar obelisks are displayed in Western cities, according to a statement late Monday.

But Dr. Monica Hanna, a heritage expert, said Egyptian artifacts in cities like London, Paris and New York are themselves endangered by being outdoors. "The sphinxes are made of sandstone, they are part of the dry environment in Luxor, when they would be moved to Tahrir Square with all the pollution, they will deteriorate as a result of the reactions with the carbon dioxide and carbon monoxide in the air," Hanna told The Associated Press.

She and a member of parliament are part of a lawsuit to block the artifacts' move, filed recently by a local rights group.

Mostafa Waziri, secretary general of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, said the government "will do everything" to protect the artifacts.

Tahrir Square was the epicenter of Egypt's so-called Arab Spring uprising in 2011. The square also contains the Egyptian Museum.

The decision to move the artifacts as part of a larger renovation of Tahrir Square was taken without debate in parliament. The controversy only surfaced after archaeologists objected.

Since coming to power in 2013, El-Sisi has touted a number of megaprojects aimed at rebuilding and expanding infrastructure. Those include an expansion of the Suez Canal and a new Egyptian museum near the Giza Pyramids.

A centerpiece of the new museum is a towering statue of Ramses II. It once stood in a busy square near Cairo's main railway station, but was removed in the 1990s due to preservation concerns.

Waziri, the antiquities chief, said the four sphinxes are not part of the famed avenue of sphinxes in the city of Luxor. They were among several located behind the first edifice of the temple of Karnak.

The obelisk was recently moved to Cairo from the San el-Hagggar archaeological site in the Nile Delta, the ministry said.

But Hanna, the heritage expert, stressed that the obelisks in Western capitals had been moved during the colonial era. "We really had no say in their shipment."



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Egypt to reopen historic Jewish synagogue in January

[Arab League reaffirms rejection of foreign interference, calls for Libya solution](#)

Tue, 2019-12-31 20:11

CAIRO: The Arab League Council reaffirmed commitment to Libyan unity, sovereignty, and safety yesterday, and also reaffirmed supporting the full implementation of the Sokhairat agreement, signed in December 2015, for a

political solution to settle the crisis in the North African country. The council held an emergency meeting in an extraordinary closed session attended by permanent representatives, after the Arab League General Secretariat received a memorandum from Egypt requesting an extraordinary meeting of the council to discuss the latest developments in Libya. In its memorandum, Egypt called for a discussion on its neighbor, as well as the prospects of escalation.

The meeting was headed by Iraq, represented by Ambassador Ahmed Nayef Al-Dulaimi, its permanent representative to the Arab League and chair of the current session. The meeting aimed to find a unified Arab stance towards illegitimate foreign interventions in Libyan affairs.

In its resolution, the council expressed grave concern regarding the military escalation in the country which, it said, threatened the security and stability of both Libya and its neighbors in North Africa and the Mediterranean. It underscored the need to halt military conflict, and said that a political solution was the only way to restore stability.

The league underlined the dangerous consequences of a unilateral decision by any Libyan party that would allow foreign military interventions, thus contributing to the escalation and prolonging the period of conflict in the region.

The resolution also stressed the need to prevent regional interventions that, among other things, would contribute in facilitating the movement of foreign combatants from other conflicts into Libya. It underlined its rejection of violating international resolutions banning the supply of weapons in a way that would threaten the security of Libya's neighboring countries as well as the security of the Mediterranean.

The council called on UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to submit a report on the issue to the UN Security Council to accelerate the process of handling developments, since any potential foreign military intervention in Libya would entail a threat to international peace and security, and asked Kuwait, the only Arab member of the Security Council, to discuss the issue with its partners.

It also called on Arab League Secretary-General Ahmed Aboul Gheit to conduct high-level contacts with the all international parties concerned with the Libyan crisis with the aim of deriving positive coordinated stances to resolve the crisis. Such efforts stemmed from the Berlin Process to reach an all-Libyan solution to the crisis, and to submit periodical follow-up reports to the Arab League Council on the implementation of the resolution.

Al-Dulaimi called on concerned parties to resort to constructive national dialogue. The Iraqi representative also called for Arab support for efforts to achieve peace and stability, and for the league's efforts.

The chair delivered a speech in which he underlined his country's firm stance rejecting and condemning foreign interventions in the affairs of any Arab country. He said that this, the second extraordinary meeting of the council within two weeks, reflected the magnitude of the challenges facing Arab nations and peoples, and added that the stability of each was the cornerstone of stability of the whole Arab world.



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[Palestinian Fatah marks 55 years with West Bank marches](#)

Tue, 2019-12-31 19:58

RAMALLAH: Hundreds of Palestinians marched through the West Bank city of Ramallah on Tuesday to mark the 55th anniversary of the Fatah movement led by President Mahmoud Abbas.

Established by Yasser Arafat in 1965, Fatah led the armed struggle against Israel for decades as the main component of the Palestine Liberation Organization. The PLO recognized Israel in the early 1990s at the start of the peace process, and since then it has been committed to a two-state solution.

Around a dozen masked men led the march through Ramallah, firing several rounds of gunfire into the air. Similar marches are planned elsewhere in the West Bank in the coming days.

Fatah has long vied with Hamas for leadership of the Palestinian national struggle. In 2007, the two factions battled one another in Gaza, leading to the Hamas takeover of the coastal strip. Several attempts at reconciliation have failed.

The peace process with Israel ground to a halt over a decade ago, leaving the Fatah-led Palestinian Authority with limited control over parts of the occupied West Bank but little hope of achieving an independent state anytime soon.

Israel seized the West Bank, Gaza and east Jerusalem in the 1967 Middle East war. The Palestinian Authority wants all three territories to form a future state living alongside Israel.

Israel annexed east Jerusalem in 1967, and Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has recently vowed to annex large parts of the West Bank, which would make it virtually impossible to establish a viable Palestinian state. The popularity of Abbas, and by extension Fatah, has plunged in recent years as he has failed to achieve an independent state or heal the rift with Hamas. Many Palestinians also accuse the Fatah-led Palestinian Authority of rampant corruption.





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Mahmoud Abbas hails Fatah university election win Fatah withdraws officers from Gaza-Egypt crossing

[Yemen officials: Houthi militia ban on banknotes stops gov't salaries](#)

Author:

Tue, 2019-12-31 19:25

SANAA: Yemeni officials said on Tuesday that a militia group's ban on recently-printed government banknotes in areas under their control, including the capital, Sanaa, has held up the salaries of tens of thousands of civil servants and pensioners.

The officials and the internationally recognized government said the militia,

known as Houthis, refused to work with the Yemeni rials that its central bank had printed in the past three years.

The Iran-backed Houthis control most of the country's north, after more than five years of a stalemated civil war. An Arab coalition backs the internationally recognized government which still rules southern Yemen, including its interim capital, Aden, where its Central Bank is located. The fighting in the Arab world's poorest country has killed over 100,000 people and left millions suffering from food and medical shortages. The conflict has also pushed the country to the brink of famine.

The finance ministry said the militia's move paralyzed most banking activities in areas under Houthi control, depriving tens of thousands of people, including around 40,000 pensioners, of desperately needed payments this month.

Officials in Sanaa said the Houthis had given residents a month to hand over the newly printed but banned banknotes or face penalties that include jail. The Houthi militia said they would compensate them with old currency or an electronic rial they have created, they added.

The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to brief the media.

They said banks and shops in Houthi-controlled areas have refused to use the banned banknotes. Residents have resorted to trading in the Yemeni rial with the Saudi Arabian rial and the UN dollar before entering the Houthi-controlled areas to avoid being arrested, the officials said.



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Houthi militants in Yemen shell World Food Program's Hodeidah grain store

Oman says Sultan Qaboos in 'stable condition'

Tue, 2019-12-31 17:57

JEDDAH: Sultan Qaboos who has ruled Oman for almost half a century is in stable condition after recently traveling to Belgium for a medical checkup, his royal court announced Tuesday.

"The Royal Diwan Court wishes to inform the people that the Sultan Qaboos bin Said ... is following the prescribed medical treatment and that he is in a stable condition, thanks to God," the official ONA news agency cited the royal court as saying, without giving details.

The court announced on Dec. 7 that Sultan Qaboos, 79, was traveling to Belgium for "a limited period of time," but did not give details on his condition.

The statement from the royal court said Sultan Qaboos thanked his people for the good wishes they had sent him.

"The Sultan extends his thanks and appreciation to the righteous people all over the world for sharing their good wishes and prayers for him," it added. Sultan Qaboos, 79, has ruled the Gulf Arab state since leading a bloodless coup in 1970 with the help of Britain, Oman's former colonial power.

(With agencies)



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