

[Palestine to cancel ministers' raise after uproar: UN envoy](#)

Author:

Thu, 2019-06-06 22:39

RAMALLAH: The cash-strapped Palestinian government has pledged to suspend a secret increase in ministerial salaries, the UN envoy on the Israel-Palestinian conflict said Thursday after reports of the raise sparked anger.

Documents leaked online appeared to show that in 2017, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas had quietly agreed to increase monthly salaries of ministers from \$3,000 to \$5,000, as well as boosting the prime minister's salary from \$4,000 to \$6,000.

The revelation, by an anonymous online group known as "Against the Current," came as the Palestinian government faces desperate financial shortfalls.

Nickolay Mladenov, UN special coordinator for the Middle East peace process, said Thursday he had spoken to recently installed Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh, who had agreed to cancel the raises.

"At a time when the #Palestinian people are struggling with economic hardship, when salaries were cut in #Gaza, such decisions defy logic and rightly anger people," Mladenov tweeted in reaction to the news of the salary increase.

"I spoke to @DrShtayyeh who committed to end this practice immediately and investigate."

Shtayyeh, who replaced predecessor Rami Hamdallah in April, was not immediately available for comment.

Palestinians commenting on Against the Current's Facebook page expressed outrage at the reported raises.

"All these ministers, what service do they provide to the people anyway? They're just honorary roles," wrote Subhi Al-Hamdani.

Palestine has been forced to halve the salaries of many employees in recent months due to an ongoing financial dispute with Israel.

The Jewish state has been deducting around \$10 million a month from taxes it collects on behalf of the PA, money it says corresponds to payments to families of prisoners in Israeli jails – including those who have carried out attacks.

Israel sees such payments as rewards for attacks on its citizens, but the Palestinians argue they are a vital lifeline for families who have often lost their main breadwinner. They also accuse Israel of arresting people arbitrarily.

Abbas has responded to the Israeli move by refusing to accept any of the tax revenues, which equate to more than half his government's budget.

The US has also cut hundreds of millions of dollars in aid to the Palestinians.

US envoy Jason Greenblatt said the salary hikes for ministers showed the Palestinian leadership had sought to enrich themselves while creating a "self-imposed financial crisis."

"Where's the care/concern about the people?" he tweeted.



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Hezbollah leader says 'it's our duty' to confront Trump's Israel-Palestine deal
Israel restores Gaza fishing zone to ease humanitarian crisis

[**Egypt categorically rejects HRW's**](#)

report as fabrication

Thu, 2019-06-06 22:21

CAIRO: Egypt has categorically rejected a report issued by the Human Rights Watch (HRW) accusing Egyptian forces of having committed human rights violations against civilians in the Sinai Peninsula.

The report blamed both the security forces and Daesh militants for rights violations.

The organization accused the Egyptian army and police, between 2016 and 2018, of carrying out large-scale arrests, forced disappearances, torture and killing, in what amount to crimes against humanity.

“It is possible that the army also launched air and ground attacks that killed many civilians and used civilian property for military purposes,” HRW said.

The report was rejected by the Egyptian government, whose Information Service Authority (ISA) responded: “The organization (HRW) has consistently propagated lies and fabrications against Egypt, most recently its report on the situation in the Sinai.

“The contents of the report carried many allegations about cases in which the organization failed to provide any real evidence as if it was addressed to a naive audience to mislead them on such baseless allegations.”

The ISA also said that the report from the US-based HRW lacked internationally recognized professional standards, having conducted interviews with 54 people in Sinai without identifying them, eroding their credibility.

It added that the report did not publish pictures or statements or videos of those who interviewed outside Egypt, even in a manner similar to the mainstream news practice of altering or blurring the face and voice of the speaker.

“Some countries supporting terrorism in the region are using the organization to support their political agenda, providing political cover for terrorist organizations operating in the Middle East, especially the Muslim Brotherhood.”

Dalia Ziadeh, Analyst

Dalia Ziadeh, director of the Egyptian Center for Free Democratic Studies, said that since its inception, HRW has played a political role intervening in other countries, such as in the Cold War between the US and Soviet Union in the 1970s.

In a statement, Ziadeh explained that “some countries supporting terrorism in the region are using the organization to support their political agenda, providing political cover for terrorist organizations operating in the Middle East, especially the Muslim Brotherhood, and to help spread them in the Middle East and threaten important countries in the region, including Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the UAE.”

“The second part of the strategy is to fight these countries diplomatically by dispersing their efforts and distorting their image in front of the world’s public to destroy their economic and political interests and international relations,” she added.

Ayman Aqeel, head of the Maat organization for peace, development and human rights, told Arab News that HRW does not issue human rights reports, but publishes political manifestos. In the latest report, which attacked the Egyptian army in Sinai, he said, the aim was to pressure the US not to arm Egypt.

Hazim Mounir, head of the National Foundation for Training and Human Rights, revealed that HRW’s latest report was a compilation of old reports dating from 2016 onward, or “old tunes with new mixes.”

He added: “Most of what was mentioned in the report was answered previously. The attorney general issued a statement two years ago rebutting these lies.”



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Egypt: Troops kill 14 militants day after Daesh attack in Sinai Militants kill 8 Egyptian police in North Sinai

Trump says Tehran is 'championing terrorism' across the Middle East

Author:

Reuters

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Thu, 2019-06-06 13:05

CAEN, France: Iran is "championing terrorism" across the Middle East, President Donald Trump said Thursday in Caen, western France, after attending a ceremony to commemorate the 75th anniversary of D-Day.

Trump also said Iran was failing as a nation following tough US sanctions, but that he was ready to talk to the Iranians.

France and the United States share the common objective of preventing Iran obtaining nuclear arms and new international negotiations need to be opened for that goal to be met, President Emmanuel Macron said on Thursday.

Both men were speaking before holding bilateral talks in Caen, western France, after attending a ceremony to commemorate the 75th anniversary of D-Day.

Trump added that he would make a decision on whether to slap more than \$300 billion in tariffs on China after a meeting of leaders of the world's largest economies at the end of June in Japan, where he will hold talks with China's president.

Meanwhile, Germany's foreign minister is traveling to Iran next week to discuss the faltering nuclear accord between Tehran and leading world powers. Foreign Ministry spokesman Maria Adebahr said Thursday that the visit is part of a broader trip to the Middle East that also includes stops in Jordan and the United Arab Emirates. She said Foreign Minister Heiko Maas plans to meet his Iranian counterpart Mohammed Javad Zarif on Monday.

Adebahr said Germany believes the 2015 deal remains "a good agreement that prevents Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons" and that Maas discussed the trip with US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo during a recent visit to Berlin. US President Donald Trump withdrew from the accord last year, saying that it failed to sufficiently curb Iran's ability to develop nuclear weapons.





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Macron and Trump: 'frenemies' in open disagreement
US president Donald Trump meets Queen Elizabeth II on UK state visit

[‘Please tell my mother that her son died like a man’: Moving last words of soldier killed in Sinai attack](#)

Wed, 2019-06-05 23:19

CAIRO: Egyptians wept on Wednesday as they read the dying words of a soldier killed in a Daesh terrorist attack in North Sinai.

“You won’t be able to rescue me,” Capt. Amr El-Kady told comrades by two-way radio as he lay wounded after being shot three times.

“Please tell my mother that her son died like a man, and take good care of

her,” he said. “I made many mistakes, pray to God to forgive me.”

El-Kady was one of six soldiers and two police officers killed in the Daesh attack early on Wednesday on a security checkpoint near El-Arish. Five militants also died in the attack and others were on the run, Egypt’s Interior Ministry said.

Footballer Mohamed Salah was among the Egyptian social media users who paid tribute to the dead officers. “Heartfelt prayers to those martyrs of El-Arish checkpoint, sending condolences to all the families of the martyrs killed today,” he wrote.

One of the terrorists was wearing an explosive belt. Security forces killed him before he could detonate the device.

Two other militants hijacked two tanks belonging to the Central Security Forces. A military plane destroyed one tank and security forces killed the other terrorist in a shootout.

Egypt has been battling North Sinai insurgents affiliated with Daesh for years.

Hundreds of police officers and soldiers have been killed in militant attacks, which surged after Islamist President Mohamed Morsi was ousted in 2013.



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Militants kill 8 Egyptian police in North SinaiEgypt says 16 suspected militants killed in Sinai

'No more joy in Eid' for Syrians displaced for the holiday once again

Author:

Wed, 2019-06-05 22:35

HAZANO/SYRIA: Abu Mohammed lives his life in lists: He lists the places in Syria to which his family has been forcibly displaced. He lists the different reasons for each displacement. He lists the number of Muslim holidays he has spent away from home.

"When we were in our houses we had our rituals and our ambience and the joy was different," he said, sitting in a field in the village of Hazano in the northern countryside of Idlib province, among the last territory in Syria still held by opponents of Syria's Bashar Assad.

His house is now a tent made of blankets, taped and sewn together. Some olive groves stand nearby.

"The sweets we would put out had their own style. Today there is nothing available and we've forgotten this. We used to visit cemeteries before Eid prayer. Today we've forgotten this. We can't reach the dead's tomb to pray."

Eid Al-Fitr, celebrated after the holy month of Ramadan during which Muslims fast from sunrise till sunset, is one of the main markers of the Muslim calendar, a day of family joy.

This is the eighth Eid Al-Fitr that Syria has spent at war, and the fourth that Abu Mohammed has spent away from home. His latest displacement is the fifth time he has been forced to flee as regime forces advanced. Another list: Where his family has ended up. Afrin and Azaz in northern Syria. Turkey. Europe.

"We've dispersed and there is no more joy in Eid."

The last opposition-held territory in the northwest corner of Syria is home to hundreds of thousands of people who fled other parts of the country as regime forces advanced.

Last year opposition fighters and regime forces reached a demilitarization agreement there sponsored by Assad's ally Russia and by Turkey, long an ally of the opposition.

But the Syrian regime and Russia stepped up an offensive last month on the

area. Hundreds of people have been killed by shelling. Last month 270,000 people were displaced in the most intense violence for months.

Last year's agreement envisioned a demilitarized zone in Idlib that would be free of all heavy weapons and militants. Moscow, which is keen to help Assad retake territory, has since complained about escalating violence in the area and said that fighters who used to belong to the Nusra Front, an Al-Qaeda offshoot, are in control of large tracts of territory.

Mohammed Zahed Al-Masry, a member of the Syrian NGO Alliance, said 600 civilians had died in recent weeks.

"We have 22 medical facilities that have been directly targeted. We have five markets that have been directly targeted, six centers for the White Helmets (rescue service) also have been directly targeted."

Back among the displaced people sheltering in Hazano, Ahmad Shayhan, 38, had left everything behind and was now living in a tent with 50 people. He said new families were joining them every day. Some volunteers had thrown an Eid party for the kids.

"We haven't seen anything like this in eight years," he said of the celebration. "Those days are gone and will never return."



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authorities to release 800 Syrians from Al-Hol camp: official