

Rule of law must return to Tunisia, says Italian foreign minister

Tue, 2021-12-28 21:08

ROME: Italy's foreign minister said Tuesday that his country wanted a "full re-establishment of the rule of law in Tunisia."

Luigi Di Maio was speaking after a meeting with Tunisian President Kais Saied in Tunis. He also met Prime Minister Najla Bouden and Foreign Minister Othman Jerandi.

He said: "Tunisia is a privileged partner of Italy also thanks to the presence of about 800 Italian companies here. I hope that this partnership, which is important for both countries, can be further strengthened."

He said his meetings were very fruitful, strengthening a dialogue that had "never been interrupted" with Tunisia.

"I confirmed that Italy is looking with great interest at the beginning of a concrete path of political and constitutional reforms that will hopefully bring new legislative elections in Tunisia.

"This path has to continue toward the full re-establishment of the rule of law and democratic normality and must be carried out with an inclusive, transparent and substantial dialogue involving all the political and social components of the country, ensuring full respect for rights and promoting stability and economic growth."

Sources in the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs told Arab News that the issue of migrants was covered, especially since the start of political turmoil in Tunisia in July.

There has been a considerable increase in migrants arriving on Italian soil, mainly landing on the tiny island of Lampedusa, where the reception facility is permanently overbooked.



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[Sudan officials say defunct mine collapses, kills 38 people](#)

Tue, 2021-12-28 20:04

CAIRO: Sudanese authorities said at least 38 people were killed Tuesday when a defunct gold mine collapsed in West Kordofan province.

The country's state-run mining company said in a statement the collapse of the closed, non-functioning mine took place in the village of Fuja 700 kilometers (435 miles) south of the capital of Khartoum. It said there were

also injuries without giving a specific tally.

Local media reported that several shafts collapsed at the Darsaya mine, and that besides the dead at least eight injured people were taken to a local hospital.

The mining company posted images on Facebook showing villagers gathering at the site as at least two dredgers worked to find possible survivors and bodies.

Other images showed people preparing traditional graves to bury the dead. The company said the mine was not functional but local miners returned to work it after security forces guarding the site left the area. It did not say when the mine stopped working.

The Sudanese Mineral Resources Limited Company in its statement called for troops to guard the site to prevent unregulated mining. It also called on local communities to help it resume its mining activities in the area, which were suspended in 2019. It did not elaborate.

Sudan is a major gold producer with numerous mines scattered across the country. In 2020, the East African nation produced 36.6 tons, the second most in the continent, according to official numbers.

The transitional government has begun regulating the industry in the past two years amid allegations of gold smuggling.

Collapses are common in Sudan's gold mines, where safety standards are not widely in effect.



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[Algeria drops 'protest' case against teenage girl](#)

Author:

Mon, 2021-12-27 23:50

ALGIERS: Algerian prosecutors have dropped a case against a 14-year-old girl

who was facing trial in connection with the country's pro-democracy Hirak protest movement, her lawyer told AFP Monday.

"The prosecution ... recognized that it had been an error (and) dropped the charges," Abdelhalim Khereddine said.

The teenager had been ordered to appear in court in the eastern city of Annaba on Wednesday, alongside 20 other suspects, charged with attending an "unarmed gathering."

According to Algerian law, the age of criminal responsibility is 18 and minors are tried in juvenile courts. Her case had sparked outrage online.

Rights groups condemned what they said would have been the first trial of a minor connected to the Hirak movement. But Khereddine said Monday that prosecutors had realized the girl was a "witness and not a suspect" in the case.

"What's important is that she has her rights restored, as guaranteed by the constitution," he added.

Khereddine told AFP that the girl's father has been in prison for eight months for allegedly belonging to the outlawed Islamist-inspired movement Rachad.

The National Committee for the Release of Detainees (CNLD) says nearly 300 people are currently in jail on charges linked to the Hirak movement, which forced veteran strongman Abdelaziz Bouteflika from office in 2019.

Many of the detainees are being held over publications on social media, it says.



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[100 Houthis killed in heavy fighting around Yemen's Marib city](#)

Author:

Mon, 2021-12-27 22:32

AL-MUKALLA: At least 100 Houthis were killed in heavy fighting with government forces outside Yemen's central city of Marib in the past day as the Iran-backed rebels pressed ahead with assaults to recapture the strategic city, local officials and media reports said on Monday.

Backed by massive air support from Arab coalition warplanes, Yemeni government troops and tribal fighters on Sunday mounted counterattacks on Houthi positions south of Marib in a bid to push back the militia from strategic locations outside the city and seize control of new areas.

Fierce fighting raged between the two sides from Sunday to Monday near Al-Balaq Al-Sharqi mountain range and surrounding areas, claiming the lives of at least 100 Houthi fighters, including a field military leader.

"The national army seized control of three strategic hilly locations near Al-Balaq Al-Sharqi and cut off supply lines to pockets of Houthis," a military official told Arab News by telephone, shortly after he returned from the raging battlefields in Marib.

"What I can say is that we managed to count the bodies of at least 100 Houthis killed during the last 24 hours."

To pave the way for their forces to advance, the Houthis fired about 25 ballistic missiles at government-controlled areas and intensified drone and mortar attacks outside Marib.

"The Houthis hysterically shelled our forces with 25 ballistic missiles. The coalition's warplanes intercepted and destroyed two of the missiles in the air," the official said.

The shelling did not help the Houthis make new gains on the ground as government troops held strong in their positions and killed waves of Houthi

fighters.

West of Marib, eight Houthis, including a field leader, were arrested, and many other militia members were killed when government troops repelled attacks.

Local army officials said that warplanes from the Arab coalition on Monday conducted dozens of air sorties in support of government troops on the ground by targeting Houthi military reinforcements and locations outside Marib city.

In February, the Houthis renewed a military offensive to recapture the oil and gas-rich city of Marib, the government's last stronghold in the northern part of the country.

In the neighboring province of Shabwa, hundreds of troops from the Giants Brigades were deployed in the oil-rich province ahead of an expected offensive to dislodge the Houthis from the Bayhan, Al-Aid and Ouselan districts and to alleviate military pressure on government troops in Marib province.

A long convoy of military vehicles carrying fighters and military equipment were seen departing positions along the country's west coast and heading toward Attaq city, Shabwa's provincial capital.

In November, the Arab coalition announced the redeployment troops in Hodeidah province as part of a new strategy to reinforce government troops battling the Houthis.

In Riyadh, Yemen President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi ordered the new governor of Shabwa, Awadh Mohammed Al-Wazer Al-Awlaki, who took the constitutional oath before the president on Monday, to work on unifying political and tribal forces and mobilizing efforts to expel the Houthis from areas in the province.

Separately, Yemen's government on Monday demanded the Lebanese government contain the military activities of Iran-backed Hezbollah in the war-torn country amid an influx of fighters, military experts and weapons from Lebanon.

"We ask about the position of the presidency, the government, political forces, elites and the brotherly Lebanese people regarding the aggression led by the Hezbollah militia against Yemen," Muammar Al-Eryani, Yemen's minister of information, culture and tourism, said on Twitter.

"We renew the call to the brothers in Lebanon to declare a clear position on the aggression of the Hezbollah militia, to exert real pressure to withdraw its experts and fighters, stop the smuggling of weapons to Yemen, and to prevent the use of the lands and capabilities of the Lebanese state to support the Houthi militia."

The Yemeni government's criticism of Hezbollah activities in Yemen came a day after the Arab coalition revealed to reporters a video showing Hezbollah experts training Houthi fighters in the use of explosive-rigged drones.



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[Lebanon's president delivers veiled criticism of Hezbollah during televised speech](#)

Mon, 2021-12-27 21:11

BEIRUT: Lebanese President Michel Aoun on Monday night criticized Hezbollah, without mentioning the party by name, for disrupting the work of the government.

“It is true that defending the homeland requires cooperation between the

army, the people and the resistance, but the primary responsibility rests with the state," Aoun said during a televised speech.

"Only the state sets the defense strategy and ensures its implementation. Before reaching this point, it must stop deliberate, systematic and unjustified disruption that leads to the dismantling of institutions and the dissolution of the state."

Aoun also affirmed his desire for "the best relations with Arab countries, particularly with the Gulf states," and asked: "What is the justification for straining relations with these countries and interfering in matters that do not concern us?"

The alliance between the president's Free Patriotic Movement party and Hezbollah was strained last week when the Constitutional Council rejected an appeal submitted by the FPM against amendments to electoral laws that were approved by the Lebanese parliament but are opposed by Aoun's team. The appeal would have limited the right of expatriates to vote, by limiting them to voting for six new seats specifically for non-residents rather than existing seats in the 128-member legislature.

In a speech following the council's decision, FPM leader Gibran Bassil denounced Hezbollah. It had been expected that Aoun would be similarly critical of the party and blame it for the disruption of government.

Earlier on Monday, Interior Minister Bassam Mawlawi announced that he had signed a decree to hold parliamentary elections on May 15. Parliament had recommended the election take place on March 27, but Aoun objected to this date and demanded it be moved to May.

In his speech, the president called for "an urgent national dialogue for understanding on three issues: The expanded administrative and financial decentralization, the defense strategy, and the plan for financial and economic recovery."

While keen to avoid a complete breakdown of relations with Hezbollah, he indirectly accused the party of responsibility for disrupting the operations of the state.

"I do not want to quarrel with anyone, neither people nor parties, and I do not want to dismantle the unity of any sect," Aoun said.

But he added that he would not "accept to be a witness to the fall of the state and suffocation of people, and I will continue to work until the last day of my tenure and the last day of my life to prevent this.

"The solution lies through dialogue and peaceful means, and its beginning is in the meeting and work of the Council of Ministers and all state institutions."

He stressed that "it is necessary for the government to meet today ... and the parliament should monitor its work and not contribute to its disruption. The disruption of the government is responsible for the paralysis of the

administration.”

The president stressed that “only the state sets and implements the defense strategy, and the deliberate, systematic and unjustified obstruction must stop.”

Aoun criticized the disruption to the state caused by demands by Hezbollah and the Amal movement to halt Judge Tarek Bitar’s investigation into the causes of the Beirut port explosion in August 2020.

“By which Shariah, logic or constitution is the council of ministers suspended and it is asked to take a decision that is not within its powers, and its work is suspended due to an issue that does not constitute a charter dispute?” he asked

He concluded by saying that he was delivering “a frank message and I hope I will not have to say more.”

Aoun’s speech coincided with a campaign on social media and news sites in protest against incidents on the road to Beirut airport, where Hezbollah has raised banners and images in support of Iran’s leaders, in particular former commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps’ Quds Force, Qassem Soleimani, in the run-up to the second anniversary of his assassination by a US drone strike on Jan. 3, 2020.

Activists describe the banners and photos as a “provocative scene for every Lebanese, and specifically for Lebanese expatriates returning to Lebanon for the holidays.”



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