

Egypt seeks global push in Ethiopian dam talks

Sat, 2021-07-17 21:07

CAIRO: Egypt is keen to complete the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) negotiations to reach a fair and binding legal agreement that meets the aspirations of all in the development, Minister of Irrigation Mohamed Abdel-Aty said.

Ethiopia is pinning its hopes of economic development and power generation on the GERD, but Egypt fears it will threaten its water supply from the Nile. Sudan is concerned about the dam's safety and its own water flow.

During his visit to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) on Friday Abdel-Aty stressed Egypt's keenness to protect its water rights and achieve benefits for all in any agreement on the dam.

He highlighted a request by Cairo and Khartoum for the participation of the US, EU and UN in any GERD negotiations to maximize their chances of success, given the deadlock as a result of Ethiopia's intransigence.

The minister said that Egypt and Sudan would not accept Addis Ababa's unilateral decision to fill and operate the GERD dam.

Abdel-Aty said a high-tech rain forecast center to be set up in the DRC will help to study the effects of climate change and to identify measures to protect citizens from its risks.

He said Egypt has trained the staff at the center in the use of rain and flood forecasting systems, aerial image analysis, hydrologic modeling and technical reporting.

He said the establishment of this center stems from Egypt's keenness to transfer its expertise in the field of integrated management of water resources to its "brothers from the Nile Basin countries" with the aim of maximizing the use of these resources.

Egypt, he said, has been providing and is still keen to provide all forms of support through bilateral cooperation projects with the Nile Basin countries.

He explained that Egypt has established several rainwater harvesting dams and underground water stations to provide clean drinking water in remote areas by using the solar energy technology in a large number of underground wells.

He said Egypt has established many farms, fisheries and river marinas with the aim of developing the surrounding areas economically, socially and environmentally, creating job opportunities, developing fishing conditions and reducing swamp areas, which reduces diseases.



Battle for the Nile

How will Egypt be impacted by Ethiopia filling its GERD reservoir ?

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Family: Palestinian Authority covering up critic's death

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Sat, 2021-07-17 21:12

RAMALLAH: The family of a political activist who died in the custody of Palestinian security forces last month on Saturday accused the Palestinian Authority of trying to cover up his death.

Relatives of Nizar Banat said they still have not received a document with an official cause of death and said the Palestinian Authority has made efforts to settle the matter out of court.

"The behavior of the Palestinian Authority until this moment is criminal behavior, covering up a crime," Ghassan Banat, Nizar's brother, told reporters.

Nizar Banat was an outspoken critic of the Palestinian Authority who called on Western nations to stop providing aid to the PA due to human rights violations and growing authoritarianism.

In a series of posts and live videos on Facebook, Banat had criticized the authority's close security coordination with Israel, seen by many Palestinians as betrayal, and its corruption. He also lashed out at President Mahmoud Abbas in April for calling off what would have been the first Palestinian elections in 15 years. Banat was a candidate on an opposition slate.

His family has said security forces stormed into Banat's bedroom while he was sleeping and beat him, inflicting bloody head wounds before removing him from the house. He died shortly afterward while in custody.

His death has prompted weeks of protests. On July 5 at least six activists were arrested by security forces when protesting outside the Palestinian Authority headquarters. Multiple witnesses said the police used pepper spray and beat the protesters with batons.

Some 150 people demonstrated in Ramallah on Saturday evening, holding up posters of Banat and chanting anti-Abbas slogans. The protest was peaceful and there were no reports of violence or arrests.

The Palestinian Authority, seen as a crucial partner of the US and other Western countries, has formed an investigative committee into Banat's death. His brother said that weeks later, the family has heard little from the government.

"Until this moment, we have failed to obtain a death certificate. How can you have a citizen who dies without issuing a death certificate?" Ghassan Banat said.

Accompanied by two family lawyers, the brother rejected what he said were attempts by the authority to send tribal elders to the family in hopes of closing the case and stopping it from reaching the courts.

“This file will not be resolved or closed through elders or tribal ways,” he said. “Nizar’s file is a political assassination and will remain open until justice is achieved, even if it takes 1,000 years.”

The Palestinian Authority is widely viewed as corrupt and authoritarian, with a recent poll last month showing that support for Abbas, who took power for what was supposed to be a four-year term in 2005, had nosedived.

Abbas has faced mounting pressure after calling off the elections when it appeared that his Fatah party would suffer a crushing defeat to the rival Hamas militant group.

Last month, Palestinian security forces arrested prominent activist and critic, Issa Amro, after he criticized recent arrests on Facebook.



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Palestinian minister withdraws threat to quit over activist Israel troops arrest dozens of Palestinian university students

Israel proposes new restrictions to combat virus surge

Sat, 2021-07-17 01:25

JERUSALEM: Israel is planning tougher health restrictions to combat rising cases of COVID-19 as the delta variant spreads, the prime minister's office said in a statement.

If the new plans are approved by parliament, only those vaccinated or who have recovered from coronavirus will be allowed to take part in indoor events of more than 100 people.

They will also have to wear masks, except for eating and drinking.

The proposal is a joint plan drawn up by the prime minister's office as well as the health and economy ministries.

The Health Ministry has said it would cut quarantine time for those in contact with infected people and for returning nonvaccinated residents from 10 days to seven, following a negative test.

FASTFACT

Israel became a pioneer in COVID-19 inoculations after it obtained millions of doses from Pfizer in exchange for sharing extensive health data on their impact.

Israel became a pioneer in COVID-19 inoculations after it obtained millions of doses from Pfizer in exchange for sharing extensive health data on their impact. Its initial vaccine rollout of the Pfizer-BioNTech jab was among the world's fastest, delivering two doses of the vaccine to more than 55 percent of the population, including about 85 percent of adults.

Case numbers dropped dramatically, and in early June Israel eased many restrictions.

But soon after, as cases rose, the Health Ministry reimposed a requirement for masks to be worn in enclosed public places.

In the past 24 hours, more than 600 cases have been reported, up from around 200 per day on average a week ago.

Prime Minister Naftali Bennett on Wednesday called on Israelis to wear masks in closed public places and to avoid travel.

"The vaccine is not sufficient to fight against the Delta variant (...) we need the cooperation of citizens to defeat the coronavirus without having to impose a new lockdown," he said, calling on children aged 12 to 16 to get vaccinated.



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Israel troops arrest dozens of Palestinian university students
Israeli club calls off match with Barcelona over Jerusalem

[Saltwater-grown crops lift food-security hopes of arid Arab countries](#)

Fri, 2021-07-16 22:11

JEDDAH: Conventional agriculture is energy- and water-intensive, especially in countries that rely on desalination to irrigate crops and often import most of their food, amplifying their carbon footprint.

The good news is that a Saudi Arabia startup offers an ingenious, environmentally friendly solution that could ease nations' food worries. Red Sea Farms, which is based on the campus of King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST), near Jeddah, nurtures new breeds of crops that are irrigated with seawater.

Some are grown in greenhouses while others are farmed in open fields. The company cultivates and sells at least a dozen crops, including tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers, celery, eggplant and green beans.

All are sustainable, organic and pesticide-free. The farm will expand its crop range to include around 30 fruit and vegetables in 2021, eventually raising this to about 100.



Traditionally, agriculture in the Kingdom was problematic due to the high cost of the suppling water in a desert landscape. But Red Sea Farms is breaking new ground. (AFP/File Photo)

“It’s about increasing the availability of fresh fruit and vegetables across the world while reducing the carbon and water footprint,” said Mark Tester, a bioscience professor at KAUST and co-founder of Red Sea Farms.

“What we need to do is get plants that now grow on full seawater and turn them into crops.”

Red Sea Farms, which has received \$1.9 million in funding from KAUST, began by building a 2,000-square-meter greenhouse on the university campus. It has now broken ground on a 10,000-square-meter greenhouse nearby.

The first facility has cut its freshwater consumption by 90 percent and also reduced energy use thanks to innovative engineering that improves the process of evaporative cooling.

This is the result of work done by Red Sea Farms co-founder and CEO Ryan Lefers. His solution relies on liquid evaporation to lower the air temperature – in the same way that sweating cools our bodies – and uses far less energy than other air-conditioning methods.

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Saudi Arabia is a waterless and barren land, covered by vast deserts and rugged mountains and therefore unsuited to anything but growing dates. Right? Actually, wrong. [Find out why here.](#)



However, this approach was long ineffective in the Gulf region because of the high relative humidity reducing the rate of evaporation. Lefers created a salt-based desiccant that dehumidifies the air and makes evaporative cooling possible.

The company extracts brackish groundwater from a nearby borehole to irrigate its crops and run the air-conditioning system. In Saudi Arabia, most freshwater is obtained via desalination, which is energy-intensive and expensive, so switching to groundwater has slashed the farm's carbon footprint.

Red Sea Farms is also developing open-field saltwater-grown plants. "That's where the plant science comes in more to create new types of crops," said Tester.

The principle is to get plants already growing in very salty water, or even seawater, and domesticate them to turn them into new varieties. Much of this work is being done at KAUST's desert agriculture center.

For example, salicornia (sometimes known as sea asparagus) has an oil-rich

seed that could be used for cooking and as a lubricant. Tester and his colleagues are improving it genetically so that it can become an economically viable crop.

“Your cooking oil in 10 years’ time could be made from salicornia,” he said, noting that oil seeds occupy a huge amount of land and have an enormous carbon footprint.



A general view taken from an airplane shows cultured farms in northern Saudi Arabia. (AFP/File Photo)

Having been selectively bred for thousands of years to improve their yield and hardiness, the wheat or corn seeds farmers use today are vastly different from their wild ancestors.

“We can turbocharge those processes through genomics but also through machine-learning algorithms to help accelerate that breeding process,” Tester said. “We’ve an opportunity now that we’ve never before had in human history to get some of these wild plants which have extraordinary properties and turn them into crops.”

The company aims to extend its footprint worldwide. Over a three- to five-year timeframe, the expansion will be focused on covered agriculture (the greenhouse) but will shift more to open-field agriculture five to 10 years from now.

Tester said: “This is a fantastic region in which to develop, test and deliver this technology. It’s a perfect incubator for this type of activity. Having got ourselves technically and financially ready, we want to go global.

North and sub-Saharan Africa are on our doorstep and will be excellent regions to expand into, both in terms of impact and business potential.”



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How Saudi Arabia is charting a path toward food security

[Fears of environmental disaster in Red Sea grow as UN-Houthis talks on Safer tanker fail](#)

Author:

Fri, 2021-07-16 22:01

ALEXANDRIA: The UN will continue talks with Iran-backed Houthi rebels until they agree to allow its experts to begin a vital assessment of the floating oil tanker Safer, and also urged the rebels to be more cooperative.

“We are continuing our efforts to send a team to the FSO Safer,” UN spokesman

Farhan Haq told Arab News, adding that the primary goal of the UN salvage expedition was to assess the damage and conduct "light" maintenance to prevent the tanker from crumbling.

"This is what we said a month ago about this: 'The United Nations is committed to its planned mission to assess the Safer oil tanker, conduct light feasible repairs to reduce the risk of a spill and formulate evidence-based recommendations for a permanent solution.'"

The UN official was responding to Arab News' request to comment on Houthi accusations that the UN was responsible for delays in the arrivals of the mission for allegedly breaching an agreement with the rebels.

On Thursday, the Houthi-controlled Safer Agreement Committee (SAC) blamed the UN Office for Project Services (UNOPS) for the failure of talks to repair the floating tanker after insisting on carrying out a "mere visual inspection work" rather than addressing the issue once and for all.

"The committee regrets the failure of UNOPS to comply with the agreement signed in November 2020 and its insistence on wasting time and wasting donors' funds allocated to the project in fruitless meetings," the Houthi committee said in a statement carried by the official Houthi news agency.

Carrying more than 1 million barrels of crude oil and moored off the Yemeni Red Sea coast for almost four decades, the FSO Safer tanker has decayed during the past six years due to lack of regulator maintenance, which ended when the Houthis seized control of the western city of Hodeidah.

The Houthis have backtracked many times on promises to allow the UN mission to visit the tanker, first accusing the UN mission of including agents from America and Arab coalition member states, and later rejecting the signing of a written security guarantee to protect members of the mission.

The latest move by the Houthis prompted the UN to announce in February that it was delaying its mission indefinitely.

Given the large load of the tanker, experts have long described it as a ticking time bomb that could explode at any time or leak oil, causing a major environmental disaster worse than the Exxon Valdez oil spill in Alaska in 1989.

The Yemeni government has accused the rebels of using the tanker as a "pressure card" to blackmail the government and the international community, and for leverage during peace talks.

Yemen's Foreign Minister Ahmed Awad bin Mubarak told the Kuwaiti news agency KUNA last week that the UN should take tougher measures against Houthi officials who derail the arrival of the UN mission to the tanker.

"The failure to achieve progress in the (Safer) oil tanker file is due to the failure of the international community and the Security Council to use effective tools of pressure, including sanctions against the Houthi militia and its leadership responsible for the file," the minister said.



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