

Houthis denounced for sentencing two activists to death

Thu, 2021-06-17 19:19

ALEXANDRIA: Yemeni government officials, human rights activists and journalists have condemned a Houthi-run court's decision to sentence two Yemeni activists to death, accusing the rebels of using the judiciary in areas under their control to punish dissidents.

On Tuesday, a Houthi-run court ordered that Zafaran Zaid, a Yemeni human rights activist and lawyer, and her husband and fellow activist Fuad Al-Mansouri be executed by firing squad. The two were tried in absentia.

Zaid, head of the Yemeni Women's Empowerment Foundation (Tamkeen), has exposed a number of human rights abuses by the Houthis. Al-Mansouri is the head of the Development Media Association and an outspoken critic of the Houthis. His brother, the journalist Tawfiq Al-Mansouri, was abducted by the Houthis in 2015 and sentenced to death in 2020.

The court found the couple guilty of smuggling Buthaina Mohammed Al-Raimia – the Yemeni child injured in an errant airstrike by the Arab coalition in 2017 – to Riyadh.

The child was sent to Riyadh by the King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Center, where she received life-saving medical treatment. Once she was fully recovered, she was returned to her family in northern Yemen.

Ahmed Arman, Yemen's minister of legal affairs and human rights, told Arab News on Thursday that the Houthis are using the judicial bodies in areas under their control to "settle scores" with their opponents and to confiscate their property.

"The ministry renews its strong condemnation and denunciation of all immoral and inhumane practices used by the Houthis against citizens in areas under their control and calls on the international and regional community to provide support to the Yemeni government and help it restore its authority over all Yemeni territories," Arman said.

He added that Houthi-controlled courts have issued similar death sentences against hundreds of Yemeni activists, military and security officials, politicians and journalists for challenging their rule and backing the Yemeni government and Arab coalition.

"The Houthis continue to use so-called judicial authority in areas under their control to seek vengeance on Yemenis," Arman said.

Yemeni activists and rights groups echoed Arman's concerns about the Houthis' escalating crackdown on dissidents at a time when regional and international mediators are pressuring the rebels to agree to a peace initiative brokered by the UN to end the war.

“The Houthis have become violent and oppressive towards Yemeni women – employing all methods of intimidation against them. What is happening is a flagrant violation of human rights,” Noora Al-Jarwi, a Yemeni activist, said.

The Geneva-based SAM Organization for Rights and Liberties demanded the Houthis put an end to their “farcical” death-sentence rulings.

“SAM emphasizes that such rulings seriously violate a set of basic rights guaranteed by both Yemeni and international law,” the organization tweeted.



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Yemenis demand end to Houthi siege of Taiz as part of peace plans
US condemns Houthi drone attack on Saudi school

[Egypt completes concrete work on](#)

tallest tower in Africa

Thu, 2021-06-17 18:43

CAIRO: Egypt has announced the completion of the concrete work at the Iconic Tower skyscraper – the tallest tower in Africa – in the New Administrative Capital (NAC), east of Cairo.

“This represents a historic day in the history of modern Egypt and serves as a documentation of the growth the country is witnessing,” Minister of Housing Assem Al-Gazzar said at a function celebrating the feat on Thursday.

The project’s investments are estimated at \$3 billion.

The project is being jointly implemented by the Egyptian Ministry of Housing, represented by the New Urban Communities Authority, and the China State Construction Engineering Corporation, one of the largest contracting companies in the world.

Al-Gazzar said the political leadership is taking full interest in the development projects at the NAC.

He said the Iconic Tower project will serve as a turning point in the history of urbanization in Egypt and that next week a new project will be launched in the city of El-Alamein alongside several new towers, “which confirms the extent of cooperation between Egypt and China.”

He added that several further projects would be inaugurated in the coming period.

Al-Gazzar thanked China and the Chinese company for their “great flexibility with the Egyptian government in implementing this huge project.”

The central business district of the NAC will feature 20 towers, including the 400-meter Iconic Tower.

Ahmed Al-Banna, project manager from the company Dar Al-Handasa, said the construction took 800 non-stop working days, adding that the pandemic did not halt the work.

He said the work was carried out in three phases, after which the concrete strength was installed, which accelerated work inside the tower.

The second phase, from the third floor to the 30th floor, took about 100 workdays, while during the third phase, one floor took about six workdays. The number of engineers, technicians and workers in the group amounted to 190.

The 80-floor tower project covers an area of 65,000 square meters.



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Egypt considers proposal to set up cultural entertainment city in New Administrative Capital
Egypt will mark move to New Administrative Capital with 'mass celebration'

[Lebanon govt hopes collapse amid heated exchanges](#)

Author:

Wed, 2021-06-16 21:17

BEIRUT: Efforts to form a government and end the political stalemate gripping Lebanon reached a dead-end on Wednesday amid heated exchanges between President Michel Aoun and Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri.

After Aoun's political team, the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM), an ally of Hezbollah, announced that it had rejected Berri's initiative to form a new

government, the parliamentary speaker responded with a strongly worded statement accusing the Lebanese president of doing "what he has no constitutional right to do" by insisting on the blocking third in the government.

Aoun has demanded a third of all Cabinet seats, effectively giving his team veto power over government decisions.

Berri said that he had put forward the initiative "to help the Prime Minister-designate Saad Hariri," and accused Aoun of backing out of a pledge to support the formation of a new government.

"The president has no constitutional right to even one minister. He does not participate in voting, so how can he indirectly have votes?" Berri asked.

"The country is collapsing, institutions are deteriorating, and the people are suffering," he added.

Addressing Aoun, the parliamentary speaker said: "You openly say that you do not want Hariri as prime minister. This is not your right; the decision to assign him is not yours, and the Parliament has voiced its decision loud and clear."

In response, Aoun's office issued a statement criticizing "statements and positions from various officials interfering in the process of forming a government."

The statement also highlighted what it claimed were "abuses and direct targeting of the powers of the president."

With hopes of a new government dashed, government and private sector trade unions called for a strike on Thursday to rescue Lebanon from the political deadlock and threat of economic collapse.

According to political observers, Aoun's team prefers to keep the caretaker government in place to allow the country's affairs to be run by the Baabda Palace and through the Supreme Defense Council, chaired by Aoun.

MP Mohammed Al-Hajjar told Arab News: "We are going through a very difficult stage. The president and the FPM do not value the constitution and are insisting on obstructing the formation of the government, taking the Lebanese people hostage for their personal interests."

He said that it is clear Aoun and his political team want a government that is subject to their decisions until presidential elections are held.

Al-Hajjar said that Hezbollah "is standing idly by and this is unacceptable."

He added that Hezbollah could "facilitate the formation of the government by putting pressure on its ally, but it has another agenda."

Meanwhile, Charles Jabbour, head of the Lebanese Forces' Media and Communication Service, said that while Hezbollah wants to protect its ally

Aoun and his political team, the FPM is dissatisfied with Hezbollah's position.

"This was revealed by direct statements made by FPM officials against Hezbollah," he said.

Jabbour said that Hezbollah is "no longer a major force in this field. It is politically paralyzed and unable to do anything."

However, he voiced concerns that the political impasse would worsen.

"There is a struggle over power and political positions, and cooperation with Aoun's team is impossible," he said.



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Lebanon's Sunni leaders renew support for Hariri

Yemenis demand end to Houthi siege of Taiz as part of peace plans

Wed, 2021-06-16 20:30

ALEXANDRIA: Yemen human rights activists, politicians, journalists, and residents of Taiz have demanded that government and international mediators include the lifting of the city's siege by Iran-backed Houthis in any peace initiative to end the war in the country.

Fearing being shut out of the current UN-brokered peace initiative that largely focused on Sanaa, residents of the besieged southern Yemeni city and human rights activists said the Houthis should stop their military operations and continued shelling of the city's densely populated districts under any deal to bring the conflict to a close.

In a tweet as part of an online campaign to focus world attention on the Taiz siege, Yemeni activist Abdullah Al-Sharabe said: "Ending the siege of Taiz unconditionally is the demand of all Yemenis, and no one opposes this human desire except the Houthi criminals who imposed the siege."

According to Yemeni and UN officials, and Western diplomats, the UN-brokered peace initiative calls for an immediate nationwide ceasefire, the reopening of Sanaa airport, the lifting of restrictions on Hodeidah port, and the resumption of peace talks between the Yemeni government and the Houthis.

But Taiz residents claim too much focus has been placed on easing restrictions in Houthi-controlled areas without including the Houthi siege as one of the peace conditions.

However, UN Yemen envoy spokeswoman, Ismini Palla, told Arab News that the Houthis would lift their siege of Taiz at the same time as the warring factions put into place a ceasefire.

"The proposed nationwide ceasefire in that plan aims not only to halt all forms of fighting but also result in the opening of main roads connecting the country from north to south, including Taiz, for the free movement of civilians, commercial goods, and humanitarian aid," she said.

The Yemeni government said it would not agree to any peace plan that did not include lifting the siege of Taiz and removing Houthi checkpoints from Yemeni cities.

"Opening roads, ensuring freedom of movement for citizens, and lifting the siege on cities, especially the city of Taiz, are among the basic issues that the government puts at the forefront of its priorities," the Yemeni Foreign Ministry said.

Facing stiff resistance from army troops and resistance fighters in the city, the Houthis have imposed a siege on Taiz, Yemen's third-largest city, since early 2015, in the process disrupting the distribution of vital humanitarian

and medical assistance to thousands of hungry residents and turning a deaf ear to international calls to lift the blockade.

At the same time, the group has reportedly deployed snipers near its checkpoints to shoot any residents trying to enter or leave government-controlled areas of the city.

Speaking to Arab News from Taiz, Aqmar, a housewife, said people had been forced to use dangerous and unpaved roads to get food and medicines into the city and that the Houthi siege had pushed up transportation fares and exacerbated the suffering of the people.

“We travel only when there is an extreme necessity as bus fares are between 10,000 Yemeni rials (\$40) and 15,000 rials per passenger,” she added.

She pointed out that over the years the siege had gone on, the Houthis had clamped down on freedoms of movement and that her sick grandmother who lived in a rural area outside of Taiz had died while on her way to the city to receive medical treatment.

Local rights groups claim Houthi shelling of the city has killed and wounded thousands of civilians over the past six years. Taiz Human Rights Center has put the civilian death toll from Houthi missile and artillery strikes at 1,462, including 443 children and 180 women, with 8,996 people left wounded.



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Yemeni army opens new front in Taiz, makes 'great gains' against Houthis
Yemeni army kills 18 Houthi militants in an ambush near Taiz

[Why Egypt's Hamas policy changed after Israeli-Gaza conflict](#)

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Wed, 2021-06-16 18:45

GAZA CITY: During the recent Israeli conflict with Gaza, a shift in Egyptian policy was evident in President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi's pledge of half a billion dollars to rebuild the besieged enclave.

The unprecedented visit of the head of the Egyptian General Intelligence Service, Abbas Kamel, to Gaza, as an official envoy of El-Sisi, came as a major indication of the change in Cairo's policy toward Hamas.

The relationship deteriorated following the overthrow of former Egyptian President Muhammad Mursi, affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood, in 2013. Egypt played a key role in brokering a cease-fire between Israel and Hamas on May 21 following 11 days of cross-border fighting last month that left a trail of destruction with more than 250 dead and hundreds wounded.

Cairo opened the Rafah crossing to dozens of Egyptian vehicles that entered Gaza to remove the rubble of destroyed buildings and pave the way for the reconstruction process. In addition, Cairo is also supplying goods to Gaza in light of strict Israeli restrictions.

However, Mukhaimer Abu Saada, professor of political science at Al-Azhar University in Gaza, differentiates between the Egyptian policy toward Gaza and the official Egyptian relationship with Hamas.

He said Egypt's role in Gaza is strategic due to the factors of history and geography. As for the country's relationship with Hamas, it falls within the framework of "political tactics" to serve both sides.

Abu Saada believes the shift that appeared in the Egyptian policy toward Gaza rulers Hamas would not have taken place "without the green light from the US administration" following American President Joe Biden's first phone call to El-Sisi.

"Egypt and Hamas are beneficiaries of this transformation," Abu Saada told Arab News.

"Hamas, which has suffered greatly politically and financially after the years of estrangement that followed the overthrow of the late President Mursi, is keen to develop its relationship with the Egyptian regime."

As for Egypt, Abu Saada said, it adheres to its position as a major regional

player in the Palestinian arena, being the historical sponsor of Palestinian issues.

At the same time, the Palestinian Authority (PA) is not completely satisfied with the current Egyptian policy toward Gaza and the country's openness to Hamas, he said, adding that this may be one of the main reasons behind the dialogue setback that was supposed to be launched in Cairo last Saturday. "The PA, which has sought over the past four years to besiege Hamas politically and financially by imposing sanctions on Gaza, does not want Hamas to exploit the recent Israeli conflict in its favor through the Egyptian gate," Abu Saada said.

Following Mursi's ouster, the Hamas-Egypt ties deteriorated to the point that it was suggested in the Egyptian media that Hamas has supported the Salafists in Sinai and helped them carry out attacks in Cairo.

Ibrahim Al-Madhoun, a political analyst close to Hamas, believes that Egypt has a great opportunity to regain its regional weight. He also thinks Hamas is ready to identify with the Egyptian side if its demands are met, especially the lifting of the siege on Gaza and the cessation of Israeli attacks on Jerusalem.

Al-Madhoun does not see Egypt making a U-turn on Hamas, but he says it has raised the degree of its interest, concentration, and ability to move in vital files.

Hani Al-Basous, professor of political science and international relations, said the current Egyptian tactic with Hamas is based on recognizing it as a fait accompli. He said the Palestinian force has great weight, gained popular Arab momentum after the latest conflict, and it should be dealt with with new mechanisms and not with a new political orientation.



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