

Algeria trial over French mountaineer's murder postponed

Author:

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ALGIERS: A trial in Algeria over the murder of French mountaineer Herve Gourdel by terrorists in 2014 was postponed on Thursday due to the prime suspect's ill health, judicial sources said.

Abdelmalek Hamzaoui, an alleged terrorist, had arrived at court for the opening hearing of the trial in a wheelchair, and according to a doctor who accompanied him, he is asthmatic and had undergone hip surgery.

"Given the state of health of the main defendant Hamzaoui, the court decided to postpone the case to Feb. 18," said the presiding judge of the court in Dar El Beida, a suburb of Algiers.

The slain hiker's partner, Francoise Grandclaude, was "disappointed" about the postponement, said her lawyer, Chawki Benarbia, gave the same reason for the postponement.

Gourdel, 55, was abducted on Sept. 21, 2014 while exploring Djurdjura National Park, a draw for hikers but which has long been a sanctuary for extremists.

Three days after he disappeared, gunmen from militant group Jund Al-Khilafa published a video of his execution-style beheading.

France had rejected their demand to halt airstrikes against Daesh in Iraq and Syria.

Three months later, after a massive manhunt, Gourdel's body was found in a booby-trapped grave.

Fourteen people face charges over the case. Only Hamzaoui is known to be in custody.

Seven others are being tried in absentia, but no details have been made public on the charges they face.

Gourdel's Algerian guides are also accused of failing to alert the authorities to his kidnapping, while another person is facing unspecified charges.

Gourdel's gruesome killing caused shock both in France and in Algeria, where it triggered memories of the decade-long civil war between Islamists and the army that left some 200,000 dead.

The murder came in the wake of Daesh terrorists dramatic takeover of northern Iraq and Syria in the summer of 2014.

Jund Al-Khilafa – Arabic for Soldiers of the Caliphate – had sworn allegiance to Daesh leader Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi just weeks before his killing.

Hamzaoui, arrested in late 2014 on suspicion of belonging to Jund Al-Khilafa, is accused of "kidnapping, torture and premeditated murder" as well as joining an "armed terrorist group" – charges that can carry the death penalty.

Gourdel's five Algerian guides, who were initially captured alongside him but were released hours later, had also been due to appear in court.

They are accused of neglecting to tell the authorities they were hosting a foreign national and of failing to raise the alarm promptly after he was

kidnapped.

The Algerian government has said this delay had given the kidnapers time to flee.

But ahead of the trial, a lawyer for one of the guides had questioned the logic of the charge, which could carry a sentence of up to five years' jail. "My client informed the authorities as soon as he could – after he was released by the kidnapers," said Faycal Ramdani.

Authorities have not made public any details on the other defendants.

Two decades since the end of Algeria's civil war, the authorities regularly report clashes between the army and militant groups.

In 2016, authorities said they had wiped out almost all the Jund Al-Khilafa group.



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[Head of Libyan parliament arrives in Cairo following invitation from Egyptian president](#)

Author:

Fri, 2021-02-05 00:51

CAIRO: Speaker of the Libyan Parliament Aguila Saleh arrived in Cairo on a visit following an invitation from Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi.

During the visit, discussions are expected to take place between Saleh, El-Sisi and Egyptian officials about the latest developments in Libya.

Fathi Al-Marimi, adviser to the speaker, denied reports regarding the resignation of Saleh, saying they were unfounded. He explained that Saleh did not submit his resignation from the presidency of the council to any party, despite the fact that he is the closest candidate to winning the position of head of the Presidential Council in Libya.

Al-Marimi praised the political leadership in Egypt for embracing Libyan dialogue sessions and working toward returning stability to Libya, saying that El-Sisi played a pivotal and effective role in bringing together the Libyan factions that were fighting before Egypt joined the dialogue sessions.

Egypt is one of the first countries to support the stability of Libya and create new channels for reconciliation.

Saleh added that Libyan national security and stability are linked to those of Egypt, as the two countries are neighbors. He stressed the role of the Egyptian people and media in supporting Libya, its people and their demands for stability.

Al-Marimi indicated that Egypt and its political leadership helped Libya in fighting terrorism, foreign interference and the attacks of mercenaries inside the country.

This comes as the Libyan Dialogue Forum continues to vote on candidates for the interim executive authority, including Saleh, to lead the country toward elections by the end of the year.

On Tuesday, members of the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum finished voting for the position of head of the Presidential Council.

Saleh received nine votes – the highest number – but the UN mission in Libya announced that the results of the elections inside the electoral complexes would not be decided in favor of any candidate.

Libya's Al-Ahrar channel quoted a source saying that the members of the forum had agreed to pledge to the candidates running for office to resign if one of them wins.

The Libyan Political Dialogue Forum in Geneva announced the transition to vote on candidates for the Presidential Council in the prospective interim executive authority with a list system after the candidates failed to achieve the required percentage for their individual election.

A source from the Libyan Political Dialogue Committee confirmed that the vote would take place on Friday.



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UN Security Council orders ceasefire monitors deployed to Libya
UN Libya forum starts voting for country's interim presidency council

[Egypt to chair UN peace initiative](#)

Fri, 2021-02-05 00:40

CAIRO: Egypt has been elected to chair the 15th session of the UN Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) for the first time, succeeding Canada, according to the Egyptian Foreign Ministry.

The election took place during an official commission meeting at the UN'S headquarters in New York.

Egypt's election to chair the session came after the UN African group chose the country to represent Africa, and follows its reelection as a member of the PBC with the highest number of votes in December 2020.

Mohammed Idris, Egypt's permanent representative to the UN, said that Egypt's election is the culmination of diplomatic efforts since the commission was founded in 2005.

The election demonstrates the international and African confidence in Egypt's ability to continue its effective contribution to strengthening the role of the peacebuilding system at the UN, he added.

Idris said that the meeting had witnessed a review of the priorities of the Egyptian chairing of the PBC, adding that the interventions of the committee

members showed appreciation for Egypt's pioneering role in peace efforts. Egypt's chairing committee will continue to work on mobilizing international support and attention to support peace initiatives in countries emerging from or affected by conflicts. Efforts will be based on the principle of national ownership and leadership, especially in Africa, which occupies the largest share of the committee's work program.

Egypt is keen to maximize the benefit from this advisory role to the Security Council, General Assembly and Economic and Social Council, as well as the committee's role in building bridges and enhancing the consistency of roles within the UN system.

Idris said that the committee's role in researching options for providing adequate, sustainable and predictable financing for peace initiatives and programs is the most urgent challenge, especially in light of the coronavirus pandemic.



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impact of UN report on banking sector

Fri, 2021-02-05 00:32

AL-MUKALLA: The internationally recognized government of Yemen will try to mitigate the impact of the latest UN report on the central bank's reputation and the country's banking system in general, a senior government official told Arab News.

"After reading the report, we feel concerned about the reputation of the central bank and the report's impact on currency rates, the citizens and the economy," the government official said, speaking on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to brief reporters.

The UN panel of experts who monitor international sanctions in war-torn Yemen said in their latest report that the Aden-based Central Bank of Yemen misused millions of dollars from the Saudi deposit meant for buying food and diverted millions of dollars to a group of local traders.

On Wednesday, Yemeni government officials held a virtual meeting with members of the UN panel with the aim of correcting some points in their report, the official news agency SABA reported.

The Yemeni officials told the UN experts that their report included "inaccurate information and conclusions" about the disbursement of the Saudi deposit, reprimanding the UN officials for not meeting the relevant Yemeni authorities before releasing the report, SABA said.

The central bank officials also held another virtual meeting with the UN experts for the same purpose. During the meeting, the bank's officials voiced reservations about corruption and money laundering accusations that were included in the report, and demanded the UN experts correct any misinformation.

According to official media, both sides agreed to hold more meetings and review the report based on the responses and clarifications from the Yemeni side.

In an eight-page report seen by Arab News, the central bank said that several Yemeni and Saudi institutes were aware of the bank's "transparent" procedures for spending the Saudi deposit, adding that the bank was forced into giving some "incentives" to local traders to boost their trust in the central bank.

The bank noted that the Iran-backed Houthis banned banks in areas under their control from dealing with the Saudi deposit and imposed taxes on essential commodities that crossed into their territories from government-controlled areas, which pushed up their prices.

"All financial transactions that took place from the Saudi deposit were based on a clear, transparent and fair mechanism that applied all foreign banking and trade standards," according to the bank's report.

Headed by the chairman of the Arab Parliament Economic Commission, Insaf Mayo, the Yemeni parliament recently formed a committee of several Yemeni economists to investigate UN corruption allegations about the central bank in Aden.

At the same time, Yemen's government has said that the World Bank allocated \$20 million for repairing roads and basic infrastructures across Yemen.

According to the official news agency, the dean of executive directors board of the World Bank Group, Merza Hasan, told Yemeni minister of planning, Waed Bathib, that the World Bank would support the Yemeni central bank and the banking system in Yemen by disbursing the WB's grants through the central bank in Aden.



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Yemen Central Bank denies UN accusations of money-laundering, corruption
Yemen central bank shuts firms linked to currency crash

[Sudan appoints key rebel leaders to interim government](#)

Author:

Thu, 2021-02-04 23:14

CAIRO: Sudan has appointed three representatives of armed rebel groups to top posts in the country's interim government as part of a peace deal signed last year, the state news agency reported Thursday.

Sudan is transitioning to democratic rule after a mass uprising forced the military to remove longtime dictator Omar Al-Bashir in 2019 and trying to quell years of conflict in its rebellious regions.

The country's governing body, the Sovereign Council, said in a statement released by Sudan's state news agency that it had appointed Alhadi Idris Yehia, a leader of the Sudan Liberation Movement, Malik Agar, head of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North faction in the Blue Nile state, and Al-Taher Abu Bakr Hagar, president of Sudan Liberation Forces, as new members.

All fall under the umbrella of the larger Sudan Revolutionary Front, an alliance of armed groups centered in the western Darfur, South Kordofan and Blue Nile regions with whom the government signed a peace deal last year. The three rebel leaders will be joining the other 11 members of the ruling Sovereign Council, formed in 2019 following a power-sharing agreement between military commanders and civilian protesters, who spearheaded the five-month-long uprising that led to Al-Bashir's ouster.

Reaching a negotiated settlement with rebels in Sudan's far-flung provinces has been a crucial goal for the transitional government. The deal was hailed as step toward reviving Sudan's battered economy and rejoining the international community after years of isolation.

But the government failed to reach similar peace pacts with two other key armed factions ,including Sudan's largest single rebel group, the Sudan Liberation Movement-North led by Abdel-Aziz Al-Hilu, and the Sudan Liberation Movement- Army, which is led by Abdel-Wahid Nour.

The peace deal, signed in October in Juba after months of negotiations, granted self-rule for the southern provinces of Blue Nile, South Kordofan and West Kordofan and stipulated that that rebel forces should be integrated into Sudan's armed forces. Under the same deal, rebels were also promised cabinet positions and 75 legislative seats in a yet-to-be-formed transitional parliament.

A cabinet reshuffle is expected to be announced next week, the state's official news agency SUNA reported late Wednesday.



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