

Not guilty pleas entered in Jordan sedition trial

Mon, 2021-06-21 19:01

AMMAN – The suspects in Jordan’s high-profile “sedition case,” former minister Bassem Awadallah and Sharif Hassan bin Zaid, appeared in court on Monday over their alleged roles in a plot to “destabilize the country.”

Dozens of reporters had been outside the State Security Court (SSC) since the early hours on Monday waiting for permits to enter the heavily-guarded court but were told it was a closed-door hearing.

Images on social media showed Awadallah, a former royal court chief, and bin Zaid both wearing blue prison uniforms as they were escorted by security guards to the SSC building.

Sources who attended the session said that the judges read out the charge sheet against the defendants, who pleaded not guilty. The court also heard testimonies of two prosecution witnesses related to leaked audio clips.

The court is scheduled to hold another closed-door session on Tuesday.

Last week, the SSC prosecution office leveled sedition and incitement charges against Awadallah and bin Zaid and accused them of conspiring with former crown prince Hamzah to destabilize the country and fuel unrest against the monarch in collaboration with foreign parties.

Bin Zaid was also charged with possessing illegal narcotics (hashish).



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Expelled Jordanian MP Osama Al-Ajarmeh arrested
Jordan's former royal court chief charged in Prince Hamzah sedition case

[Sharjah Honours Kenyan Humanitarian Outfit, RefuSHE, for Pioneering Contributions in Child and Girl-Focused Refugee Development](#)

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Associated Press

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Mon, 2021-06-21 17:13

SHARJAH: RefuSHE, a Nairobi-based humanitarian agency, was conferred with the 2021 Sharjah International Award for Refugee Advocacy and Support (SIARA) at a virtual ceremony.

Founded in 2008, RefuSHE addresses the significant, unmet needs for child and girl-focused refugee services in Kenya.

The \$136,000 award, now in its fifth edition, is given annually by The Big Heart Foundation (TBHF), a UAE-based global humanitarian organization dedicated to helping refugees and people in need worldwide, in collaboration with United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

With the COVID-19 pandemic deepening the vulnerabilities of marginalized women and girls, the SIARA selection committee acknowledged the leading contributions of RefuSHE, a girl- and woman-centric humanitarian organization, for its efforts in protecting, educating, and empowering orphaned, unaccompanied, and separated refugee girls, children and young women aged 13 – 21 in the Great Lakes region of East Africa.

Through a holistic model comprising of trauma-informed and girl-centric interventions and long-term programs that address urgent safety, shelter and health care concerns to economic empowerment, vocational training, and mental health initiatives, among others, RefuSHE has enabled 5,000 individuals, and around 20,000 indirect beneficiaries build healthier and more resilient futures for themselves and their children.

Three entities shortlisted for SIARA 2021, namely, RefuSHE from Kenya, International Network for Aid Relief and Assistance (INARA), which works for forcibly displaced children and youth in Lebanon and Turkey, and Iraq's The Lotus Flower from Kurdistan which economically empowers vulnerable women and girls through innovative projects.

They are also recipients of a special grant this edition instituted by TBHF, in collaboration with UAE-based NAMA Women Advancement Establishment (NAMA). The \$300,000-grant will be divided evenly among the three non-profit organizations.



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UN pressures UK over resettling Syrian refugees

[Iran's Bushehr nuclear plant shut down over 'technical fault'](#)

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Mon, 2021-06-21 07:42

TEHRAN: Iran's only nuclear power plant has been temporarily shut down over a "technical fault," the country's atomic energy body said in a statement.

The Bushehr plant and its 1,000-megawatt reactor, on Iran's southern coast, were completed by Russia after years of delay and officially handed over in September 2013, raising regional concerns in what is an earthquake prone area.

The shutdown comes as Tehran and world powers attempt to revive a hobbled 2015 agreement on Iran's nuclear program in Vienna talks, which an EU negotiator said Sunday were moving "closer to a deal."

That agreement is staunchly opposed by Israel, which Tehran has accused in the past of sabotage against its nuclear enrichment efforts.

"Following a technical fault at Bushehr power plant, and after a one-day notice to the energy ministry, the plant was temporarily shut down and taken off the power grid," the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran said on its website around Sunday midnight.

The statement said the plant will be reconnected to the grid and the issue will be resolved "in a few days," but did not elaborate further.

Iran's national electricity company had in a statement on Sunday called on Iranians to minimize consumption during peak hours due to a "predicted rise in temperature" and "limitations in power generation due to ongoing repairs" at Bushehr.

The company said that the repairs may continue until the end of the week, which is Friday in Iran.

In 2016, Russian and Iranian firms began building two additional 1,000-megawatt reactors at Bushehr. Their construction was expected to take 10 years.

Iran's Gulf Arab neighbors have often raised concerns about the reliability of the facility and the risk of radioactive leaks in the event of a major earthquake.

In April, Bushehr province was shaken by a 5.9-magnitude earthquake, leaving five people injured but causing "no damage" to the nuclear complex, according to authorities.

Also in April, Iran accused Israel of being behind a "terrorist" attack on its Natanz uranium enrichment plant, after a "small explosion" at that facility's electricity distribution center.

Iran started rolling blackouts in May this year after Tehran and several other cities were hit by unannounced power cuts that sparked complaints from consumers and an apology from the energy minister.

The shortages were blamed on heat, drought impacting hydropower generation, and surging electricity demand blamed in part on crypto-currency mining.

Power cuts in the peak summer months are not uncommon in Iran, but a government report last month said precipitation was down 34 percent compared to the country's long-term average, and warned of reduced water supplies for the year.

Since late May, the energy ministry regularly notifies citizens of "potential blackouts" lasting at least two hours, unless consumption in their area drops.

Iran's outgoing President Hassan Rouhani last month announced a ban on all crypto-currency mining until September to reduce the pressure on the power grid.

The Islamic republic has announced plans to construct 20 nuclear power plants in the long-term in order to reduce its reliance on fossil fuels.

The 2015 nuclear deal promised Iran sanctions relief in return for limits on

its nuclear program.

The deal was torpedoed in 2018 after the former US president Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew from it and reimposed punishing sanctions on the Islamic republic.

But Trump's successor Joe Biden favors rejoining the accord and the remaining parties are engaged in negotiations in Vienna to try to salvage it.

On May 23, nine people were injured in a blast at a plant producing explosive materials in central Iran, local media reported, and three days later, a pipeline explosion at a petrochemical complex near Iran's Gulf coast left one dead.

Some in the Islamic republic see the various events as the result of attacks by Israel's security forces. Others consider US sanctions – which almost completely isolate Iran from the rest of the world, complicating the maintenance of industrial facilities – as a more likely cause.

In July last year, a "worn out transformer" was blamed by a provincial electricity company for an explosion that hit a thermal power plant in the central province of Isfahan.



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Iran says upcoming round of Vienna talks could be the last

Iran's sole nuclear power plant undergoes emergency shutdown

Sun, 2021-06-20 20:30

TEHRAN: Iran's sole nuclear power plant has undergone an unexplained temporary emergency shutdown, state TV reported on Sunday.

An official from the state electric energy company, Gholamali Rakhshanimehr, said on a talk show that the Bushehr plant shutdown began on Saturday and would last "for three to four days."

He said that power outages could result. He did not elaborate but this is the first time Iran has reported an emergency shutdown of the plant, located in the southern port city of Bushehr. It went online in 2011 with help from Russia. Iran is required to send spent fuel rods from the reactor back to Russia as a nuclear nonproliferation measure.

In March, nuclear official Mahmoud Jafari said the plant could stop working since Iran cannot procure parts and equipment for it from Russia due to banking sanctions imposed by the US in 2018.

Bushehr is fueled by uranium produced in Russia, not Iran, and is monitored by the United Nations' International Atomic Energy Agency. The IAEA did not immediately respond to request for comment on the reported shutdown.

Construction on Bushehr, on the coast of the northern reaches of the Arabian Gulf, began under Iran's shah in the mid-1970s. After the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the plant was repeatedly targeted in the Iran-Iraq war. Russia later completed construction of the facility.

The plant, which sits near active fault lines and was built to withstand powerful quakes, has been periodically shaken by temblors. There have been no significant earthquakes reported in the area in recent days.



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Decision time on Iran nuclear deal 'approaching fast,' says European diplomat
Nuclear deal negotiators take stock after Iran elections

[Decision time on Iran nuclear deal 'approaching fast,' says European diplomat](#)

Sun, 2021-06-20 18:38

VIENNA: Talks on reviving a 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and six world powers cannot continue indefinitely and a decision needs to be made soon, a senior diplomat from the 'E3' grouping of France, Germany and Britain said on Sunday.

"We continue to make progress but we still need to resolve the most difficult issues. As we have stated before, time is on nobody's side. These talks cannot be open ended," the diplomat said

"Delegations will now travel to capitals in order to consult with their leadership. We urge all sides to return to Vienna and be ready to conclude a deal. The time for decision is fast approaching."

Meanwhile, Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett on Sunday opened his first Cabinet meeting since swearing in his new coalition government last week with a condemnation of the new Iranian president.

He said Iran's presidential election was a sign for world powers to "wake up" before returning to a nuclear agreement with Tehran.

Iran's hard-line judiciary chief, Ebrahim Raisi, was elected Saturday with 62% of the vote amid a historically low voter turnout.

He is sanctioned by the US in part over his involvement in the mass execution of thousands of political prisoners in 1988, at the end of the Iran-Iraq war. Raisi has not commented specifically on the event.

* *With AP and Reuters*



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