

Drought-hit Jordan to build Red Sea desalination plant

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AMMAN: Jordan said Sunday it plans to build a Red Sea desalination plant operating within five years, to provide the mostly-desert and drought-hit kingdom with critical drinking water.

The cost of the project is estimated at "around \$1 billion," ministry of water and irrigation spokesman Omar Salameh said, adding that the plant would be built in the Gulf of Aqaba, in southern Jordan.

The plant is expected to produce 250-300 million cubic meters of potable water per year, and should be ready for operation in 2025 or 2026, Salameh said.

"It will cover the need for drinking water (in Jordan) for the next two centuries," he said, adding that the desalinated water would be piped from Aqaba on the Red Sea to the rest of the country.

Jordan is one of the world's most water-deficient countries and experts say the country, home to 10 million people, is now in the grip of one of the most severe droughts in its history.

Thirteen international consortiums have put in bids, and the government will chose five of them by July, Salameh said.

Desalinating water is a major drain of energy, and the companies must suggest how to run the plant in Jordan, which does not have major oil reserves.

Last month Salameh said that Jordan needs about 1.3 billion cubic meters of water per year.

But the quantities available are around 850 to 900 million cubic meters, with the shortfall "due to low rainfall, global warming, population growth and successive refugee inflows," he said.

This year, the reserves of key drinking water dams have reached critical levels, many now a third of their normal capacity.



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[Jordan's former royal court chief charged in Prince Hamzah sedition case](#)

Sun, 2021-06-13 13:44

AMMAN: Jordan's former royal court chief and another man will go on trial this week at the State Security Court (SSC) for their alleged roles in a plot to "destabilize the country."

The country's public prosecutor endorsed the charges against Sharif Hassan bin Zaid and Bassem Awadallah, the former royal court chief.

Both are accused of working with Prince Hamzah, the former crown prince.

In the indictment, a copy of which was seen by Arab News, Awadallah and bin

Zaid are charged with “attempting to undermine the regime, and the country’s security and stability,” as well as “inciting sedition.”

On June 2, they were referred to the SSC, which looks into cases related to terrorism and state security. The court is expected to begin the trial next week.

Awadallah and bin Zaid were arrested on April 3 along with 15 other people suspected of involvement in the case, which also involved Prince Hamzah. Jordanian authorities said that Awadallah, bin Zaid and Prince Hamzah were attempting to destabilize Jordan in collaboration with “foreign entities.”

Prince Hamzah’s involvement was resolved within the framework of the Hashemite family upon directives from his half brother King Abdullah II. The Jordanian royal court published a letter signed by Prince Hamzah in which he vowed allegiance to King Abdullah and confirmed that he would act “always for His Majesty and his Crown Prince to help and support.”

The charge sheet into the sedition case said that there is enough evidence proving a “solid connection” between Prince Hamzah and the two suspects, Awadallah and bin Zaid.

It also said that bin Zaid recommended Awadallah to Prince Hamzah to help them gather external support in their plot to topple the regime and place Prince Hamzah on the throne.

The charges said that the three men regularly met at the home of Awadallah, who was reportedly “encouraging the prince to intensify his meetings with notables and tribal leaders.”

Prince Hamzah then moved to the so-called “open criticism stage,” and began attacking national institutions and accusing them of ineptitude, the indictment said.

The charges also claim that Prince Hamzah exploited a hospital tragedy to mobilize Jordanians and ignite public anger against the state.

Seven COVID-19 patients died in March in the New Salt Public Hospital, northwest of the capital Amman, when the hospital’s oxygen supply failed.

The incident triggered public anger, forcing Jordan’s health minister at the time, Nazir Obeidat, to step down.

The indictment contains a number of text messages that Awadallah, bin Zaid and Prince Hamzah sent to each other during March, days before the case became public.

On March 13, Awadallah sent a WhatsApp message to bin Zaid that said: “It is time for H.” On the same date, Prince Hamzah wrote to bin Zaid: “There is another person saying ‘go ahead.’” The latter wrote back: “This (medical tragedy) is considered the spark.”

Before nationwide rallies planned for March, 24, prosecutors said that bin

Zaid sent a text message to Prince Hamzah warning: "From now on, there should not be only words, but there should be a leadership."

Activists affiliated with the United Jordanian Movement, Hirak called for the nationwide rally to commemorate the 10th anniversary of massive opposition protests in 2011 organized by the Youth of March 24 movement.

Bin Zaid sent another message to Prince Hamzah urging him to "seize the opportunity, maybe not today or tomorrow, but I'm sure not in June, for example. God be on your side."

In another text message to Prince Hamzah, bin Zaid said: "Things are coming my friend and, as the man (Awadallah) said again last day, the thing will occur sooner than you think."



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King Abdullah forms committee to oversee 'qualitative leap' in Jordan's political system
Jordan's King Abdullah calls for dialogue for the nation's interest

Two thirds of eligible people in Dubai fully vaccinated against COVID-19

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DUBAI: About two-thirds of people eligible for inoculation against COVID-19 have now received two doses of the vaccine in Dubai, the tourist and business hub of the United Arab Emirates, Dubai Health Authority (DHA) said.

Dubai is the most populous of the seven emirates that make up the UAE and has one of the world's busiest airports.

For six months the UAE has been running one of the world's fastest vaccination campaigns against COVID-19, initially using a vaccine developed by the China National Pharmaceutical Group (Sinopharm) and then adding the Pfizer/BioNTech and AstraZeneca shots and Russia's Sputnik V.

DHA deputy director general Alawi Alsheikh Ali told Dubai Television late on Saturday that 83 percent of people aged over 16 – or about 2.3 million people – had now received at least one dose of a vaccine and that 64 percent had received two doses in the emirate.

The UAE recently said nearly 85 percent of its total eligible population had received at least one dose of a vaccine, without saying how many people had had both doses.

The UAE, which does not break down the number of cases by emirate, has seen a rise in the number of infections in the past month. It recorded 2,281 new cases on Saturday, bringing the total so far to around 596,000 cases. Daily cases peaked at almost 4,000 a day in early February.

DHA said 90 percent of the COVID-19 patients admitted to intensive care units in Dubai hospitals were unvaccinated, without specifying when that statistic was recorded.



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[Shelling kills 16 in northern Syria's Afrin: Monitor](#)

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Sat, 2021-06-12 19:01

BEIRUT: Shelling of the rebel-held city of Afrin in northern Syria killed at least 16 people Saturday, many of them when a hospital was struck, a war

monitor said.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said a doctor, three hospital staff, three women and a child died at Al-Shifaa hospital in the city which is held by Turkish-backed rebels.

The artillery fire originated from northern Aleppo province where Syrian regime and Kurdish forces are both deployed, the Britain-based group said. The Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) issued a statement denying any involvement in the shelling.



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Regime shelling kills 10 in northwest Syria: Monitor

[Egypt to launch two space research satellites in 2022](#)

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CAIRO: Egypt will launch two satellites next year, including NExSat-1, a lightweight vessel that will be used for remote sensing and scientific research, Khaled Abdel Ghaffar, Egyptian minister of higher education and scientific research, announced on Saturday.

Space authorities will also launch EgyptSat 2, which weighs 330 kilograms and will use sensor applications to employ a photographic accuracy of two meters from space.

The minister revealed the plans at the European-African Space Forum being held in Lisbon, Portugal. Mohamed El-Koosy, head of the Egyptian Space Agency, was also present.

Abdel Ghaffar said that Egypt will also host the headquarters of the African Space Agency, which includes all 54 countries on the continent.

The Egyptian Space Agency will be equipped with the latest equipment and space technology, he added.

The African Space Agency will be an "essential accelerator" for cooperation with Europe, he said, adding that Egypt will "spare no effort" in promoting multilateral cooperation in space activity.

"All the facilities and infrastructure for space projects are available in Egypt, and we are ready to become a reliable partner," Abdel Ghaffar said, adding that all support will be "provided to Africa to benefit from space technology and its applications."

He called on the EU to discuss the establishment of the European-African Space Training Program in Egypt, adding that the Egyptian agency will provide full logistical support for the program, which can provide annual training courses and degrees for African students and researchers.

Abdel Ghaffar said that next month Egypt will also launch a training and capacity-building program for 18 African researchers in various space fields. The Egyptian Space Agency will distribute educational satellite sets among African countries, which will provide researchers and students with experience and technical skills, enabling them to conduct further space research, he said.

"We aim to transform Egypt into a center for training, research and development in space activities, adopt and encourage African youth to explore new horizons in space science, prepare them for the transformation of the digital economy, develop and support emerging technologies, spread the use of satellite images to support activities, especially in the field of agriculture, and stimulate exploration and innovation and provide social and economic benefits to improve the lives of all Africans," the minister said.



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