

Egypt Holds Funeral for Former President Mubarak

CAIRO (Dispatches) – Egypt held a military funeral in Cairo on Wednesday to bury its former president Hosni Mubarak, who ruled for 30 years until he was ousted in a 2011 popular uprising.

Horses drew Mubarak’s coffin draped in the Egyptian flag at a mosque complex, followed by a procession led by President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, Egypt’s top military brass, Mubarak’s sons Alaa and Gamal and other Egyptian and Arab dignitaries.

Mubarak died on Tuesday in intensive care weeks after undergoing surgery, leaving Egyptians divided over his legacy presiding over an era of stagnation and repression.

He was swept out of power as an early victim of the Arab Spring revolutions that swept the region in 2011. He spent many of the subsequent years in jail and military hos-



A horse-drawn carriage carries the flag-draped coffin of former President Hosni Mubarak during his funeral, at Tantawi Mosque, in eastern Cairo, Egypt, Wednesday, Feb. 26, 2020.

pitals before being freed in 2017.

Egypt’s presidency declared three days of national mourning.

Mubarak’s coffin was to be airlifted from the Field Marshall Tan-

tawi mosque to the family burial grounds, state television reported.

Dozens of Mubarak supporters, some from his home village Kafr al-Meselha in the Nile Delta, gath-

ered outside the mosque.

Mohamed Zaree, a human rights activist, said the present era of autocracy and economic hardship was worse than Mubarak’s.

President Sisi, who came to power after leading the overthrow of Mubarak’s successor, Mohamed Mursi, has overseen a broad crackdown on dissent, which rights groups say is the most severe in recent memory.

Many of the activists who helped organize mass protests which ousted Mubarak are now behind bars or live in exile abroad. Sisi’s supporters say a crackdown was needed to stabilize the country after the turmoil that followed 2011.

Mubarak was sentenced to life in prison for conspiring to murder 239 demonstrators during the 18-day revolt in 2011, but was freed in 2017 after being cleared of those charges.

Zionists Vandalize Palestinian Cars in Hate Crime Attack

AL-QUDS (Dispatches) – Some vehicles have been damaged and anti-Arab slogans have been spray-painted in a Palestinian village in the West Bank in an apparent hate crime by Zionists, the Zionist regime’s police have confirmed.

The incident took place before dawn in the village of Yasuf, southwest of Nablus city in the Israeli-occupied West Bank.

A field researcher with Yesh Din, an Israeli human rights group, said in a statement sent to Xinhua that at least 13 cars were damaged.

Photos taken by the village council of Yasuf showed tires of car punctured and graffiti sprayed on residents’ home.

Zionist hardliners have been known to perpetrate such attacks against Palestinians and their prop-

erty, including olive trees, mosques, churches, and cemeteries. Thousands of these attacks have been reported over the past years, mostly in the West Bank.

Two weeks ago, 170 vehicles were vandalized and hate graffiti was spray-painted on the walls of a mosque in the Arab town of Jish in northern parts of the occupied territories.

The West Bank is a land occupied by the Zionist regime during the 1967 Middle East war. The occupying regime has controlled it ever since, despite international criticism.

Arab League Wants Int’l Observers Back

The Arab League has called

for the redeployment of international observers to al-Khalil and other Palestinian cities to protect the Palestinians against Zionist crimes a year after the regime expelled the civilian observer mission from the occupied territories.

Arab League Assistant Secretary General for Palestine and Occupied Arab Territories, Saeed Abu Ali, made the remarks on Tuesday, marking the 26th anniversary of the Ibrahimi Mosque massacre.

On February 25, 1994, a Zionist settler randomly opened fire at Muslims observing the dawn prayers at the Ibrahimi Mosque in the holy fasting month of Ramadan, killing 29 worshipers and injuring 150

others.

Later in the day, Zionist troops killed an additional 21 Palestinians who took to the streets across the occupied lands to protest the al-Khalil bloodshed.

The Temporary International Presence in Hebron (TIPH), tasked with safeguarding Palestinians in al-Khalil, was set up in the wake of the fatal attack. The mission was staffed by nationals of Italy, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and Turkey.

The mission did not start its work until 1998, after the Zionist troops refused to leave al-Khalil following the establishment of an illegal settlement at the heart of the city.

Dissident Rights Activist: Trials in Saudi Arabia Not Legal, Sham, Cover for Suppression

RIYADH (Press TV) – An exiled Saudi human rights activist has censured the judicial process in the kingdom, stating that trial sessions there are not legal and genuine, and are indeed a cover for further suppression amid a widening crackdown led by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman against rights campaigners and intellectuals.

“While Saudi authorities make claims about the integrity of the judiciary and fairness of the judgments, judges actually obtain papers condemning the defendants even before the trials are held. Therefore, they rule based on confessions extracted under duress, and categorically reject all attempts to defend the detainees,” Taha al-Haji told Arabic-language Mirat al-Jazeera news website in an exclusive interview.

He added, “Saudi trials are not legal, as they are bogus and merely meant to burnish the image of authorities. Such trials are held only to claim that the defendants had obtained their rights before any verdicts were passed against them.”

Haji further highlighted that the Al Saud regime has been stigmatized by oppression as it rejects any dissenting or opposing opinion.

“Today, there is no person inside the country who can speak out and publicly oppose the rule of the Al Saud. No one can demand reforms or legitimate rights at all. The authorities cannot accept any voice that contradicts theirs. This was the case in the past; nevertheless, current authorities led by Mohammed bin Salman have set a brutal and unprecedented dictatorship that has crossed all red lines socially, culturally, religiously and politically. They do not accept criticism or any call for reforms. They have gone beyond

that limit, and do not accept even neutral opinion, moderate voice or even silence. The regime presses silent people to glorify it, otherwise they will not be granted mercy. The elderly, women and children have not witnessed such an unprecedented campaign of mass trials and executions over the past years ever since (King) Salman and his son took power,” the human rights activist highlighted.

“Saudi authorities have moved from religious fundamentalism to secular radicalism. They have kept exercising oppression and even expanded its scope. Such an approach has therefore prompted Saudi men and women to immigrate from the country and seek asylum abroad,” he added.

Haji also pointed to the situation in Saudi Arabia’s Shia-populated Eastern Province, saying that local residents of al-Ahsa and Qatif regions have been facing blatant discrimination, and that they cannot hold sensitive positions in public institutions and departments.

“Saudi authorities initially dealt with the (protest) movement (in Qatif region) with great caution, fearing that the popular demonstrations would depose Al Saud before adopting a policy of brutal repression against the demonstrators,” he underscored.

Eastern Province has been the scene of peaceful demonstrations since February 2011. Protesters have been demanding reforms, freedom of expression, the release of political prisoners, and an end to economic and religious discrimination against the region.

The protests have been met with a heavy-handed crackdown by the regime, with government forces increasing security measures across the province.

Pope Says Trip to Iraq This Year Off

VATICAN CITY (Dispatches) – Pope Francis has indicated he will not be visiting Iraq this year as he had planned to do.

His improvised comments to a group of visiting Iraqis during his general audience in St. Peter’s Square were his clearest yet that the trip had been indefinitely postponed.

“To you citizens of Iraq, I say I am very close to you. You are (in) a battleground. You suffer war, from one side and the other,”

he said. “I pray for you and I pray for your country, where a visit by me had been programmed for this year.”

The pope first said in June that he wanted to visit Iraq, birthplace of the Biblical patriarch Abraham, who is revered by Christians, Muslims and Jews, in 2020.

But security concerns meant that the trip was never announced by the Vatican and preparations never reached a formal stage.

Iraq’s small Christian population of several hundred thousand suffered particular hardships when Daesh controlled large parts of the country, but have recovered freedoms since the terrorists were pushed out.

Last month, Francis met Iraqi President Barham Salih.

The Christian presence in Iraq, and some other countries in the Middle East, is deep-rooted.

President... Iranian...

(Continued From Page One)

them at the disposal of all of the country’s hospitals” he said, noting that the package would enable medics to easily diagnose new cases.

The president said what demands even more attention than coronavirus itself was “the virus of fear, anxiety, ambivalence, and distrust among the people,” which has to be tackled properly as it could lead to other problems if not contained.

Rouhani pointed to stepped-up U.S. attempts over the past two years to bring to a standstill economic activities and productivity inside Iran.

The Newsweek said Iran is racing to curb the spread of the new coronavirus, but these efforts are complicated by tight economic restrictions imposed by the United States.

“The U.S.’ sanctions regime has severely impacted the access that Iranians have to life-saving medical supplies and will most likely hamper the Islamic Republic’s ability to respond to the coronavirus efficiently,” Naveed Mansoori, a co-editor of online Middle East magazine Jadaliyya’s Iran Page, told Newsweek.

Secret... (Continued From Page One)

I feel that it is the duty of the Muslim countries to educate the western countries and other nations about Islam.”

The document states that the key purpose of their campaign was to “belittle the importance of the summit and the decisions that may emerge out of it in view of the absence, or the downgrading of the level of participation by Islamic states that play a pivotal role in leading the Islamic world and in serving its causes”.

It told its journalists to write that the convening of a mini-summit in Malaysia outside the framework of the OIC could “encourage the creation of similar blocs among other Islamic states that have not been invited. These states would be tempted to convene other summits. Consequently, efforts would be wasted and so would be the endeavor to reform the structure of the organization”.

The document also told them to highlight Imran Khan’s withdrawal from the summit.

“The absence of pivotal Islamic states from the Malaysian summit, and the cancellation of the participation of Pakistan’s Prime Minister Imran Khan, and downgrading the level of representation to that of the Foreign Minister, reflects the lack of conviction on the part of a country that has been instrumental in setting up this summit that it would not be possible to achieve any success outside the framework of the OIC.”

More revealing still were the “implementation mechanisms” revealed in the secret document.

These included: “Instructing authors of opinion columns to criticize any grouping formed for the purpose of achieving narrow political objectives outside the OIC,” along with the preparation of TV news reports highlighting the role of the kingdom in founding the OIC, and the hosting of political analysts.

These were put out on a host of Saudi TV channels, radio stations, and newspapers.

The document also lists a number of foreign media organizations at which the propaganda campaign was to be targeted.

These included the Dawn, Daily Jang and Nawa-i-Waqt newspapers in Pakistan; Al-Rai, Ad-Dustour, and Ammon newspapers and websites in Jordan; and other news channels and publications in countries including Egypt, Sudan, Iraq, Lebanon, Indonesia and India.

A Turkish official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said that there had been ongoing anti-Turkey propaganda efforts by Saudi authorities since the murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi in October 2018.

“We aren’t even surprised by any of this,” the official said. “They continuously smear Turkey.... They never downgrade their anti-Turkey efforts.”

“They spend millions of dollars on this, making American and British companies rich to relay ridiculous talking points to their own parrots.”

A Turkish diplomat said Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan was angry at Saudi and Emirati officials for putting pressure on Imran Khan to cancel his participation into the summit. “The Saudis thought Turkey and Qatar were trying to forge a new division with the south Asian countries by also adding Iran to the picture. They were totally mistaken. It was regional countries that invited Turkey and Qatar. It wasn’t led by Ankara,” the diplomat said.

Erdogan at the time said that Khan was pressured to cancel his visit.

Speaking to reporters in the Malaysian capital in December, he said: “This isn’t the first time that the Saudi Arabia and Abu Dhabi administrations have taken such an attitude.

“Unfortunately, we observe that Saudi Arabia is putting pressure on Pakistan. See, there are [Saudi] promises to Pakistan regarding its central bank.

“Beyond everything else, there are four million Pakistan workers in Saudi Arabia,” said Erdogan. “They [Saudi Arabia] tell them that ‘we can send them back, and instead take Bangladeshis’.

“On the other hand, regarding the central bank, they tell [Pakistan] that they could withdraw their money. And following similar threats, Pakistan, which is facing harsh economic conditions, found itself in a position to take such [a decision not to attend the summit].”

of gas condensates and 400 million tonnes per day of sulphur - all for export – on top of 1 million tonnes per year of ethane gas to feed Iranian petrochemical plants.

Minister of Petroleum Bijan Zangeneh said on Monday Iranian natural gas production capacity will surpass 1 billion cubic meters per day next month.

Iran sits on the world’s largest reserves of gas and the fourth largest oil deposits just behind Venezuela, Saudi Arabia and Canada, but the development of its energy sector has been be-deviled by sanctions.

The U.S. government has been trying to cripple the sector which is Iran’s biggest hard currency earner in order to force the country to submit to Washington’s demands.

The dark clouds of the sanctions, however, have had a silver lining for many Iranian companies which have landed major deals in oil, gas and other industries.

SADRA is Iran’s largest shipyard group which has turned into an oil and gas behemoth on the fringes of Western sanctions in recent years along with Petropars, another Iranian company specializing in upstream oil and gas exploration, exploitation and production as well as downstream industries.

Petropars was awarded a multibillion-dollar deal to develop phase 11 of South Pars after French oil major Total and the China National Petroleum Corp (CNPC) withdrew from the project.

The sanctions have spawned an inward-looking drive in Iran, especially in its oil industry which has gone out of its way to put unprecedented trust in local companies for implementation of some major projects.

Last week, Iran unveiled its first oil rig manufactured by domestic companies, fulfilling a dream which the country’s petroleum industry cherished for long.

Addressing the unveiling ceremony in Ahvaz, Zangeneh explained why building an oil drilling rig is such a big deal, especially at the time of sanctions.

“The cost of building many factories is less than the cost of building a rig, and building an oil rig is very important,” he said.

“Given the country’s capacities, we need drilling equipment and accessories for many years to come, and the construction of a rig in Iran was one of the aspirations of the oil industry which realized today,” the minister added.

Zangeneh has said Iran’s oil, gas and petroleum sectors are on the frontline of the fight against the United States’ “maximum pressure” which President Donald Trump has aggressively applied on the oil industry with an express aim of bringing the country’s exports down to zero.

Next month, Iran is about to launch its biggest refinery for processing gas associated with oil production, built by local companies.

The Persian Gulf Bid Boland Gas Refinery in Behbahan is expected to be “the source of a major change in reducing environmental pollution and developing the petrochemical industry”, Zangeneh said this month.

Iran... (Continued From Page 2)

trade with Iran while protecting companies from sanctions, but so far it has found little success.

Borrell said that everyone at the meeting acknowledged the importance of further strengthening INSTEX, and Iran seemed somewhat optimistic after the talks.

“We discussed about different ways on how to strengthen this mechanism, how to provide it with more liquidity and funding, how to make sure that this mechanism can work, and I think the willingness is strong,” Iran’s Araqchi said. “Also the methods we discussed today can be utilized to expand trade between Iran and the EU.”

U.S. nuclear diplomacy with Iran has reached a stalemate. The Washington Post said on Wednesday Republican Senator Lindsey Graham and Democratic Senator Robert Menendez traveled to Europe earlier this month to discuss their new nuclear plan with the European leaders, including French President Emmanuel Macron, on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference.

They have assured the European leaders that the final deal would be ratified by the Senate in order to avoid the fate of the previous nuclear deal with Iran.

The new scheme, it said, includes the Arab allies of the United States in the Persian Gulf.

The plan, it said, offers free access to nuclear fuel for civilian energy purposes. In exchange, both Iran and the Persian Gulf countries are expected to abandon fuel enrichment inside their own countries forever. Iran would also benefit a limited sanctions relief.

“The goal is to give Iran nuclear power without enrichment. That way they can have what they say they want, nuclear power. And the world never has to worry about a bomb, because you can’t make a bomb unless you enrich,” Graham said. Tehran has maintained that nuclear enrichment is its absolute right, thus non-negotiable.

Based on the Graham-Menendez plan, Washington and Tehran would subsequently negotiate a comprehensive agreement including restrictions on Iran’s missile program in exchange for broader sanctions relief.

Iran has time and again asserted that it would not negotiate on its missile capabilities under any circumstances.