

Woman Jailed for ‘Challenging’ Saudi King, Crown Prince on Twitter

RIYADH (Dispatches) – A woman sentenced to 45 years in prison was found guilty of “challenging the religion and justice” of Saudi Arabia’s King Salman and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS), the country’s 37-year-old de facto ruler, through the use of Twitter.

Nourah al-Qahtani, a mother of five, was sentenced to jail last week for Twitter posts found to be malicious by the Saudi authorities. The harsh punishment drew international condemnation, which highlighted the poor human rights records of the kingdom.



Saudi men walk outside the General Court in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

The sentencing document was provided to media outlets by Democracy for the Arab World Now (DAWN), a Washington-based rights group founded by Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi, who was murdered by agents of the Saudi government at the behest of MBS at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul on October 2, 2018.

Qahtani, a mother of five in her late 40s who suffers from “unspecified health issues,” also used

Twitter to “insult state symbols and officials” and demand “the release of detainees pending security cases,” the document said, according to AFP.

Her 45-year prison sentence came to light less than a month after another Saudi woman, Salma al-Shehab, was sentenced to 34 years in prison for having a Twitter account and for following and retweeting the critics of the kingdom.

Shehab, 34, a mother of two

young children and a student at Leeds University, was detained in Saudi Arabia in January 2021 when she was visiting home for a vacation. She was initially sentenced to six years in prison for using social media to “disturb public order and destabilize the security and stability of the state.”

However, an appeals court on August 15 handed her the 34-year prison sentence followed by a 34-year travel ban, after a public pros-

ecutor asked the court to consider other alleged crimes.

Qahtani’s sentence “is now part of a pattern,” Abdullah Alaoudh, DAWN’s director of research for the Persian Gulf region, told AFP.

“Targeting ordinary people is meant to send a shockwave of fear to the locals and Saudi public to refrain from even criticizing the Saudi government via anonymous Twitter accounts,” Alaoudh added.

Ever since bin Salman became Saudi Arabia’s de facto leader in 2017, the kingdom has arrested hundreds of activists, bloggers, intellectuals, and others for their political activism, showing almost zero tolerance for dissent even in the face of international condemnation of the crackdown.

Muslim scholars have been executed and women’s rights campaigners have been put behind bars and tortured as freedom of expression, association, and belief continues to be denied by the kingdom’s authorities. Over the past years, Riyadh has also redefined its anti-terrorism laws to target activism.

Saudis Seize Two More Yemen-Bound Fuel Ships, Violate Ceasefire

RIYADH (Dispatches) – The Saudi-led coalition forces have seized two more Yemen-bound oil tankers carrying thousands of tons of fuel for the conflict-plagued country in flagrant breach of a UN-brokered ceasefire that has been extended by another two months.

Essam al-Mutawakil, a spokesman for the Yemen Petroleum Company (YPC), announced in a post published on his Twitter page on Tuesday that the Riyadh-led alliance did not give SUPER EMERALD and OCEAN AUTUMN tankers, which were carrying tens of thousands of tons of petrol each, the permission to dock at Yemen’s western port of Hudaydah and offload their shipments.

Mutawakil added that the vessels were impounded despite being inspected and cleared for the port call by the United Nations staff.

The latest incident brings to twelve the number of fuel ships detained by the coalition despite having undergone inspection, the senior Yemeni energy official noted.

Moreover, Saudi-led coalition forces and their allied militant groups have breached the UN-brokered nationwide truce at least 150 times during the past 24 hours.

A Yemeni military official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the violations included 32 flights of armed Saudi-led reconnaissance aircraft in the skies of the provinces of Ma’rib, Ta’izz, Hajjah, al-Jawf, Sa’ada, Hudaydah, Dhale and al-Bayda, as well as border areas.

The official added that Saudi-led troops and their mercenaries also fortified their positions in the vicinity of al-Hannaya School in al-Aqrud sub-district of the al-Misrakh district in Ye-

men’s southern coastal province of Ta’izz, and in al-Rawda sub-district of the al-Jubah district in Ma’rib province.

Moreover, Saudi-led troops and allied militants fired shots on 90 occasions at residential buildings and the positions of Yemeni army troops and fighters from Popular Committees in Ma’rib, Ta’izz, Hajjah, Sa’ada, Dhale and Hudaydah provinces as well as border areas.

Saudi-backed militants also launched a total of 21 artillery rounds, targeting residential buildings in Ma’rib, Hajjah, Sa’ada, Hudaydah and border areas. The facilities of Yemeni armed forces were also hit in Balaq al-Sharqi and Mala’a areas of Ma’rib province.

Last month, the United Nations Special Envoy for Yemen, Hans Grundberg, said the extended UN-sponsored truce, running

from August 2 to October 2, included a commitment from the parties to intensify negotiations to reach an expanded truce agreement as soon as possible.

Under the terms of the truce, commercial flights have resumed from the Yemeni capital of Sana’a to Jordan and Egypt, while oil tankers have been able to dock in the lifeline port city of al-Hudaydah.

Moreover, in line with the agreement, the coalition agreed to end its attacks on Yemeni soil and end a simultaneous siege that it has been enforcing against Yemen.

Yemen has, however, reported many violations of the truce by the Saudi-led forces.

Saudi Arabia launched the devastating war on Yemen in March 2015 in collaboration with its Arab allies and with arms and logistics support from the U.S. and other Western states.

Lebanon to Name Second Investigator to Stalled Beirut Blast Probe

BEIRUT (Reuters) – Lebanon’s judiciary wants to appoint a second judge to a stalled investigation into the Beirut port blast, according to a letter seen by Reuters, further complicating efforts to hold officials to account over a tragedy that killed more than 220 people.

Judge Tarek Bitar’s investigation into the 2020 explosion, which flattened swathes of the city when hundreds of tons of ammonium nitrate stored at the port detonated, has been suspended since late 2021 by lawsuits brought by senior politicians whom he has sought to question.

That has left him unable to summon suspects or press charges, but also means that individuals detained after the blast but cleared of suspicion have remained in custody.

In the letter, Justice Minister Henry Khoury asked the country’s Higher Judicial Council to discuss assigning a judicial investigator “to work on urgent and necessary matters in the Beirut port explosion

case.”

That secondary judge would stay in place “as long as the original investigator cannot carry out his missions — including release requests,” according to a copy of the letter seen by Reuters.

The Judicial Council had agreed to the plan, and Khoury would now propose one or more candidates, a senior judicial source said, adding that the new judge would not be empowered to issue charges.

Khoury did not respond to a request for comment.

A second judicial source said Bitar had been surprised by the move, which he considered “illegal,” and that he would not step down from his role and was keen to return to investigating in full.

A group of independent lawmakers denounced it for “gross violations” of the judicial process said it was intended as a “final blow” to Bitar’s role, according to a statement.

Syrian Air Defenses Intercept Second Zionist Missile Attack in Week

DAMASCUS (Dispatches) – An air attack by the Zionist regime on Aleppo airport in Syria’s north has damaged the runway and taken it out of service, the Syrian state media said quoting a military source in the wake of the second reported attack on the airport in less than a week.

The occupying regime’s missile attack was launched from the Mediterranean Sea, west of the coastal city of Latakia, at 8:16pm local time (17:16 GMT), the SANA news agency said.

Syrian air defenses intercepted the Zionist regime’s missiles, downing several of them,

the SANA said.

It made no mention of casualties but only reported “material damage.”

The so-called Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, an opposition war monitor, said on Wednesday that three people had been killed in the attack, and that the target was allegedly a warehouse in the airport.

The transport ministry said all flights will be diverted to the capital, Damascus. The private airliner Cham Wings said in a statement that it is diverting all its flights from Aleppo to the international airport of Damascus. It added that passengers will be shuttled

by buses for free between the two cities.

Al Jazeera could not independently verify the claims of the attacks, but the Zionist regime has carried out hundreds of attacks inside Syria since 2011.

The Aleppo airport suffered material damage in the regime’s missile attacks on August 31, according to the Syrian state media.

Last week’s strike tore a hole in the runway and also damaged a structure close to the military side of the airfield.

Syria’s foreign minister last week said the attack “completely destroyed the navigation station with its equipment.”

Putin ... (Continued From Page One)

the Far East -- a region with close geopolitical and economic ties to Russia’s Asian neighbors -- comes a day after the Russian president oversaw large-scale military drills there.

The week-long maneuvers, called Vostok-2022, were concluding on Wednesday and involved several Kremlin-friendly countries, including China.

Putin is expected next week to hold an in-person meeting with Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping, who has not left China since 2020 due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The two leaders will meet at a summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) held in Uzbekistan on September 15 and 16, a Russian diplomat said Wednesday.

Beijing and Moscow have drawn closer in recent years, ramping up cooperation as part of what they call a “no limits” relationship, acting as a counterweight to the global dominance of the United States.

Beijing has refused to condemn Moscow’s intervention in Ukraine and provided diplomatic cover by blasting Western sanctions and arms sales to Kyiv, heightening tensions between China and the West.

Tensions were further strained during the August visit of U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi to self-ruled, democratic Taiwan, which China considers its territory.

In a sign of further rapprochement, Russia announced Tuesday that China will be switching from U.S. dollars to the national currencies of the two countries -- yuan and rubles -- to pay for deliveries of Russian natural gas.

Putin said Wednesday that “confidence has been lost” in U.S. dollars, euros and British pounds, and Russia is distancing itself from such “unreliable, compromised” currencies.

Host... (Continued From Page One)

Paris, following which it moved its base to Iraq.

The group members spent many years in Iraq, where they were hosted and armed by the former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein. They sided with Iraq during the 1980-88 war against Iran, and then helped the Iraqi dictator quell uprisings in various parts of the Arab country.

Albania started hosting the terrorists after the cult was shunned by the government of former Iraqi prime minister Nouri al-Maliki.

The terrorist outfit caught the United States and its allies’ attention in the 2000s.

In 2012, it was taken out of the U.S. list of terrorist organizations. The EU has also removed the MKO from its list of terrorist organizations.

Experts have underlined the role that the U.S. played in resettling the terrorist group from Iraq to Albania. Some say Tirana accepted to accommodate the terrorists in order to secure substantial American financial support.

“Although the group gets little mainstream attention, it has actively been courted by powers hostile to Iran, primarily the United States,” analysis London-headquartered website Emerging Europe reported last year.

In 2020, Olsi Jazexhi, an Albanian historian, said that the MKO was not embraced by Albania but imposed on it by the administration of former U.S. president Barack Obama’s administration.

“Albania today is ruled by the US embassy in Tirana. The embassy vets our politicians...and it decides which politicians enter parliament or not. The hosting of MKO in Albania is not an Albanian affair, but an American-Israeli affair,” he said last year.

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Multiple other industries are mulling similar industrial action.

“Real wages are falling, certainly faster than they have done for at least 45 years, possibly for about as much as 100 years,” said Greg Thwaites, an economist and research director at the Resolution Foundation, a UK economic and social affairs think tank.

Warning of Long Recession

The Bank of England has predicted that skyrocketing energy prices will push the UK into recession later this year, with economic output forecast to decline in every quarter of 2023.

The International Monetary Fund says the UK economy is expected to have the weakest growth among the Group of Seven wealthy democracies in 2023.

“The point is that this acute living-standard crisis that we’re living through now comes on the back of 15 years of very weak growth in the UK economy,” Thwaites said.

Britain’s exit from the European Union didn’t help matters, he added.

Truss is due to announce a major financial package Thursday to tackle soaring energy costs.

Her government has not released details, but British media reports suggest she will approve an immediate freeze on household energy bills and extra support for businesses.

The BBC reports that energy bills could be capped with the introduction of a government “superfund,” from which energy firms can borrow, and the cost of such aid could reach 100 million pounds (\$116 billion).

Bank of England Governor Andrew Bailey said Wednesday that such measures will likely calm inflation in the short term. But it’s not clear how Truss’ government intends to foot that huge bill, while meeting her core campaign promises to slash taxes and grow the economy.

“There’s a reasonable question about whether it should be paid for by future electricity bills or by future taxpayers or by current taxpayers,” Thwaites said. “But ultimately, somebody needs to pay.”

Hannah White, acting director of the Institute for Government, says the measures go against the prime minister’s inclinations.

“What (Truss) is being pushed into, which is way against her instincts, is a big program of government spending to support people in this situation,” White said. “She’s really got no alternative, but it goes directly counter to how she would ideally govern as prime minister.”

Iran ... (Continued From Page One)

sector was initially established in the early stages of the Sacred Defense (the Iraqi imposed war in the 1980s). We have attained tremendous success in the field of cooperation between universities and the defense sector. We can definitely declare that we have turned from an importer of barbed wire into an exporter of technology,” Hajizadeh said.

“Thanks to artificial intelligence, we have managed to defeat the enemy at a distance of more than a thousand kilometers away.”

“The IRGC Aerospace Force enjoys fairly high standards in terms of technicality, military hardware, and reduction of the adverse effects of signal jamming,” Hajizadeh said.

He also said the enemies of Iran have admitted the abject failure of the so-called maximum pressure campaign, and the fact that Iran has turned into an undisputed power.

“Iran’s security comes from within and is at an excellent level,” the commander said, also praising Iran’s capability to put satellites into orbit.

“We are among the top 20 countries in the world concerning radar production, and we are among the major powers in the field of drones and precision strike missiles,” Hajizadeh said.

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purchase so that we can avoid sanctions,” one of the sources said.

The second government source said Amani had extended the offer from Iran to Prime Minister Najib Mikati, who provided the envoy with the specifications of fuel grade that would be needed to run Lebanese power plants. “Based on that, Mikati asked Energy Minister Walid Fayad to prepare a technical delegation to discuss the technical details with officials in Tehran,” the source said.

The first source said the delegation would be in Tehran in the coming days. Reuters quoted what it called an Iranian official as saying that a delegation from Lebanon would be in Tehran shortly “to discuss various issues,” without elaborating. “We have repeatedly expressed Iran’s readiness to help Lebanon resolve its fuel crisis,” the official said, Reuters claimed.

Last year, Iran sent fuel to Lebanon. That fuel was shipped to Syria and then brought into Lebanon in trucks to try and avoid sanctions.

The head of Hezbollah, Hassan Nasrallah, has repeatedly urged Lebanon’s government to turn to Iran for fuel to ease its energy crisis.