

Massive funeral for slain Palestinian teenager

Author:

Sat, 2020-12-05 23:57

RAMALLAH: Hundreds of Palestinians attended the funeral on Saturday of a teenager killed in clashes with the Israeli army, defying a curfew imposed on the occupied West Bank to stem the coronavirus.

Ali Ayman Nasr Abu Aliya, 13, died on Friday after he was “shot with live rounds in the stomach” during clashes in the village of Mughayir, north of Ramallah, the Palestinian Health Ministry said.

The boy, whose death drew Palestinian condemnation and was deplored by the UN and the EU, was hit during a protest against the construction of a Jewish settlement.

A funeral cortege joined by hundreds of mourners took the body from a hospital in Ramallah to Mughayir where Abu Aliya was buried.

His body, draped in the Palestinian flag and a traditional keffiyeh headscarf, was carried shoulder high by mourners, who also waved yellow flags of the Fatah movement of President Mahmoud Abbas.

The mourners defied a weekend curfew imposed by Palestinian authorities to stem the rise in coronavirus cases to pay their respects.

The West Bank has recorded 71,703 Covid-19 infections, including 678 deaths, since the first cases emerged earlier this year.

The EU delegation to the Palestinians on Saturday denounced the “shocking” killing of Abu Aliya in a tweet.

“This shocking incident must be swiftly and fully investigated by the Israeli authorities in order to bring the perpetrators to justice,” it said.

“How many more Palestinian children will be subject to the excessive use of lethal force by the Israeli security forces?”

UN Middle East envoy Nickolay Mladenov said on Friday he was “appalled by the killing” and also called on Israel to investigate the death of Abu Aliya calling it an “unacceptable incident.”

The Israeli army denied live rounds were used during Friday’s protest and clashes, but said dozens of protesters had thrown rocks at security forces.

The Palestinian Authority condemned “the cold-blooded murder” describing it as “the latest episode in Israel’s crimes against the Palestinian people.”

The Palestinian foreign ministry said on Friday it will file legal proceedings against Israel at the International Criminal Court over Abu Alya’s fatal shooting, the Palestinians’ Wafa news agency said.

Israel has occupied the West Bank since 1967. Excluding annexed east Jerusalem, more than 450,000 Israelis live in settlements in the territory, which is home to more than 2.8 million Palestinians.



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Israeli defense minister calls on Palestinians to return to negotiations

[IISS Manama Dialogue examines Middle East's pressing security challenges](#)

Sat, 2020-12-05 23:24

LONDON: COVID-19's impact on governance, multilateralism and the rules-based global order topped the agenda on day one of the 16th annual Manama Dialogue in Bahrain, organized by the UK-based International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS).

Although the conference, running from Dec. 4-6, is exploring the broader themes of Middle East conflict and security, the strategic and geo-economic implications of the COVID-19 pandemic predictably dominated Saturday's discussions.

"This year we bore witness to a cooperation deficit in international

affairs,” said John Chipman, IISS director-general and chief executive, opening the conference, whose focus this year is on the themes of war, power and rules.

“We now swing perilously on the hinge between an old rules-based order that seems poorly maintained for contemporary purposes, and a new order that is yet to be well engineered and strategically designed.”

Headlining Saturday’s morning session, Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan called 2020 an “unprecedented” year, with “challenges posed by a pandemic that is leaving a lasting mark both of state resilience and multilateral cooperation.”



Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan addresses the Manama Dialogue security conference in the Bahraini capital, on December 5, 2020. (AFP)

It has also been a year of positive lessons, however, as “through collective action we have shown how the international community can come together during times of crisis,” he said.

Prince Faisal outlined Riyadh’s “whole-of-government approach” to tackling the pandemic, including an allocation of SR 47 billion (\$12.53 billion) for bolstering the Saudi health system; heavy investment in mass testing and contact tracing; and economic interventions to reduce interest rates, protect private-sector financing and banking liquidity, and ease tax burdens.

He also highlighted the role Saudi Arabia has played through its presidency of the G20 international forum, which has committed \$11 trillion in economic stimulus, pledged over \$21 billion to the fight against the pandemic, and

offered debt relief to developing countries totaling \$14 billion.

“Given the multiple prospects of an effective vaccine, the Kingdom seeks to work with international partners towards ensuring a fair and speedy distribution of the vaccine globally, and especially to countries most in need,” he said.

Seconding Prince Faisal’s view, Kang Kyung-wha, South Korea’s foreign minister, identified the pressing need for closer cooperation as the coronavirus pandemic’s key lesson.

“Global governance was already at a low point when COVID-19 struck, with trust in multilateralism and the rules-based international order already greatly eroded,” she said.

“COVID-19 is indeed a humble reminder of our interconnectedness and our shared vulnerability, and thus the critical importance of global solidarity and international cooperation.”



German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas (R) and Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan arrive for a joint press conference in Berlin, on August 19, 2020. (AFP/File Photo)

Kang urged countries to support each other in strengthening emergency health capabilities and guaranteeing equitable access to supplies, treatments and vaccines. More specifically, she cited the need for strengthening the global health architecture centered around the World Health Organization (WHO), upgrading health regulations, and motivating the UN to streamline efforts against future pandemics.

This must go hand in hand with economic cooperation ranging from expansionary budgets and stimulus packages to normalization of cross-border movement of peoples, Kang said.

Echoing the sentiments of his fellow panelists, Miguel Berger, Germany's state secretary for the federal foreign office, described COVID-19 as the "biggest test of our generation" and "the most serious challenge" for the multilateral system.

"The erosion of global governance started even before the COVID-19 crisis," he said. "The reason is not that multilateralism is failing but that some of us are failing to support multilateralism."

Berger said he is especially proud of Germany's role in the quest to find a vaccine, hailing the achievements of BioNTech, which worked alongside the American pharmaceutical giant Pfizer to create the world's first licensed shot.

"The hope is that we are going to have very effective vaccines soon available as a very important first step," said Berger. "Now we must arrange a fair and even distribution. ... This will be a crucial test in our view for multilateralism."

Berger commended Saudi Arabia "for leading the G20 countries through this very difficult crisis with strong commitment and leadership."

FASTFACT

IISS

* Provides objective information on military, geopolitical and geo-economic developments that could lead to conflict.

"The Riyadh summit has taken very important decisions in order to counter the effects of this crisis," he said, referring to the virtual leaders' conference held last month.

One of the most interesting questions that emerged during the discussion was the widespread hesitance surrounding the vaccine candidates, including in the Middle East, which potentially makes the case for compulsory immunization.

"I think it is always better to give the choice to the people but you then need to provide the facts and the evidence that enables that choice," said Kang, highlighting the role of trust in crisis management.

Referring to the phenomenon of facts, rumors and fears mixing and dispersing, she said: "Infodemics are much more dangerous than pandemics. Because in infodemics, when you lose the importance of facts and evidence, you don't have any anchor to decide which direction to go."

“Fake news, misinformation, disinformation ... are something that responsible leaders really need to get our minds wrapped around.”



Russian and Turkish soldiers walk together while clad in surgical masks due to the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic during a joint Russian-Turkish military patrol in the countryside near Darbasiyah along the border with Turkey in Syria's northeastern Hasakah province on November 30, 2020. (AFP/File Photo)

Kang added that with people so wrapped up in their own “misinformed universes,” it becomes very difficult to build consensus.

The Manama Dialogue is taking place against a backdrop not only of the pandemic but also tectonic shifts in the power and diplomatic balance of the Middle East and the prospect of significant changes when the new administration of Democrat Joe Biden assumes office.

Central to these shifts are the Abraham Accords, which saw the UAE, Bahrain and Sudan normalize relations with Israel in September – only the third, fourth and fifth Arab countries to do so since Egypt and Jordan decades earlier. This in turn has given new impetus to resolving the Israel-Palestine conflict.

“Regarding Palestine and Israel and also whether we will at some point join the Abraham Accords,” Prince Faisal said in his remarks, “for Saudi (Arabia), it is critical to get the Israelis and the Palestinians back to the negotiating table. That is the only way to bring about lasting regional peace.”

Delegates are curious as to how Joe Biden, one of the architects of the Obama-era Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), would handle future

relations with Iran.



Turkish-backed Syrian rebel fighters, mask-clad due to the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic, take part in a military parade marking the graduation of a new batch of cadets and attended by officials from the Turkey-backed opposition in the town of Jindayris, in the Afrin region of the northern Syrian rebel-held province of Aleppo, on November 14, 2020. (AFP/File Photo)

The Trump administration has pursued a campaign of “maximum pressure” to force Iran to abandon its nuclear and ballistic missile programs and to stop its geopolitical muscle-flexing. Many worry Biden intends to turn back the clock.

“We learned the lessons from the prior administration’s appeasement. Sending pallets of cash didn’t change Iran’s behavior; rather, it funded and supercharged their terror campaigns,” Mike Pompeo, the US secretary of state, told delegates via video link on Friday evening.

“We know our campaign is working because now the Iranians are desperately signaling their willingness to return to the negotiating table to get sanctions relief.”

Germany is one of the core signatories of the JCPOA and among several European powers that have fought to preserve the deal since the US withdrew in May 2018. In his remarks, Berger said Germany and other signatories “will be waiting to see the direction of the new US administration.”

However, as a result of Iran’s non-compliance in important areas of the JCPOA and its recent advances in nuclear research and development, signatories

recognize the deal will need to be updated, he added.

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Iran still a destabilizing influence in Middle East, Saudi Arabia committed to regional peace: Prince FaisalEmir of Kuwait thanks King Salman for efforts to resolve Gulf dispute

[Bethlehem lights up Christmas tree as virus rules keep crowds away](#)

Author:

AFP

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Sat, 2020-12-05 18:19

BETHLEHEM: Bethlehem lit up its Christmas tree on Saturday evening but without the usual crowds, as novel coronavirus restrictions put a damper on

the start of Christmas festivities in the holy city.

Palestinian authorities last week announced measures, including a night-time curfew, across the Israeli-occupied West Bank for 14 days to fight a “worrying spread” of the virus.

Locals and pilgrims traditionally gather each year for the lighting of the tree in Manger Square, near the Church of the Nativity, built on the site where Christians believe Jesus was born.

But this year, only a small crowd of journalists was present due to coronavirus restrictions, an AFP photographer said.

Carmen Ghattas, director of public relations at the Bethlehem municipality, told AFP that Palestinian prime minister Mohammed Shtayyeh had lit up the tree remotely from his office in Ramallah.

The West Bank, with a Palestinian population of more than 2.8 million, has officially recorded 71,703 coronavirus infections, including 678 deaths.

Israel has occupied the territory since 1967.







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Life in Gaza 'extraordinarily difficult' for disabled: HRWGaza gets vital medical aid as hospitals struggle with rising infections

[**Istanbul turns to foreign funding as state banks close their doors to city**](#)

Sat, 2020-12-05 22:11

ANKARA: The refusal of Turkey's state-run banks to extend loans to Istanbul is forcing the municipality to seek loans from abroad.

At a press conference in Istanbul on Wednesday, Ekrem Imamoglu, the mayor of Istanbul, announced that the municipality issued its first eurobond to international capital markets to fund its new infrastructure projects.

The municipality secured \$580 million of financing with this eurobond for

four landmark subway projects in the city.

“Our relationship with foreign financing sources will continue. This could be either another bond issue, project financing or another instrument,” Imamoglu said.

Imamoglu declared he will focus on metro projects in 2021 following the repeated calls of Istanbulites to ease the traffic jams in the second most congested city in the world.

Imamoglu emerged a powerful challenger to the authority of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) since he won two local elections last year in March, then in June to be elected the mayor of 16 million people.

The local projects he has implemented so far attracted various segments of the society as they touched on their daily needs. Imamoglu is also expected to challenge Erdogan in the next presidential elections in 2023.

Turkish state banks closed their doors to the municipality after they had supported AKP-affiliated municipalities for the past 25 years.

“It is no secret that Erdogan felt threatened by the loss of Istanbul to the opposition. He refused to accept the loss initially and demanded a rerun of the election, which – embarrassingly – Imamoglu won even more decisively. Now Imamoglu has emerged as a serious contender for 2023 and therefore has a target on his back,” said Paul T. Levin, director of the Stockholm University Institute for Turkish Studies.

“It is unsurprising that the AKP uses its sway over state banks to make governing difficult for the opposition mayor, but it is the citizens of the city who will ultimately pay for it,” he told Arab News.

Given Istanbul’s importance to the country’s economy, Levin warns that trying to punish Imamoglu may backfire and end up hurting Turkey’s rulers, especially Erdogan.

FASTFACT

The Istanbul mayor emerged a powerful challenger to the authority of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) since he won two local elections last year in March, then in June to be elected the mayor of 16 million people.

Separately, the government has not abandoned the controversial Kanal Istanbul, The \$9 billion project, dubbed as Erdogan’s “crazy project,” aims to connect Black Sea and Marmara Sea through an artificial waterway. It has drawn harsh criticism from Imamoglu who has been a vocal opponent of the project on environmental and financial grounds along with the fear that it might trigger earthquakes.

The security around Istanbul mayor was recently increased following serious claims of Daesh-linked assassination plot.

According to Berk Esen, a political analyst from Sabanci University in Istanbul, the state banks' decision to not offer loans to opposition-controlled municipalities is another sign of the increasingly authoritarian regime in Turkey.

"The AKP government has turned the state bureaucracy into its partisan machine, using public resources to favor the party base and punishing opposition voters," he said.

"This is a deliberate move by the government to leave mayors from opposition parties without sufficient funds to service the municipality debt and undertake large-scale public projects simultaneously," he said.

Similarly, a senior official at the Ankara municipality confirmed that public banks are refraining from extending loans to the capital as well.

In March 2019 elections, the opposition candidate, Mansur Yavas, ended 25 years of rule by the mayors affiliated to the AKP who benefited continually from the loans of state banks for strange and unpopular urban projects such as dinosaur parks.

According to Esen, the AKP elites calculate that these projects could help opposition mayors draw votes from their base, thereby undermining the AKP's political hegemony.

"State banks are a convenient tool to use for this strategy. Under the AKP rule, the state banks instead turned into cash machines for pro-government businesses who openly side with Erdogan," he said.



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Turkey's main opposition faces a continuous physical threat Turkey in weekend lockdown with coronavirus cases at record highs

[Lebanon's 'hunger heroes' bring food to people in need](#)

Author:

Sat, 2020-12-05 01:58

DUBAI: Preparing over a million meals is no mean feat, but it is an even more extraordinary endeavor when achieved solely through the power of volunteers, donations and the salvaging of over 200 tons of food waste.

Since it was established eight years ago after Maya Terro and her team won a competition, the Beirut-based social enterprise FoodBlessed has grown steadily and organically.

"I was able to turn my passion for food and my pursuit of empowering others into a humanitarian mission that nourishes individuals, communities, and public institutions to promote positive change in their country – one meal at a time," said Terro, executive director of FoodBlessed.

After raising \$2,600 through a fundraising initiative during the holy month of Ramadan, the company began to divert food from landfills, feed hungry people throughout Lebanon, and use food to "build communities and tackle loneliness."

"We believe that food is an act of love, for the planet and its people," Terro said. "In the long term, we strive to create a cultural shift fueled by mindful consumption. It is only when people see and appreciate the value of food that they will they stop wasting it and start sharing it."

As a community-based and volunteer-driven initiative, FoodBlessed relies heavily on the help and generosity of volunteers and monetary and in-kind donations.

The coronavirus pandemic has naturally had a negative effect on the country's economy and, subsequently, access to food. Over 3,000 community volunteers (otherwise known as "hunger heroes") have signed up to be part of the solution.

"The current broken Lebanese economy will probably need a minimum of five

years to recover,” said Terro. “In this period, we will be diligently working on providing food assistance to Lebanese families across the whole of Lebanon on a weekly basis, be it through a meal or a food parcel.

“One food parcel costs us \$19 and is enough to provide food sustenance to a family of four for between three to four weeks. To date, we have successfully distributed 5,000 food parcels across the whole of Lebanon.”

Human compassion is at the forefront of FoodBlessed’s values. Alongside its work with food, the organization aims to help vulnerable communities, including refugees, domestic migrant workers and single mothers – all made possible thanks to its extended network of NGOs, partners, and community members.

IN NUMBERS

- 5,000 Food parcels distributed in Lebanon by FoodBlessed.
- \$19 Cost to FoodBlessed of one food parcel.

FoodBlessed also works on rebuilding the dignity of those in need in the way they deliver the food. Terro said: “Instead of lining up for food, like in most humanitarian relief settings, our guests are invited to sit down at our table and made to feel at home.”

However, FoodBlessed’s success has not come without its challenges. Within the first year of starting up, both of Terro’s teammates left, leaving her to manage the company on her own.

“The key to success is self-belief and being true to oneself. Turning rejections into motivations, and embracing one’s difference and uniqueness is the only way to make it in the world,” she said.

“Sadly, the majority of people, including sometimes the people closest to you, will judge you and often mistaken your diligent determination for ego or for aggressiveness. Nevertheless, I urge you to never lose hope.”

• This report is being published by Arab News as a partner of the Middle East Exchange, which was launched by the Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Global Initiatives to reflect the vision of the UAE prime minister and ruler of Dubai to explore the possibility of changing the status of the Arab region.



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Hunger threatens Lebanon if leaders don't act, UK minister warns
Lebanon plunged into 'deliberate depression': World Bank