

Ex-Tehran mayor sentenced to death over wife's murder

Author:

Tue, 2019-07-30 21:53

TEHRAN: Former Tehran mayor Mohammad Ali Najafi was sentenced to death after being convicted of murdering his wife, the judiciary said Tuesday, after a high-profile case that received extensive media coverage.

A prominent reformist, Najafi was found guilty of shooting dead his second wife Mitra Ostad at their home in the capital on May 28, said Iran's judiciary spokesman Gholamhossein Esmaili.

According to Iranian media reports, her body was found in a bathtub after Najafi, 67, turned himself in and confessed to killing her.

"The charge sheet included premeditated murder, battery and possession of an illegal firearm," Esmaili said, quoted by the judiciary's official news agency Mizan Online.

"The court has established premeditated murder and passed the execution sentence," he added.

Najafi was acquitted of the battery charge but received a two-year jail sentence for possessing the illegal firearm, the spokesman said without elaborating.

His lawyer said he would appeal the sentence.

"We hope the supreme court accepts our concerns and helps justice to be served by rejecting the verdict," ISNA news agency quoted Hamid Goudarzi as saying.

Ostad's family had appealed for the Islamic law of retribution to be applied – an "eye for an eye" form of punishment which would see the death penalty served in this instance.

Najafi's trial received detailed coverage in state media where scandals related to politicians rarely appear on television.

A mathematician, professor and veteran politician, Najafi had previously served as President Hassan Rouhani's economic adviser and education minister. He was elected Tehran mayor in August 2017, but resigned the following April after facing criticism from conservatives for attending a dance performed by schoolgirls.

Najafi married Ostad without divorcing his first wife, unusual in Iran where polygamy is legal but socially frowned upon.

Some of Iran's ultra-conservatives said the case showed the "moral bankruptcy" of reformists, while reformists accused the conservative-dominated state television of bias in its coverage and highlighting the case for political ends.



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[Sudan shuts all schools after pupils' killing](#)

Tue, 2019-07-30 22:10

KHARTOUM: Sudanese authorities Tuesday ordered all schools nationwide to suspend classes indefinitely after crowds of students launched demonstrations against the killing of five pupils at a rally in a central town.

"Killing a student is killing a nation," chanted hundreds of schoolchildren, dressed in their uniforms and waving Sudanese flags, as they took to the streets of Khartoum against the killing of five students in Al-Obeid on Monday.

Sporadic protests by schoolchildren were also held in other parts of the capital and in other cities.

Five high school students were shot dead and more than 60 wounded, some by snipers, when they rallied in Al-Obeid against fuel and bread shortages, the protest movement and residents said.

Demonstrators accused feared paramilitaries of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF)

of shooting dead the teenagers.

Late on Tuesday, the authorities ordered all schools nationwide to suspend classes.

"Orders have been given to governors of all states to shut kindergartens, primary and high schools from tomorrow (Wednesday) until further notice," the official SUNA news agency said, following a directive issued by the ruling military council.

The killings came a day before protest leaders were due to hold talks with generals on remaining aspects of installing civilian rule after the two sides inked a power-sharing deal earlier this month.

But protest leaders called off Tuesday's meeting.

"There will be no negotiation today with the Transitional Military Council as our negotiating team is still in Al-Obeid and will return only tonight," said a negotiator and prominent protest leader, Satea Al-Hajj.

Another protest leader told AFP on condition of anonymity that talks would resume after "calm returns to the streets as dialogue is the only way to break the overall political impasse."

The chairman of Sudan's military council, General Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan, condemned the killings.

"What happened in Al-Obeid is sad. Killing peaceful civilians is an unacceptable crime that needs immediate accountability," he told journalists, quoted by state television.

On the streets, crowds of students rallied in Khartoum waving flags and chanting: "The people want to fight for the rights of martyrs."

"We keep silent all the time and they kill us," said Enas Saifeddine, a 16-year-old high school student.

"The five students of Al-Obeid were killed because they were asking for something basic like food, water and electricity."

The UN children's agency UNICEF called on the authorities "to investigate" the killings and hold the perpetrators accountable.

"No child should be buried in their school uniform," UNICEF said, adding that the pupils killed were between 15 and 17 years old.

Authorities announced a night-time curfew in four towns in North Kordofan following the deaths in the state's Al-Obeid, as the main protest group, the Sudanese Professionals Association, called for nationwide rallies against the "massacre."

"The Janjaweed forces and some snipers, without any mercy, confronted school students with live ammunition," the SPA said, referring to the RSF which has its origins in Arab militias that were originally deployed to suppress an ethnic minority rebellion that erupted in Sudan's western region of Darfur in 2003.

Doctors linked to the protest movement say more than 250 people have been killed nationwide in protest-related violence since December when demonstrations first erupted against now ousted president Omar Al-Bashir.

Tuesday's talks were to cover issues including the powers of the joint civilian-military ruling body, the deployment of security forces and immunity for generals over protest-related violence, according to protest leaders.

The power-sharing deal agreed on July 17 calls for the establishment of a new governing body of six civilians and five generals.

But the publication on Saturday of the findings of an investigation commissioned by the military into the deadly dispersal of a Khartoum protest camp in June also triggered angry demonstrations. Shortly before dawn on June 3, gunmen in military fatigues raided the site of a weeks-long sit-in outside army headquarters, shooting and beating protesters.

Doctors linked to the protests say the raid left 127 people dead and scores wounded.

Protest leaders have rejected the findings of a joint investigation by prosecutors and the military council which concluded that just 17 people were killed on June 3, with a total of 87 deaths between that day and June 10.



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School students shot dead at Sudan rally ahead of talksSudan says 87 killed when security forces broke up protest in June

[Arab coalition accuses Houthis of](#)

massacre in northern Yemem

Author:

Mon, 2019-07-29 23:31

JEDDAH: The Arab coalition on Monday accused the Houthi militia of committing a massacre in northern Yemen.

Earlier reports said 13 people were killed in a strike on a market Al-Thabit Al-Shaabi district in Saada province.

The Iran-backed Houthis are committing violations and then accusing coalition forces, Col. Turki Al-Maliki said.



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Russian-backed regime forces recover area in northwestern Syria

Author:

Mon, 2019-07-29 22:31

BEIRUT: Syrian regime forces have recovered control of two villages in northwestern Syria from militants who withdrew following intensive air and artillery bombardment, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said on Monday.

Fighters captured the villages of Al-Jabin and Tel Melah in northern Hama province in early June during a counterattack against regime forces that have been waging a Russian-backed offensive in the area since late April.

An opposition commander in the area confirmed that fighters had withdrawn from Al-Jabin after heavy bombardment.

The pro-Damascus Al-Watan newspaper said the Syrian army had advanced in the area as Syrian and Russian warplanes targeted militant positions and after several days of preparatory fire.

More than 400 civilians have been confirmed killed in the escalation of violence in northwestern Syria over the last three months and more than 440,000 displaced, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs said last week.

Ongoing shelling and airstrikes included the use of “indiscriminate weapons, such as barrel bombs,” it said.

The use of these weapons, which are dropped from helicopters, by the Syrian regime troops has been widely recorded in the eight-year conflict.

The targeted area is part of the last major foothold of the revolution against President Bashar Assad, who has vowed to take back “every inch” of Syria. However, his side has failed to make significant gains during the latest campaign.

The Idlib area of the northwest is dominated by Tahrir Al-Sham, the extremists formerly known as the Nusra Front. It is proscribed as a terrorist group by the UN Security Council. Groups backed by Turkey also have a presence in the area.

The Syrian regime has described its operations as a response to militant violations of cease-fire agreements.

Meanwhile, a US-led coalition airstrike killed five terrorists in eastern Syria, a spokesman said, in the first such raid since the collapse of the Daesh’s “caliphate.”

“Coalition forces conducted a strike against a Daesh cell near Busayrah,” a town in Deir Ezzor province, said coalition spokesman James Rawlinson.

The five terrorists were all Syrian, according to the Observatory.

The head of the UN special probe into Daesh’s crimes has called for trials like those at Nuremberg of Nazi leaders to ensure the terrorists’ victims are heard and their ideology “debunked.”

For a year, British lawyer Karim Khan has traveled around Iraq with a team of almost 80 people to gather evidence and witness testimony for the UN body known as UNITAD.

“It’s a mountain to climb,” the human rights specialist said, as the investigative team works to analyze up to 12,000 bodies from more than 200 mass graves, 600,000 videos of Daesh crimes and 15,000 pages from the group’s bureaucracy.

Five years ago, when their self-proclaimed “caliphate” spanned territory the size of the UK, the terrorists imposed their brutal rule over 7 million people across Iraq and Syria with administrations, schools, child soldiers, a severe interpretation of their ideologies and medieval punishments.

Daesh “was not some kind of guerilla warfare or a mobile rebel group ... that’s one aspect that is unusual” for international justice, Khan said from the ultra-secure UNITAD headquarters in Baghdad.

“There was no taboo” for Daesh, Khan said.

“Who could have thought in the 21st century we would see crucifixion or

burning a human alive in a cage, slavery, sexual slavery, throwing people off buildings, beheadings."

And all this captured "with a TV camera."

Despite the horror, these crimes "are not new," he said.

"What is new perhaps with Daesh, is that the ideology fuels the criminal group in the same way that fascism fueled the criminal pogroms of Hitler."

Today almost every day Iraqis are sentenced, often to death, but the victims are not present at the trials and the only charge brought is belonging to Daesh.

But Khan said trials where evidence and testimony are exposed to everyone are the only way to turn the page.

After Daesh, "Iraq and humanity requires its Nuremberg moment," he said.

Because of Nuremberg, "nobody could be taken seriously if they would espouse the principles of Mein Kampf (written by Adolf Hitler). In fact alarms bells in the public conscience would be aroused if anybody thought the principles of fascism were an alternative political philosophy," he added.

Nuremberg also "separated the poison of fascism from the German people," according to Khan.

"It was one of the principles of Nuremberg that there is no collective guilt," but individuals held responsible, and condemned.

A fair trial for Daesh "can also contribute to separating the poison of IS from the Sunni community," a minority group in Iraq, Khan said.

And where "Nuremberg also educated Germany (and) Europe," a Daesh trial would have an "educative effect, not only in the region, but in other parts of the world where communities may be vulnerable to the lies and propaganda of" Daesh.

"That ideology can be debunked, so people that are watching ... can realize a self-evident truth, that it was the most un-Islamic state that we have seen," Khan added.

UNITAD is working to establish if Daesh actions constitute crimes against humanity, war crimes or genocide, the most serious crimes in international law.

"You will see in the next two months that we are feeding into some prosecutions that are already taking place in some states," he added.

UNITAD "will build our own cases also" that will permit states which like Germany have universal jurisdiction to deal with crimes regardless of where they were committed and the nationality of the perpetrators and victims.

Some trials are already in motion, notably in France for attacks claimed by Daesh and in Munich where a German woman has been charged with having left a young Yazidi girl “purchased” at a Daesh slave market to die of thirst.

But, Khan said, “Iraq is the primary intended recipient of our evidence, of our information.”

Iraq has already tried thousands of its own nationals arrested on home soil for joining Daesh and has sentenced hundreds to death, whether they fought for the group or not.

“The forum is not so important,” Khan said, as the possibility of an international tribunal has been raised by some but seems unlikely in the near future.

What is essential is that “the victims have the right to have their voice heard.”



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Air strikes kill 15 civilians in northwest Syria
Syria's Rukban camp dwindles after five-month Russian siege

School students shot dead at Sudan rally ahead of talks

Author:

Mon, 2019-07-29 21:32

KHARTOUM: Four Sudanese school students were among five demonstrators shot dead Monday during a rally against shortages of bread and fuel, a day before protest leaders and ruling generals are set to hold new talks on the country's transition.

Authorities announced a night-time curfew in four towns following the deaths in the central town of Al-Obeid, as a key protest group called for nationwide rallies against the "massacre."

The ruling military council and protest leaders earlier this month inked a power-sharing deal providing for a joint civilian-military administration which in turn would install civilian rule.

That is the main demand of a nationwide protest movement that led to the April ouster of longtime leader Omar Al-Bashir and has since demanded that the generals who took his place cede power to civilians.

But on the eve of Tuesday's talks aimed at resolving outstanding issues over the transition, five protesters were killed in Al-Obeid, the capital of North Kordofan state, said a doctors' committee linked to the protest movement.

"Five martyrs succumbed to direct wounds from sniper bullets during a peaceful rally in Al-Obeid," the committee said in a statement.

Prominent protest leader Babikir Faisal told AFP that the dead included "four high school students."

Al-Obeid residents and a local journalist also confirmed that the dead included high schoolers.

A key protest group, the Sudanese Professionals Association, said "live ammunition" had been used against a "rally of school students."

In a post on its Facebook page, it urged "all citizens and medics" to head to hospitals treating the wounded.

In a separate statement, it called for nationwide protests against the "massacre," demanding that "the perpetrators be brought to justice."

Hundreds of protesters later rallied in Khartoum's two districts of Bahri and Burri, but they were swiftly confronted by riot police who fired tear gas, witnesses said.

The office of North Kordofan's governor announced an overnight curfew in four towns including Al-Obeid, starting Monday and continuing indefinitely.

It added that all schools in the province had been told to suspend classes.

Residents of Al-Obeid said the rally had been over a shortage of bread and fuel in the town.

It was a sudden tripling of bread prices that initially triggered December protests against Bashir, which later turned into a nationwide movement against his three-decade rule.

"For the past few days there has been a shortage of fuel and bread," an Al-Obeid resident told AFP by telephone.

"School children were affected as there is no transport to help them reach their schools. Today, they staged a rally and when it reached downtown there were shots fired."

The town had not previously witnessed major rallies against Bashir even as provinces, cities and towns were swept up by the campaign against his rule. Monday's deaths sparked calls for talks set for Tuesday to be suspended.

"We cannot sit at the negotiating table with those allowing the killing of revolutionaries," Siddig Youssef, a prominent protest leader, said in a statement.

Tuesday's talks were set to cover issues including the powers of the joint civilian-military ruling body, the deployment of security forces and immunity for generals over protest-related violence, according to protest leaders.

The power-sharing deal agreed on July 17 provided for the establishment of a new governing body of six civilians and five generals.

It was then to oversee the formation of a transitional civilian government and parliament to govern for 39 months, followed by elections.

Khartoum has seen angry demonstrations since Saturday, when investigators announced the results of a probe showing into a deadly crackdown on a protest camp.

Shortly before dawn on June 3, gunmen in military fatigues raided the site of a weeks-long sit-in outside the military headquarters in Khartoum, shooting and beating protesters.

Doctors linked to the protest movement say the raid left 127 people dead and scores wounded.

But the joint investigation by prosecutors and the ruling military council that took power following Bashir's ouster found that just 17 people were killed on June 3, with a total of 87 dying between that day and June 10.

The probe identified eight officers involved in the violent crackdown on the protest camp, including three from the feared Rapid Support Forces paramilitary group.

But protest leaders have rejected the findings, saying the inquiry exonerated the military council and gave a far lower death toll than their own figures.

The investigation "was commissioned by the military council, this is challenging its integrity as the military council itself is accused in this case," said the Sudanese Professionals Association.

Demonstrators have called for an independent investigation into the raid.

The country's ruling generals have insisted they did not order the dispersal of the sit-in.



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Sudan says 87 killed when security forces broke up protest in June
Sudan protest leaders, rebels end rift over power deal