

Lebanon central bank governor's brother denies claims

Fri, 2022-03-18 21:41

Lawyer for Lebanon's Raja Salameh, brother of Central Bank governor, says evidence in case against him is "media speculation without any evidence"-statement.

Allegations of illicit enrichment and money laundering against Raja Salameh are absolutely unfounded, lawyer says in statement.



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Documents detail Iran's sanction-dodging financial infrastructure

Author:

Fri, 2022-03-18 20:41

LONDON: Iran has established a clandestine banking and finance system that allows it to handle billions of dollars and evade US-imposed sanctions, according to intelligence officials and documents seen by the Wall Street Journal.

The Islamic Republic uses a system of foreign commercial banks, proxy companies cooperative firms and a transaction clearing house within the

country to move money and withstand sanctions.

According to documents seen by the WSJ and officials they have spoken with, Iran's clandestine banking system works as follows: Iranian banks that serve companies barred by US sanctions from exporting or importing engage affiliate firms – "Rahbar" companies – in Iran to manage sanctioned trade on their behalf. Those firms establish companies outside of Iran's borders to serve as proxies for the Iranian traders.

The proxies then trade with foreign purchasers of Iranian oil and other commodities, or sellers of goods for import into Iran, in dollars, euros or other foreign currencies, through accounts set up in foreign banks.

Some of that revenue is smuggled into Iran by couriers who carry cash withdrawn from the proxy company accounts abroad, officials told the WSJ, but much of it remains in bank accounts abroad. The Iranian importers and exporters use it to trade foreign currency among themselves, on ledgers maintained in Iran, according to the Iranian central bank.

These methods are used to facilitate the sale of Iranian oil and other goods and also the purchase and import of goods needed within Iran.

The system provides Iran the revenues and imports it needs to keep the economy and country running. It eases the pressure on the Iranian rial by giving the economy access to the dollars, euros and other reserve currencies in which world trade is denominated, according to diplomats and officials.

One Western official told the WSJ: "This is an unprecedented governmental money-laundering operation."

According to Gholamreza Mesbahi-Moghaddam, a senior Iranian political figure, covert import and export transactions amount to \$80 billion a year.

"The majority of our exports of gasoline, steel, petrochemicals – all are under hidden subsidiary activities," he said.

The International Monetary Fund estimates that the figure will grow to \$150 billion in 2022 including foreign sales that are banned under the sanctions, more than twice the levels during the brief period when Iran was freed from sanctions.

In this way, it appears, Iran has managed to evade sanctions, even managing to boost its trade to roughly pre-sanctions levels.

While the value of the rial has plummeted during the years of sanctions, the Iranian economy has withstood international isolation enough to allow Iran to conduct tough negotiations with the US over the future of its nuclear program.

Iran's mission to the UN did not respond to a WSJ request for comment about the finance system.



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US imposes new Iran sanctions over human rights violationsUS pressures UK on Iran sanctions at the UN

[Crewman feared drowned after UAE cargo vessel capsizes, sinks in Gulf](#)

Author:

ARAB NEWS

ID:

1647554233772209400

Fri, 2022-03-18 00:56

DUBAI: A crewman was still missing presumed drowned late on Thursday after a UAE cargo ship capsized and sank in a storm at sea in the Arabian Gulf. A massive search and rescue operation recovered all but one of the 30 crew of the Al Salmy 6, which had been transporting a cargo of cars from Dubai to Umm Qasr port in southern Iraq.

The vessel encountered a storm 50 km off the coast of Asalouyeh in southern Iran, with wind gusting at more than 70kph and waves as high as 4.4 meters. The choppy waters forced the vessel to list at a precarious angle and within hours it was fully submerged, said Capt. Nizar Qaddoura, operations manager of the company that owns the ship, Salem Al-Makrani Cargo in Dubai. Emergency workers sent from Iran initially saved 16 crew members, Qaddoura said, and civilian ships had been asked to help with the rescue efforts. A further 11 survivors made it into life rafts, and two were plucked from the water by a nearby tanker. The crew consisted of nationals from Sudan, India, Pakistan, Uganda, Tanzania and Ethiopia, Qaddoura said. "All but one of the 30 crew members have been rescued," the crisis management director for Bushehr province on Iran's Gulf coast said. He said the search was continuing for the final missing crew member with two rescue vessels combing the waters. Iran's weather service had put out a red alert on Wednesday for high winds and heavy seas in the waters off Asalouyeh. As well as a port, Asalouyeh is a major petrochemicals center on the Gulf coast southeast of the city of Bushehr. Vessels sinking are rare in the Gulf, but poor weather sweeps across the region as the season changes from winter to summer.



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13 dead after tourist boat sinks in Vietnam6 dead, 30 missing after migrant boat sinks off Tunisia

Yemen war turns nature reserve back into waste dump

Author:

Fri, 2022-03-18 00:07

ADEN: Yemen's Al-Heswa nature reserve was once hailed as a beacon of conservation efforts by the United Nations, but civil war has turned it into a rubbish-strewn wasteland reeking of sewage.

The ticket office has been abandoned at the entrance to the 19-hectare site in Yemen's southern city of Aden, where trees have been cut down and construction waste dumped.

What was long a haven for flamingos and other migratory birds is now swarmed by crows.

"Al-Heswa used to be a recreational outlet for residents and tourists," said Aden resident Ibrahim Suhail. "It has now become a rubbish dump, full of insects and sewage."

Declared a nature reserve in 2006, Al-Heswa was one of 35 initiatives awarded the UN's Equator Prize in 2014 for meeting climate and development challenges through sustainable use of nature.

Wastewater that had previously flown into the sea was treated and redirected to create an artificial wetland on the site of a former garbage dump, attracting the migratory birds.

The initiative was the first of its kind in Yemen, improving livelihoods, creating jobs and generating about \$96,000 in revenue in 2012.

"The communities behind Al-Heswa Wetland Protected Area have successfully transformed a garbage dump into a functioning wetland ecosystem that provides a breeding site to more than 100 migratory bird species," the UN Development Programme said at the time. But since 2014, Yemen, already the region's poorest country, has been embroiled in a conflict between the government, supported by the Coalition to Restore Legitimacy in Yemen, and the Iran-backed Houthi rebels.

The reserve has been left in ruins by the fighting.

The director of Yemen's department of nature reserves, Salem Bseis, said the wastewater treatment tanks had not been serviced since 2015.

Some nearby residents have seized parts for their personal use.

“This led to a disruption in the maintenance and treatment of sewage,” Bseis said. While visitors have mostly stayed away, some parts of the reserve have been used as an “informal waste dump,” according to the UK-based Conflict and Environment Observatory.

The UN considers war-torn Yemen the world’s worst humanitarian disaster, and estimates hundreds of thousands of people have been killed, directly or indirectly, by the war.

Millions have been forced from their homes by fighting, pushing the country to the brink of famine.

“Insecurity from violence, war and conflict poses the most significant threat to the long-term sustainability of this initiative,” the UNDP Development Programme said.

“Since the intensification of the conflict in Yemen, visitor levels have dropped to zero.”

But the UN believes that all does not have to be lost.

“When peace is restored, the community is committed to working with government officials to enhance the economic and environmental services provided by the protected areas,” it added.



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GCC-sponsored talks between Yemeni factions to begin in Riyadh on March 29
Saudi Arabia pumps \$19bn into Yemeni aid program: KSrelief chief

Houthis reject proposed GCC peace talks in Riyadh

Thu, 2022-03-17 23:22

AL-MUKALLA: The Iran-backed Houthis have dashed hopes of ending the war in Yemen by rejecting the latest Gulf Cooperation Council offer to broker comprehensive peace talks in Riyadh between the warring factions.

Yemeni government officials told Arab News on Tuesday that the GCC had offered to sponsor the talks in the Saudi capital to achieve a peace deal.

Hundreds of Yemeni politicians, activists, civil society leaders, and even outspoken politicians will be invited to the conference, which will begin on March 29 and end on April 7.

But Houthi media quoted an anonymous official as saying the movement rejected holding peace talks in Riyadh and demanded that the Coalition to Restore Legitimacy in Yemen eased alleged restrictions on Sanaa airport and Hodeidah seaport.

Aid workers and officials have warned that the humanitarian crisis in Yemen is intensifying.

Yemeni officials said they predicted the Houthis would turn down the offer, citing the movement's track record of derailing peace efforts.

"The Houthi militia's refusal is expected," Abdul Baset Al-Qaedi, undersecretary at Yemen's Information Ministry, told Arab News. "These militias would have surprised the Yemenis if they agreed, but this militia constantly proves that it is malignant cancer that must be eradicated in order for Yemen to be stable."

The government had positively responded to the GCC's offer and pledged to support any peace initiative, including the current UN-brokered peace efforts.

Al-Qaedi said that Houthi leaders who had racked up millions of dollars during the war would resist calls for achieving peace in Yemen.

"The Houthi militia cling to the option of war because they benefit from it by accumulating wealth, looting Yemeni property and usurping power in areas under their control."

Abdulmalik Al-Mekhlafi, Yemen's former deputy prime minister and an adviser

to the country's president, called for collective and strong pressure by the international community on the Houthis to force them to accept peace plans and proposed putting into place a humanitarian truce during Ramadan.

"Ramadan is the month of mercy and peace for the Yemenis, and it is the month of death and killing, according to the Houthis. The Houthis are the enemy of the Yemenis and the enemy of peace and humanity," Al-Mekhlafi tweeted.

The Houthi rejection came as local aid workers sent a fresh and desperate plea to international donors to step up their humanitarian assistance to war-torn Yemen, expressing concerns that the country's crisis had been put on the backburner since the beginning of the war in Ukraine.

There is fear that the growing humanitarian crisis in Ukraine might absorb funds from international donors allocated for Yemen.

Jamal Balfakih, the general coordinator of the Yemeni government's High Relief Committee, said the protracted war had had a destructive impact on people, mainly the thousands of internally displaced, amid a falling currency and a crumbling economy.

"Yemen is experiencing a real tragedy through the war and its impact on the economy and currency," Balfakih said, calling for a fair and transparent distribution of the latest funds from international donors.

He suggested supporting the fishery and agriculture sectors to help the country secure its food.

"People will not benefit from this relief if it is not organized and if their real needs are not taken into account," he said.

Other Yemeni relief workers, such as Saeed Munef who deals with several thousand people who fled their homes in Marib province's southern districts, said that international aid organizations had already reduced food baskets and cash to displaced people.

Munef said that less than 30 percent of displaced people from Maheia, Al-Abedia, and Juba districts had received humanitarian assistance from international organizations.

"The world has quickly and extensively sent aid to Ukraine during the war that started 17 days ago and turned its back to Yemen's eight-year-old crisis," Munef told Arab News. "We are in need of help to address malnutrition, landmines, and large displacement."



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