

Tunis goes under partial lockdown over record virus cases

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Thu, 2021-07-01 22:24

TUNIS: Tunisia placed the capital Tunis and the northern town of Bizerte under a partial lockdown from Thursday in a bid to rein in record daily coronavirus cases and deaths.

Parties, sporting and cultural events and public prayers are banned until July 14 under the measures which cover Tunis and its surroundings, adding to similar measures in place for the coastal cities of Sousse and Monastir.

The measures announced late Wednesday also include an overnight curfew from 8:00 p.m. (1900 GMT) until 5:00 am (0400 GMT) and a ban on cafes and restaurants serving food except outdoors or by delivery.

Many Tunisian hospitals are at full capacity, and medics say they are unable to cope.

Four inland regions of the North African country have also been under total lockdown since June 20 as cases have spiralled, as well as the northern town of Bizerte.

Adding to the sense of crisis, the army has been deployed in some areas to enforce lockdown measures.

The health ministry announced a record 5,921 cases and 116 deaths from Covid-19 on Tuesday, the latest figures available in the country of 12 million.

Tunisia has struggled with a lack of vaccines and has so far administered initial jabs to around 15 percent of its population, with just over half a million receiving the full two doses.



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Tunisian doctors battle coronavirus spike
Tunisian PM Hichem Mechichi contracts COVID-19

[A Gaza library gives Palestinian children a chance to escape into literature](#)

Author:

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Thu, 2021-07-01 21:49

DUBAI: Picking through the debris of what had been his university's English department, before it was pulverized by an Israeli airstrike, Mosab Abu Toha

brushed away a fine film of dust coating a book he found among the rubble.

The battered volume was an anthology of classic American literature, featuring the work of great writers such as Ernest Hemingway and Walt Whitman.

The poignancy of this discovery, among the ruins of the Islamic University of Gaza in the summer of 2014, when Israel and the Palestinian militant group Hamas last fought a major war, has stuck with Abu Toha ever since.



Abu Toha wants Palestinian children to discover the vast world of literature, and grow beyond the mental and physical confines of Gaza. (Supplied)

The emotions came flooding back during the 11 tumultuous days in May this year when hostilities between the old belligerents flared up anew.

A 28-year-old poet and teacher of the English language, who has lived through four significant wars in Gaza since 2008, Abu Toha saw an urgent need to protect public access to learning resources and classic works of literature amid the stifling blockade of the territory and the routine bombardments it endures.

It was in the aftermath of the 51-day war in 2014 – “the hardest of them all,” as he recalls – that Abu Toha began to receive donations, organized through social media, that laid the foundations for what would become the

Edward Said Public Library.



Abu Toha: These kids are learning new things and they are going to be better than me. (Supplied)

Named in honor of the late Palestinian scholar and theoretician, Gaza's first and only English-language library opened its doors in 2017 with the help of international fundraisers. Now its two branches, in Beit Lahiya and Gaza City, house more than 2,000 volumes, most of them classic works of literature.

The venues have become a refuge amid the chaos, places where young Palestinians can freely access the timeless works of authors such as William Shakespeare, Leo Tolstoy, Dr. Seuss, John Le Carre, Herman Melville, Mahmoud Darwish and, of course, Edward Said.

Abu Toha likens the library to a candle in the dark, offering an escape from the harsh realities of life in Gaza.



Mosab Abu Toha hopes young Palestinians will channel their daily traumas into rewarding creative pursuits. (Supplied)

“Many children seem happy in the street,” he told Arab News. “They will smile at you – but deep inside they are traumatized. If you sit with them and ask

them some questions, and you dig deep inside their subconscious, you would know that these children have nightmares at night.

“These children need to have some space to understand that what they are living through is not normal. What they are living in is abnormal.”

Abu Toha’s passion for reading and the English language stems from a childhood during which he was surrounded by books. After obtaining a bachelor’s degree in language tuition, he taught English classes at UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) schools.



The library is a place where young Palestinians can freely access works by William Shakespeare, Leo Tolstoy, and John Le Carre. (Supplied)

A major turning point came when he was invited to travel to the US in 2019 as a visiting poet at Harvard University as part of the international Scholars at Risk program. It was the first time he had ever left the Gaza Strip.

“I think my experiences – especially as a kid who never traveled outside of Gaza until he was 27, someone who doesn’t have an airport in his country, someone who doesn’t have a seaport, someone who has never stopped hearing the noise of the drones in the sky and the shelling of tanks – pushed me to discover my own talent in writing creatively,” Abu Toha said of his literary inspirations.



Edward Said was not only a Palestinian but a global citizen, and naming the library after him is an honor for us, says Abu Toha. (Supplied)

He hopes other young Palestinians will likewise channel their daily traumas into rewarding creative pursuits.

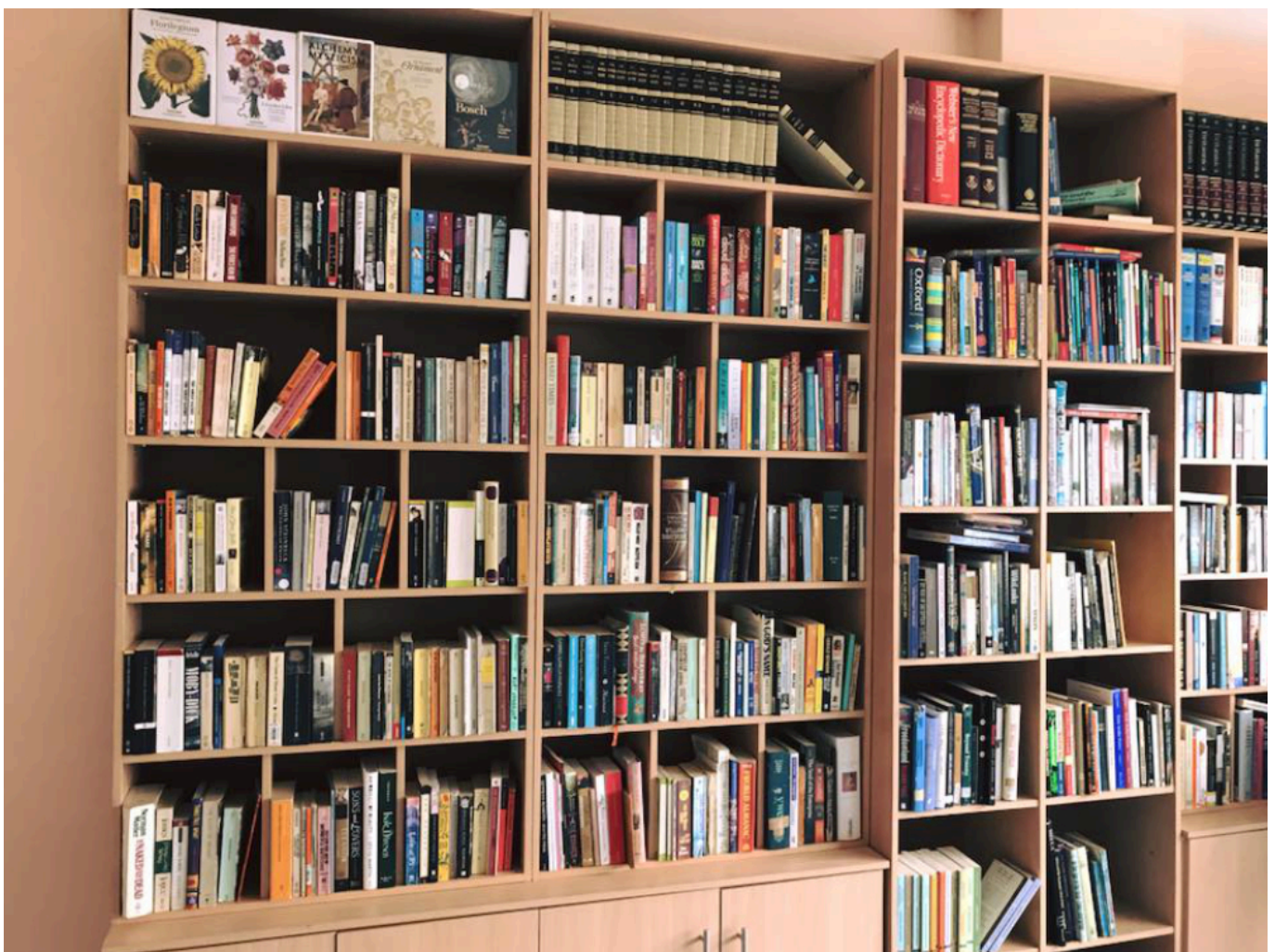
“I think it’s very important for young writers to talk about their experiences in different genres, in both Arabic and English,” he said. “It’s a duty. You need to tell the world what you are seeing.”

Most of the visitors to the library are children and young adults, he explained, who rarely have access to books at home.

“It’s not easy to find home libraries in Gaza,” said Abu Toha. “It’s very rare maybe because of the financial circumstances; people can barely put food on their table.

“But some children, when they come to the library they see these books, beautiful tables and chairs, and they want to make use of it.”

The library has become his life’s work. But stocking its shelves has proved to be an endless struggle as a result of the strict blockade, with every shipment of new books detained and thoroughly searched by Israeli customs officials.



"It's not easy to find home libraries in Gaza," says Abu Toha. (Supplied)

Nevertheless, thanks to generous donations by overseas supporters, including many authors who provide signed editions of their works, the Edward Said Public Library is richly stocked.

Even Noam Chomsky, the famed American linguist, philosopher and public intellectual, has contributed to its collection, describing the library as "a rare flicker of light and hope for the young people of Gaza."

The family of Edward Said, who died in 2003 at the age of 67, has also offered its support, sending copies of the scholar's influential works. Abu Toha never met Said, but feels his is a fitting name for the library.

"He's a symbol for Palestine, a symbol for freedom," said Abu Toha. "He's a public intellectual, not siding with this or that. He said what he thought loudly without fearing the Palestinian Authority or Israel or the American administration.

"I think he's a prominent example for everyone who seeks justice in this world. I think Edward Said was not only a Palestinian but a global citizen, and naming the library after him is an honor for us."



Famed American philosopher Noam Chomsky has contributed to the library's collection. (Supplied)

Both branches of the library were fortunate to survive the fighting in May this year with minimal damage.

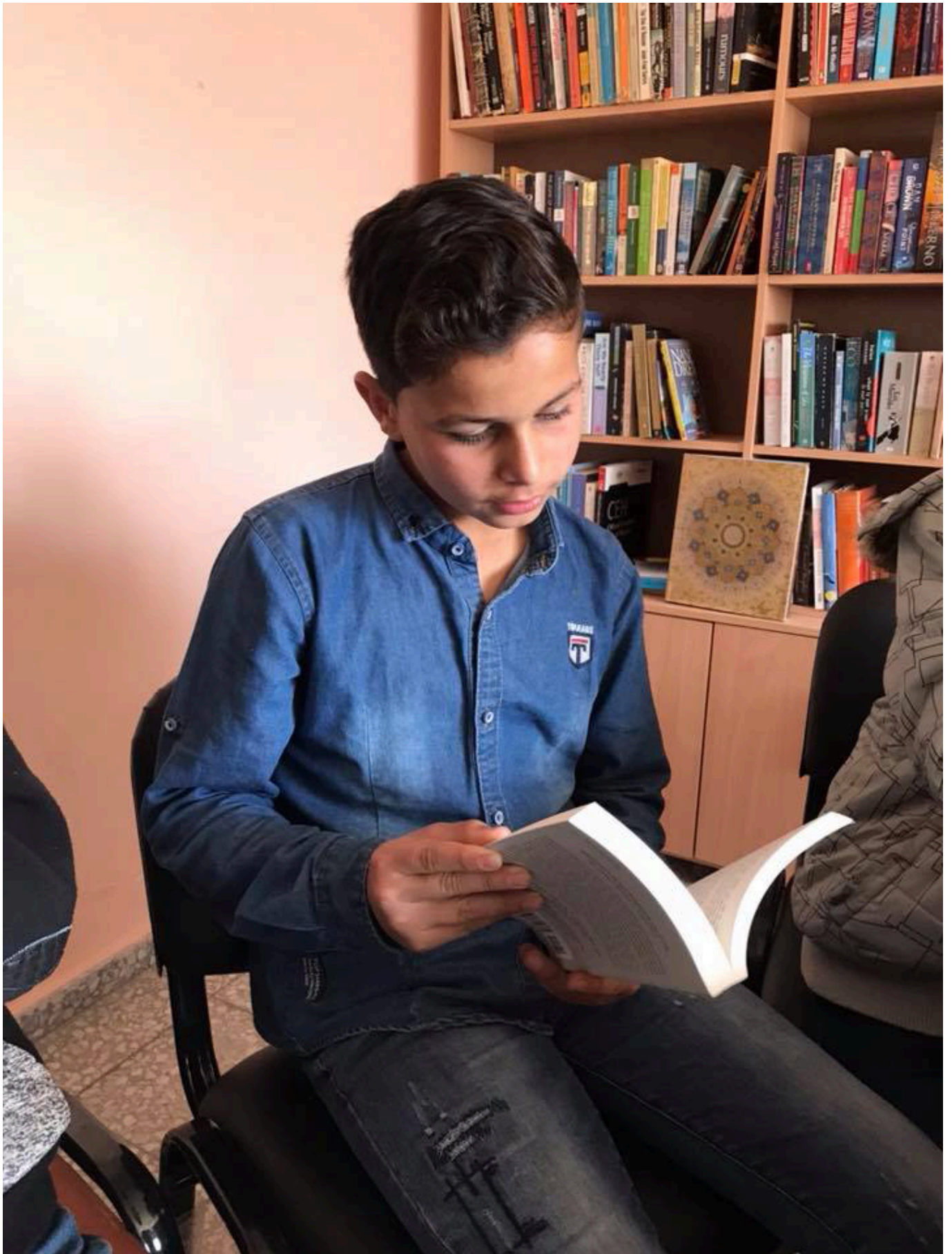
“Although it was short, the scale of terrorism, destruction and eviction of families was astonishing. It was very tough,” Abu Toha said. “There was the use of new weaponry and it was really frightening. Even now, when I remember what happened, I can’t believe we’re still alive.”



Mosab Abu Toha looks at a book he found among the rubble following an Israeli airstrike. (Supplied)

To help the community get back on its feet, support the library and fund psychological support programs for families affected by the latest war, he has launched a fundraising campaign that so far has raised about half of its \$20,000 goal.

He also wants to open several additional branches of the library so that many more Palestinian children can discover and explore the vast world of literature, put their plight into perspective and, ultimately, grow beyond the mental and physical confines of Gaza.



These children have nightmares at night, says Mosab Abu Toha. (Supplied)

“The only hope that I feel is when I see children coming to the library, reading books, taking part in activities, going back to their homes, telling their parents about what they did in the library, and coming the next day

with friends to the library,” Abu Toha said.

“This is the only thing that brings hope to my heart: that these kids are learning new things and they are going to be better than me.”

Twitter: [@artprojectdx](https://twitter.com/artprojectdx)





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Gaza children fly kites with portraits of kids killed in last conflict with Israel 'She screams when someone comes near': Gaza children in trauma

[Jordan's military prosecutor seeks highest punishment for sedition accused](#)

Thu, 2021-07-01 20:12

AMMAN: Jordan's military State Security Court (SSC) prosecutor on Thursday asked the court to inflict the highest punishment on Bassem Awadallah and Sharif Hassan bin Zaid over their alleged involvement in a high-profile

sedition case.

Awadallah, a former chief of the Jordanian Royal Court, and bin Zaid, a distant royal family member, are standing trial at the SSC on charges of plotting to undermine the regime and the country's security and stability.

The two men were arrested on April 3 along with 15 other people suspected of involvement in the case, which also involved Prince Hamzah, a half-brother of Jordan's King Abdullah.

Jordanian authorities said that Awadallah, bin Zaid and Prince Hamzah were attempting to destabilize Jordan in collaboration with "foreign entities."

Prince Hamzah's case has been settled within the Hashemite family on directives from King Abdullah.

The Jordanian Royal Court published a letter signed by Prince Hamzah in which he vowed allegiance to the monarch and confirmed that he would act "always for His Majesty and his crown prince to help and support."

The charge sheet against Awadallah and bin Zaid said the two defendants were long-time friends because of the nature of their work and connection to Prince Hamzeh.

Prince Hamzeh was seeking to become the ruler of Jordan and "took advantage of certain incidents, including the COVID-19 pandemic, to create chaos and frustration in the country," the charge sheet added

Their strategy included attacks and criticisms of King Abdullah "with the hope of gaining popular support."

Awadallah and bin Zaid pleaded not guilty during their opening trial earlier this month. Both suspects presented written statements to the SSC on Sunday.

The SSC prosecution sheet also included a charge against bin Zaid of possessing illegal narcotics (hashish).

During Thursday's fifth closed-door session, the defense team asked the SSC for time to prepare their closing arguments, according to the state-run news agency Petra.

The SSC, which looks into cases related to terrorism and state security, set next Tuesday as the date for the trial.

Awadallah's lawyer, Mohammad Afif, was quoted by government-owned Al-Mamlakah TV on Wednesday as saying that the defense team has requested that princes Hamzah, Hashemite and Ali be summoned as witnesses along with Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi.

Afif, a former SSC president, did not elaborate, but sources familiar with the case told Arab News that the SSC turned down the request.

According to lawyers, the two defendants could receive prison terms of three to 20 years if convicted on charges of incitement and sedition.



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Defense in trial on Jordan's destabilization plot will ask court to bring Prince Hamza to testify Prince Hamzah 'in my care' at his palace: Jordan King Abdullah II

[Fighting outside Marib simmers as Houthis take heavy casualties](#)

Author:

Thu, 2021-07-01 19:22

ALEXANDRIA: Fighting on major battlefields outside Yemen's central city of Marib died down on Thursday as Iran-backed Houthis halted their assaults after suffering heavy casualties and losing military equipment, two local

military officials told Arab News.

It follows Yemen's appeal to the US to increase military support and training for the country's coast guard so it can rein in the smuggling of Iranian weapons to the Houthis.

Over the past five days, "unprecedented" fighting between the Yemeni government forces and the Houthis broke out in several contested areas outside Marib. The rebels renewed attacks on government forces in a bid to make gains on the ground that would put them closer to the strategic city.

Yemeni army officials said dozens of rebel forces and government troops were killed in the fighting as the Houthis also suffered heavy casualties. The rebels were forced to retreat after facing stiff resistance and heavy aerial bombardment from Arab coalition warplanes.

"There is a cautious calm on the battlefields (on Thursday) after the Houthi suffered heavy losses during their last attack," an army military official said on the condition of anonymity.

Thousands of combatants and civilians have been killed in fighting and missile strikes in the Marib province since February when the Houthis resumed a major offensive to seize control of the government's last bastion in northern Yemen.

Another military official said the Yemeni army received information on Thursday that the Houthis were regrouping outside Marib and have called for military reinforcements from Sanaa and other areas in northern Yemen.

"The national army is aware of regrouping of fighters and will defeat them," the official said, preferring anonymity.

Yemen has demanded the US increase its military support to the coast guard forces to help disrupt the flow of Iranian weapons and experts to the Houthis that fueled the latest conflict.

On Wednesday, Yemeni Vice President Ali Mohsen Al-Ahmar met with Vice Adm. Brad Cooper, the commander of US Naval Forces Central Command and the US 5th Fleet and Combined Maritime Forces, to discuss the fighting. Al-Ahmar urged the US to train, arm, and share intelligence with the Yemeni Coast Guard, which is trying to thwart a smuggling surge of weapons from Iran to the Houthis through the country's long coastline.

Al-Ahmar thanked the American and the Arab coalition navies for seizing several arms shipments from Iran to the Houthis, adding that his country's coast guard would not be able to confront the smuggling of arms and drugs on their own, the official news agency SABA reported.

"The vice president stresses the importance of the US and international support for efforts to combat terrorism and smuggling in our country and the region," SABA said.

"Yemen looks forward to more support and training for the coast guard forces

so they can play a bigger role in combating Iranian arms smuggling and limiting activities threatening maritime security.”

The smuggling of weapons, drugs, and migrants has increased since early 2015 when the Yemeni maritime forces crumbled as the Houthis expanded rapidly across the country.

Shortly after intervening militarily in Yemen, in support of the internationally recognized government in March 2015, the Arab coalition regrouped the forces at military bases inside and outside of Yemen. After the forces received military training, they were deployed across the country’s coastline on the Red Sea and Arab Sea.



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Houthi offensive in Marib is exacerbating Yemen’s humanitarian crisis: US State Dept. Three dead as Houthi missiles hit Marib

Israel welcomes German leader as ally against antisemitism

Author:

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1625155491713969700

Thu, 2021-07-01 19:07

JERUSALEM: Israel's president warmly welcomed his German counterpart on Thursday, praising him as an ally in combatting antisemitism.

Reuven Rivlin said that Germany has been Israel's "strong partner in the uncompromising fight against antisemitism" and has stood with Israel against "the forces of terror who seek to wipe us off the map."

German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier also met with Israel's new Prime Minister Naftali Bennett in Jerusalem. The prime minister's office said in a statement that the two discussed Iran's nuclear program, and that Bennett restated Israel's determination to prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons. Steinmeier was expected to reiterate Germany's strong support for Israel.

Nazi Germany and its collaborators murdered 6 million European Jews in the Holocaust. Germany's postwar leaders have repeatedly apologized for the Nazi atrocities and it has paid hundreds of millions of dollars in reparations to Jewish victims. Israel and Germany have developed close ties in recent years. During a solemn visit to Israel's Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial, Steinmeier said the "unspeakable suffering" caused in Germany's name "fills us with pain and shame."

"We will keep the memory of this alive for the sake of those who were murdered and for the sake of future generations," he said.

Germany launched a new initiative with the United States last week to stem an alarming rise in antisemitism and Holocaust denial around the world.

The US-Germany Holocaust Dialogue seeks to reverse the trend, which gained traction during the coronavirus pandemic amid a surge in political populism across Europe and the US. The dialogue creates a way to develop educational and messaging tools to teach youth and others about the crimes of the Nazis and their collaborators.



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Israeli, UAE airlines announce cooperation deal
Lapid, on UAE trip, opens first Israeli embassy in Gulf