

## FAMILY OF ARAB ISRAELI SEEKS ANSWERS

**HURA:** A year of uncertainty for Hisham Al-Sayed's family finally came to an end this month when a grainy black and white photo appeared on a Hamas-affiliated television channel. Their 27-year-old son had disappeared a year earlier from his home in the Negev desert in Israel. But the image of Sayed's face was the first time the Islamist movement that runs the Gaza Strip had said they were detaining him. "When I saw him on the video, I felt relieved of course because I knew he was there. Before that I didn't know that he was still alive," his father Shaaban said from the living room of their modest home at the end of a dirt road.

Sayed is a Bedouin Muslim Arab with Israeli citizenship, without any apparent connection to the Israeli authorities, making his case particularly unusual. How he got from his home into Gaza, which is blockaded by Israel, is unclear. The Israeli army declined to comment on the matter, but his family say he could have somehow scaled or cut the heavily guarded fence surrounding the Palestinian territory. The family say Sayed has schizophrenia and has disappeared to Jordan and Egypt multiple times, eventually

being returned by the authorities. In fact, they say, he twice before broke into Gaza in 2010 and 2013, with the authorities eventually returning him after realizing he was unwell. "But this time, I don't why, in April 2015, they (Hamas) kept him and detained him, but didn't say they had him," his father said.

In the months after his disappearance, a police call was put out in Israel, but the family gradually learned he was likely to be in Gaza. Then on April 1 this year, Hamas released a video with photos of four Israeli citizens they claim to be holding. Two of them, Oron Shaul and Hadar Goldin, were soldiers in the 2014 war in Gaza. The Israeli army believes they were killed and Hamas has yet to provide reliable evidence to counter that.

The third is Avraham Mengistu, an Israeli Jew of Ethiopian descent, who Hamas announced they had in 2015 and whose family also say has mental health problems. The fourth face was Sayed, who was accused of being a soldier for the Israeli army. It was the first time Hamas had publicly confirmed holding him. — AFP



**HURA:** Manal Al-Saayed, mother of Hisham, who disappeared a year beforehand from his home in the Negev desert, shows a photo of her son at their family home in this southern Israeli town on April 13, 2016. — AFP



**CAIRO:** Egyptians shout slogans against Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah Al-Sisi during a protest against the decision to hand over control of two strategic Red Sea islands to Saudi Arabia in front of the Press Syndicate yesterday. — AP

## PROTESTERS SLAM EGYPT GOVT OVER ISLANDS DEAL

POLICE FIRE TEAR GAS, BREAK UP RALLIES

**CAIRO:** Thousands of Egyptian protesters angered by President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi's decision to hand over two islands to Saudi Arabia called yesterday for the downfall of the government, chanting a powerful slogan used in a 2011 uprising. Sisi, who once enjoyed widespread support, has faced mounting criticism in recent months, including over his management of the economy. "The people want the downfall of the regime," the protesters yelled outside the Cairo press syndicate, using the same phrase heard during the 2011 revolt against president Hosni Mubarak who later stepped down. They also chanted: "Sisi Mubarak", "We don't want you, leave" and "We own the land and you are agents who sold our land." Sisi's government announced last week the signing of a maritime demarcation accord that put the uninhabited Red Sea islands of Tiran and Sanafir, which lie between Saudi Arabia and Egypt's Sinai Peninsula, in Saudi waters, prompting an outcry in Egyptian newspapers and on social media.

Saudi and Egyptian officials say the islands belong to the kingdom and were

only under Egyptian control because Saudi Arabia had asked Cairo in 1950 to protect them. In other parts of Cairo, police fired tear gas at protesters, security sources said. A Reuters witness said a crowd was dispersed and riot police had taken control of an area outside a mosque in the Mohandiseen district of the capital. Four people were arrested, the security sources said. Tear gas was also fired in the Giza area outside Cairo, dispersing about 200 people, security sources said. Critics say the government has mishandled a series of crises from an investigation into the torture and killing of an Italian student in Cairo to a bomb that brought down a Russian airliner in the Sinai last October.

### Patience with Sisi Fading

Many Egyptians, eager for an end to the turmoil triggered by the 2011 uprising against Mubarak, enthusiastically welcomed Sisi when he seized power from the Muslim Brotherhood in 2013 after mass protests. As military chief, Sisi toppled Egypt's first freely elected leader, and then went on to become president on promises of stability after

launching the fiercest crackdown on dissent in modern Egypt's history. Egyptians turned a blind eye as Islamists and other opponents of the government were rounded up, swelling prisons to about 40,000 political detainees, according to estimates by human rights groups. But a growing number of Egyptians are losing patience over corruption, poverty and unemployment, the same issues which led to Mubarak's downfall, while Sisi has appeared increasingly authoritarian in televised speeches.

"We want the downfall of regime. We have forced disappearances, all the youth are in jail. I just got out of jail a year ago after two years inside," said Abdelrahman Abdellatif, 29, an air conditioning engineer, at the press syndicate demonstration. "The youth of the revolution are still here. We are not gone. We want stability but that doesn't mean sell our land and kill our youth. We are experiencing unprecedented fascism and dictatorship." There were also Sisi supporters, such as a woman with a shirt with an image of the former military intelligence chief on it. — Reuters

## YEMENI LOYALIST FORCES SEIZE CITY FROM AL-QAEDA

**ADEN:** Yemeni forces backed by Apache helicopters from a Saudi-led coalition wrested the city of Houta from Al-Qaeda fighters after a gun battle yesterday morning, a local military official said. Hours later, a car bomb detonated outside the foreign ministry in the southern Yemeni city of Aden, causing no casualties, another local official said. Islamic State claimed responsibility in a posting on its al-Amaq news agency website.

The recapture of Houta, regional capital of southern Lahj province which has been held by the militants since last summer, is one of the embattled Yemeni government's most important inroads yet against Al-Qaeda forces who have taken advantage of more than a year of war to seize territory. Government troops began their attack at daybreak and succeeded after several hours of air strikes and heavy combat, the military official told Reuters.

"The campaign to control Houta has been completed and it has been cleansed of Al-Qaeda and extremist elements," he said. Several people were killed and injured on both sides and 48 militants were captured, he added. Saudi Arabia and its mostly Gulf Arab allies entered Yemen's civil war on March 26 last year in support of Yemen's internationally recognised government after it had been pushed into exile by the Iran-allied Houthi group.

Amid impoverished Yemen's security chaos, Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) seized the port city of Mukalla and extended its area of control and influence about 600 km along Yemen's southern coast toward the government seat at Aden. Forces loyal to President Abdu-Rabbu Mansour Hadi have been repeatedly attacked by Al-Qaeda and Islamic State militants as the embattled administration struggles to secure Aden and the southern provinces where the fighters thrive.

A Reuters investigation this month revealed that the group earns up to \$2 million every day by taxing imports of basic goods and fuel. Until the attack on Houta, AQAP has suffered few territorial losses despite a stepped-up American campaign of air strikes and drone attacks on its bases. — Reuters



**ADEN:** Yemeni onlookers and security forces gather at the site where a car bomb exploded near a building housing the foreign ministry yesterday in the Mansoura residential district of Yemen's second city. — AFP