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JAMADA ALTHANI 27, 1438 AH

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## EGYPT'S MUBARAK FREED, FINAL CHARGES DROPPED

6 YEARS AFTER UPRISING, MUBARAK'S ALLIES REGAIN INFLUENCE



Min 16°

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In this Oct 16, 2016 file photo, ousted Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak waves to his supporters from his room at the Maadi Military Hospital as they celebrate the 43rd anniversary of the Oct 6, 1973 war. An Egyptian security official said yesterday that the country's ousted President Hosni Mubarak returned home, after his release. — AP

CAIRO: Hosni Mubarak, the Egyptian president overthrown in 2011 and the first leader to face trial after the Arab Spring uprisings that swept the region, was freed yesterday after six years in detention, his lawyer said. The 88-year-old was cleared of the final murder charges against him this month, after facing trial in a litany of cases ranging from corruption to the killing of protesters whose 18-day revolt stunned the world and ended his 30-year rule.

"Yes, he is now in his home in Heliopolis," Mubarak's lawyer, Farid El Deeb said when asked if Mubarak had left Maadi Military hospital in southern Cairo where he had been detained. Heliopolis is an upscale neighborhood where the main presidential palace from which Mubarak once governed is located. Mubarak was initially arrested in April 2011, two months after leaving office, and has since been held in prison and in military hospitals under heavy guard.

Many Egyptians who lived through his presidency view it as a period of stagnation, autocracy and crony capitalism. Arabs watched enraptured when the first images of the former air force commander, Egypt's modern-day Pharaoh, were beamed live on television, showing him bed-bound in his courtroom cage. The overthrow of Mubarak, one of a series of military men to rule Egypt since the 1952 abolition of the monarchy, embodied the hopes of the Arab Spring uprisings that shook autocrats from Tunisia to the Gulf and briefly raised hopes of a new era of democracy and social justice.

His release takes that journey full circle, marking what his critics say is the return of the old order to Egypt, where authorities have crushed Mubarak's enemies in the Muslim Brotherhood, killing hundreds and jailing thousands, while his allies regain influence. Another military man, Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, stepped into Mubarak's shoes in 2013 when he overthrew Mohamed Morsi, the Brotherhood official who won Egypt's first free election after the uprising.

A year later, Sisi won a presidential election in which the Brotherhood, now banned, could not participate. The liberal and leftist opposition, at the forefront of the 2011 protests in Cairo's Tahrir Square, is under pressure and in disarray. Years of political tumult and worsening security have hit the economy, just as Mubarak always warned. Egyptians complain of empty pockets and rumbling bellies as inflation exceeds 30 percent and the government tightens its belt in return for loans from the International Monetary Fund.

"The economic crisis we are living in and the high prices take priority over everything, as does the fear of terrorism. That is what preoccupies ordinary citizens, not Mubarak," said Khaled Dawoud, an opposition politician who opposed the Islamists but also condemned the bloody crackdown on them. "When you see the group of people who show up and cheer and support him, you are talking about 150, 200 people," he said, referring to occasional shows of support outside the Maadi hospital when Mubarak was there.

In the turmoil of the Arab uprisings, Tunisian President Zine Al-Abidine Ben Ali fled into exile in Saudi Arabia, Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi met an ignominious death at the hands of rebels and Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh resigned. But early hopes of democratic change in the region have eroded. In Syria, Bashar Al-Assad still holds the presidency in a country ruined by a civil war that has drawn in global and region powers. Yemen's Saleh joined his erstwhile enemies in a new battle for power that has driven into famine a country on the fringes of the Gulf, one of the world's richest oil-producing regions. — Reuters

## GULF AIRLINES EYE FREE WIFI

### AIRLINES GRAPPLE WITH US LAPTOP BAN

ISTANBUL: Turkish and Gulf airlines are touting free WiFi and better in-flight connectivity for smart phones as they scramble to mitigate the impact of a ban on laptops in plane cabins bound for the United States. The restrictions could deal a blow to fast-growing Gulf airlines, which depend on business-class flyers stopping over in Dubai or Doha for far-flung destinations, and to Turkish Airlines with its high volume of transit passengers.

A Turkish Airlines official said it was working on rolling out a system to allow passengers to use 3G data roaming on mobile phones to connect to the Internet in-flight, and planned to make WiFi freely available on some aircraft from next month. "We've sped up infrastructure work after the latest developments ... If the work is complete, we're planning on switching to free WiFi services in our Boeing 777 and Airbus 330 aircraft in April," the official said.

Emirates said on Thursday it was introducing a "laptop and tablet handling service" for US-bound flights which would allow passengers to use their devices until just before they board. The devices would be "carefully packed into boxes" and returned on arrival in the United States, it said. Emirates passengers can access limited free WiFi or pay \$1 for 500 MB. Fellow Gulf carrier Etihad encouraged passengers to pack their electronics in check-in luggage but said it would also allow devices to be handed over at boarding, a spokesman said. Turkish said it had introduced a similar measure.



BEIRUT: A Syrian woman travelling to the United States through Amman opens her laptop before checking in at Beirut international airport. — AFP

Qatar Airways did not respond to questions on how it planned to mitigate the impact of the new security measures, but in a Facebook posting this week it said its in-flight entertainment was "the only entertainment you'll need on board". Royal Jordanian also took a tongue-in-cheek approach, listing on Twitter "12 things to do on a 12-hour flight with no laptop or tablet", including reading, meditating, saying hello to your neighbor, or "reclaiming territory on your armrest." — Reuters