

## Developer of Dubai's 'Little Britain' in jail

By **STEPHEN JONES**  
*Epoch Times Staff*

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates—A London-born businessman who bought the island of Great Britain on the artificial World archipelago in Dubai is serving four years in a Dubai jail over a pair of bounced security cheques.

Safi Qurashi, a 41-year-old father of three, was convicted of the crime of signing a cheque without having sufficient funds, and withholding payment.

His family, still in Dubai where they have lived for the last six years, is appealing the conviction.

The circumstances are explained on a website set up by the family, justiceformydad.com, written from the perspective of Qurashi's 11-year-old daughter, Sara.

"This is not fair since the wrong man is in jail. My dad has the contract between him and the man and also all the bank statements which include all the payments made to the man," Sara writes.

Sara also has a Facebook page, Twitter account, and a YouTube video in which she appeals to Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid al Maktoum, the ruler of Dubai, for justice.

"I am very upset because my dad has been sentenced for four years into jail and I don't know why. Please can you help me get justice for my dad because I know he is innocent," she says in the video.

Qurashi was detained in February along with his business partner, Mustafa Nagri, after two security cheques bounced.

According to the family's website, the cheques were security cheques only, and were never meant to be cashed. But when the property market in Dubai went sour, the cheque holder got greedy, deposited the cheques, and then lied to police, landing Qurashi in jail.

Bouncing a cheque is a criminal offence under UAE law.

"We're not criminals, we are victims of the system," Qurashi was quoted as saying by Zawya Dow Jones.

Radha Stirling, founder of the Britain-based pressure group Detained in Dubai, said she is inundated with cases.

Security cheques are issued regularly in the emirate, when signing a housing rent contract, taking out a bank loan, or signing a business deal.

Stirling said bouncing cheques should be decriminalized in Dubai.

"There are too many companies and individuals in Dubai holding cheques as security, thereby having the power to put you behind bars," she said.

"It's not acceptable that a landlord, a bank, a business partner, or other party can put you in jail, simply by presenting a cheque."

Local daily the Khaleej Times reported on Sunday that bounced cheques occupy 70 percent of police time in Dubai.

The situation has been exacerbated by current economic woes. The emirate has recently faced one of its biggest property downturns in history, and it is not clear what will happen to stalled projects such as the Great Britain island on the World.

The development is a group of 300 reclaimed sand banks set in the azure waters of the Persian Gulf, arranged in the shape of every land mass on earth.

Although they were built at the height of the emirate's boom in 2003, they have remained largely undeveloped and infrastructure has yet to be put in place for much of the development.

Qurashi, who was touted as one of the top businessman in Dubai when he purchased the Britain development for about \$60 million two years ago, had planned to turn the 4.45 hectares into a homage to his home city.

"I am proud of my British heritage and not a day goes past when I don't miss London," he recently told the U.K.'s ITV for the program "Piers Morgan On Dubai."

"It's home at the end of the day and who doesn't miss home?"



Laura Dekker sits in the court house in Utrecht, Netherlands, on Aug. 24. A Dutch court ruled on July 27 that the 14-year-old no longer needed to be under the supervision of child protection services, making it possible for her to make her attempt to become the youngest person to sail around the world. VALERIE KUYPERS/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

# Court rules teen ready to sail solo around the world

By **MARCO 'T HOEN**  
*Epoch Times Staff*

AMSTERDAM—A 14-year-old Dutch girl has been given the green light to sail solo around the world, a journey that will take her through the pirate-infested waters of the Gulf of Aden.

Born on a ship and living out her first four years of life at sea, Laura Dekker has sailing in her blood.

Initially, Dekker wanted to start her bid to become the youngest person to sail around the world at age 13, but was blocked from doing so. A Dutch court put her under the charge of childcare protection services after ruling that her planned journey posed too much of a risk and would impact her personal development.

But on Tuesday, a Dutch court in Middelburg ruled that Dekker no longer needed to be under supervision as she had made all the necessary

improvements to her plan. The court said it was now up to her parents to decide whether she can set sail.

Dekker was on her boat when she received a phone call from her father telling her the good news. The very happy teen told Dutch media that she hadn't dared to hope for this outcome.

"They [child services] so often came up with something new that I thought, 'What will they come up with next?' But I am very happy they finally have been objective."

When asked whether she thought she was capable enough to undertake the journey she said, "I still have to prove that. My parents are convinced of it and so am I."

Appearing on television Tuesday night, Dekker's father gave his daughter permission to go. He said he was aware that not every 14-year-old would be able to sail around the world, but at the same time "there

are people 80 years old who could not sail around the world, or 40 years old."

After she was denied permission to start her journey last year, Dekker ran away to the island of Saint Martin.

One stipulation the court had imposed was that the teen needed to produce a sail plan. Her trip will be different from Australian Jessica Watson's who currently holds the record for youngest girl to solo sail the world at 16 years old.

"I will not go nonstop as she did," said Dekker whose journey will take two years, arriving back home before she turns 16. "I will not sail during the hurricane season."

She regards damage to her boat the biggest potential danger. To mitigate that, she said "good navigation, especially near the coast and harbours," is important.

"You have to pay attention to reefs

and things lying just below the surface."

Other points the court told Laura to improve on were sleep management, first aid skills, and getting more sailing experience under her belt.

The teen made good on all points, except perhaps practicing sleeping on the boat. "I have tried it, yes. It's different," she commented in the television interview.

Dekker's journey will bring her from Australia to the Red Sea and across the Gulf of Aden where Somali pirates are active. She said she is not worried, since she doesn't expect the pirates to be interested in one small boat.

Now that she has the official go ahead, Dekker will leave with her father for Portugal within two weeks to make the final adjustments to her 38-foot red boat, named "Guppy," before setting sail on the journey of her dreams.

## End of Israeli settlement freeze approaches, report raises questions

By **GENEVIEVE LONG**  
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JERUSALEM—A human rights organization is making strong claims against the Israeli government, saying that Israel has manipulated the law to support Israeli settlers in the West Bank.

B'Tselem, a nonprofit organization based in Jerusalem, says the violation of international law is so clear that they advocate for the complete removal of all Israeli settlers.

That's a population of almost 500,000 people in the West Bank and the annexed part of Jerusalem.

"Settlements are illegal," stated Jessica Montell, B'Tselem's executive director, during a press conference last week to a packed room of about 40 reporters.

Montell was discussing B'Tselem's updated 2002 report that details what the organization says are the government's methods to take land from Palestinians.

The report asserts that establishing settlements in the West Bank has been "one of Israel's main national enterprises for the past 43 years."

'We're looking at the issue through a very narrow lens of human rights and international law.'

— Jessica Montell

Other rights organizations also contend that the establishment of Israeli settlements in the West Bank constitutes a violation of the human rights of Palestinians. Examples include restricted movement, military-enforced curfews, and settlement of land legally owned by Palestinians.

However, in late 2009 the Israeli government put a 10-month partial freeze on further settlement building. The freeze is set to expire in September, raising questions about what the next steps will be.

Montell admits that B'Tselem's report, "By Hook and by Crook: Israeli Settlement Policy in the West Bank," does not represent a broad-based approach to the issue.

"We're looking at the issue through a very narrow lens of human rights and international law," she said. But she asserted that based on the report, the Israeli government is complicit in the growth of unauthorized settlements by providing roads, electricity, and military protection.

She added that with the approach of the end of the partial freeze and predicting Israel's next move, "it's always the question: what is the big picture plan?"

One of the major assertions of the report is that Israel has manipulated an Ottoman-era law regarding "land grabs" to seize land legally owned by Palestinians. B'Tselem says Israel's interpretation of that law is that any land not worked for three years can be settled.

Some of the data used in the report includes a 2005 Israeli government-commissioned analysis of illegal settlements by attorney Talya Sasson.

Sasson's report said that the phenomena of unauthorized outposts began in the mid-90s after the Rabin administration froze building in Judea, Samaria, and Gaza in 1993. Settlement building was still approved, but at a rate that decreased as the negotiations with Palestinian representatives accelerated.

Recent signs of renewed negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians have resulted in little to no progress toward agreement on issues such as West Bank settlements.

Spokespeople at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the prime minister's office could not be reached for comment at time of publication.

B'Tselem, or the Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, was formed in 1989 by academics, attorneys, journalists, and Israeli Parliament members.

## France vows to fight Al-Qaeda after Frenchman's murder

By **AURELIEN GIRARD**  
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PARIS—France is "at war against al-Qaeda" and will "reinforce its fight" against terrorism, French Prime Minister Francois Fillon said on Tuesday after Aqmi (al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb) claimed to have executed a French humanitarian worker.

"These people are indescribably cruel," Fillon said on Europe 1 radio station. "France does not practice revenge. However, we have agreements with regional governments—especially the Mauritanian government—to track these terrorists and bring them to court."

Michel Germaneau, a 78-year-old humanitarian worker, was kidnapped in Niger by Aqmi last April. Described as humble and dedicated to others, Germaneau was there to supervise the building of a school. In the early days following his kidnapping, French authorities were worried that they would not be able to rescue him since they were unable to start negotiations with Aqmi representatives.

"The life of the hostage was condemned" following a "weird ultimatum" given by Aqmi last July, said Fillon. "Because of this, we were led to believe that Michel Germaneau was already dead at that time, but it only was a hypothesis."

The prime minister explained how French special forces organized a rescue operation at a place where they thought the hostage was detained.

"We hoped he would be in that camp," said Fillon. "That was the only solution [to make an attempt



Erard Corbin de Mangoux, head of France's foreign intelligence service, arrives on July 26 at the Elysee Palace in Paris to attend a security and defense council meeting following al-Qaeda's announcement of the death of French hostage Michel Germaneau. BERTRAND LANGLOIS/AFP/GETTY IMAGE

to rescue Germaneau] in a desert as large as Europe."

An elected official from Mali told AFP that Germaneau was beheaded on July 24 by Aqmi after the group suffered an attack from French and Malian troops, but French media also raised the possibility that he died weeks ago as a result of a heart condition that went untreated after being held captive by Aqmi.

Since 2009, al-Qaeda has made France a particular focus for future terror attacks for two main reasons. First, France is involved militarily in Afghanistan with more than 4,000 troops and several jet fighters. In addition, France recently passed legislation prohibiting Islamic veils—burqas and niqabs—in public.

Le Point newspaper noted that

in June 2009, when French President Nicolas Sarkozy announced that burqas were "not welcome" on French soil, Aqmi leader Abou Moussab Abdoul Wadoud promised to take "revenge against France and its interests by all means."

However, the threat against France is no cause for alarm, expert on radical Islam Mathieu Guidère told Le Figaro newspaper.

"No information allows us to say that France is in greater danger ... Nothing suggests that Aqmi is planning an operation on our territory."

The current threat, he said, resembles more the case of "isolated terrorists" like Times Square's Faisal Shahzad who commit radical acts without evident links with key al-Qaeda members.

## UK to fight for Turkey's seat in EU

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Sticking points slowing Ankara's entrance into the EU include the lack of progress in normalizing relations with Cyprus, which joined the EU in 2004, and Turkey's increasing support for pro-Islamic parties.

Cameron criticized Turkey's detractors, calling them protectionists and "prejudiced," saying that they "wilfully misunderstood Islam" and "see no difference between real Islam and the distorted version of the extremists."

The PM also told Turkish officials to "aggressively" deal with economic and political reform to fulfill its requirements for EU membership.

Perhaps to test Turkey's commitment to its EU aspirations, Cameron also said he hoped Turkey will support sanctions imposed against Iran designed to prevent the development of a nuclear weapons program.

"So we need Turkey's help now in making it clear to Iran just how serious we are about engaging fully with the international community," he said.

Iran will meet Turkey and Brazil in the coming days to push forward discussions on a nuclear-fuel swap deal the three nations agreed to in May. The deal would allow Iran to ship low-enriched uranium to Turkey in exchange for nuclear fuel for its research reactor.

Last October, a fuel swap deal was central to talks between Russia, France, and the United States over how to deal with Iran. The failure to reach an agreement led to fresh sanctions being imposed on Iran first by the United Nations, then by the U.S., EU, and Canada.