

# Syria battles forest fires for seventh day straight

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AFP

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DAMASCUS: Syrian firefighters and army helicopters Wednesday battled forest fires for a seventh consecutive day in government-held areas of the war-torn country, state media said.

Damascus ally Iran sent in a firefighting plane Wednesday carrying 40 tons of water to help fight the fires in the hilly woodlands of Latakia and Hama provinces, in northwestern and central Syria respectively, state news agency SANA said.

State media has published repeated images of billowing smoke above tree tops and charred vegetation.

"Numerous fires have been put out, others brought under control, but the fires continue to rage in some areas" of Latakia, forestry official Hassan Fares told AFP.

The agriculture ministry said steep terrain was an obstacle to fire trucks being able to reach the fire hit areas quickly.

There was no immediate data for how large an area had been affected overall. But Hama governor Mohammed Al-Hazouri said the blaze had ravaged eight square kilometers (three square miles) of agricultural land in his province alone. Summer fires, sometimes sparked by accident and generally not linked to the war, are common in Syria, but residents have said this year's are worse than usual.

Syria's war has killed more than 380,000 people, displaced millions from their homes, and decimated the country's economy.





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## [Lebanon president requests contact with US Embassy over sanctions on ex-ministers](#)

Author:

Wed, 2020-09-09 23:57

BEIRUT: Lebanon's President Michel Aoun has asked his interim foreign minister to contact the US embassy about the imposition of sanctions on two of the country's former ministers, the presidency media office said on Wednesday.

Aoun also requested contact be made with the Lebanese embassy in Washington "in order to understand the circumstances" behind the decision to place the politicians, allied with the Shiite Muslim group Hezbollah, on its sanctions list.

The US Treasury on Tuesday announced it was imposing sanctions on former finance minister and top Amal official Ali Hassan Khalil and former public works and transportation minister Youssef Fenianos, a senior member of the Christian Marada Movement.

The treasury department said they "provided material support to Hezbollah and engaged in corruption." The move was Washington's strongest warning against Hezbollah's allies.

Khalil is currently a member of the Lebanese Parliament and Hezbollah and its allies control majority seats in parliament.

The Shiite Amal group is headed by Lebanon's longtime Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri and the Marada Movement is an organization allied with Hezbollah and Syrian President Bashar Assad's government.

The sanctions came as Lebanon grapples with an unprecedented economic and financial crisis and deals with the aftermath of a devastating explosion at Beirut's port that killed more than 190, wounded 6,500 and caused damage worth billions of dollars.

The sanctions also came as prime minister-designate Mustapha Adib works to form a new Cabinet to replace the one that resigned on Aug. 10, six days after nearly 3,000 tons of ammonium nitrate detonated in Beirut. The disaster fueled outrage against a ruling class that has run the country for decades amid widespread corruption and mismanagement.

Some analysts in Lebanon saw the sanctions as a message to Hezbollah's allies to review their links with the Iran-backed group, especially by targeting a Christian ally for the first time.

"Fenianos and Ali Hassan Khalil are two central figures in the coalition that

is led by Hezbollah,” said Ali Hamadeh, a political writer at An-Nahar newspaper who is often critical of the Iran-backed group. He added that by sanctioning Fenianos, the US is sending a message to Frangieh, the Marada chief, who is a presidential hopeful. Hamadeh said Hezbollah’s non-Shiite allies will now have to “think seriously about the repercussions of their relations with Hezbollah.” Amal denounced the US sanctions against one of its senior members in a statement on Wednesday, saying they infringe on Lebanon’s sovereignty and will not succeed in extracting any concessions. *(With Reuters and AP)*



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US sanctions Lebanese former ministers for corruption, supporting Hezbollah  
Lebanese army puts out fire at Beirut Port

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# Storm in a teacup: Lebanon's president and 1.675 kilos of finest Ceylon brew

Wed, 2020-09-09 23:07

BEIRUT: So you're the president of a country with a ruling elite widely held to be inept and corrupt, the economy is collapsing, and swaths of your capital city have been reduced to rubble by a devastating explosion.

It must be tempting just to sit down and have a nice cup of tea. But President Michel Aoun of Lebanon can't even do that without getting into hot water.

The trouble started brewing when the president's office published a photo last month of Aoun receiving the Sri Lankan ambassador, who said Colombo had "donated 1,675 kilos of Ceylon tea to those affected by the Beirut blast."

All well and good. The beleaguered residents of Gemmayze may have no homes, but at least they can be refreshed.

On Wednesday, however, it emerged that Aoun had written to Sri Lankan president Gotabaya Rajapaksa thanking him for the gift, which "was distributed to the families of the soldiers in the Presidential Guard Brigade."

And that's when it all boiled over. Aoun has a new social media hashtag – #TeaThief – and his conduct has been described as shameful, although admittedly not for the first time.

"The tea was sent to the Lebanese, particularly those affected by the explosion," said independent MP Paula Yacoubian. "Of course it wasn't a present for those who don't need it. Distributing the aid to your entourage is shameful."

الشيء ارسل الى اللبنانيين بخاصة المتضررين من انفجاركم وطبعاً لم يكن هدية لمن لا يحتاجها

توزيع المساعدات على حاشيتك معيب #لبنان ينحدر مع عهدكم كما لم يفعل حتى في زمن الاقتتال في عهدكم السابق <https://t.co/XlweMGdYJu>

– بولا يعقوبيان (@PaulaYacoubian) [September 8, 2020](#)

One Lebanese Twitter user wrote: "Corruption in Lebanon continues. This government has 0 percent chance of changing."

Corruption in Lebanon continues. That government has 0% chance of changing. 100% wrong.

– Sunshine & Lollipops (@ljhinco) [September 9, 2020](#)



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## [Cyprus repatriates 90 Lebanese](#)

Author:

Wed, 2020-09-09 01:28

BEIRUT: Cypriot authorities on Tuesday repatriated 90 Lebanese, including women and children, to Tripoli after they tried to enter the country illegally.

"Those repatriated were tested for COVID-19 and quarantined in preparation for their return home," said North Governorate District Commissioner Iman Al-Rafi.

Emigration from Lebanon is growing rapidly amid the dire economic situation

and spiraling unemployment.

According to Lebanon's National News Agency, Cypriot authorities will send a delegation to Beirut this week to discuss ways to "prevent boats loaded with illegal migrants from Lebanon sailing towards Cyprus."

Cypriot authorities said an "unprecedented number of boats" had been intercepted. "At least five boats carrying more than 150 migrants were stopped by authorities," Cypriot Interior Minister Nicos Nouris said, adding that his country "is on alert."



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## [Turkey urged to release rights defender after European court ruling](#)

Author:

Wed, 2020-09-09 00:33

ANKARA: Turkey has been urged to release human rights defender Osman Kavala following a European court ruling that said his detention was unlawful.

The International Commission of Jurists (ICJ), Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and the Turkey Human Rights Litigation Support Project are among those campaigning for Kavala's freedom. He has been behind bars for more than 1,000 days.

Rights groups are trying to keep his case on the agenda and prevent the targeting and persecution of activists, dissident politicians and critical journalists from becoming the norm in Turkey.

Kavala has been imprisoned since Nov. 2017 on various allegations and charges. The lawfulness of his detention has been brought to the attention of Turkey's Constitutional Court.

The Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers recently ordered Turkey, which has been a founding member of the council since 1950, to ensure Kavala's immediate release.

The European Court ruled last December that Turkey was persisting in its violations of provisions in the European Convention on Human Rights, especially the rights to liberty, security and a speedy decision on the lawfulness of detention.

The court said that, by detaining Kavala since 2017 and prosecuting him, Turkish authorities had "pursued an ulterior purpose, namely to silence him as a human rights defender."

In an official visit to Turkey earlier this month, the head of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) Robert Spano spoke of the importance of implementing ECHR rulings by local courts in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, but without making any open reference to Kavala's case.

"Turkish authorities should have complied with the binding ruling of the European Court to free Osman Kavala some time ago," Amnesty International's Turkey researcher Andrew Gardner told Arab News. "Obviously, keeping an innocent person in prison on absurd charges for almost 3 years is in itself a very damaging stain on the reputation of Turkish judiciary and with respect to the human rights record in Turkey in general."

Gardner said the call from the Committee of Ministers to free Kavala had significantly increased the pressure on Turkish authorities. He added that Kavala's case was far from the only example of authorities imprisoning people in an "attempt to silence them and people they represent."

"He (Kavala) should never have been detained in first place. Ultimately, all members of the Council of Europe have to abide by the rulings of ECHR. If they don't, they face serious sanctions."

Spano has been criticized for not being tougher on Turkey's human rights record and the rule of law during his meeting with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and top judiciary members in Ankara.

The leader of Turkey's main opposition, Kemal Kilicdaroglu, said on Tuesday that Kavala was behind bars because Erdogan wanted it that way and that his

detention period would continue.

“Turkey as a party to the European Convention on Human Rights undertook the obligation to implement all judgments of the European Court of Human Rights,” Massimo Frigo, senior international lawyer at the ICJ, told Arab News. “Not doing so would put the country in breach of its duty of collaboration with the court.”

Turkey must implement several measures to execute the judgment but it must first of all release Kavala and not maintain his detention under charges issued just to delay his freedom, Frigo said.

“The case of Osman Kavala is crucial for the rule of law in Turkey,” he added. “Both a national court and an international court have ordered his release and he is still in jail. Genuine execution of courts’ decisions is an essential tenet of the rule of law.”



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