

TV network files lawsuit against Lebanon presidency

Sun, 2020-09-06 22:23

BEIRUT: The TV channel MTV Lebanon has taken legal action against the Lebanese presidency after being banned from entering the parliament building to cover talks on the formation of a new government.

Urgent appeals court judge Carla Shawah told the presidency of the lawsuit – believed to be the first of its kind focusing on media freedom – which comes after a reporter and camera crew from the channel were refused entry to the Baabda Palace last week.

MTV attorney Mark Habaka told Arab News: “We look forward to a decision that is in the interest of press freedom because the decision to deny the MTV team entry to the Republican Palace is unfair and a violation of freedom of expression, which is guaranteed by the constitution.”

The MTV team said it was shocked after being stopped from entering the Baabda Palace to cover binding parliamentary consultations that Lebanese President Michel Aoun held to appoint a prime minister for the next government.

Habaka denied claims that the channel undermined the presidency.

“We consider this move to be a dangerous precedent with regard to undermining the Fourth Estate,” he said.

MTV, like many privately owned channels, has been highly critical of the Lebanese government and Aoun in the wake of the Beirut port explosion on Aug. 4.

Presidential spokesman Rafik Shalala confirmed a statement had been issued by the General Directorate of the Lebanese Presidency explaining the decision to deny MTV entry to the palace.

The statement said: “MTV attacked the president, stripped him of his official capacity, referred to him using his name alone without his title, and persisted in insulting and defaming him as well as describing him using inappropriate expressions. Numerous attempts to get the channel to reconsider yielded no results. All these violations are punishable by law.”

FASTFACT

MTV, like many privately owned channels, has been highly critical of the Lebanese government and Aoun in the wake of the Beirut port explosion on Aug. 4.

Further infringements could result in the channel being shut down, the statement added.

Habaka said the Republican Palace failed to communicate with the channel before banning it from entry, and the decision came as a shock to the MTV team.

"There is no immunity in the law for the presidency. It is a public department like other public departments in Lebanon, and the law guarantees freedoms, including freedom of expression. We appeal to the judiciary and the law above everyone," he said.

Asked whether the lawsuit targeted the presidency as a whole or Aoun individually, Habaka said: "The presidency is represented by President Michel Aoun, and he is the one who made the decision."

The channel said in a news bulletin following the ban that "this is the headquarters of the Lebanese presidency, not the house of Michel Aoun."

Lebanon's Media Professionals for Freedom initiative criticized the presidency's ban on MTV, saying it was "the other face of the unparalleled bankruptcy, distress and piracy."

It added: "The Republican Palace violated a constitutional principle that guarantees public and media freedoms."

The lawsuit is one of many filed against the presidency. Lebanese lawyer Majd Harb issued a complaint against Aoun and outgoing Prime Minister Hassan Diab, alleging both were aware that ammonium nitrate was stored at the port but took no action.

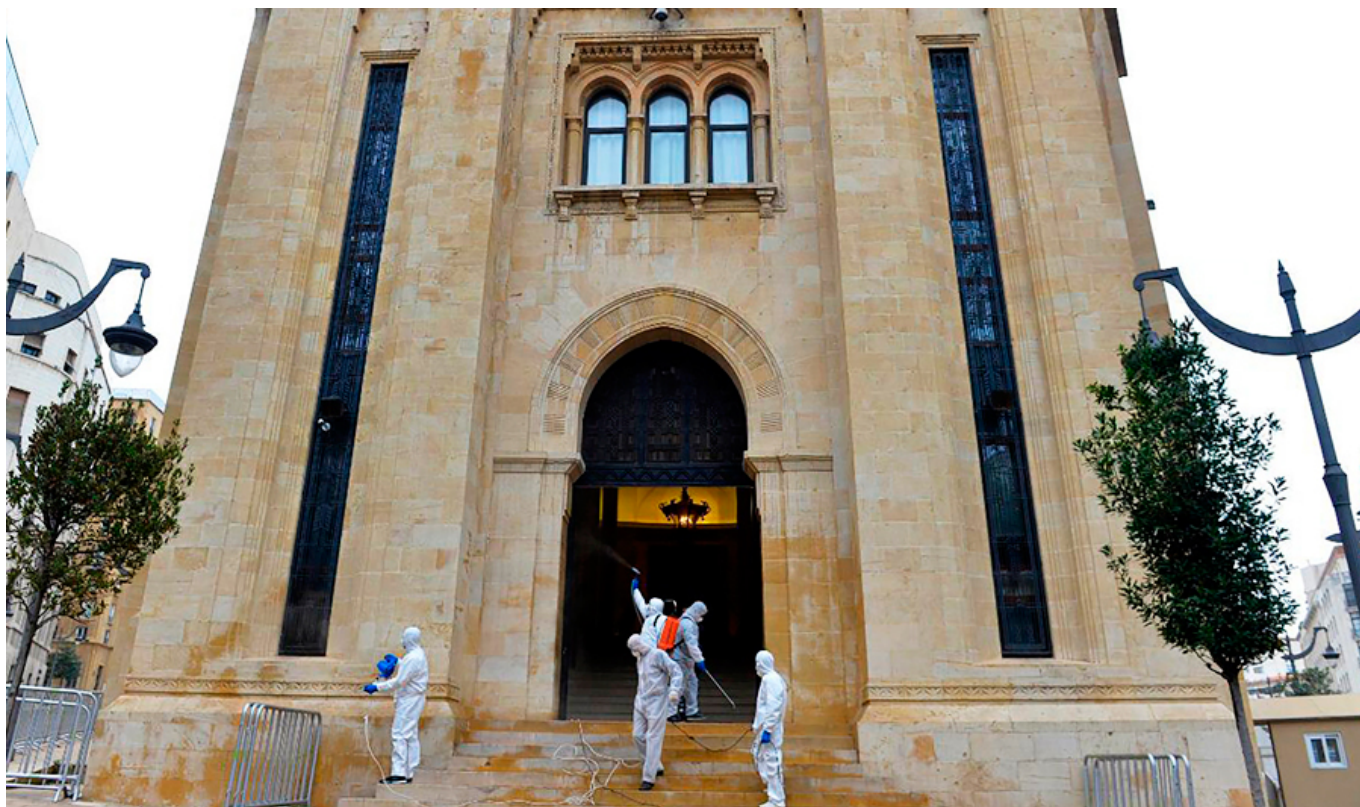
In a statement, the presidency said it hopes the judicial investigation will "clarify the full truth about the explosion, its circumstances and those responsible at all levels."

The massive blast killed 191 people, injured more than 6,000, left nearly 300,000 homeless and devastated large areas of the capital. Up to five people are still believed to be missing.

A total of 19 people, mainly customs and port officials, have been detained as part of the investigation.

The search for possible survivors in a residential building destroyed by the explosion in Mar Mikhael street was called off on Saturday after no bodies were found.

Engineer Riyad Al-Asaad, a contractor who joined the search, said: "The Chilean volunteer rescue team reached the same conclusion after three days of searching and removing debris by hand: There are no survivors or bodies."



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Lebanon's army finds 4 tonnes of explosive material near Beirut port

[Egypt's new administrative capital will be center of Middle East, says official](#)

Sun, 2020-09-06 22:12

CAIRO: The start of the second phase of Egypt's New Administrative Capital is underway, its chairman has said.

Maj. Gen. Ahmed Zaki Abdeen, chairman of the New Administrative Capital Company also said there are also plans to implement new proposals in an area of 47,000 feddans (48,778 acres).

Abdeen said the focus is now on attracting international brands in fields such as electronics, computing and electronic services. Different sectors in the capital will be divided into smaller "cities."

He said the capital is communicating with major international companies like Microsoft and Amazon for the project.

Abdeen said there will be fewer residential neighborhoods in this phase compared with the first phase. The third phase of the new capital will be built on an area of 90,000 feddans (93,405 acres).

He said that the new presidential district, government district and headquarters of the House of Representatives will be completed by the end of the year, and that the presidential neighborhood will be ready to receive the Egyptian leader.

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi has said he will exercise his duties from the new headquarters after June 2021. The government also plans to move to the government district at the same time.

FASTFACT

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi is likely to exercise his duties from the new headquarters after June 2021.

Abdeen added that the rest of the residential neighborhoods are between 70 and 80 percent complete. There are growing expectations that within three to four years, the capital will have seen a huge influx of new residents.

Abdeen said that total investment in the first phase of the project ranged from 700 to 800 billion Egyptian pounds (\$44.2 to \$50.2 billion) and did not cost the state any money.

“We are hoping to transform the New Administrative Capital into the capital of the Middle East,” he said.

This project is designed to boost Egypt’s economy. He said the New Administrative Capital is a smart city that will feature the latest technology.

Abdeen added that services in the capital will be accessible using a unified main card. Those who live in the capital can obtain services using the card, as well as buy products and transportation, removing the need for cash.

He said that services are controlled through a central control and operation center operated on a fiber network. The capital is secured by a camera system linked to satellites, the security control center and signaling systems. Accidents and fires can be dealt with rapidly through the system, Abdeen added.



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Egypt to announce major archaeological discovery in Saqqara
Egypt sends aid to 30 African countries

[Egypt to announce major archaeological discovery in Saqqara](#)

Author:

Sun, 2020-09-06 21:30

CAIRO: Egypt is preparing to announce its largest archaeological discovery in recent memory, which includes wooden and gold coffins, with much of their original colour preserved.

Sources at the Egyptian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities said that the Supreme Council of Antiquities working in the Saqqara archaeological area discovered a new major archaeological cache.

The discovery includes human and animal burials, a group of shabti statues and statues of the gods Isis, Nephthys and Horus, in addition to masks and canopic vessels that belong to the late age.

Sources told local websites that about 50 coffins had been discovered so far, but that number is expected to double during the excavations.

None of the coffins are thought to belong to important historical figures, and work continues on identifying who was buried in the coffins.

The sources said that the discovery would be announced during the next few days.

The archaeological area of Saqqara, an ancient burial ground in the governorate of Giza, has witnessed many archaeological discoveries in recent years. The most important of these was the discovery of the Tomb of Wahty and the sacred cache of animals and birds, in which a large number of animal mummies were found.

Sources revealed to Al-Watan, the local newspaper, that the discovery of the animal cemetery, which began in April 2018, continued till April 2020. It was on World Heritage Day, April 18 this year that a well measuring about 120 x 90 cm and a depth of about 11 meters was discovered.

Towards the end of 2019 the Egyptian archaeological mission working in the region discovered a cache of mummies of animals and sacred birds, including five mummies of large cats, which preliminary studies suggested could be small lions.

International news agencies circulated the discovery, saying that the animals resembled the Sphinx.



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El-Sisi backs Egyptian companies building major dam in Tanzania
Egyptian artist Hady Boraey: 'Without roots, we would be lost'

'No sign of life' in search for Beirut blast survivor

Author:

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Sun, 2020-09-06 04:27

BEIRUT: Rescue workers said Saturday there was no longer any sign of life in a collapsed Beirut building, dashing hopes raised by sensor readings showing a pulse beneath the rubble from last month's blast.

The cataclysmic August 4 explosion in the port of Beirut killed at least 191 people, making it Lebanon's deadliest peacetime disaster. One month on, seven people are still listed as missing

On Wednesday night, a sniffer dog deployed by Chilean rescuers detected a scent beneath a collapsed building in the heavily damaged Gemmayzeh neighborhood adjacent to the port.

High-tech sensors confirmed an apparent heartbeat and rescue teams took up the search.

But after three days' work removing piles of masonry, Chilean rescue specialist Francesco Lermenda late Saturday said there was no longer any sign of life under the rubble.

"Sadly today we can say that technically we have no sign of life inside the building," he told the media.

Two female rescue workers on Saturday slipped through a final tunnel to check for any victim in the last air pocket where there could possibly be but found nobody there, he said.

Work would however continue to make the zone secure and ensure there was no possibility of any victim being left inside, Lermenda said.

In the afternoon, engineer Riyadh Assad had said the workers had cleared two layers of rubble and reached a stairway, where they found no one.

The civil defense agency's operations director, George Abou Moussa, in the morning said the chances of finding someone alive were "very low."

But civil defense officer Qassem Khater said his team was determined not to give up.

"We are not leaving the site until we've finished going through the rubble, even if a new building collapse threatens," he said.

Chilean specialist Walter Munoz in the morning had put the chances of finding a survivor at “two percent.”

Lebanese officials had played down the chances of anyone surviving so long beneath the rubble.

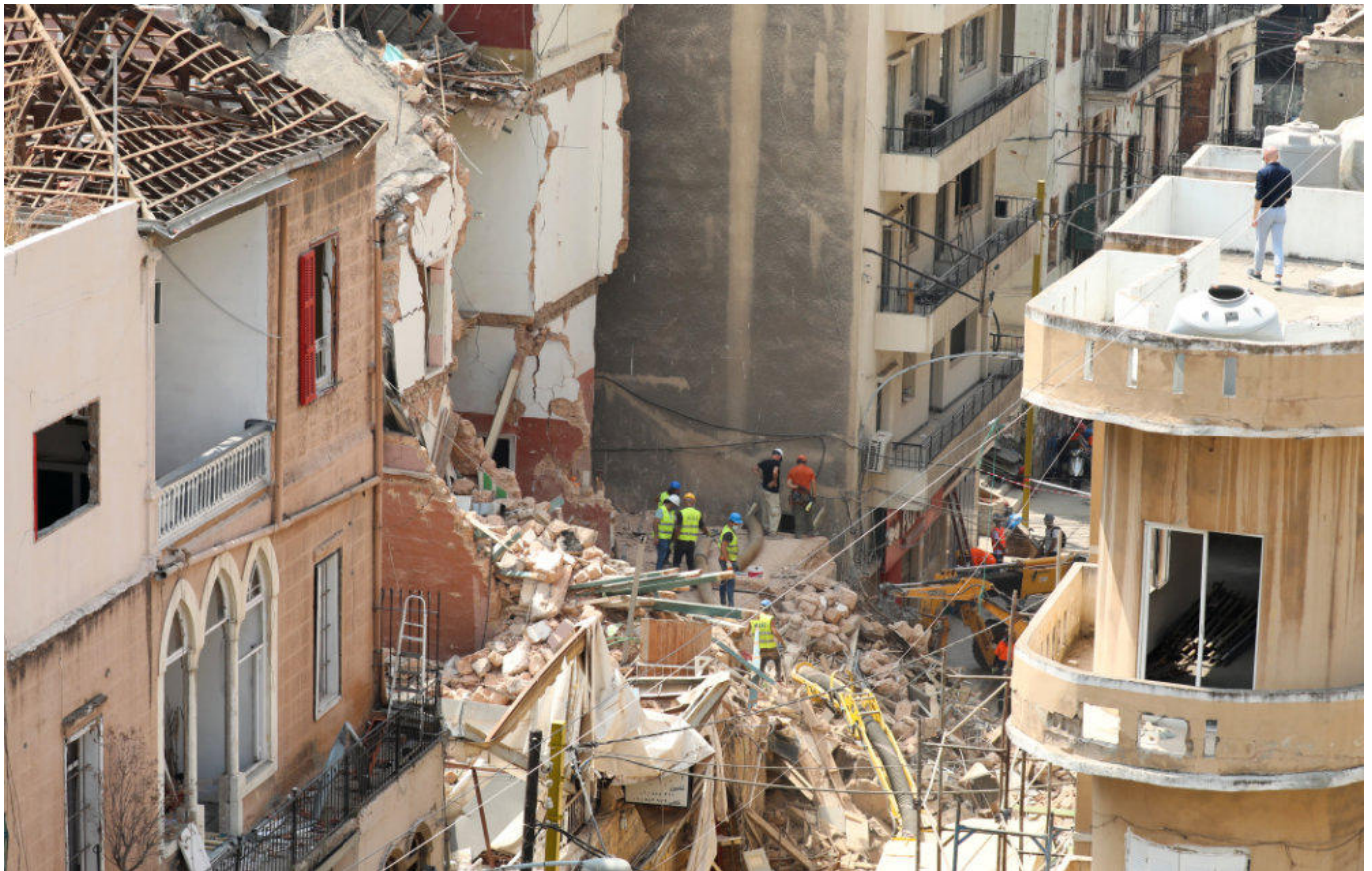
But even the faint hope of a miracle caught the imagination of a country already reeling from the coronavirus pandemic and the country’s worst economic crisis in decades.

“I was not aware I needed a miracle that much. Please God, give Beirut this miracle it deserves,” said Selim Mourad, a 32-year-old film-maker.

Lebanon lacks the tools and expertise to handle advanced search and rescue operations, so they have been supported by experts from Chile, France and the United States.

The Chileans, in particular, have been praised as heroes by many Lebanese on social media, who have compared their expertise with the lackluster performance of what they see as their own absent state.

The country observed a minute’s silence for the dead on Friday.





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Egypt and UAE discuss Eastern Mediterranean

Sat, 2020-09-05 22:10

CAIRO: With the escalation of tension between Egypt and Turkey, Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry discussed with his Emirati counterpart Abdullah bin Zayed the latest developments in the Eastern Mediterranean.

The two sides also discussed relations between their countries and ways to enhance joint cooperation in all fields, according to UAE News Agency WAM.

This coincides with Greece's denial of holding talks with Turkey, mediated by NATO, with the aim of easing tensions between the two parties due to disputes over maritime borders and gas exploration in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Turkey is provoking Greece – which has drawn its maritime borders with Egypt in accordance with recognized international agreements – by exploring gas in the Eastern Mediterranean on its own, a move that was met with great international condemnation.

“There are deep, brotherly relations between the UAE and the Arab Republic of Egypt and a continuous keenness to strengthen each other and develop areas of joint cooperation,” bin Zayed said.

Both countries share similar visions with regard to the Eastern Mediterranean, Libya, and a number of other issues.

HIGHLIGHT

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Bin Zayed confirmed his country's rejection of any measures threatening stability in the Eastern Mediterranean region.

Last month, Egypt and Greece signed an agreement to demarcate the maritime borders between them, which Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan described as worthless.

Egypt responded by expressing its astonishment at the Turkish position, explaining that it was surprising that such statements and allegations should be issued by a party that did not know the agreement and its details.

Two days ago, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo called on Athens and Ankara to de-escalate tension in the Eastern Mediterranean around the maritime borders and energy reserves in the region, after strong statements from

Turkey.



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Erdogan raises rhetoric in Greece standoff in Mediterranean NATO sets up talks in search for solution to Turkey-Greece conflict