

Sudan's Omar Bashir's trial adjourned to Sept. 15

Author:

Wed, 2020-09-02 01:55

KHARTOUM: Sudan's trial of ousted President Omar Bashir over the 1989 coup that brought him to power was adjourned Tuesday to Sept. 15, the presiding judge said.

The session, which was broadcast on Sudan TV, was held amid tight security as Bashir, 76, and other co-accused regime figures stood behind bars in the courtroom.

After procedural questions and debate about coronavirus precautions in the courtroom, the presiding judge declared the hearing was "adjourned to September 15."

Giving his profession as "former president of the republic," Bashir seemed in good physical condition as he appeared in a metal courtroom cage wearing white prison-issue clothes and a medical face mask that he lowered to identify himself.

In footage carried by Sudanese state TV he said he was resident in Khartoum's Kober Prison, 76 years old, and had two wives.

Some of Bashir's former associates appeared alongside him at the trial, which had been postponed because of overcrowding at the scheduled opening last month.

Military officers ousted Bashir in April 2019 after months of street protests, leading to a power-sharing agreement between the military and civilian groups.

Bashir is separately facing prosecution over his alleged role in the repression of protests against his rule, and in December was sentenced at another trial to 2 years in prison on corruption charges.

He is also wanted by the International Criminal Court on charges of alleged genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity in Darfur.

Tuesday's court hearing came a day after Sudan's transitional leadership signed a peace deal with some of the rebel groups that had battled Bashir's military and allied militias in Darfur.

Three major groups signed the deal, including factions from Darfur where more than 300,000 people are estimated to have been killed and 2.5 million displaced since 2003, and one from southern regions which say they were also marginalized.

But two factions with the biggest presence on the ground in Darfur and the

south did not sign, and the cash-strapped transitional government will struggle to pay for the return of millions of displaced people and regional development promised in the deal.

“The main challenge facing us now is the implementation of the peace agreement, and finding donations to do that,” Jibril Ibrahim, leader of Darfur’s Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), said after he and the other rebel leaders signed the agreement.

Sudan has been riven by regional conflicts for decades. After the oil-rich south became independent in 2011, a gradual economic decline fueled the protests which pushed Bashir from power last year.

Civilian and military leaders who have shared power since then say ending internal conflicts is a top priority in the path to democracy for the once-pariah state. Analysts said Monday’s deal, signed in the South Sudanese capital Juba, was very important but left big gaps.



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Sudan government and rebel groups agree peace deal
Sudan rebels agree to key peace deal with government

Egypt to try ex-student for sexual assault, blackmail in #MeToo case

Tue, 2020-09-01 21:48

CAIRO: Egypt's chief prosecutor Tuesday referred a former student of an elite university to the criminal court for trial on charges of sexual assault of three minors, in a case that added fuel to the #MeToo movement in the Arab world's most populous country.

Public Prosecutor Hamada El-Sawy said former student Ahmed Bassam Zaki is also charged with blackmailing and sexually harassing the women, who were minors at the time the alleged crimes took place.

No date has been set for trial. The suspect could face up to life in prison if convicted.

Zaki was arrested in July after the allegations against him went viral, resulting in a firestorm on social media. The #MeToo movement aims to hold accountable those involved in sexual misconduct and those who cover it up. Several attempts at the time by The Associated Press to contact his family or his lawyer were unsuccessful.

According to accusations posted on social media, the former student would mine the pool of mutual friends on Facebook, online groups or school clubs. He would start with flattery, then pressure the women and girls to share intimate photos that he later used to blackmail them with to have sex with him, according to these accusations. If they did not, he would threaten to send the pictures to their family.

The former student hails from a wealthy family and studied at the American International School, one of Egypt's most expensive private high schools, and the American University in Cairo. AUC officials said he left the university in 2018.

Claims against 22-year-old Zaki erupted online in July in the form of testimonies including an alleged rape and instances of assault against dozens of girls and women, some involving blackmail.

Some alleged incidents involved girls as young as 14.

Zaki, a former student of some of Egypt's most elite schools and the American University in Cairo, was arrested on July 4 and confessed to assaulting several girls, according to the prosecution.

The case kickstarted a #MeToo campaign in Egypt, where women complain of rampant sexual harassment, an offense that was only criminalized since 2014. United Nations surveys say most women in the conservative country have been subject to harassment ranging from catcalling, pinching, groping or worse. Women are often reluctant to speak out fearing public shame and being blamed for dressing or acting "provocatively."

Egypt's parliament last month approved amendments to the criminal code granting victims of sexual assault the right to anonymity.

Zaki's case, activists say, shows that misogyny cuts across the country's stark class lines. Many in Egypt have previously portrayed sexual harassment as a problem of poor urban youth.

Sexual assault and harassment are deep-seated problems in Egypt, where victims must also fight the undercurrent of a conservative culture that

typically ties female chastity to a family's reputation. In courts, the burden of proof lies heavily on the victims of such crimes.

The allegations against the former student were collected by the Instagram account @assaultpolice. Since then, the account has played a crucial role in revealing an alleged gang rape that shook Egyptian society in recent weeks. Allegations of sexual misconduct also emerged against several rights activists.

The alleged gang rape took place at a five-star Cairo hotel in 2014, but word of the assault surfaced only in July after the former student's case was made public.

Last week, prosecutors said seven suspects left the country after allegations of the gang rape went viral. Five of the suspects arrived in Lebanon, according to Lebanese authorities. Acting on a request from Egypt, three were arrested late Friday in a village north of Beirut, while the other two apparently left Lebanon.

Another nine suspects were arrested in Egypt, including one last week as he attempted to flee the country. Prosecutors ordered five suspects to remain in custody for four days pending investigations. They ordered the release of four others, three of them on bail of 100,000 Egyptian pounds (\$6,315).

(With AP and AFP)



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Lebanon arrests 3 Egyptian suspects in Cairo gang rape case
Egypt kills 77 extremist militants in anti-terror operations

[‘National hero’ Iranian wrestling champion sentenced to death](#)

Author:

Tue, 2020-09-01 23:51

LONDON: An Iranian wrestling champion has been sentenced to death for his role in anti-regime protests in 2018.

The Supreme Court confirmed that Navid Akfari would receive two death sentences, six and a half years in jail and 74 lashes, according to Persian-language broadcaster Iran International.

Saqeb Saba, editor of Iran International, told Arab News that Akfari’s brothers Vahid and Habib were spared the death penalty but received prison sentences of 54 and 27 years respectively, as well as 74 lashes each.

The siblings allegedly participated in protests in 2018 that were triggered by the deteriorating economic situation in the country but morphed into an anti-regime movement.

The judiciary charged the brothers with 20 different crimes, including “attending illegal gatherings, assembly and conspiracy to commit crimes against national security, and insulting the supreme leader.”

Akfari’s case “is really, really upsetting for everybody,” Saba said. “He was a national hero, and we don’t even know the circumstances of his participation in the demonstrations.”

Saba said Akfari was tortured into making false confessions against his brothers, and their lawyer has since said their confessions have no value in any court because of this.

Saba said the regime violently suppresses anyone who expresses dissatisfaction with it, even those who do so peacefully.

“The worst thing Akfari could’ve done was sympathizing with his friends’, family’s and compatriots’ economic situations, but the way the regime has responded to these demonstrations is horrible – pure brutality,” Saba added.

“This is the action of a regime that’s frightened. The only way it can deal with a situation like this is brute force.”

Iran is notorious for its extensive use of the death penalty, particularly against protestors and political detainees.

According to rights group Amnesty International, Iran is behind only China in executions carried out per year, and killed at least 251 people in 2019 alone.

Many of those executions are carried out publicly, and much like in the case of the Akfari brothers, defendants are regularly subject to “systematic violations of fair trial rights,” Amnesty said.



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Iran must quash death sentences against protestors: UN experts
Internet access in Iran disrupted as anger at protestors' death sentences grows

Beirut: The city where streets still have French statesmen's names

Tue, 2020-09-01 01:37

BEIRUT: After the French entered Lebanon in 1920 after the declaration of the State of Greater Lebanon, they reconfigured the capital Beirut to conform to the new political order.

Among the most visible transformations was the introduction of identity cards for residents, a move that sought to establish a Lebanese entity separated from other Arab states.

In 1921, the French mandate authorities conducted the first census of the Lebanese population, and on the basis of this the Lebanese were granted a new identity card in place of Ottoman tickets. The census was boycotted by those who refused to separate from Syria and recognize the new state.

The streets of Beirut, which were under Ottoman rule for more than four centuries, were referred to as haraat (alleyways).



The alleys were named after the families that inhabited them, leaders and princes, or even sects. The city's markets were named after the professions found in them, according to the records of the Sharia court in Beirut.

The French mandate authorities, however, changed the names after modifying the city's architecture. Twenty-meter streets were paved to connect the capital's neighborhoods and make life easier. And while the neighborhoods preserved the names of the families that lived in them, such as Al-Barbir,

Al-Bashoura, Karm Al-Zaitoun, Zaroub Saba and Zaroub Al-Arawi, the mandate left its mark on modern streets by naming them after French generals and high commissioners who ruled Lebanon after the fall of Ottoman rule.

Although Lebanon won its independence in 1943, some prominent streets in Beirut still have the names of French generals who became famous during the two world wars.

Rue Gouraud is a residential and commercial street in Gemmayzeh in the Achrafieh district of Beirut. It is one of the trendiest thoroughfares, full of fine restaurants, French cafes and jazz bars.



General Henri Gouraud was the French high commissioner in Syria and Lebanon and army commander on the eastern side. Gouraud declared the State of Greater Lebanon from the porch of the Pine Residence in Beirut, and adopted the French military strategy known as “battle of annihilation.”

General Gouraud, who led the French forces in the famous Battle of Maysalun, lived on this street in Beirut.

A parallel street, Rue Pasteur, was named after the famous French scientist Louis Pasteur. It is also a commercial street and features shops of Lebanese innovators. Louis Pasteur (1822-1895) was a French chemist and one of the most important founders of medical microbiology. His medical discoveries contributed to reducing the fatality rate of puerperal fever, and he prepared vaccines against rabies and anthrax. He was known to the general public for inventing a method for pasteurizing milk.

The street adjacent to Beirut Municipality, Rue Weygand, bears the name of Maxime Weygand, a high-ranking officer in the Mandate-era French Army. He was the second high military commissioner appointed by France to rule Syria and

Lebanon, from April 1923 to Nov. 29, 1924. Weygand, who saw action in both the world wars, died in 1965.

Rue Georges Catroux is located in Beirut's Badaro residential area. Catroux was a general in the French Army (1877-1969), a diplomat who served in World War I and II, and an adviser in the Legion of Honor.

Rue Clemenceau, located in Ras Beirut, is named after the French prime minister Georges Benjamin Clemenceau (1841-1929). He was a statesman, doctor and journalist who was elected twice to head the French government.

His first term was between 1906 and 1909, while his second was during the critical period 1917-1920 during World War I. One of the leading architects of the Treaty of Versailles, he was nicknamed Father of Victory and the Tiger.



Avenue Charles de Gaulle (1890-1970) is the waterfront road of Beirut and named after the most prominent French figure during the World War II. De Gaulle lived in Lebanon for two years (1929-1931) when he was a major in the French army. He went on to serve as president of France.

Rue Verdun is one of the most high-end lively residential streets in Beirut. It has luxury retail stores, beauty and hair salons, and several cafes. In the center of the street is the Lycée Franco-Libanais school. The French St. Joseph School was situated on this street before it moved to a new location outside the capital. Although this street has been renamed after former Prime Minister Rashid Karami following his assassination in 1987, the name Verdun has remained popular.

Rue Verdun was so named in honor of the victims of the Battle of Verdun, which took place during World War I.



Foch Street, or Marshal Ferdinand Foch Street, is in the commercial heart of Beirut. Foch was a supreme Allied general in the World War I. One of Beirut's streets was named after him following the Allies' victory over the Germans.

Monnot Street, located on the eastern side of Beirut's central district, is full of restaurants, bars and libraries. It hosts painters and creative events and holds concerts and plays in its famous theater, which is named after Father Ambroise Monnot, the head of the Jesuit mission to Lebanon in the late 19th century.

Father Monnot contributed to the establishment of schools and printing presses so that Lebanon could become a cultural and intellectual center in the Near East.

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[French mandate-era landmarks fading from Lebanon's collective memory](#)

Author:

Tue, 2020-09-01 00:22

BEIRUT: Lebanon is celebrating its centennial as a modern state with a fading recollection of the landmarks that stood a hundred years ago.

The exception is the Residence des Pins (Pine Residence), the residence of the French ambassador in Beirut, which witnessed the establishment of Greater Lebanon on September 1, 1920 and has remained steadfast against the country's subsequent turmoil.

Other urban markers of that era either became extinct from natural factors and social development or were destroyed during the Lebanese Civil War. Whatever little was preserved perished in the explosion at the Port of Beirut less than a month before Lebanon's centennial.

The houses of Beirut's neighborhoods tell the stories of various epochs. During the first two decades of the 20th century, Beirut was a modest city centered around a tiny natural port, its inhabitants not exceeding 10,000

people.

The city was surrounded by a wall bearing many gates, which closed early each day. The names of these gates – such as Bab Idriss, Asour Gate, and Bab Al-Burj – still resonate, although the walls and gates are no longer standing.

“Beirut did not start to develop until the end of the third decade of the 20th century, when the West began showing an interest in cities on the eastern shores of the Mediterranean Sea, including Alexandria, Haifa, Beirut, Mersin and other Ottoman ports that were ready to receive commodities,” said architect Rahif Fayad, 84.

The role of Beirut’s port quickly grew and resulted in the rise of a new mercantile class in the city and Mount Lebanon, Fayad explained.

“The city’s population boomed and had to expand beyond its walls to neighboring areas, which led to it becoming a modern, open city.”

Most buildings during that period were constructed with sandstone excavated from Beirut sand rocks. These old stones can still be seen in Spears Street, the wall of the American University of Beirut, and many of Beirut’s old houses that are still resisting the two forces of modernity and destruction.

The stones were covered with a layer of limestone or cement to protect them from seasonal climatic effects. Houses consisted of one or two floors and were surrounded by a garden, often overlooking the sea, so that family members could live safely, without coming into contact with the surrounding neighborhood.

The facade of these houses consisted of three arches, with a red-sloped brick roof. This style was widespread in Beirut and other coastal cities throughout the eastern Mediterranean and served specific social needs. The inner courtyard was covered with a roof and became known as “Al-Dar” (living room), which was surrounded by bedrooms, a kitchen, and a dining room. This was the typical house of Beirut’s rising mercantile bourgeois class.

The houses were constructed by professionals – designers and construction workers educated in Europe and the US. The architecture was of the finest quality and fit in well with the surrounding environment, as local materials and expertise were used.

Italian architects were hired to design such places as the Sursock Palace, located on the eponymous street bearing the name of this aristocratic family.

With the large number of new arrivals, Beirut expanded and saw its port boom.

In 1920, with the declaration of Greater Lebanon and the beginning of the French Mandate era, colonialists introduced wide streets, modern transportation – such as tramways and cars – and an insatiable, consumerist lifestyle. They tried to fashion public places in the heart of historical Beirut, but some of these collided with the ancient churches and mosques present in the area.

Colonialists also introduced Haussmannian architecture, which entailed dividing the façade of a building into three vertical parts that would be adopted into contiguous buildings, forming the facade of a whole street. This design is best featured in Maarad, Foch, Allenby and Wegan Streets, and other orthogonal streets north of the Beirut Municipality Building.

This design can also be seen in areas relatively distant from the historical heart of Beirut, including Spears, Al-Kantari, May Ziadeh, Gemmayzeh, all the way to the Sursok area in Achrafieh.

“Beirut was the link between East and West, and this is depicted in its architecture since the French Mandate, which introduced new stylistic elements without relinquishing Islamic characteristics,” architect Fadlo Dagher said. “This blend of modern and Islamic elements is best expressed in the architecture of the Beirut Municipality building, which reflects both Ottoman and French architecture.

“This building was designed by the Greek-Lebanese engineer Youssef Aftimus (1866-1952), who began its construction during the Ottoman era and finished it during the French Mandate.”

Beirut’s architectural identity, in Dagher’s words, “reflects the city’s openness to everybody.”

How is it that some palaces and buildings are still standing after 100 years?

“Prior to the Mandate era, Ottoman construction depended on wood to build roofs,” Dagher said. “In 1925, cement was introduced, and brick claddings were replaced with iron, reinforced concrete, or cement.

“During the Ottoman period, balconies were made of marble, but during the Mandate era they were replaced with verandas with three walls, exposed on one side to winds blowing over Beirut. It is pleasant to spend the evening on them.”

As these balconies were roofed, Dagher added, people would be protected from the sun during summer and rain during winter.

“It is noteworthy that terraces were always built on the northern side, in order to not be exposed to the sun,” he said. “They were usually ornamented with oriental and Western designs.”

The Mandate period witnessed a shift from single-family homes to multi-story buildings for commercial investment, Dagher explained.

“With the introduction of cement, buildings became five stories high, with each floor divided into two apartments, while the ground floors were left for shops,” he said. “New social groups came to live in these buildings, adopting the Western economic, social and cultural lifestyle, away from the independent houses surrounded by gardens.”

Lebanon’s independence in 1943 led to the further growth of Beirut. The city adopted modern, vertical architecture and the international style. Later,

this would lead to uneven development, and the “Beirut bourgeois house” would become engulfed by asymmetric iron and cement buildings and towers. Beirut’s ties to the sea withered away.

With the explosion that shook the city on Aug. 4, the Lebanese discovered how fragile and easily damaged their city was. They were also disappointed to discover that the city was not easy to evacuate in case of natural or man-made disasters.

According to a survey by specialized committees, 360 heritage buildings dating back to the period between 1860 and 1930 were partially or fully damaged by the explosion at the port.

“The restoration of these buildings, with their wooden ceilings, renowned decorations, marble balconies and carved windows, primarily requires a political decision to preserve the architectural memory of the city,” Dagher said.

“These are two or three-story buildings and palaces, while the building system in Beirut allows the construction of buildings as high as 13 stories. Many investors are showing interest in buying these damaged, forgotten buildings in order to replace them with tall ones and erase our heritage.”

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