

Iran daily calls for expulsion of French diplomats

Author:

Tue, 2019-03-05 23:13

TEHRAN An ultraconservative Iranian newspaper called Tuesday for the expulsion of French diplomats from the country, accusing France of expelling an Iranian diplomat on the basis of a "ludicrous accusation."

The Kayhan daily demanded that the Iranian Foreign Ministry reciprocate "the insolent and vile behavior of France in accusing and expelling our diplomat from its soil."

The newspaper, considered to be the mouthpiece of ultraconservatives in Iran, reported in October that an Iranian diplomat had been expelled by France without saying why.

Neither the Iranian nor the French foreign ministries have denied or confirmed the report.

On Tuesday the paper reported in a front-page article that the diplomat had been expelled on the basis of the "ludicrous accusation of attempting to attack a meeting of the terrorist cult of hypocrites in Paris."

It was referring to the People's Mujahedin Organization, an opposition group in exile that aims to overthrow the Islamic republic in Iran.

Kayhan also blamed France for the arrest of another Iranian diplomat by Germany in July 2018 on suspicion of involvement in the alleged plot to bomb an Iranian opposition rally outside Paris the previous month.

The diplomat, normally based in Vienna, was extradited to Belgium for prosecution.

Kayhan, Iran's second-oldest daily in circulation, is state owned and its managing director and editor in chief Hossein Shariatmadari was personally appointed by Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in 1993.

Its demand came a day after Iran expelled two Dutch diplomats in retaliation for the Netherlands' expulsion of two Iranian embassy staff in June 2018.

According to the Dutch foreign minister Stef Blok, the Iranian diplomats had been expelled "due to strong indications from (Dutch intelligence) that Iran has been involved in the liquidations on Dutch territory of two Dutch people of Iranian origin."

Kayhan has consistently been opposed to the policy of detente with Western powers pursued by moderate Iranian President Hassan Rouhani and his Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif.

It has ceaselessly attacked the 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and world powers and cited US President Donald Trump's decision to quit the accord as an example of the futility of dealing with Western powers.



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Dutch envoy to Tehran recalled over Iran's assassination plots
Iran's Khamenei doubted Europe could help Tehran against US sanctions

[Beirut should 'reject options dictated from abroad,' says US envoy](#)

Author:

Tue, 2019-03-05 22:48

BEIRUT: US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs David Satterfield said in Beirut that Lebanon should reject "options dictated from abroad," stressing that the "US will do everything in its power to support Lebanon's national options."

Satterfield, who had been assigned the territorial and naval border dispute file between Lebanon and Israel on the Blue Line and in the exclusive

economic zone, arrived in Beirut on Monday evening to brief the Lebanese officials on the results of the Warsaw Conference, which was held in mid-February and devoted to discuss “the impact of Iran and its terrorism in the region.”

Satterfield’s visit to Lebanon is expected to pave the way for US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, who visited the region in mid-January. He did not visit Lebanon at the time but his visit included Qatar, the UAE, Bahrain, Oman, Kuwait, Egypt and Jordan.

A source at the US Embassy did not confirm Pompeo’s visit. He told Arab News that he does not “rule out his visit to Lebanon.”

Satterfield said in brief statements after meeting a number of Lebanese officials, who did not include President Michel Aoun, that his country was “deeply committed to Lebanon and would like to see it move forward and face its options.”

He also said after meeting Lebanese Foreign Minister Jebran Bassil, that “the US and other countries will deal with Lebanon according to the way in which Lebanon will adopt these options, which we hope will be positive for the benefit of Lebanon and its people, not for the benefit of foreign parties.”

“Lebanon now has a new government to take sensitive decisions related to the country’s economy, security and combating corruption,” he added.

The US official, accompanied by US Ambassador to Lebanon Elizabeth Richard, visited Prime Minister Saad Hariri. During the meeting, they discussed “the latest developments, the general situation in Lebanon and the region and the bilateral relations between the two countries,” according to the media office of the prime minister.

After his meeting with MP Sami Gemayel, leader of the Lebanese Phalange Party, Satterfield said that his tour in Lebanon “comes after the formation of the government and in light of the changes in the region. There is a US desire to see real stability and security in Lebanon, and this depends on its national options, not on dictated options.”

“Lebanon has long suffered from conflicts and ideologies promoted from abroad,” he said.

“This situation must change and there must be serious decisions in this context. The parties in Lebanon are effective and there must be national action in this direction. The US will do everything in its power to support Lebanon’s national options.”



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Lebanon's Hezbollah suspends official over Parliament spatArab delegations arrive in Beirut for economic summit

[Once-bustling Baghdad boulevard dallies in disrepair](#)

Author:

Tue, 2019-03-05 22:36

BAGHDAD: Behind the dilapidated storefronts and collapsing colonnades of Rasheed Street lie the treasures of the Iraqi capital's cultural boom years: Old cinemas, artisan shops and smoky cafes playing classic ballads.

But with young Iraqis listening to modern music and spending hours in hipster-style coffee shops, the boulevard that bustled non-stop in the 1970s is at risk of being passed over.

Authorities have tried to revive the street in recent weeks by removing the security checkpoints and concrete blast walls that lined Rasheed for years.

Announcing the move, Prime Minister Adel Abdel Mahdi extolled: "Rasheed Street is the memory of Baghdad."

Despite his government's best efforts though, it may be reduced to only that.

Decades ago, the street's Umm Kulthum Cafe was packed with wistful young men listening to the sultry voice of its namesake, the Egyptian "queen" of Arabic music.

"Coming here was a daily tradition for us. We used to have a lovely time," reminisced Abu Haidar, a retired army serviceman in his 70s.

It was so busy that customers – writers, men on their way to or from work, and those seeking solace in the music – struggled to call over harried waiters to order muddy coffee and sweet Iraqi tea.

Now, it only fills up on Saturdays, the traditional day for meeting up with friends in cafes, when older men chain-smoke and sip hot drinks on wooden benches under framed portraits of Iraq's unseated king, Faisal II.

"After all these years, this coffee shop is the only place we can go to remember," said Abu Haidar. "We hope it can escape extinction."

Some date the street's deterioration back to the 2003 US-led invasion that toppled dictator Saddam Hussein.

"I started coming here in 1971, but after 2003, it was ignored," said Tareq Jamila, 70, another cafe customer. "You wouldn't find the old pioneers, who used to sit in the coffee shop and actually understand Umm Kulthum's songs."

The invasion and sectarian violence that followed saw several bombs planted near Rasheed Street, with the last explosion in 2016 killing more than two dozen people.

Other historic areas of the capital similarly fell into disrepair during the years of bloodshed, with Baghdadis often filled with nostalgia for the past. The floor of the abandoned Mekki Awwad theater, further south in the capital along the winding Tigris River, is blanketed in dust and litter.

It once hosted boisterous nighttime shows, but the rows of numbered seats have not been occupied in years.

Art galleries dotting the neighborhoods between the theater and Rasheed Street have shuttered their doors one after the other. As one of Baghdad's first cinemas, Al-Zawra had long been a legendary stop along Rasheed – but it too lies unused now.

Last year, young Iraqi artists organized a walking tour through their capital in an effort to revive some of its historic districts with their own art installations.

Along the tired two-story buildings of Rasheed Street, one photographer hung new versions of decades-old pictures of Baghdad's heralded past.

But instead of looking up at the photographs, most shoppers were more interested in the tables selling watches, shimmering carp and fake Adidas.

Another Umm Kulthum-themed cafe has opened on Rasheed, choosing one of the singer's nicknames – Al-Ustura, or The Legend – as its name.

Although its traditional yellow-brick walls and stained glass windows are "falling into ruin," the original Umm Kulthum is soldiering on, said Said Al-Qaissi, 65.

"No one has considered renovating or preserving this place which celebrates art," said Qaissi.



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Four decades on, the legacy of Umm Kulthum remains as strong as everThe enduring magic of Umm Kulthum, Star of the Orient

Thousands on strike in Sudan calling for president to quit

Author:

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Tue, 2019-03-05 12:48

KHARTOUM: A one-day strike shuttered businesses and emptied streets in the Sudanese capital, Khartoum, and other parts of the country on Tuesday, as pressure mounted on longtime autocratic President Omar Al-Bashir to step down following more than two months of deadly protests.

Initially sparked by rising prices and shortages, the unrest quickly turned to calls for Al-Bashir to resign after two decades in power. A heavy security crackdown has killed scores since the current wave of demonstrations began in December, the most serious protests against Al-Bashir.

Many students, doctors, markets, public transportation and other professionals took part in the strike Tuesday in support of Al-Bashir's ouster, according to photos and videos provided by activists and posted by the Sudanese Professionals Association. The association is an umbrella group of independent professional unions that has been spearheading the recent wave of protests.

Sarah Abdel-Jaleel, a spokeswoman for the group, said in a video posted late Monday that the strike is part of their "peaceful resistance" against the government.

Media workers at the privately owned newspaper Al-Tayar joined the strike. "We've faced daily abuses since protests first broke out," said Shamayel El-Nour, a journalist. "We cannot do our work. Security agencies censor and confiscate our newspaper and others."

The opposition Sudanese Congress Party said its leader, Omer El-Digair, was released Monday after two months in detention. El-Digair tweeted Tuesday that he would "resume the path with our people ... to freedom. We will not come back halfway."

The country's intelligence and security officials, along with Al-Bashir, insist that the rallies are the work of what they describe as "evil" foreign powers, and have vowed to stop them.

Al-Bashir has banned unauthorized public gatherings and granted sweeping powers to the police since imposing a state of emergency last month, and security forces have used tear gas, rubber bullets, live ammunition and batons against demonstrators.

Activists say at least 57 people have been killed in the current wave of

protests, but the government total stands at 30, including police. The figures have not been updated in weeks.

Opposition leaders, doctors, journalists, lawyers and students have been arrested, along with some 800 protesters. Emergency laws and night-time curfews have been imposed in some cities.

Al-Bashir's current term ends in 2020, and he would not be able to seek another term without amending the constitution.

Though he has repeatedly promised not to run again, a parliamentary committee was tasked with amending the constitution to scrap presidential term limits. In February, the committee canceled its meetings in what appeared to be the only political concession by Al-Bashir so far.



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Sudan's Al-Bashir hands party leadership to new deputy
Protesters challenge emergency courts in Sudan, police fire tear gas

Army chief of staff vows to secure Algeria, prevent bloodshed

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Tue, 2019-03-05 13:02

TUNIS: Algeria's army will guarantee security and not allow a return to an era of bloodshed, its chief of staff said on Tuesday.

Gaed Salah said there were some parties he did not name which wanted Algeria to return to the "years of pain," referring to civil war in the 1990s.

Thousands of Algerian students, meanwhile, marched in protest at ailing President Abdelaziz Bouteflika's determination to stand for re-election, brushing aside his pledge not to serve a full fifth term.

Following mass demonstrations, the veteran leader promised that if he wins the April poll he will organize a "national conference" to set a date for further elections which he would not contest.

But his pledge, made in a letter read out late on Sunday on state television, has been angrily dismissed as an insult by Algerians weary of his two-decade-old rule.

Rallies demanding the 82-year-old resign have rocked Algeria since Feb. 22, with protesters mobilized by calls on social media, in a country where half the population is under 30 and many young people struggle to find jobs.

On Tuesday thousands of university students from campuses across Algiers marched in the capital, many carrying their country's flag.

Abderahman, a 21-year-old student, said Bouteflika "wants an extra year" in power. "We don't want him to stay even an extra second. He should leave now," he said.

Police deployed across the centre of the capital where protests have been banned since 2001.

The TSA news website reported similar protests in Algeria's second and third cities, Oran and Constantine, as well as in other towns and cities.

"Hey Bouteflika, there won't be a fifth term," the students chanted in central Algiers, a reporter said.

Onlookers applauded them and motorists honked their horns in a show of support.

And in a sign they will not back down from protests calling on the president to resign, the students chanted "bring on the army commandos and the BRI (police rapid response squad)."

"Game over" read one poster. "System – go away", said another.

The protests appear to lack leadership and organization in a country still dominated by veterans of the 1954-1962 independence war against France, including Bouteflika.

But the unrest still poses the biggest challenge to the ailing leader and the ruling elite made up of the ruling party, businessmen, the military and security services.

Young Algerians who are at the forefront of the protests want a new generation of leaders and have few attachments to the old guard.

After a decade-long insurgency that Bouteflika crushed early in his rule, Algerians generally tolerated a political system that left little room for dissent as a price to pay for relative peace and stability.

But Algeria's mostly young population are agitating for jobs, better services and an end to rampant corruption in a country that is one of Africa's largest oil producers.

Bouteflika suffered a stroke in 2013 and is rarely seen in public.

He formally submitted his candidacy for the April 18 poll just before a midnight deadline on Sunday. It was handed in by his campaign manager Abdelghani Zaalane as the president has been in Switzerland since Feb. 24 for what the presidency has described as "routine medical tests."

In Sunday's message he said that his pledge not to serve a full term if re-elected "will ensure I am succeeded in undeniable conditions of serenity, freedom and transparency."

He acknowledged the mostly peaceful protests against him.

"I listened and heard the cry from the hearts of protesters and in particular the thousands of young people who questioned me about the future of our homeland."

But his words have failed to end the protests against him which first erupted on Feb. 22 and have continued daily, drawing Algerians from all walks of life, including students, lawyers and journalists.

Tuesday's rallies came in response to calls on social media for students to gather outside the iconic building housing Algiers' main post office.

"No means no! Hasn't he understood the message of the people?" asked Selma, who studies mathematics.

"Today we will make it clear for him, and again on Friday," which has been

the main day for protests, she said.

A sign held up by protesters read: "No studies, no teaching until the system (regime) falls," as students were reportedly considering going on strike.

The sprawling Bab Ezzouar campus of the University of Algiers, just outside the capital, was deserted.

"There is a massive strike by students... I've never seen anything like it since the 1980 Berber Spring," a professor said.

She was referring to a weeks-long uprising demanding cultural rights for Algeria's Berber community, who long fought for greater recognition for their customs and ancient language overshadowed by Arabic culture.

University professors were meeting to decide if they too should go on strike

And the bar association of lawyers in the city of Bejaia, 180 km east of Algiers, called on its members to follow in the footsteps of their colleagues in Constantine and go on strike.



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Algeria president's offer to protesters fails to quell anger Amid mounting

protests, Algeria's Bouteflika promises to quit early if re-elected