

Social media calls by Lebanese citizens for prosecution of central bank governor

Author:

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DUBAI: Growing numbers of people in Lebanon are taking to social media to call on the country's judiciary to prosecute Riad Salameh, the governor of the country's central bank, over his alleged involvement in financial irregularities and corruption.

The hashtag "Sa'at Al-Haqeeqa Riad Salameh," which translates as "Moment of Truth for Riad Salameh," began trending on Twitter, as hundreds of users called for him to be dismissed from his position, arrested and impeached. They demanded that he be punished for allegedly dispersing public funds and covering up for corrupt politicians involved in the misappropriation of depositors' funds and life savings.

Salameh denies the allegations of wrongdoing. He recently told Reuters: "I ordered an audit and it was proven that public money was not the source of my wealth."

Twitter users also urged the judiciary expand its efforts to investigate the criminal and financial activities that led to the current financial crisis in Lebanon, as a first step toward holding the politicians and others who are responsible or it to account.

One Twitter user posted a photo of Salameh dancing during a Brazilian carnival and commented with just one word: "Wanted."

Someone else posted a message that asked the question: "What are you afraid of and who is behind you?"

Another read: "It's a shame how you all are protecting each other and neglecting people's basic rights. What kind of a country are you planning for?"

Many others social media users posted or retweeted photos of Salameh and asked him to provide information required for criminal investigations.

"Almost every single depositor who has lost his or her life savings and deposits wants Salameh behind bars," said an activist and pro-bono lawyer who spoke to Arab News on condition of anonymity.

"Set political affiliations or pressures aside; Salameh is involved and should be held accountable in his capacity as central bank governor. He should be questioned and it is up to the judiciary to decide whether or not he's corrupt or guilty."

On Monday, Mount Lebanon's attorney general, Judge Ghada Aoun, charged Salameh with illicit enrichment. He was charged in absentia after he failed to attend the hearing.

Judge Aoun had ordered the arrest of Salameh's brother, Raja Salameh, on Friday in connection with the same case. Raja's lawyer said any allegations of illicit enrichment and money laundering were unfounded, describing them as "media speculation without any evidence."

Meanwhile, a strike in Lebanon's banking sector that began on Monday

continued on Tuesday in protest against judicial decisions issued against several leading banks. They condemned the rulings as arbitrary and noted that some lawsuits filed by groups of activists defending depositors are related to their requests to recover US dollar funds that have been withheld by the banks since 2019.

The Lebanese Banks' Association announced that the financial institutions would be open again on Wednesday.



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Lebanon's Salameh to sue Bloomberg after US denies talk of sanctioning him
Lebanese judge charges central bank governor with illicit enrichment

Modest turnout in Jordan's municipal, governorate elections

Tue, 2022-03-22 21:15

AMMAN: Polling stations across Jordan closed on Tuesday for municipal and governorate councils elections, which saw a modest voter turnout of less than 30 percent.

The Independent Election Commission said that 1.356 million people had cast their ballots by 7:00 p.m. local time, out of 4,602,135 eligible voters.

It added that voter turnout across the country reached 29.64 percent.

Jordan's capital Amman, which has a population of more than 4.5 million, saw the lowest voter turnout with around 15 percent, according to the IEC. The highest turnout was in the northern city of Ajloun, which has a population of around 195,000 people.

The IEC, the national body overseeing elections in Jordan, said it would study the reasons for the capital's apathy in elections.

Amman has always seen the lowest voter turnout in Jordanian parliamentary and municipal elections, with observers attributing it mainly to tribalism playing a less influential role in the capital and other metropolitan cities.

Arab News spoke to people in Amman who did not participate in the elections. They said their disinterest in the polls had to do with the failure of former representatives to bring about the desired changes whether in parliament or municipal councils.

Suha Faraj, 32, said candidates ran for elections "only to achieve some personal gains."

"They just want to be there in parliament or municipalities to serve themselves. They are not there to benefit the country but to secure a job and prestige for themselves," Faraj said.

The absence of fully-fledged partisan activity and programs in elections was the main reason for 42-year-old Adnan Abu Taha boycotting the polls.

"There is no encouraging atmosphere for participation," he said. "We before had 'so-called' representatives in parliament or municipalities, but they just benefited themselves. That is the result of the absence of fully-fledged political parties with a well-defined agenda."

"Why voter turnout is low in Amman and high in other cities is simply because there is still a strong influence outside the capital. People outside Amman just vote for their relatives regardless of their programs or agenda," political commentator Khaled Qudah said.

A total of 4,644 candidates, including 846 women, registered for the 2022 municipal and local council elections.

The IEC said that around 5,000 people, including 100 international figures, monitored the elections.







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Jordan's King Abdullah to visit Ramallah next week
Jordanian Royal Court rejects 'inaccurate' claims surrounding King Abdullah's accounts

[UAE, Japan foreign ministers highlight bilateral strategic ties](#)

Tue, 2022-03-22 01:22

DUBAI: The UAE and Japan foreign ministers agreed to continue promoting cooperation in various fields under the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Initiative and maintain energy-related relations with a stable supply of crude oil.

The agreement was reached on March 20 during a meeting in the UAE between Japanese Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi and Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, the minister for foreign affairs and international cooperation.

Hayashi is visiting the UAE on the second and last leg of a short tour to the Middle East that started in Turkey a day earlier. Hayashi is scheduled to arrive back in Tokyo on Monday.

In the meeting, Hayashi congratulated the UAE on the successful hosting of the Dubai 2022 Expo and highlighted the importance of this year, which marks the 50th anniversary of establishing diplomatic relations between Japan and the UAE.

According to the Foreign Ministry in Tokyo, Sheikh Abdullah thanked Japan for participating in the Dubai Expo and said that he was pleased that the relationship between the two countries advanced beyond the traditional energy fields, expanding to a wide range of fields, including renewable energy, infrastructure and space.

Both ministers exchanged frank opinions on this matter and confirmed that they would continue to cooperate closely in international efforts. They also agreed to work closely through the Disarmament and Non-Proliferation Initiative.

Minister Hayashi expressed his appreciation for the stable supply of crude oil from the UAE and the participation of Japanese companies in crude oil development projects in the UAE. He also expressed concern about soaring oil prices while asking the UAE to contribute to stabilizing the global oil market by further supplying crude oil and securing production capacity as a key member of OPEC Plus.

In response, Sheikh Abdullah said the UAE's relationship with Japan, a

strategic partner, is unwavering and that he would like to continue working together.

In addition, Hayashi condemned the attack on Abu Dhabi by Yemen's Houthis militants and conveyed his condolences to the victims and their families.

The two sides also exchanged views on the situation in the Middle East, including Iran and Yemen, and the situation in east Asia, including China and North Korea, and confirmed that they would continue to work closely together.



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[UN condemns Houthi attacks on Saudi oil facilities as detrimental to peace efforts](#)

Mon, 2022-03-21 22:54

NEW YORK: The UN condemned Sunday's Houthi attacks on Saudi Arabia, with Spokesperson Stephane Dujarric saying such attacks on civilians and infrastructure are prohibited by international humanitarian law.

"These actions damage prospects of peace and regional stability and are detrimental to the ongoing mediation efforts of our Special envoy Hans Grundberg," Dujarric told reporters in New York on Monday.

"We call upon all parties to exercise maximum restraint and avoid any further escalation," he added.

On Saturday night and Sunday, Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi militia fired a barrage of missiles and drones strikes targeting a Saudi petroleum products distribution terminal in the southern Jizan region, a water desalination plant in Al-Shaqeeq, a power station in Dhahran Al-Janub, a gas station in Khamis Mushayt and an LNG facility in the Red Sea port of Yanbu.

The Houthi attacks came just as a meeting in Oman was convened by the UN Special Envoy for Yemen Hans Grundberg with Houthi chief negotiator Mohammad Abdulsalam and Omani officials as part of the envoy's efforts to address the dire humanitarian situation in Yemen, including a possible truce during the upcoming Holy month of Ramadan.

Dujarric said that Grundberg, however, is "not discouraged in the least" and will continue to work toward "at least a cessation of hostilities or a truce during the upcoming month of Ramadan."

Dujarric added: "We strongly urge the parties to engage constructively and without precondition with Grundberg and his mediation efforts with the main aim of advancing the political process to reach a comprehensive negotiated settlement to end the conflict in Yemen."

The militia has continued to refuse to allow Grundberg to visit Sanaa. Dujarric declined to comment on whether there has been any progress toward facilitating the envoy's visit there.

The Houthi attacks also come one week ahead of GCC-sponsored peace talks between Yemeni factions. The Houthis have rejected invitations to attend these meetings.

"Given the delicate security situation in these parts, once he's in Sanaa we would announce it. But I have nothing to share with you at the moment," Dujarric said.



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[Community mediation aids social justice and peace in Syria's war-torn Deir Ezzor](#)

Mon, 2022-03-21 21:23

BEIRUT: The years of war in Syria has left an indelible mark on the countryside of Deir Ezzor governorate with significant economic, social and security effects, including the widespread destruction of infrastructure, the absence of effective policing and the emergence of extremist groups.

The Syrian Democratic Forces formed by Kurdish units, and the Syrian regime's forces share control of the governorate.

The largest part of the province remained under the control of Daesh for years. This was until the regime's forces and Iranian militias took control of the area south of the Euphrates River in late 2017, while the SDF asserted its authority in the area north of the river in early 2019.

After the fighting stopped and the security situation improved, the local residents in the area sought to restore community relations, but were hampered by the absence of courts. This situation was further exacerbated by the withdrawal of the Syrian authorities from this area, resulting in various local groups vying for control.

Since 2021, a number of activists and social actors, in cooperation with five civil society associations and organizations, namely Dirna, Furatna, Sama, Mary and Ensaf, have called for the formation of community mediation committees to resolve legal and other disputes, and to break the cycle of violence in the conflict-ridden society.

These committees were formed with a number of local dignitaries, jurists, and educated people of good social standing. There was also a significant presence of women activists who worked on resolving issues related to females.

Mohammed Awad Al-Mohammed, chairman of the board of directors of the Ensaf Development Organization, and who is responsible for the body's peace-building projects, told Arab News: "The war has resulted in countless problems of displacement and siege, causing a change in people's behavior and lives, especially during Daesh's 3-year control of the region."

He said this led to a breakdown in social cohesion, with disputes arising over lost property documents, identity cards, and others related to debts and loans.

Al-Mohammed stressed: "People want stability, but in the absence of courts, disputes arose, and some sought to settle old disputes. So the idea of forming mediation committees emerged. The committees include influential and respected clan figures who intervened to resolve disputes at the request of one of the parties ... based on Islamic law and clan custom."

The community mediation committees have resolved many issues, including clan disputes, revenge or murder, and others related to divorce, marriage, and inheritance. They have also contributed to solving economic problems, such as distributing aid to families, and regulating the provision of electricity, water and bread.

These committees also resolved personal disputes resulting from traffic accidents and extortion through social media.

It is estimated that the work of these committees has benefited directly or indirectly nearly 500,000 people residing in the villages and towns of Deir Ezzor.

These bodies have relied on their members' experience and knowledge. Al-Mohammed, who is a lawyer, said the resolution of disputes is accompanied by

awareness-raising efforts which have included supporting women's Islamic inheritance rights, in the face of the "greed" of some men.

"Because the women who lived through the war were in need, they began to demand their rights, something they did not do before the war."

Al-Mohammed said there have been particular difficulties from people still holding onto their arms. "Even traffic accidents may be exploited by armed men. The fragility of the security situation leads to new conflicts or revives old problems."

He indicated that at the onset people were ashamed or hesitated to approach mediation committees because they were accustomed to going through the courts. "There were 50 courts in Deir Ezzor, now there is one court, which is more than 110 kilometers away, (this is) in addition to (the) high costs and the bureaucracy of the courts. We shortened the distance and the time through (these) social justice (bodies) because it gives immediate results, and we have been able to solve individual problems that are over 15 years old."

In promoting and providing continuity to the efforts of the committees, a group of activists, in cooperation with the Dirna, Furatna, Samah, Mary, and Ensaf organizations, launched the "Peace Is Good" campaign.

The campaign coordinator, Ayman Allaw, told Arab News: "The campaign is about five months old, and we are working in a tribal and clan area where problems abound. The idea of Peace Is Good did not exist in this area. It was the force of arms that deterred people, and in the absence of the government, ignorance prevailed and the strong killed the weak. Therefore, the idea of Peace Is Good was welcomed by the clergy, jurists, and reputable clansmen."

Allaw said the area in which they work was controlled during the war by the Free Syrian Army militias, then Jabhat Al-Nusra, then Daesh, followed by the Syrian regime and now the SDF. He said people were psychologically traumatized by the war. Some "individuals exploited the war to gain power and influence" which led people to seek refuge in the mediation committees because they included respected community leaders, he added.

The mediation committees appear determined not to politicize their work, and have called on aid groups and wealthy individuals to provide assistance. Allaw said the committees should operate widely, but added that Deir Ezzor may face the most difficulties because of the lack of educated people to work with the clans.

Al-Mohammed added that the mediation committees have contributed to promoting peace through conflict resolution and he hoped this could become part of the society's culture.





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Syria state media say US forces 'kidnapped civilians' near Deir EzzorAnti-Kurdish demonstrations grow in Syria's Deir Ezzor