

CPJ urges Iran to free journalist seized at march in Tehran

Author:

Fri, 2022-03-11 20:58

LONDON: The Committee to Protect Journalists has urged the Iranian authorities to free a journalist who was seized at an International Women's Day parade.

Amir-Abbas Azarmvand, a financial reporter for state-run economic newspaper SMT, had been arrested in September 2021 for allegedly "colluding against national security" and "spreading propaganda against the system," according to HRANA (Human Rights Activists News Agency) and CPJ's reporting from the time; he was released on bail on Sept. 23.

He was sentenced to four years and four months behind bars in January this year but was not summoned to jail, CPJ said, until suddenly being detained on Tuesday. He has now been sent to Evin Prison to begin the sentence.

"Iranian authorities must immediately release journalist Amir-Abbas Azarmvand and ensure that he does not face any further charges over his work," Sherif Mansour, Middle East and North Africa program coordinator at the CPJ, said.

"It is bad enough that Iran sentences journalists to years in prison over their reporting – it is even worse when those sentences hang over a journalist's head, to be enforced whenever authorities want to retaliate," Mansour said.

CPJ said: "Iranian authorities must release journalist Amir-Abbas Azarmvand from prison immediately and should cease jailing members of the press for their work."

Tehran has a long history of abusing journalists and other citizens who report on the regime and its activities – even for state media.

On its website, CPJ lists the newspapers shut down and the journalists jailed by the Islamic Republic as it seeks to exert control over the public sphere and discourse within it.



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[Committee to Protect Journalists \(CPJ\)](#)

Record number of journalists jailed in 2021: CPJ Turkish journalist convicted but freed over Erdogan insult

[Libya armed groups step back after Tripoli escalation](#)

Author:

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Fri, 2022-03-11 19:08

TRIPOLI: Libya's parliament-appointed prime minister said Friday that armed groups backing him had withdrawn from positions around Tripoli, after the UN warned of a new escalation in the divided country.

Libya has had rival administrations since the eastern-based assembly swore in a prime minister earlier this month in a challenge to interim premier Abdulhamid Dbeibah.

Dbeibah has refused to hand over power to Fathi Bashagha, arguing that his own administration, installed last year under a United Nations-led peace process, has a mandate to rule until elections. Pro-Bashagha forces had deployed on the eastern edges of Tripoli on Thursday, prompting the UN mission in Libya (UNSMIL) to warn against any escalation. But Bashagha's office said in a statement in the early hours of Friday that the groups had "opted not to use arms, and to return to their bases." The groups had mobilized "to provide security, not to wage war," it said. Libya has been riven by conflict since the 2011 revolt that toppled dictator Muammar Qaddafi, and has had two rival governments before: from 2014 until Dbeibah was sworn in last year. Washington's ambassador to Libya, Richard Norland, had also warned Thursday against spiralling tensions. Late Thursday evening he said he had spoken to both Dbeibah and Bashagha, praising what he said were moves to resolve the standoff peacefully. He commended Dbeibah's "commitment to protect lives" and Bashagha's "willingness to de-escalate tensions." "Libya's stability and unity can only be sustained through dialogue and respect for the right of freedom of movement throughout the country," he tweeted. In a recording published on Friday, Bashagha said he was "ready for any dialogue" and repeated that he was "a supporter of peace, not war." "We reassure our compatriots in Tripoli that there will not be a war," he said.



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[Fathi Bashagha](#)
[Abdulhamid Dbeibah](#)

Rival Libyan premier says he plans to be in Tripoli in days Armed groups deploy in Tripoli amid Libyan election postponement decision

[Iran nuclear talks paused after Russian demands](#)

Author:

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1647000106472172800

Fri, 2022-03-11 11:56

VIENNA: The EU said Friday that the talks it is chairing on the revival of the 2015 Iran nuclear accord must be paused, days after fresh demands from Russia complicated negotiations.

The EU's foreign policy chief Josep Borrell tweeted that the pause was "due to external factors," despite the fact that "a final text is essentially ready and on the table."

The current round of negotiations started in late November between Britain, China, France, Germany, Iran and Russia, with the US taking part indirectly. They had reached most of the way toward their aim – the revival of the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), which began unraveling when former US President Donald Trump withdrew from the deal in 2018.

However, last week Russia said it was demanding guarantees that the Western sanctions imposed on its economy following its invasion of Ukraine would not affect its trade with Iran.

As with the original JCPOA in 2015, Moscow had been expected to play a role in the implementation of any fresh deal, for example by receiving shipments of enriched uranium from Iran.

After he withdrew from the JCPOA, Trump went on to reimpose swingeing sanctions on the Iranian economy, including on its vital oil sector.

That prompted Iran to start disregarding the curbs laid down in the deal on its nuclear activity, including its stockpile of enriched uranium – now at more than 15 times its limit in the deal.

The JCPOA's aim was to ensure Iran would not be able to develop a nuclear weapon, which it has always denied wanting to do.

"Russia's gambit may be to delay the revival of the deal in order to avoid a flood of Iranian oil on the market" and the concomitant fall in prices, French academic and Iran specialist Clement Therme said.

"In keeping prices high, the Kremlin can use energy as a weapon against the West," he added.

As for Iran itself, "the Islamic Republic isn't in a position to counter the

Russian strategy,” he explained.

“Moscow is making use of Iran’s weakness.”

Iranian foreign ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh said the pause in talks “could be a momentum for resolving any remaining issue.”

“No external factor will affect our joint will to go forward for a collective agreement,” he said in a tweet.

Russia’s ambassador to the UN in Vienna, Mikhail Ulyanov, told reporters outside the hotel where the talks have been taking place that he rejected “attempts to put all the blame on the Russian Federation.”

“The conclusion of the deal does not depend on Russia only,” he said, saying that other parties to the talks “need additional time.”

He added that Russia was in favor of the “earliest conclusion” of the talks.

Borrell said on Friday that he would “continue to be in touch with all #JCPOA participants and the US to overcome the current situation and to close the agreement.”

He gave no further details on when the talks might resume.



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EU foreign policy chief says ‘pause’ needed in Iran talks
White House: Iran nuclear deal “close,” end of negotiations challenging

Lebanese prosecutor bans five bank board chiefs from travel

Author:

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1646935882295370600

Thu, 2022-03-10 21:15

BEIRUT: A Lebanese prosecutor on Thursday issued travel bans against the heads of the boards of five Lebanese banks as a precautionary measure as she investigates transactions by their banks, the prosecutor told Reuters. Judge Ghada Aoun issued the bans against Salim Sfeir of Bank of Beirut, Samir Hanna of Bank Audi, Antoun Sehnaoui of SGBL, Saad Azhari of Blom Bank, and Raya Hassan of Bankmed.

She has not charged any of them with a crime.

When contacted, Hassan told Reuters she was “speechless” and noted she had joined the bank after the transactions took place.

Azhari did not immediately respond to a request for comment, neither did officials from Bank Audi, SGBL and Bank of Beirut.



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Lebanese bank closes over 30 British-held accounts after UK ruling-depositors' groupUK court orders Lebanese banks to pay \$4m to saver

Two dead as UN, AU warn of 'grave danger' in Sudan

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Thu, 2022-03-10 20:34

KHARTOUM: Two protesters were shot dead during protests in Sudan on Thursday, as UN and African Union officials warned that the country was in "grave danger."

Hundreds took to the streets across Khartoum and its twin city of Omdurman, witnesses said.

Security forces shot dead one protester in Omdurman and another in Khartoum, pro-democracy doctors said.

At least 87 people have been killed and hundreds wounded during more than four months of protests demanding civilian rule and justice for those killed in previous demonstrations, according to medics.

"All indicators available to us at the UN and AU show that the country is in grave danger," said African Union envoy Mohamed Lebatt at a joint news conference in Khartoum with UN special representative Volker Perthes.

"We are deeply concerned about the state of the country," he said, calling for a resumption of the transition to full civilian rule.

The AU has suspended Sudan's membership since army chief Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan led a coup in October.

The military takeover derailed a painstakingly negotiated transition between civilians and military leaders following the April 2019 ouster of dictator Omar Al-Bashir following massive street protests.

It triggered international condemnation and regular mass anti-coup protests. Hundreds of political figures and pro-democracy activists have been rounded up in the broadening crackdown.

On Thursday, Lebatt urged Sudan's key civilian factions to iron out their differences and seek a consensus.

"If they remain split, they will throw the country's future in the hands of the military institution," he said.



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Sudan's economy tumbles in post-coup deadlock Mothers and fathers protest to support Sudan's anti-coup youth