

Lebanon judiciary stands firm despite Hezbollah allegations

Author:

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BEIRUT: The Beirut Bar Association has urged all officials to refrain from interfering with the judiciary and respect the law and work of institutions.

Nader Kaspar, head of the association, said: "The lawyers stand in solidarity with the judges and the Judicial Council."

His statement came as the confrontation between Hezbollah and the Lebanese judiciary took a dangerous turn. The party has accused Judge Tarek Bitar, who is leading the probe into the Beirut port explosion, of "politicizing the investigation."

In the past few days, the Justice Palace in Beirut has been abuzz with news about the resignation of several judges in protest at the poor conditions the judiciary is experiencing, due to political interference on the one hand and the economic situation on the other.

Former public prosecutor Judge Hatem Madi told Arab News: "What is happening increases the state of disgust within the judicial body. These pressures should not affect the course of the judiciary's work, but how long can the judiciary stand its ground in light of a pressing financial and economic crisis?"

"Pressure has always been exerted on the judiciary. If the judiciary had surrendered, the judges would have resigned a long time ago. They want to remove Bitar at any cost. They have paralyzed the government and they want to do the same to the judiciary, but the latter has so far been steadfast."

The president of the Fifth Chamber of the Court of Cassation Judge Jeannette Hanna, public defender Judge Carla Kassis, and president of the Court of Appeal Judge Rola Al-Husseini have submitted their resignation.

However, the head of the Supreme Judicial Council Judge Suhail Abboud rejected these resignations, asking the judges to "hold back."

The Coalition for an Independent Lebanese Judiciary warned that the judicial body was facing imminent danger.

It said: "These resignations serve as a warning of what the financial and economic collapse may cause within one of the most important public facilities, and of the ongoing systematic campaigns against every judge who dares to question immunities, which was evident in the Beirut port blast probe."

It added that the resignations "reflect the feelings of helplessness and resentment of many judges regarding the financial and moral factors that

prevent them from performing their judicial function properly, and put them in an embarrassing situation before public opinion.”

On Friday, in addition to demanding that Bitar be removed, Hezbollah secretary-general Hassan Nasrallah went after the entire judicial body because it had pushed back against attempts by defendants to remove Bitar.

“Hezbollah resorted to the judiciary to confront Bitar’s discretion, but the rulings show that the entire judiciary is politicized,” Nasrallah said. “This was evident over the past couple of days when the judiciary rejected all requests to dismiss Bitar.”

He once again claimed that the US, represented by its embassy in Lebanon, was supporting Bitar.

“The investigation is trying to accuse Hezbollah of being involved in the blast. The current judicial process is on a discretionary path that does not lead to any justice or truth.”

Speaking about the Tayouneh incident, which occurred when Hezbollah supporters took to the streets and clashed with residents of Ain Al-Rummaneh, Nasrallah said Hezbollah did not want personal revenge, but that many people involved had not been handed over to the judiciary and they were still in Maarab, a reference to Lebanese Forces party leader Samir Geagea.

“The extent of recklessness, in this case, is an invitation to the families of the victims to take matters into their own hands,” Nasrallah said.

The party has been disrupting Cabinet sessions and preventing the resignation of Information Minister George Kordahi to fix Lebanon’s relationship with Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states.



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Sun, 2021-11-28 00:52

ANKARA: Turkey welcomed Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, the UAE's de facto ruler, on Nov. 24, marking the highest-level visit to Ankara since a nearly decade-long disagreement between the two countries.

The visit represents a new page in Turkey-UAE economic relations with the signature of several investment accords that will be supported with a \$10 billion fund.

The agreements concentrated on strategic sectors such as energy, ports and logistics, petrochemicals, technology, food and health care, as well as some cooperation deals between stock exchanges and central banks with a potential swap agreement on the horizon.

Dr. Robert C. Mogielnicki, senior resident scholar at the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington, said that Turkey was a big market that the UAE could not afford to ignore if it wanted to get the most out of economic engagement with the broader Middle East and North Africa region.

“Turkey likewise wants to shore up stable trade and investment partners given the volatility and uncertainty plaguing its domestic economy,” Mogielnicki told Arab News.

Considering the huge potential of the accords, especially in times of economic hardship for Turkey with its lira plumbing new lows this week, to what extent this economic rapprochement that unlocked billions of dollars will be supported by political contacts remains to be seen.

Simultaneously, the Emirati economy minister Abdulla bin Touq Al-Mari held a meeting with Turkish Trade Minister Mehmet Mus, just after the Turkey-UAE Joint Economic Commission meeting in Dubai.

“Today, we are starting a new era in sustainable economic partnership between the two countries,” Al-Mari said.

Sovereign wealth funds of the UAE have already made huge investments in Turkish online grocer Getir and e-commerce giant Trendyol.

Soner Cagaptay, director of the Turkish program at the Washington Institute, thinks that the UAE signaling that Abu Dhabi is willing to invest 10 billion dollars in Turkey could be a shot in the arm for the Turkish economy, coupled with sound economic policies in Ankara.

“It will be not for complete recovery of the Turkish economy but will just help to prevent further deterioration nowadays,” he told Arab News.

However, Mogielnicki thinks that the Emirati-Turkish rapprochement is unlikely to have a major impact on Turkey’s currency crisis, which is more closely related to political dynamics surrounding the central bank and US interest rates.

“But an economic vote of confidence from the Emiratis won’t hurt,” he said.

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu will visit Abu Dhabi in mid-December when hopes are pinned on mutual steps for initiating political rapprochement.

Melahat Kemal, an Istanbul-based researcher on Turkey-MENA relations, said that Turkey and the UAE had to settle some of their key political disputes to sustain the economic benefits of this latest wave of agreements.

“As a first step, they need to develop a consensus over their policies in the

Syrian and Libyan conflict and gas exploration in the Eastern Mediterranean,” she told Arab News.

“There is still no political statement from the leaders regarding these hot topics. Turkish authorities rather prefer to compartmentalize their rapprochement by focusing merely on the monetary side of the relations.”

The trade volume of the two countries increased by 21 percent last year compared to 2019, and doubled in the first half of 2021 compared to the same period the previous year.

Both sides are working to diversify non-oil trade as Turkey is a key market for Emirati products to reach Asia and Europe, while the UAE helps Turkish goods opening up to the Middle Eastern and African markets.

According to Kemal, the political rapprochement requires confidence-building measures on a mutual basis, and in the short term relations are likely to proceed merely on economic fronts that could contribute to stability in the region.

“The visit of Cavusoglu in December is a significant step toward this direction,” she said.

Cagaptay agreed but said that there was a long way to go as both countries did not see eye-to-eye on a number of issues.

“In three war zones they have different views, with the UAE moving forward to normalize ties with Syria’s Assad regime while Turkey is still remaining hostile to him,” he said.

“In the Libyan and Yemeni civil wars, they also have opposing interests,” he said.

According to Cagaptay, the Muslim Brotherhood issue will be a litmus test for political normalization.

“Turkey also should end its support for Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood that is seen by the UAE as the greatest security threat both domestically and internationally,” he said.

With the US shifting pivot from the Middle East to the Pacific, Arab countries are trying to de-escalate tensions in the region and pursue normalization efforts.

Ankara has also taken some steps to restrict the activities of Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood on Turkish soil – an incentive for the Gulf countries to reconcile with Turkey.

According to Mogielnicki, since early 2021 there has been a broad realization that diplomatic tensions and conflicts in the region have reached a point of diminishing returns.

“Lingering conflicts have the potential to hamper the all-important economic

recovery efforts in the region. Gulf states like the UAE want to ensure that its foreign policy decisions going forward are good for business,” he said.



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[Mixed reaction in Jordan over amendment to expand king's power](#)

Author:

Sun, 2021-11-28 00:44

AMMAN: Jordan's Parliament has been presented with 30 constitutional changes that aim to reform electoral law while also increasing the powers of the king within the executive branch.

MP Salah Armouti, former head of the Jordanian bar, and Mamdouh Abadi, former Amman mayor and deputy prime minister, were among those who voiced criticism against what they described as “unnecessary amendments.”

Among the changes is the “constitutionalizing of the National Security Council with wide-ranging political and security powers.”

The new council, headed by the king, will include the prime minister, army chief, directors of the security forces, foreign and interior ministers, as well as two other members that the king will appoint.

The concern is that the council will “create a new body that will be parallel to that of the executive and legislative branches of government.”

Jordan’s monarch will also be able to appoint and fire the chief justice, head of the Sharia court, the general mufti, the head of the Royal Hashemite Court and advisers, adding to existing control over the chief of the army, head of the gendarmerie and head of the intelligence service.

In the past, all these appointments were made based on the recommendations of the prime minister.

Samar Mhareb, director of Arab Renaissance for Democracy and Development, told Arab News that there is “no justification” for the amendments.

“These amendments will deepen the lack of trust with government and will propel the palace into the unilateral decision-making process on the account of sovereign bodies that are supposed to carry out issues of national accountability,” said Mhareb.

The message behind these amendments is that the elected bodies are not able to take such important decisions, he added.

“As civil society activists, we reject these amendments, which reflect a paternalistic attitude in terms of who can decide on important security and foreign relations issues.”

However, Haytham Ereifej, a lawyer and a political activist, told Arab News that he welcomed the constitutional amendments, which he said have “a single goal.”

He added: “The goal is to prepare for the creation of elected governments while issues of security and foreign affairs stay clearly in the hands of the king.

“The elected prime minister will have local powers in areas of economics, health and education, as well as in other areas,” said Ereifej.

He believes that the amendment “sends messages of comfort and reassures the public that we are moving closer and closer to an elected government which will change the way that Jordan is run.”

Saad Hattar, a former BBC reporter and an investigative journalism trainer, told Arab News that the amendments are “not needed” and “will weaken democratic reform efforts.

“By ceding powers from the government to the palace, the amendments will put

the king in a vulnerable position, because on the one hand he is immune from criticism, but now that his appointments will not require recommendations from the government, it will be difficult to uphold his immunity if things don't turn out well," Hattar said.

Etaf Roudan, manager of Radio Al-Balad and a member of the MENA region WAN/IFRA gender committee, told Arab News that the amendments "have not been available for discussions among the public.

"Some argue that these amendments came because of the weakness of the government, but it is important to remember that the decision to appoint and remove prime ministers is in the hands of the king."

Ahmad Awad, the founder and director of the Phenix Center for Economic and Informatics Studies, told Arab News that those behind these amendment "did not consider the dangers on the operations of the government and the effects that they will have on the king as a unifying symbol of the country."

Awad said: "I think this will trap the king into administrative issues even though according to the constitution, he is not accountable. I believe that the king should stay above reproach by means of upholding the current constitutional checks and balances."

The Jordanian government responded to critics through Minister of Political Affairs Musa Maaytah.

The minister said that the constitutional amendments will create a national security council "that will help coordinate between the military and civilian institutions of the country."

Responding to a question in parliament on Tuesday, Maaytah said: "The recent challenges such as armed conflicts, wars, terrorist acts and drugs are all issues that affect the national security of the country and this is what caused the push to come up with this idea and to constitutionalize it."



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[Iraqi family of English Channel shipwreck victim mourn her death](#)

Author:

Hamid Mohamed | AFP

ID:

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Sat, 2021-11-27 20:36

SORAN, Iraq: In a simple house in northeast Iraq, the parents of Maryam Nuri Hama Amin mourn the loss of their beloved daughter who drowned trying to reach her fiancée in Britain.

"She wanted a better life," her father Nuri Hama Amin said, still reeling

from shock, just days after his daughter vanished into the freezing waters of the Channel between France and England. "But she ended up in the sea."

Maryam – "Baran" to her family, a name meaning "rain" in Kurdish – was one of at least 27 migrants who died Wednesday when their inflatable boat sank off the French port of Calais.

The shipwreck was the deadliest disaster since at least 2018 when migrants began using boats en masse to cross the Channel to England.

"We have no information on the smugglers," said her father, speaking from the family home in Soran, a town in Iraq's autonomous region of Kurdistan, some 3,700 kilometers (2,300 miles) away from where his daughter died.

"Their promises turned out to be lies."

Maryam, in her twenties, was desperate to join her fiancée Karzan, also from Iraqi Kurdistan, but who had settled in Britain.

Karzan was on the phone with her as she set out onto the dangerous waters from France – and was the one who called the family in Iraq to tell them she died, her cousin Kafan Omar said.

Shortly before she set left France, her father had spoken to her for hours on the phone.

"She was very happy, she was relaxed," he said. "She was in a hotel in France, we spoke until eight in the morning."

Since the shipwreck, the bodies of the passengers have been held in a morgue in France. Officially, nothing has been released about the identities and nationalities of the 17 men, seven women and three minors.

But at Maryam's home, around 100 relatives gathered to offer their condolences for her death.

On Saturday, dozens of men, many dressed in traditional Kurdish clothes, sat reciting a prayer.

Close by, under the shelter of a large tent, women in black robes sat in mourning. Maryam's mother was too grief-stricken to speak.

In the house, Maryam's room is tidy, as if she had just left it.

Above the bed, two photos show Maryam and her fiancée at their engagement. A picture shows the young woman in a traditional dress decorated with embroidery, with a tiara over an elaborate hairstyle.

A bouquet of white roses lies on her bed.

Her cousin, Kafan Omar, said she had left home nearly a month before.

"She got a work visa and went to Italy, and then to France," he said. "We had tried many times to send her to Britain to join her fiancée, but without success."

Maryam was just one of thousands of young hopefuls from the region who have left home in recent months.

Thousands of migrants – many Kurds from Iraq – have been stuck on the border with Belarus in a bid to cross into Poland and the European Union. Some have returned on repatriation flights, battered by their freezing ordeal.

Many of those Iraqis say they have spent their savings, sold valuables and even taken loans to escape economic hardship in Iraq and start a new life.

Kermaj Ezzat, a close relative of the family, said young people in Iraqi Kurdistan were mainly leaving because of the region's "instability." He denounced the policies blocking their travel.

"These countries have closed their borders to young people who dream of a better future," he said.

Maryam's father gave a message to others wanting to head west.

"I call on young people not to emigrate and to endure the difficulties here, rather than sacrifice their lives to reach Europe," he pleaded.





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UK PM asks France to take back Channel-crossing migrants

[UAE adopts widespread legislative reform via 40 new laws and changes](#)

Sat, 2021-11-27 22:23

ABU DHABI: The UAE approved a wide-ranging reform of its legal system, with more than 40 laws included among the draft of new laws and legislative amendments, according to an official announcement on Saturday.

The proposed reforms come during the UAE's "Year of the 50th" and are intended to keep pace with its developmental aspirations, Emirates News Agency (WAM) said.

“The amendments aim to develop the legislative structure in various sectors, including investment, trade and industry, as well as commercial company, regulation and protection of industrial property, copyright, trademarks, commercial register, electronic transactions, trust services, factoring, and residency, in addition to laws related to society and personal security including as the Crime and Punishment Law, the Online Security Law, and a laws regulating the production, sale and use of narcotics and psychotropic substances,” the report said.

The new legislative changes were drawn up through the efforts of teams comprising 540 specialists and experts from 50 federal and local authorities.



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