

# Aoun's party appeals against Lebanese election law amendments

Author:

Thu, 2021-11-18 01:18

BEIRUT: Just 72 hours before the deadline for expatriates to register to vote in the Lebanese parliamentary elections currently scheduled for March 27 next year, President Michel Aoun's Free Patriotic Movement party on Wednesday lodged an appeal with the Constitutional Council over amendments to electoral law recently approved by the parliament.

On Oct. 28, an absolute majority in parliament approved plans to amend the 2017 electoral laws so that parliamentary elections can be held in March instead of May. They also scrapped its provisions for the election of six members of parliament to represent expatriates and the introduction of a biometric, magnetic card that would allow voters to cast their ballots where they live rather than returning to their home towns to vote. Aoun had previously rejected these amendments. FPM members walked out of parliament in protest when they were approved.

In its appeal to the Constitutional Council, the president's team argued that the decision not to allow expatriates to have their own elected representatives in parliament has "canceled a basic and fundamental right of a special Lebanese group."

It added that "the amendment of the deadlines is a violation of the principle of separation of powers, as the parliament is not entitled to discuss the date of the elections determined by the executive authority, which constitutes a violation of the provisions of the Constitution."

The appeal also argued that "the abolition of Article 84 of the law, related to the magnetic card, which allows the voter to vote in his place of residence, will affect the credibility and transparency of the electoral process."

FPM member Alain Aoun said: "The Constitutional Council will issue its decision within a month and the FPM will abide by its decision."

He also warned against "any step that could be taken by the minister of interior that entails inviting the electoral bodies to convene before the Constitutional Council issues its decision regarding the appeal."

If the Constitutional Council upholds the appeal, then the provision of six seats in parliament to represent expatriates will be reconsidered. If not, Lebanese citizens living in other countries will have to vote in one of the 15 electoral districts in Lebanon.

The president opposes the rescheduling of the elections because of the effect he says this will have on campaigning. He also opposes the scrapping of plans

for voting "megacenters" that would allow people to vote outside the areas where they are registered, on the grounds that this will negatively affect turnout among Christians in remote areas, who would be forced to return to their home villages to vote during snowy weather and pay for costly transportation to do so.

The president's appeal has caused some to wonder whether the move could disrupt the elections, causing a postponement or even cancellation. If the minister of interior sticks with the plans for a March 27 polling date, he will have to call on electoral bodies to convene before Dec. 27. It is also possible that there could be attempts to obstruct the Constitutional Council session to discuss the appeal.

Gebran Bassil, the head of the FPM, wants to maximize the number of expatriates who register to vote from their countries of residence. As of Wednesday, 180,000 expatriates had registered to vote in Lebanese embassies abroad. The deadline for registration is Nov. 20.

Hadi Abul-Hassan, secretary of the Democratic Gathering parliamentary bloc, on Wednesday highlighted concerns that personal information about expatriates who have registered with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to vote has been leaked to a "certain political movement that is using it for its own benefit."

He asked Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdallah Bou Habib for "an answer regarding this information and for firm measures to put an end for this farce."

Walid Fakhreddin, an expert in electoral affairs, told Arab News: "Some embassies abroad have leaked the phone numbers of expatriates eligible to vote to the FPM so that it can communicate with them, which has infuriated these expatriates, who consider that this data should have been protected."

He said that the FPM "fears losing the elections because it has lost the electoral leverage provided by former allies that broke up with it due to their rivalries, noting that the popularity of the FPM has declined inside Lebanon."

He added that it is "not only the FPM that fears losing the elections, for there are other parties that fear they will lose in light of the shift in the public mood that has deprived them of huge support."

Fakhreddin said that international support and aid for Lebanon is conditional on the successful staging of elections, which prevents the parties in power from attempting to cancel them.

"In this context, the appeal of the FPM will not obstruct the elections," he said. "However, when the decree calling for the electoral bodies to convene is presented to him, the president might try to maneuver to postpone the elections until May."

Meanwhile the Lebanese Business Councils in the Gulf has written to the minister of foreign affairs complaining that "hundreds of registration

applications for residents outside Lebanon are pending because the ministry is currently refusing to register them under tourist or commercial visit visas.”

The group said that “many Lebanese abroad are waiting for their official residencies to be issued, which is a process that takes a long time, which presents an obstacle to them that prevents them from performing their right to vote.”

It called on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to “provide facilities to allow this category to participate in the elections.”

The Lebanese Business Councils include the Lebanese Executives Council, the Lebanese-Saudi Business Council, the Abu Dhabi-Lebanese Business Council, the Lebanese Business Council in Kuwait, the Lebanese Business Council in Dubai and Northern Emirates, and the Lebanese-Gulf Economic Relations Development Authority.



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[Lebanon](#)

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# Israel court jails Spanish aid worker for funding militant group

Author:

Thu, 2021-11-18 01:14

JERUSALEM: An Israeli military court Wednesday sentenced Spanish aid worker Juana Rashmawi to 13 months in prison after convicting her of illegally funding a Palestinian militant group.

The military said Rashmawi, 63, had confessed to her role as a “fundraiser for the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine,” a group blamed for previous attacks on Israelis, a claim she rejected via her lawyer.

The court confirmed the sentence requested by prosecutors as part of a plea agreement last week that also required Rashmawi to pay a 50,000 shekel (\$16,000) fine.

Her lawyer, Avigdor Feldman, told AFP that Rashmawi could be released within two weeks based on time served.

“She has been under arrest since April and there is a chance she could be released within two weeks if the parole committee reduces her sentence by a third,” Feldman said.

Born in Madrid and married to a Palestinian man, Rashmawi had been working for a Palestinian group, the Union of Health Work Committees.

Israel said the group funneled European donations to the PFLP. Last year Israel banned the health organization in the occupied West Bank.

Feldman told reporters at Ofer military court that Rashmawi “had no idea this money was brought to the PFLP.”

“We decided to admit in a plea that says clearly that she did not know about the passing of money to PFLP but ‘suspected’ that the health organization has a connection with the PFLP,” he told AFP.

He added that this agreement was intended to spare her a long trial, especially in light of a possible early release.

Rashmawi was first detained in April. Her daughter Maria Rashmawi told reporters the sentencing was “important because the uncertainty of the last months led to a lot of anguish and it was very hard to bear.”

The sentencing came weeks after Israel outlawed six prominent Palestinian civil society groups, alleging they were also fronts for the PFLP – which the groups denied.

The groups are Addameer, Al-Haq, Bisan Center for Research and Development, Defense for Children International-Palestine, the Union of Agricultural Work

Committees and the Union of Palestinian Women's Committees.

European donors who support the banned groups and the United Nations have asked to see concrete evidence from Israel supporting the ban.

Israeli officials said Rashmawi's conviction proved their accusations against the other six groups were correct.

Foreign Minister Yair Lapid has called Rashmawi's "admission of guilt" proof of Israel's claims that the groups served as conduits for PFLP funds.

He has urged the international community to "prevent terrorist organizations from using the veneer of civilian cover."

Feldman rejected the description and said he would demand a clarification from Israeli officials.

"She did not collect money for the PFLP," he told reporters. "She has no connections with the six organizations that were outlawed."



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# Ten bodies found in migrant boat off Libya

Author:

Thu, 2021-11-18 01:05

ROME: Ten people were found dead in an overcrowded ship carrying migrants off the coast of Libya, and were believed to have suffocated, the Doctors Without Borders charity has said.

The charity said late on Tuesday that its Geo Barents rescue ship had picked up 99 survivors earlier in the day.

“At the bottom of the overcrowded wooden boat, 10 people were found dead,” tweeted the charity, known by its French initials MSF.

It described them as “10 avoidable deaths ... 10 persons who died from suffocation, after 13 hours adrift at sea. The deadly central #Med route. How can we accept this in 2021?”

Tens of thousands of people seek to enter Europe each year via the central Mediterranean, leaving from Libya and Tunisia and heading most often for Italy.

The route is deadly – 1,236 people have died in the central Mediterranean so far this year, compared with 858 in the same period of 2020, according to Flavio Di Giacomo of the UN’s Migration Agency, the IOM.

He tweeted that the Geo Barents rescue “probably avoided other victims,” saying it showed “the need to increase patrols at sea.”

MSF said there were currently 186 people on board Geo Barents, including women and children, the youngest of whom is 10 months old.

“Many of them seem traumatized by the horrendous ordeal,” it said, calling for a safe port to disembark them.



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## [UK's Charles hails queen's kinship with Jordan late king](#)

Author:

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1637180666698874200

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AMMAN: Britain's Prince Charles paid tribute Wednesday in Amman to the kinship between his mother, Queen Elizabeth II, and Jordan's late King Hussein, both veteran monarchs.

"I feel this friendship in the most personal of ways, as Jordan has always been a part of my life," Charles said in a speech at the Jordan Museum.

"His Majesty King Hussein came to the throne in 1952, the same year as my dear mother, the queen," he said.

"They would be of great mutual support to each other through the decades

ahead.”

King Hussein died in 1999 as the world’s longest ruling executive head of state.

The visit to Jordan by the prince who is heir to the throne started a day after Queen Elizabeth, 95, missed an annual remembrance service for fallen soldiers in London on Sunday “having sprained her back.”

However, Elizabeth, Britain’s longest-reigning monarch, on Wednesday made her first public appearance in almost a month, hosting a reception at Windsor Castle, west of London.

Prince Charles, accompanied by his wife Camilla met with Jordan’s King Abdullah II, Hussein’s son and successor, Tuesday at the start of a tour of Jordan and Egypt.

On Wednesday, they also visited the Greco-Roman archaeological site of Um Qais, north of Amman.

The couple are Thursday to travel on to Egypt, which is to host the next round of the UN climate summit in its Sharm el-Sheikh resort next year.

Prince Charles is the most senior royal who travels overseas, representing the Queen, who stopped overseas tours a few years back because of her age. There has been a heavy focus on him in recent weeks amid the concerns over the monarch’s health.









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## [Syrian singer Souleyman detained in Turkey](#)

Author:

Thu, 2021-11-18 01:01

ISTANBUL: Turkish police on Wednesday detained celebrated Syrian singer Omar Souleyman and questioned him about alleged ties to outlawed Kurdish militants, his manager told AFP.

Souleyman was brought in for questioning in the southern Turkish city of Sanliurfa, where he has been running a bakery since escaping Syria's decade-long civil war in 2011, said the manager, who asked not to be identified.

Souleyman was being questioned over local media allegations that he had ties to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which is proscribed as a terrorist organization by Ankara, the US and EU.

The PKK has been waging a decades-long insurgency against the Turkish state that has claimed tens of thousands of lives.

The manager said he expected Souleyman to be released later on Wednesday.

But Turkish media said Souleyman was detained on an arrest warrant issued for "membership of a terrorist organization," a charge that has seen tens of thousands jailed across Turkey in the past decade.

Souleyman has won international recognition for his melodic mix of dance and folk music, collaborating with artists such as Bjork and the Blur's frontman Damon Albarn.

He performed at a Nobel Peace Prize ceremony in Oslo in December 2013, and starred in a benefit concert at the prestigious South by Southwest (SXSW) festival in Austin, Texas earlier that year.

The official video for his 2013 song "Warni Warni" has received nearly 95 million views on YouTube.

Local administration officials in Sanliurfa did not immediately respond to request for comment from AFP.



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