

Hezbollah responsible for Lebanon's rift with Saudi Arabia, says former PM Hariri

Sat, 2021-10-30 00:51

CAIRO: Lebanese former Prime Minister Saad Hariri said on Friday that Iran-backed Hezbollah was responsible for the rift with Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries.

"The responsibility, first and foremost, in this regard lies with Hezbollah, and its professed hostility toward the Arabs and the Arab Gulf states," Hariri said in a tweet.

He issued the statement after [Saudi Arabia recalled its ambassador from Lebanon](#) "for consultation" and ordered the Lebanese envoy in Riyadh to leave within 48 hours on Friday. Saudi Arabia also banned Lebanese products from the Kingdom.

Riyadh's actions were in response to comments made by Lebanon's Information Minister George Kordahi about the Saudi-led military intervention in Yemen. Kordahi, a former newscaster of the Saudi broadcast company MBC, said that the Yemen's Houthi militia were only defending themselves against aggression.

Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and several other Arab states formed a coalition in 2015 to help restore Yemen's legitimate government which was ousted by the Houthis. Since then, the Iran-backed militia had been launching ballistic missiles, rockets and explosive-laden drones against civilian targets in Saudi Arabia.

The dispute is the latest challenge to Prime Minister Najib Mikati's cabinet which is already in political paralysis over a row around the Beirut port blast probe.

The rift risks widening to more Gulf states with Bahrain also asking Lebanon's ambassador to leave shortly after the Saudi decision.

Mikati, in a phone call with Kordahi on Friday evening, asked him to put the national interest first and "take the right decision to fix Arab relations with Lebanon," a statement by his office said.

Sources with knowledge of the matter had told Reuters the Saudi escalation was piling pressure on Kordahi to resign in order to avert further consequences.

Mikati earlier reiterated his government's commitment to good relations with Saudi Arabia and called for Arab partners to put the latest crisis behind them but stopped short of announcing concrete action to remedy the crisis.

"We also appeal brotherly Arab leaders to work and help to overcome this

crisis in order to preserve Arab cohesion,” the statement said.

Kordahi has said the show was recorded nearly a month before he took office and he would not resign over the incident, earning praises from the Hezbollah.

Mikati has been hoping to improve ties with Gulf Arab states which have been strained for years because of the influence wielded in Beirut by the Iran-backed Shiite group Hezbollah.

“The control of the terrorist Hezbollah on the decision-making of the Lebanese state made Lebanon an arena for implementing projects for countries that don’t wish Lebanon and its people well,” a Riyadh statement carried by SPA said.

In April, Saudi Arabia banned all fruit and vegetable imports from Lebanon blaming an increase in drug smuggling.

The ban added to the economic woes of Lebanon, already in the throes of one of the modern times’ deepest financial crises.



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Saudi Arabia orders Lebanon envoy to leave, recalls its ambassador to countryMBC to close office in Lebanon and relocate to Saudi Arabia

Renovations offer new view of ancient West Bank mosaic

Author:

AP

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Sat, 2021-10-30 00:07

WEST BANK: Tourists are being offered a new glimpse at one of the largest ancient mosaics in the Middle East, after renovations undertaken by the Palestinian Authority were unveiled this week.

The 930-square-meter stone mosaic, with intricate geometric patterns, is part of what is known as Hisham's Palace. It was built during the reign of the Umayyads, the first hereditary Muslim dynasty, which ruled from Damascus. The palace was the winter resort of Caliph Hisham ibn Abd Al-Malik, who ruled from 724 to 743.

It is situated near the desert oasis city of Jericho – one of the world's oldest – in what is now the Israeli-occupied West Bank. Israel, which controls access to the territory, plans to welcome tourists from Nov. 1 as it lifts COVID-19 restrictions. The Palestinians hope the new project will attract both local and foreign travelers.

The \$18 million project, which included the construction of a large dome to protect the mosaic from the elements, was partly funded by the Japanese government. Tourists can now view the mosaic from a new walkway suspended above it.

The project was originally supposed to be completed in 2018 but was delayed, in part because of the challenge of anchoring the dome without disturbing the archaeological remains.

Abdel Raheem Zahran, a local tourist who came with his children on Thursday, said he had been to the site seven years earlier, but it was "not as developed."

"The dome that they made is great, you don't have the sun beating down on you, " he said.



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Newly premiered 'The Devil's Drivers' follows West Bank outlaws

[Child among 13 civilians killed by Houthi ballistic missile](#)

Author:

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1635541170607746200

Fri, 2021-10-29 23:58

SANAA: A child was among 13 people killed when a missile fired by Yemeni rebels struck a tribal leader's home south of the strategic city of Marib, military and medical sources said on Friday.

"A Houthi ballistic missile hit the house of Sheikh Abdul Latif Al-Qibli in Al-Jawba on Thursday evening during a meeting with tribal leaders fighting on the government's side," a government military official said.

“Thirteen people, including a child, were killed,” he added. The death toll was confirmed by a medical source in the area. As well as the child, Thursday evening’s missile strike also killed four tribal leaders, said the military official. At least 11 houses were damaged and 16 civilians were wounded in the attack, according to the officials. Yemen’s Information Minister Moammar Al-Eryani said on Twitter that at least 12 people were killed, including two sons of Al-Qibli, whose fate was unknown. The Houthi “militia continues to systematically and deliberately bombard villages and homes ... in order to inflict max casualties among civilians” forcing hundreds of families and displaced to flee, he wrote. The Arab coalition backing Yemen’s government has been conducting a fierce air campaign since Oct. 11 to prevent the rebels from reaching Marib city. Since then, about 2,000 Houthi fighters have been killed in Al-Jawba, about 50 km south of Marib, and two other districts, according to the coalition. Fierce fighting has gripped Al-Jawba district in recent days. Earlier this month, the Houthi rebels advanced in the district of Abdiya, south of the city of Marib. The Houthis “are committing genocide” in Abdiya, preventing food, medicine and other basic needs from reaching the district, said Marib provincial Gov. Sheikh Sultan Al-Aradah.



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Arab coalition says 95 Houthis killed in strikes on Juba and Al-Kasarah

Lebanon asks Russia for satellite images from day of Beirut port blast

Author:

Fri, 2021-10-29 22:12

BEIRUT: Lebanese President Michel Aoun has asked Russian ambassador Alexander Rudakov to provide satellite images of Beirut from Aug. 4, 2020, when a huge explosion rocked the city's port, according to a Lebanese presidency tweet on Friday.

The massive explosion occurred when around 2,750 tons of ammonium nitrate – which had been stored at the port since 2014 – and quantities of explosives ignited. The resulting blast killed more than 215 people, injured thousands and destroyed swathes of the Lebanese capital.

Russian President Vladimir Putin said a week ago: “I would like to once again offer my condolences to the Lebanese people ... Many years ago, ammonium nitrate was delivered to and stored in the port; the local authorities did not give it the attention it needed, although, as far as I know, they wanted to sell it profitably.”

Putin added: “As for helping with the investigation, frankly speaking, I do not understand how satellite images can help, and whether we even have any. However, I promise that I will make inquiries, and if we do have anything and can provide assistance to the investigation, we will do so.”

After the explosion last year, Aoun told the press: “There are two possibilities; the explosion occurred either as a result of negligence or external interference by means of a missile or a bomb.”

In October 2020, then-Prime Minister Hassan Diab said he asked French President Emmanuel Macron for satellite images of the port before, during and after the explosion, and that he had sent a similar request to Italy. Neither country has yet publicly confirmed their intention to provide such images to Lebanon.

The lead investigator of the probe into the explosion, Judge Tarek Bitar, is expected to issue his rulings early next year, a judicial source told Arab News.

However, the probe into what was one of history's largest non-nuclear explosions is stalling amid a smear campaign against Bitar and pushback from powerful political factions.

Bitar has so far accused 10 officials, officers, and judges of being in part culpable for the explosion, including Diab; two MPs from the Amal movement (Hezbollah's ally) Ali Hassan Khalil and Ghazi Zeaiter; MP Nohad Machnouk;

former minister Youssef Finianos; Director General of State Security Maj. Gen. Tony Saliba; his counterpart at General Security Maj. Gen. Abbas Ibrahim; and former army commander Gen. Jean Kahwaji.

Hezbollah has accused Bitar of politicizing the investigation, and several of the politicians accused of negligence and causing the death of hundreds and injury of thousands have refused to appear before Bitar when summoned for questioning.

The latest of those is Zeaiter, who failed to appear for his scheduled interview with Bitar on Friday.

On Aug. 25, Bitar supervised a simulation of the welding that preceded the explosion in the port warehouse. The simulation was attended by several lawyers representing the parties concerned and a number of security and judicial officials. The Meteorological Department was also present to provide advice about the weather conditions on the day the explosion occurred.

French and American officials were also involved in the investigations, the results of which remain confidential.

The families of the victims and those affected by the explosion have been increasingly vocal about their dissatisfaction with the fact that, more than one year after the blast, no senior official has yet been held accountable for the country's worst peace-time disaster.



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Families of Beirut blast victims back judge amid pressureLebanon court dismisses case against Beirut blast judge allowing probe to continue

[How beating breast cancer changed the lives of four women in the Middle East](#)

Fri, 2021-10-29 19:55

DUBAI: Gloria Halim, Cristina Polo, Sapna Venugopal and Bharti Rao come from very different backgrounds but they have one thing in common: they are all breast-cancer survivors who emerged from their battles with the disease with a new outlook on life and a desire to help others.

The four women, who are in their 40s and 50s, are among the millions of women worldwide each year who are diagnosed with some form of breast cancer and embark on a difficult journey of surgeries, chemotherapy and radiotherapy to overcome what can be a fatal illness.

Beyond the physical side effects of the treatments, the experience of fighting and beating cancer can have a profound emotional effect on women. Indeed, medical practitioners say the vast majority of patients emerge from treatment with a greater willingness to extend a helping hand to others.

Many also take what is often seen as a second chance as a sign to change the direction of their lives, taking on new challenges or switching to a new career path.

British citizen Gloria Halim, for example, was working in the information technology sector in the UK when she discovered she had breast cancer 14 years ago. Now in her mid-40s, she is a chief wellness officer in the corporate world and a certified holistic health practitioner living in Dubai.



Breast cancer, known to be the most common cancer in women worldwide, is the leading cause of death among Saudi women, according to a retrospective epidemiological study conducted in 2012. (Shutterstock)

“For me, the key information is that prevention is possible and is important,” Halim told Arab News this month, which is Breast Cancer Awareness Month. “Having gone through what I’ve been through, there is no way I want anybody else to go through it.”

Halim said she has come to appreciate the importance of good physical, emotional and mental health in helping to reduce stress and maintain a strong immune system.

“We are not built to be in fight-or-flight mode constantly,” she said. “It takes a long time to get to the point where the human body says: ‘I’ve had enough. I can’t move.’ The immune system goes down, inflammation of the bodily organs goes up, an environment for disease grows.”

Breast cancer is the most common form of cancer in the world. As of December last year, 7.8 million surviving women had been diagnosed with breast cancer in the past five years, according to the World Health Organization. In 2020, about 2.3 million women were diagnosed with breast cancer worldwide and 685,000 died from the disease.

In Saudi Arabia, of the 24,485 cases of cancer recorded in 2018, 14.8 percent involved breast cancer, making it the most common form of cancer in the Kingdom. Of the 4,707 cancer cases recorded in the UAE in the same year, 22.4 percent were breast cancer.



L-R: Bharti Rao, Cristina Polo and Sapna Venugopal who all beat breast cancer. (Supplied)

While there was little improvement in breast cancer mortality figures between the 1930s and 1970s, survival rates began to rise in several countries from the 1980s on, thanks to early detection programs and new and improved treatments.

A growing body of research, and significant medical advances, continue to improve the prognosis for millions of women with the disease. But perhaps the most important development has been the increase in public awareness and the willingness of women to check themselves regularly and seek help early if they notice a potential problem.

Cristina Polo, from France, was 43 and living in Dubai when she noticed a lump in her breast in 2018. Determined to see her daughter, who was six at the time and the youngest of three siblings, grow up and have children of her own, she sought treatment immediately.

“Since cancer treatment, I have had a thirst for life,” she told Arab News. “I have this urge to do things in life that I kept postponing or put aside, saying I would do them later.”

Like Halim, Polo viewed her victory over cancer as an opportunity to change course. After completing her treatment, she resigned from a senior position in Dubai’s hospitality industry, began a course in digital marketing, earned a certificate in teaching English as a foreign language, and established a blog, called Cancer Majlis, devoted to cancer awareness.

INNUMBERS

*** 2.3m women diagnosed with breast cancer worldwide in 2020.**

*** 685,000 breast cancer deaths globally in 2020.**

(Source: WHO)

She said she spent many years before she was confronted with cancer worrying about “what ifs” and putting off making changes.

“Then, boom, the diagnosis came,” Polo said. “Suddenly, all this ‘what if, what if, what if’ became ‘what else, what else, what else can I explore?’”

Polo moved to Paris last year, where she teaches English at a French hospitality school and is a consultant for the travel and hospitality industry. She also enjoys sculpting and painting in her spare time and does voluntary work with recovering cancer patients, helping them to plan their post-cancer lives by developing new skills in the arts.

Sapna Venugopal had a similar desire to help others following her cancer diagnosis in Sept. 2017 at the age of 46 while living in Dubai. So she began volunteering to visit patients undergoing chemotherapy in the city, and donating a portion of her income as a jewelry designer and from furniture restoration to a cancer charity in her native India.

Despite the many awareness campaigns launched by governments and charities the world over, women are still often left in shock when they receive a breast cancer diagnosis.



Pink umbrellas decorate the Lebanese Ministry of Public Health in the capital Beirut as part of a national campaign for the public awareness of breast cancer. (AFP/File Photo)

“At the very beginning everybody thinks they have just been handed a death sentence, which they haven’t,” Elsbeth Bentley, a nurse at Dubai’s Mediclinic City Hospital, told Arab News. She is one of the few specialist breast cancer nurses in the UAE, who undergo an extra year of training to teach them how to help with the specific needs of breast cancer patients, with a main focus on communication skills.

“Research shows that after the word ‘cancer’ has been mentioned in a meeting with a doctor, most people will only retain some 20 percent of what they are told, because it freezes the brain and there is this feeling that it is happening to somebody else and they are not connected with it,” Bentley added.

Regardless of background and social status, all women react to the diagnosis in a similar way, said Bissi Punnackel-Sivaraman, a breast care nurse at King’s College Hospital in Dubai.

“It is a stressful period,” she told Arab News. “Most of the time patients will be in shock upon diagnosis, followed by anger, anxiety, fear and loneliness. Some of the patients will be in denial and it will take some time for them to accept the diagnosis, as it happens unexpectedly.

“Initial reaction will be more or less the same. But taking it in and coping with the treatment can be slightly different, as each individual is unique

and it can depend on their personal, family and occupational backgrounds.”

Bharti Rao, from India, recalled feeling “absolutely numb” and slipping into a state of denial when cancer was diagnosed in 2018, the year she turned 40, while living in Dubai.



Dubai's Burj Khalifa is lit up in pink to raise awareness and funds to fight breast cancer. (AFP/File Photo)

“But I didn’t sit on it for long because I understood that the more I go into denial, the more I am being pushed toward darkness,” she told Arab News.

Rao said she drew much of her resolve to seek treatment and beat the disease from her husband, parents, daughters and in-laws.

“I fought physically but they fought with me mentally and physiologically,” she said. “And that is where my battle was won. My day started with a smile and ended with gratitude.”

Rao worked in the banking sector but left her job before the cancer diagnosis and had worked as a volunteer helping children with autism. After beating the disease she developed a new outlook on life and is now a certified holistic lifestyle coach who provides her services for free to friends and relatives in Dubai and other people they refer to her, helping them during their emotional journeys while fighting cancer.

There is clearly an overriding sense among many breast-cancer survivors that they have been given a second chance in life to take on fresh challenges and pursue experiences they had long put on hold. Many also emerge with a sense of gratitude and a desire to give something back in some way.

“They want to see some good come out of it,” said nurse Bentley. “Life is not going to go back to exactly how it was. Something in them has changed and that means they don’t want to accept the things they accepted before.”



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Saudi campaigners are highlighting the risks of breast cancer – and not only for women
Saudi businesses think pink for October breast cancer awareness campaign