

'People threatening Bitar are involved in the port blast'

Author:

Wed, 2021-10-20 03:06

BEIRUT: Tarek Bitar, the judge leading the investigation into the August 2020 port explosion, resumed investigations on Tuesday after being notified by the Lebanese Civil Court of Cassation of its second decision to reject the request submitted by the defendant in the case of MP Ali Hassan Khalil.

Normal service resumed at the Justice Palace in Beirut after a long vacation. The Lebanese army guarding roads leading to the palace and Ain Remaneh, which was the arena of bloody events on Thursday, over protests to dismiss Bitar from the case. The repercussions of these events have affected the political scene, its parties and the people.

Civil society activists under the auspices of the "Lebanese Opposition Front" staged a sit-in outside the Justice Palace to show "solidarity with the Judiciary carrying out its national duties and support for Judge Bitar to face the threats."

Speaking on behalf of the protestors, activist Dr. Ziad Abdel Samad said: "A free and sovereign state cannot exist without a legitimate authority, judiciary and justice."

Abdel Samad urged "the defendants to appear before Judge Bitar, because the innocent normally show up and defend themselves instead of resorting to threats."

"We have reached this low point today because of a ruling elite allied with the Hezbollah statelet, protected by illegal arms.

"They want to dismiss Judge Bitar in all arbitrary ways and threats because he has come so close to the truth after they managed to dismiss the former judge, hiding behind their immunities because they know they are involved in the crime."

Abdel Samad claimed that "those making threats are involved in the crime."

Regarding the Tayouneh events that took place last week, he said: "They took to the streets to demonstrate peacefully, as they claimed, but they almost got us into a new civil war as a result of the hatred and conspiracies against Lebanon."

Lawyer May Al-Khansa, known for her affiliation with Hezbollah, submitted a report at the Lebanese Civil Court of Cassation against the leader of the Lebanese Forces party, Samir Geagea, Judge Bitar and "all those who appear in the investigation to be involved, accomplices or partners in crimes of terrorism and terrorism funding, undermining the state's authority, inciting a strife, and other crimes against the law and the Lebanese Constitution."

Hezbollah Leader Hassan Nasrallah on Monday night waged an unprecedented campaign of accusations and incitement against the Lebanese Forces party and its leader.

Nasrallah accused them of being “the biggest threat for the presence of Christians in Lebanon” and said they were “forming alliances with Daesh.”

In a clear threat to Geagea and his party, Nasrallah bragged in his speech of having “100,000 trained fighters,” calling on Christians to “stand against this murderer.”

Nasrallah accused Bitar of “carrying out a foreign agenda targeting Hezbollah in the Beirut port crime” and of “being supported by embassies and authorities, turning him into a dictator.”

During the parliamentary session on Tuesday, no contact was made between Hezbollah and the Lebanese Forces. However, a handshake was spotted between the Lebanese Forces’ MP Pierre Abu Assi and the Amal Movement’s MP Hani Kobeissi.

Minister of Culture Mohammed Mortada, who represents Hezbollah, said “Hezbollah’s ministers will attend the ministerial session if Prime Minister Najib Mikati calls for one, but the justice minister and the judiciary must find a solution to the issue of lack of trust in Bitar.”

Several calls were made on Monday night between different political groups to prevent escalation and calm the situation.

Efforts are being made to reach a settlement that allows Bitar to keep his position and for defendants in the Beirut port case – who are former ministers and MPs – to be referred to the Supreme Judicial Council for prosecution.

Elsewhere, parliament dropped the proposal of a women’s quota ensuring female participation through a minimum of 26 seats.

It passed a move to allow expats to vote for the 128 MPs and dropped the decision to allocate six additional seats representing them.

The parliament’s decision angered Gebran Bassil, who heads the Strong Lebanon parliamentary bloc. Following the parliamentary session, Bassil referred to “a political game in the matter of expats’ right to vote, which we will not allow to happen.”



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Lebanon elite united against Beirut port blast probe seen as survival threat
Lebanese parliament confirms March polls amid efforts to secure IMF rescue

[European court raps Turkey over presidential 'insults' law](#)

Author:

Wed, 2021-10-20 02:35

STRASBOURG, France: Europe's top human rights court on Tuesday called on Turkey to change a law regarding insulting the president under which tens of thousands have been prosecuted, after ruling that a man's detention under the law violated his freedom of expression.

Vedat Sorli was given a suspended 11-month jail sentence in 2017 over a caricature and a photograph of President Tayyip Erdogan that he shared on Facebook, along with satirical and critical comments.

There was no justification for Sorli's detention and pre-trial arrest or the imposition of a criminal sanction, the European Court of Human Rights court said.

"Such a sanction, by its very nature, inevitably had a chilling effect on the willingness of the person concerned to express his or her views on matters of public interest," it said.

The criminal proceedings against Sorli were "incompatible with freedom of expression," the court added.

Thousands have been charged and sentenced over the crime of insulting Erdogan in the seven years since he moved from being prime minister to president.

In 2020, 31,297 investigations were launched in relation to the charge, 7,790 cases were filed and 3,325 resulted in convictions, according to Justice Ministry data. Those numbers were slightly lower than the previous year.

Since 2014, the year Erdogan became president, 160,169 investigations were launched over insulting the president, 35,507 cases were filed and there were 12,881 convictions.

In a prominent case earlier this year, a court sentenced pro-Kurdish politician Selahattin Demirtas to 3-1/2 years for insulting Erdogan, one of the longest sentences over the crime, according to Demirtas' lawyer.

The court said Turkey's law on insulting the president affords the head of state a privileged status over conveying information and opinion about them.

It said the law should be changed to ensure people have the freedom to hold opinions and impart ideas without interference by authorities in order to put an end to the violation it found in Sorli's case.

10 diplomat summoned

Separately, Turkey's Foreign Ministry summoned the ambassadors of the US and nine other countries to protest a statement they issued that called for the release of imprisoned philanthropist and civil rights activist Osman Kavala.

Kavala, 64, has been kept behind bars for four years, accused of attempting to overthrow the Turkish government through the 2013 nationwide demonstrations that started at Istanbul's Gezi Park. He has also been charged with espionage and attempting to overthrow the government in connection with a failed military coup in 2016.

The ministry said the ambassadors were told that "the impertinent statement via social media regarding a legal proceeding conducted by independent judiciary was unacceptable." Turkey rejects the attempt to "politicize judicial proceedings and put pressure on (the) Turkish judiciary," it continued.

"Turkey is a democratic country governed by the rule of law that respects human rights, and it was reminded that the Turkish judiciary will not be

influenced by such irresponsible statements,” the ministry added.



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Turkey shifting Syria strategy after Kurdish militia's attacks
Taliban delegation lands in Turkey for 1st high-level talks

[Israel violates international law 'because it can,' UN Security Council told](#)

Author:

Wed, 2021-10-20 00:50

NEW YORK: Israel pursues policies in violation of international law and of UN resolutions “Because it can – no tangible cost or consequence is attached,” the UN Security Council heard on Tuesday.

Daniel Levy, president of US/Middle East Project, told council members of the

need to address what he called “an accountability deficit when it comes to Israel’s action” as it is one of the core understandings that should guide the peace process forward.

“If the unlawful and peace negating politics of Israel continue to be met with impunity, there should be no expectation of positive change.

Also to be considered is “a legitimacy deficit in Palestinian politics,” Levy said.

“The Palestinian Liberation Organization must become fully representative, inclusive and by extension better able to demonstrate strategic agency and to negotiate.

“Palestinians have a right to elect representatives to their national institutions. That requires a Palestinian leadership decision, as well as supportive, not preventive, steps by Israel and the International community.



Israeli activists of the Rabbis for Human Rights organization help Palestinian farmers harvest their olive trees in Burin village in the occupied West Bank, on Oct.19 2021. (Photo by Menahem Kahana / AFP)

“We also cannot ignore or condone when existing Palestinian self-governing authorities on the ground with their limited mandate repress their own people.”

Palestinian politician, activist, and scholar Hanan Ashrawi told the ambassadors that everything must be viewed in the context of occupation.

The security council's inability to assert its authority, Ashrawi said, has allowed "this injustice to become a perpetual tragic, human modern political and legal travesty."

She discounted talk of confidence-building between Israel and the Palestinians as "there can be very little confidence under occupation.

"The policy of confidence-building measures is misguided because occupation brings only contempt, distrust, resentment, and resistance. The oppressed cannot be brought to trust or accept handouts from their oppressor as an alternative to their right to freedom."

Another attempt at spreading misconception is the constant call for "balance in an unbalanced situation," Ashrawi said.

"The mindless refrain that Israel has a right to defend itself while the Palestinian people are denied such a right is perverse, and that the occupier's violence is justified as self-defense while the occupied are stigmatized as a terrorist.

"Peace is not achieved by normalizing the occupation, sidelining the Palestinian question, or rewarding it by repositioning Israel as a regional superpower.

"Such an approach maintains in place the causes of regional instability while enabling Israel as a colonial apartheid to superimpose greater Israel on all of historic Palestine."

Israel's permanent representative to the UN Gilad Erdan strongly criticized Ashrawi's presence at the security council meeting.

"A spokesperson for Palestinian leadership was invited to represent civil society," giving a platform to what he called "Palestinian rejectionism."

Erdan slammed security council meetings on the Middle East for what he called disregarding "the real threat to regional and global security: Iran.

"Iran has assembled six armies of terrorist proxies in the region and by allowing the Ayatollah regime to continue with the severe violation of their international commitments, these six terror armies will soon have an Iranian nuclear umbrella."

Before the meeting began, Erdan told reporters in New York that such meetings have the sole aim to "bash Israel" and are a "waste of everyone's time.

"The security council members help dig the ditch of conflict deeper," he said.

Erdan called on council members to "stand up to Iran and demand that Palestinian leadership abandon their culture of hate. This is the only way to transform the region into a paradise of progress, prosperity, and peace."



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[Daniel Levy](#)

Palestinians clash with Israeli police in Jerusalem Israel gives legal status to 4K in gesture to Palestinians

[UK, Arab League concerned over Iran's nuclear program](#)

Author:

Tue, 2021-10-19 23:38

LONDON: The UK shares concerns over Iran's nuclear program with Arab countries, a government official said on Tuesday. Tehran has stopped honoring some of its commitments under a 2015 nuclear deal and has been holding up negotiations aimed at reviving the landmark accord that scales back its nuclear program in exchange for sanctions relief, sparking concern from the UN nuclear watchdog agency. The comments were made during a meeting in London between the UK Minister for Middle East and North Africa in the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, James Cleverly, and Ahmed Aboul Gheit, secretary-general of the Arab League. The meeting dealt with developments in the region, including Iran, Syria and Libya, where Cleverly affirmed his country supports the Libyan political process.

I met too with [@arableague_gs](#) Aboul Gheit, to discuss recent developments in the region, including Iran, Libya and Syria.

The Arab League shares our concerns over Iran's nuclear programme and, like us, also supports the political process in Libya.
pic.twitter.com/ZyCWgLEDAA

– James Cleverly (@JamesCleverly) [October 19, 2021](#)

Earlier on Tuesday, Cleverly met with Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry, where he praised Egypt's role as "a key mediator in regional conflicts, and a leading partner on climate" change. He also congratulated Shoukry on Egypt's nomination to host the next UN climate change conference (COP27), adding he looked forward to President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi attendance at the upcoming COP26 conference in Glasgow

next month, and his meeting with Prime Minister Boris Johnson. "I also thanked Shoukry for Egypt's ongoing engagement in Hamas-Israeli talks," which "played a leading role in securing the cease-fire," Cleverly said. The UK and Egypt also agreed on the importance of Libya sticking to its elections timetable, he added.

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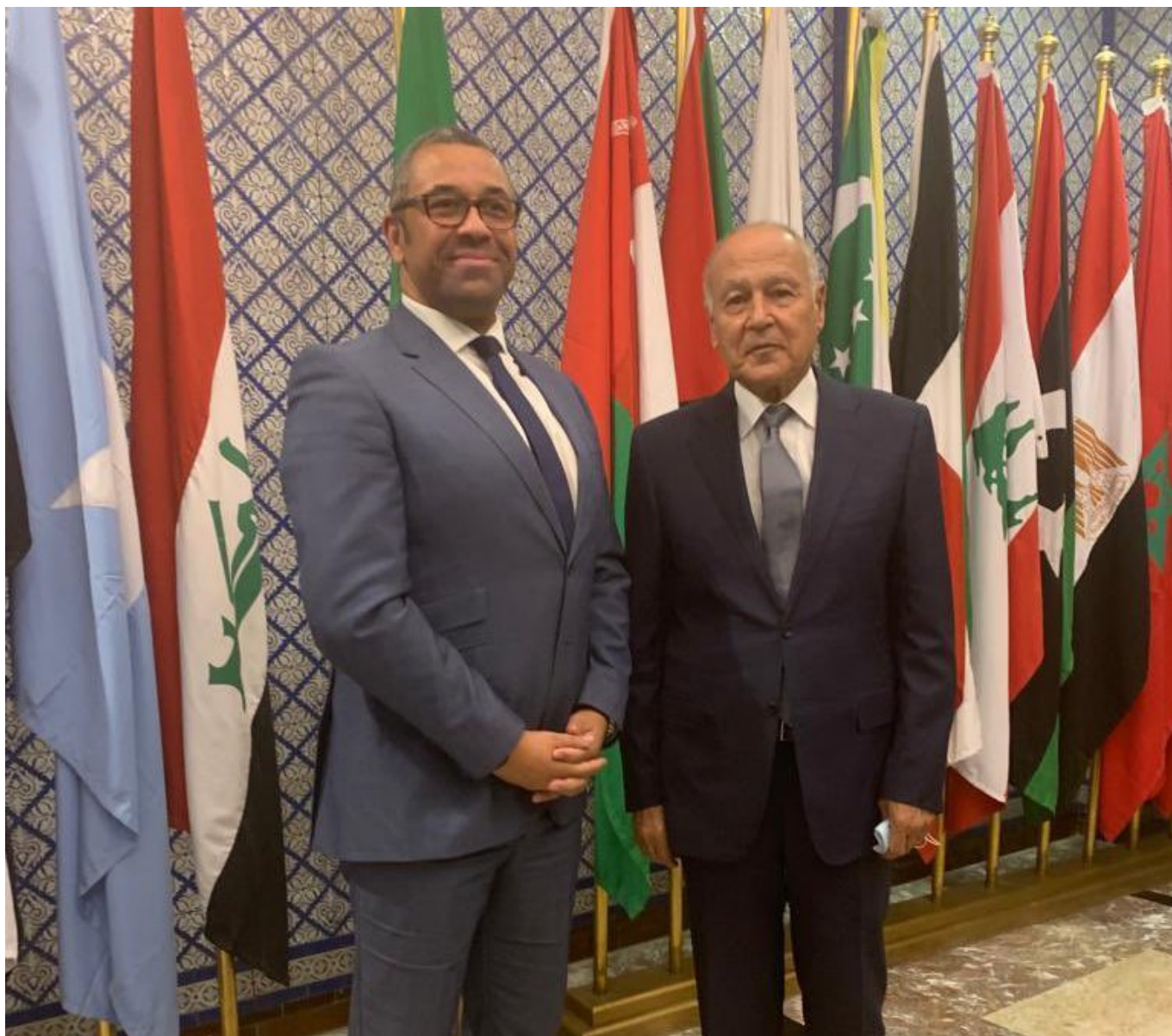
The UK & Egypt agree on the importance of [#Libya](#) sticking to its elections timetable. pic.twitter.com/tySK8gzgN6

– James Cleverly (@JamesCleverly) [October 19, 2021](#)

(With AFP)







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IAEA: Surveillance of Iran nuclear program no longer 'intact' UAE and UK foreign ministers discuss strengthening cooperation

48 Houthi militants killed near Yemen's Marib: Arab coalition

Author:

Tue, 2021-10-19 23:01

RIYADH: The Arab coalition in Yemen said on Tuesday it carried out 14 attacks targeting Houthi militia members in two districts near the strategic city of Marib in the last 24 hours.

The coalition said 48 Houthis have been killed and six military vehicles were destroyed in the military operations in Al-Jawba and Al-Kassara.

"We will continue to provide support to the Yemeni National Army to protect civilians from Houthi violations," the coalition said in a statement.

This is the ninth consecutive day that the coalition has announced strikes around Marib, reporting a total of more than 1,200 Houthi fatalities.

The previously announced bombings were in Abedia about 100 kilometers (60 miles) from Marib – the internationally recognized government's last bastion in oil-rich northern Yemen.

The strikes reported Tuesday were closer to Marib.

Al-Jawba lies about 50 kilometers from the city and Al-Kassara is about 30 kilometers northwest.

According to a government military official on Tuesday, fighting between the two sides "continues on a number of fronts but there are no major advances or changes on the ground in recent hours."

The Houthis began a major push to seize Marib in February and have renewed their offensive since September after a lull.

(With AFP)



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