

Tunisian parliament speaker Ghannouchi contracts COVID-19, adviser says

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TUNIS: The speaker of Tunisia's parliament and the leader of the Islamist Ennahda Party, Rached Ghannouchi, has contracted COVID-19, an adviser to Ghannouchi told Reuters on Tuesday.

Ghannouchi, 80, is at home and will work remotely, the adviser said.

Ghannouchi, the leader of the biggest party in the parliament, received two doses of an anti-COVID vaccine this year.

Tunisia is seeing a significant increase in COVID-19 cases, with intensive care wards almost full, health authorities said, after successfully containing the virus in the first wave last year.

In total, Tunisia has recorded more than 500,000 coronavirus cases and about 16,500 deaths.



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[Rached Ghannouchi](#)

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[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)
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Ennahda's Ghannouchi to stand for national elections in Tunisia
Virus-hit Tunisia brings Covid care home

Grief and anger: Iraqis demand justice as hospital blaze kills 92

Tue, 2021-07-13 22:00

JEDDAH: Grieving and angry Iraqis demanded justice on Tuesday after at least 92 people died when an explosion and fire ripped through a coronavirus hospital in the southern city of Nasiriyah.

The fire in a temporary quarantine clinic at Al-Hussein Hospital began when sparks from faulty wiring spread to an oxygen tank, which exploded.

By early morning on Tuesday, only the charred remains of the building were visible, with colored blankets strewn across the blackened debris as wisps of smoke rose from the rubble. The dead included 21 charred bodies that were still unidentified.



Iraqis react in grief at a funeral procession in Najaf for those killed in a massive fire that engulfed a coronavirus isolation ward of Al-Hussein hospital in the southern Iraqi city of Nasiriyah. (AFP)

It was the second such incident in three months, after 82 people were killed when oxygen tanks blew up at a COVID-19 hospital in Baghdad in April. President Barham Salih said both fires were “the result of endemic corruption and mismanagement that disregards the lives of Iraqis.”

Rescue teams at the Al-Hussein clinic used a heavy crane on Tuesday to remove the melted remains of the building, and relatives gathered near by as young volunteers cleared debris.

“This is an unforgivable crime,” said Abu Nour Al-Shawi. “A patient comes in looking for treatment and he ends up being carried out in a coffin by his family. This place is not even fit for animals.”



Mourners in Najaf prepare to bury victims of a fire that swept through a coronavirus ward in the southern city of Nasiriyah. (AP)

Uday Al-Jaberi, who lost four relatives in the fire, said: "I want to send a message to those who committed this crime – haven't you had enough of Nasiriyah's blood? We don't have a government in power, we have a mafia. We have criminals ruling the country."

Imad Hashim, 46, whose mother, sister-in-law and niece died in the fire, said: "What should I say after losing my family? No point demanding anything from a failed government. Three days and this case will be forgotten like others."

At the city's morgue, anger spread among people waiting to receive their relatives' bodies.

"No quick response to the fire, not enough firefighters. Sick people burned to death. It's a disaster," said Mohammed Fadhil, whose brother died.

A doctor at the hospital said it had no basic safety precautions. "The hospital lacks a fire sprinkler system or even a simple fire alarm," he said. "We complained many times that a tragedy could happen any moment from a cigarette stub, but every time we got the same answer from health officials: 'We don't have enough money'."

Prime Minister Mustafa Kadhimi ordered the suspension and arrest of health and civil defense managers in Nasiriyah, and the hospital's manager. Government investigators arrived in the city on Tuesday morning and their findings would be published next week, he said.



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[Mustafa Al-Kadhimi](#)

Saudi Arabia 'deeply saddened' after nearly 100 killed in Iraq COVID-19 hospital fire
Fire kills at least 83 at COVID-19 hospital in southern Iraq

[Thousands mourn daughter of jailed Palestinian activist](#)

Author:

AFP

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Tue, 2021-07-13 21:59

RAMALLAH: Thousands of Palestinians marched through Ramallah Tuesday to bury rights activist Suha Jarrar, 31, as Israel refused to release her mother, lawmaker Khalida Jarrar, from prison for the funeral.

"We are all your daughters, oh Jarrar," the crowd chanted.

Khalida Jarrar, 58, has been arrested and jailed many times and often held without charge in what Israelis call administrative detention.

Palestinians and human rights organizations had pressed in vain for her release for her daughter's burial.

Suha Jarrar was found dead in her Ramallah home on Sunday, according to the advocacy group Al-Haq where she worked.

Al-Haq director Shawan Jabarin told AFP the cause of death was not known and the family was waiting for autopsy results.

A statement from the group said Suha Jarrar would remain "a role model in her strength, patience, generosity and defiance in the face of extreme injustice and adversity of Israel's prolonged military occupation and apartheid."

Khalida Jarrar was sentenced to two years in prison in March 2021 for belonging to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, which Israel and the United States label a "terrorist" organization.

She had been detained without charge since 2019, and her sentence included time served.

Jarrar was elected to the Palestinian Legislative Council, or parliament, as part of the PFLP, but the Israeli military did not find evidence she had taken part in violent acts.

On Monday, Palestinian demonstrators threw rocks and shook the yellow gates of Ofer military prison north of Jerusalem, where many Palestinians are held. Israeli forces responded with tear gas.

Activist Abdullah Abu Rahma told AFP he attended the protest “to express our solidarity with Khalida Jarrar,” put pressure on Israel and “for our voices to reach the human rights and international institutions to stop this arbitrary arrest.”

At Al-Haq, Suha Jarrar specialized in environmental and gender issues, including briefing the United Nations on Palestinian access to water under Israeli occupation.

She studied in Canada and earned her Master’s in climate change science and policy in Britain.

Omar Shakir, Israel and Palestine Director for Human Rights Watch, blasted Israel’s decision not to release Khalida Jarrar for her daughter’s burial. “Having repeatedly detained Khalida in violation of her rights, Israeli authorities should at minimum allow her to say goodbye to her daughter,” Shakir wrote in a statement.



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[Khalida Jarrar](#)

[Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine](#)

Egypt’s foreign minister in show of support for Palestinians in Ramallah

Yemen government says Houthis not taking peace efforts seriously

Tue, 2021-07-13 21:39

ALEXANDRIA: Yemen's government on Tuesday blamed the Iran-backed Houthis for disrupting peace efforts to end the war and renewed calls to the international community to mount more pressure on the rebels to stop their bloody military operations across the country.

The government's accusation against the Houthis comes as fighting raged between Yemen troops and the rebels on key battlefields in Marib and Al-Bayda.

Ahmed Obeid bin Daghar, Yemen's Shoura Council head, in Riyadh, told Marion Lalisse, deputy head of mission of the EU delegation to Yemen, that the Houthis have never taken peace ideas seriously. In addition, Daghar said that the Yemeni government had accepted the Saudi peace initiative and is willing to comply with all efforts to end the war.

"The shortest way to achieve a just and comprehensive peace is to oblige the Houthis to respect the basic references of a solution that achieves the interest of the people and respects their will," he said, according to Yemen's official news agency SABA.

Peace efforts to end the war have reached a deadlock after the Houthis refused to put an end to hostilities that displaced thousands of people and aggravated the humanitarian crisis.

Shuttling between Sanaa, Muscat, Riyadh, and Tehran, the former UN Yemen envoy to Yemen, Martin Griffiths, the US special envoy for Yemen, Tim Lenderking, and Omani mediators failed to convince the Houthis to accept a peace plan. The UN-brokered plan demanded warring factions to achieve an immediate ceasefire, the reopening of the Sanaa airport, easing restrictions on Hodeidah ports, and later engaging in direct talks.

The Houthis said they would stop their deadly offensive on Marib only after the Arab coalition halts airstrikes against their forces and lifts its "blockade" on Sanaa airport and Hodeidah seaport.

In March, Saudi Arabia proposed a peace initiative that included the same elements as in the current UN peace initiative.

In the same sense, Swedish special envoy for Yemen, Peter Semneby, visited Iran on Tuesday where he discussed peace initiatives to end the war in Yemen.

Fars news agency, in Iran, reported that the envoy met with the Iranian foreign minister's assistant for special political affairs, Ali Asqar Khaji, and discussed alleviating the humanitarian crisis in Yemen, peace efforts to end the war, and addressing the risk of the floating FSO Safer tanker.

Safer has been moored in the Red Sea, north of Hodeidah, since it fell into Houthi hands in 2015. Carrying more than 1 million barrels of oil, the vessel's situation is deteriorating as a possible spill would be an ecological disaster much worse than that of the Exxon Valdez oil spill in Alaska in 1989.

In February, Griffiths visited Iran for the first time as part of his diplomatic efforts to mobilize support for the UN-brokered peace initiative.

Experts believe that international mediators have sought to demand Iran use its leverage on the Yemeni rebels to pressure them to stop fighting.

Meanwhile, on the ground, dozens of Houthis were killed on Tuesday and Monday in the central province of Marib as government troops pushed back several Houthi assaults in key contested areas.

Yemen's Defense Ministry said on Tuesday that army troops and tribesmen drove back a Houthi attack in Al-Kasara, west of Marib, as warplanes from the Arab coalition carried out several attacks in Marib province, targeting Houthi military reinforcements and locations.

In Jabal Murad, south of Marib, three airstrikes destroyed a command room and heavy weapons for the Houthis, local media said.

The latest escalation in fighting in Yemen began in February when the Houthis renewed a major offensive to seize control of Marib city, the Yemeni government's last stronghold in the northern part of the country.



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Yemeni FM condemns Houthi militia's continued rejection of proposed peace initiative for a cease-fire
Top Houthi commander killed in new Yemen battle

[French official: Lebanon's ruling elite 'not committed to reforms'](#)

Tue, 2021-07-13 21:27

BEIRUT: Lebanese officials received another scolding on Tuesday, this time from Franck Riester, French minister delegate for foreign trade and economic attractiveness, in response to their inability to form a government.

"France respects its commitments, unlike the Lebanese ruling class, which has not committed to reforms," Riester said.

Speaking from the site of the Beirut port explosion, he warned that "Lebanon cannot carry on like this. Sanctions will be issued against officials who obstruct the formation of the government. Our message today is to emphasize our support for the Lebanese, and to remind officials of the promises they made."

On Tuesday, French and European pressure was exerted on Lebanese officials to move forward with forming a government and not to postpone the upcoming parliamentary elections. French aid to Lebanon, especially in the period after the Beirut port explosion, has also been discussed.

Both Riester and former chief observer of the EU Election Observation Mission (EU EOM), Elena Valenciano, visited Lebanon separately on the same day.

Josep Borrell, high representative of the EU for foreign affairs and security policy, on Monday, announced: "The (foreign) ministers reached a political understanding that a sanctions regime against those who are responsible for the situation (in Lebanon) should be established."

During their meeting in Brussels, the ministers also gave the green light to put in place a legal framework against political leaders who pushed the country into economic collapse.

"They need to have a Lebanese government in order to avoid a crackdown of the country, fully able to implement the reforms and protect its population," Borell said.

According to a statement issued by the French Embassy, Riester stressed to

Lebanese President Michel Aoun the urgent need for Lebanese officials to form a credible and effective government "that works to implement the necessary reforms in the interest of Lebanon and in line with the aspirations of the Lebanese people."

He said: "France is ready to work with its regional and international partners, especially after the preliminary agreement of the EU's Foreign Affairs Council on July 12 on establishing a sanctions regime, to pressure those responsible for the political obstruction and to find a way out of this crisis."

Riester added that international economic and financial aid to Lebanon is conditional on achieving credible reforms.

Aoun told Riester: "The Lebanese have not forgotten French President Emmanuel Macron's initiatives in the conferences that were held to support Lebanon."

Riester toured the site of the Beirut port explosion and was briefed on the progress of sorting the rubble which is being carried out by a French company.

"France has stood by Lebanon since the first day of the explosion and will always support Lebanon," Riester said. "We are tackling the logistics and conducting the necessary studies to ensure the Beirut port can operate normally as soon as possible. We are not backing down from our promises."

The French Embassy announced a new meeting will soon be held to mobilize international aid for the Lebanese.

"Riester believed that the Lebanese are paying the price of the deepest economic, social, humanitarian, and political crisis in Lebanon," it said in a statement.

Meanwhile, Valenciano met Aoun, Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri, Prime Minister-designate Saad Hariri, and caretaker Prime Minister Hassan Diab.

"The parliamentary elections will be held on time next spring," Aoun assured Valenciano.

Following the meetings, Valenciano tweeted: "Encouraging to hear from the president, speaker, and prime minister that elections will be held in 2022 according to schedule. The right to vote must be respected."

The last and 18th meeting between Aoun and Hariri was on March 22, after which the latter announced that the former was insisting on blocking the third in the government. The two were supposed to meet on Wednesday, but Hariri called Aoun to postpone the meeting because he had an urgent matter to attend to.

Hariri is expected to visit Cairo to meet Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi. Hariri reportedly will return to Beirut and present to Aoun a government lineup of 24 ministers. If Aoun does not agree, Hariri would end his efforts.

On Monday evening, Hariri met former premiers to discuss possible scenarios, including the possibility of his resignation.

Deputy Speaker Elie Ferzli said on Tuesday that Hariri “is trying as much as possible to deal with the issue of forming the government himself with the tools available and he will try to interpret things on the ground soon.”

Hariri is due to announce his position in a televised speech on Thursday.

Meanwhile, French presidential envoy Patrick Durel arrived in Beirut on Tuesday. Durel’s meeting with Hariri focused on “the issue of forming a government.” He also met with the head of the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) lawmaker Gebran Bassil.

Bassil received a call on Tuesday from the Russian president’s special envoy to the Middle East, Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov, in which he stressed, “the absolute necessity to expedite the formation of a government capable of achieving reforms and ending the collapse.”



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Relatives of Lebanon blast victims scuffle with policeEU foreign policy chief Borrell to return to Beirut to discuss crisis