

Chess champ Garry Kasparov speaks out against Iranian regime

Mon, 2021-07-12 21:36

LONDON: World-renowned chess player Garry Kasparov has spoken out about the plight of everyday Iranians at the hands of the regime and urged the US to cease negotiations with Iran, calling them a “terrible mistake.”

Kasparov, who now works as chairman of the New York-based Human rights Foundation, told an Iranian opposition event attended by Arab News: “For all the foreign interference, terror, and war caused by the illegitimate Iranian regime, it is vital to remember that no one suffers more than the citizens of that regime.”

The government, Kasparov continued, “has no authority from the people. Instead, it fears its people, it oppresses and tortures them.”

Kasparov is among the world’s most decorated chess players. He was world number one for a record breaking 255 months, and held the highest ever rating in chess for 14 years, until being dethroned in 2013 by Magnus Carlsen.

Since retiring from chess, he has devoted himself to campaigning on human rights issues and against autocracy – including against his own home country, Russia.

Kasparov denounced the West’s overtures towards Iran, saying: “How can the free world, the world of democracies that supposedly value human life, negotiate with a regime of murderers?”

Those negotiations, he added, are a “terrible mistake.”

He continued: “How can the leaders of countries like the United States, which often talks about the importance of human rights, sit across the table from Raisi, whose role in the 1988 massacre is well established?”

In 1988, Ebrahim Raisi, Iran’s president-elect, was a key figure in what rights-group Amnesty International dubbed “death commissions,” which saw him ordering thousands of political prisoners to death by summary execution, following show trials.

Among those who continue to suffer at the hands of Tehran today are chess players just like Kasparov.

Despite boasting a host of renowned players of its own, Iran continues to stymie their careers for political reasons.

Players are regularly prevented from competing against Israeli counterparts, instead being forced to withdraw from tournaments or resign matches – behavior that prompted a severe warning last year from the International Chess Federation (FIDE).

“We are increasing pressure on Iran to follow the law, and if it does not comply, the Iranian federation will see the consequences,” said FIDE.

If the Iranian Chess Federation refuses to comply with the rules, FIDE said, “they will definitely be suspended.”

Last year, an Iranian chess referee was forced to flee Iran and claim asylum in the UK after she was pictured wearing a hijab that Iranian media condemned as too loose-fitting.

Separated from her husband and family, she told Arab News at the time: “The officials were watching me and checking my photos. Sometimes they’d send bad reports about us. It was affecting my career and my happiness.”

She added: “Even in other countries, we don’t feel free.”



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Kasparov, the retired champ who can not give up chessNetflix series inspires Saudis to check out chess

Judge in Lebanon blast probe 'rejects MPs' immunity move'

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BEIRUT: The judge investigating last year's deadly Lebanon port blast on Monday rejected a request by MPs for more evidence before immunity for three ex-ministers can be waived, a judicial source said.

Hundreds of tons of ammonium nitrate fertilizer exploded on the dockside at Beirut port last August 4, killing more than 200 people, injuring thousands and ravaging swathes of the capital.

Afterwards, it emerged that officials had known about the explosive substance being stored there unsafely for years.

Coming less than a month before the first anniversary of the tragedy, Monday's move may mean a new standoff, with fears that the probe could be derailed by political interference.

Earlier this month, lead judge Tareq Bitar said he had demanded that parliament lift the immunity of ex-finance minister Ali Hasan Khalil, former public works minister Ghazi Zaiter and ex-interior minister Nohad Machnouk. Bitar said he was looking at possible charges of "probable intent to murder" and "negligence."

Deputy speaker Elie Ferzli said parliament's administration and justice committee on Friday decided to "request all evidence available in the investigation, as well as all documents that prove suspicions."

He said the committee would reconvene once it had received a reply, to decide whether or not to waive immunity.

On Monday, the judicial source said no further documents would be forthcoming.

"The investigating judge rejected parliament's request ... In an official letter he explained that he had already handed over all the documents that needed to be handed over," the source told AFP.

Lawyer and activist Nizar Saghieh said the committee's request on Friday went against the separation of powers between the judiciary and the legislature, and "violated the confidentiality of the investigation."

"They're just trying to buy time," he alleged.

On Monday, relatives of victims of the massive blast protested outside Machnouk's and Zaiter's homes, demanding that their immunity be lifted, the official ANI news agency reported.

Last month, rights groups including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch called for a UN investigation into the explosion in light of the stalled investigation.

In February, Bitar's predecessor as lead judge in the probe was removed by a court, which questioned his impartiality because his home was damaged in the

explosion.

The judge had in December issued charges against caretaker prime minister Hassan Diab and three former ministers for “negligence and causing death to hundreds,” triggering outrage from politicians.

Rights activists condemned the court ruling as another example of the country’s entrenched political class placing itself above the law.

Diab stepped down after the blast, but has stayed on as caretaker premier.

The economic crisis that started in the autumn of 2019, sparking mass street protests, has deepened over the past year.

Foreign donors have pledged millions of dollars in aid to the Lebanese people, but stopped short of offering any assistance to the state itself.



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Families of Beirut port blast victims demand accountability

UN Security Council members do not want to resolve Renaissance Dam issue, Egypt envoy says

Mon, 2021-07-12 19:56

CAIRO: Egypt strongly reaffirmed its position during the UN Security Council session on the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam negotiations, a top diplomat said.

Mohammed Idris, Egypt's permanent representative to the UN, stated that Cairo held the Security Council accountable for its responsibilities regarding the Renaissance Dam crisis.

The Egyptian state has engaged in intensive diplomatic moves to present the Ethiopian dam crisis to the Security Council, the ambassador announced in televised statements.

The world is full of issues that threaten security and peace, and the Security Council must play its role, the envoy added.

The members of the Security Council do not want to take a position on the dam, said the envoy.

In previous statements, Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry said that the matter within the Security Council was complicated, given "political considerations and alignments," the interaction between permanent and non-permanent members, and "overlapping interests."

He stated that bringing the issue of the Renaissance Dam to the Security Council was an important matter in order to "hold it responsible as the main organ in the UN system concerned with maintaining peace and security."

He added that Ethiopia's argument during the Security Council session was "weak and did not live up to the words of Egypt and Sudan."



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Egypt stresses need for negotiated settlement on Renaissance Dam Egyptian minister accuses Ethiopia of intransigence over GERD

EU to place legal framework for sanctions on Lebanese leaders – France

Mon, 2021-07-12 19:40

LONDON: France said the European Union had reached a consensus to sanction Lebanese leaders to pressure them to form a stable government, the French foreign minister said on Monday.

“Lebanon has been in self-destruct mode for several months,” Jean-Yves Le Drian said. “Now there is a major emergency situation for a population that is in distress.”

A political crisis has left the country without a functioning government since the last one resigned after a massive explosion killed 200 people and destroyed swathes of Beirut in August 2020.

Speaking during an EU Foreign Affairs Council meeting, Le Drian said: “For several months now, we have been urging the Lebanese authorities to form a government, to make the necessary reforms to get the country out of the tragedy into which it is going to enter and there is now a political consensus to put in place a legal framework and sanctions before the end of the month.”

He said this will happen before the “unfortunate anniversary of the explosion in the port of Beirut on Aug. 4.”

The French foreign minister said the legal framework “will serve as a tool to pressure the Lebanese authorities to form the government, and to advance in the implementation of the essential reforms that this country is waiting for.”

Josep Borrell, EU foreign policy chief, also confirmed that the 27 nations gave the green light to establish the legal framework.

“The objective is to complete this by the end of the month,” Borrell said, adding: “The economy’s imploding and the suffering of the people of Lebanon is continuously growing.”

“They need to have a Lebanese government in order to avoid the breakdown of the country, (one that is) fully able to implement reforms and protect this population.”

Lebanon is mired in what the World Bank has called one of the worst economic crises since the 1850s. The state is struggling to buy enough fuel to keep the lights on.

The economic crisis has seen the Lebanese pound lose more than 90 percent of its value against the dollar on the black market, and left more than half the population living below the poverty line.

In April, France imposed sanctions by restricting entry of Lebanese figures it says are responsible for the political crisis.

(With Reuters and AFP)



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Lebanon power station to restart after fuel delivery

[Egypt tightens punishment for sexual harassment](#)

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Mon, 2021-07-12 19:21

CAIRO: The Egyptian parliament on Monday approved harsher penalties for sexual harassment and related crimes and upgraded them to felony offenses, aiming to curb sex-related assaults in a nation where women have long felt disadvantaged.

Sex crimes have been an increasing topic of conversation in recent years in the conservative, Muslim-majority nation, with several high profile court cases coming to varying conclusions.

Dozens of Egyptians began posting accounts of sexual assault on social media last year, but campaigners say there remains a deep-rooted bias in Egypt to place more blame on women for behavior deemed provocative than on men for sex crimes.

Public prosecutors in May shelved a case over a woman's allegation that she was gang raped at a luxury hotel in Cairo in 2014 because of "insufficient evidence" against the defendants.

Referring to earlier laws passed in 2014, a parliamentary committee said in a report on Monday that "although the punishments listed were a quantum leap at the time, they did not achieve the necessary deterrence."

In the measure approved on Monday, the penalty for sexual harassment was increased from a minimum of one year in prison to a minimum of five years, or a penalty of up to 300,000 Egyptian pounds (\$19,100), up from 20,000 pounds. In situations where a power imbalance was in place because of a professional or familial relationship, or in cases involving the use of weapons or accomplices, the penalty was increased from a minimum of two to a minimum of seven years, in addition to a 10-fold increase of the maximum fine to 500,000 Egyptian pounds.

The penalties for stalking and general harassment were also increased substantially.

In August, the parliament approved a law protecting the identity of victims of sexual harassment and assault, after a social media campaign led to the arrest of a suspected sex offender.



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