

Lebanon bridles at Iranian air chief's remarks on missiles and sovereignty

Author:

Mon, 2021-01-04 01:36

BEIRUT: The Lebanese have reacted angrily to an Iranian commander's remarks about their missile capabilities and sovereignty, with people in a pro-Hezbollah town attempting to burn a picture of the slain Quds Force leader Qassem Soleimani.

Amir Ali Hajizadeh boasted on Saturday that Lebanon owed its missile capabilities to Iran and that the country was in the front line of Iran's fight against Israel.

"Tehran supports any party that stands against Israel," he added.

President Michel Aoun tweeted on Sunday that the Lebanese had "no partner" in protecting their country's independence, sovereignty over its border and territory, and freedom of decision.

But the mildness of his response – and its delay – was criticized by some media and public figures.

The leading daily newspaper Al-Nahar called the Iranian stance "a very blatant breach challenging the principle of the sovereignty of Lebanon and a lack of respect to the minimal standards of dealings between states."

The newspaper was surprised by Aoun's initial silence on Hajizadeh's remarks, while former MP Fares Souaid renewed his call for the president to resign.

He said: "Iran's Revolutionary Guard has announced its leadership of Lebanon's missiles against Israel. Where is the Lebanese state? Mr. President, for the sake of your dignity and ours, resign."

Lebanon's former ambassador to Jordan Tracy Chamoun, the granddaughter of former President Camille Chamoun, described Aoun's response as "shy."

She said: "The foreign minister should summon the Iranian ambassador to answer to the matter and to be warned. If you are unable to uphold sovereignty, then at least save face."

FASTFACTS

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- **The mildness of his response – and its delay – was criticized by some media and public figures.**

Hezbollah hung pictures of Soleimani, who was killed in a US drone strike on Jan. 3, 2020, along the roads extending from the southern suburbs of Beirut to southern Lebanon and in the border town of Al-Khiam, which overlooks Israeli positions on the other side of the border.

But the act was criticized on social media. Former justice minister, Ashraf Rifi, said that naming Lebanese streets after the “leaders of vandalization and Iranian militias” did not represent Lebanon. He also described the hanging of the pictures as “an illegal and provocative act” that entrenched the image of Lebanon as a “prisoner of Iran.”

Hussein Al-Wajeh, who is a media affairs adviser to Prime Minister-designate Saad Hariri, said that Lebanon was not and would not be the front line for Iran’s battle. “The Lebanese will not pay any price on behalf of the Iranian regime. Despite this, some Iranian officials insist on considering Lebanon an Iranian province.”

Kataeb Party leader Sami Gemayel said that Lebanon and the Lebanese were “hostages” to Iran through Hezbollah. “They are using us as human shields in their battle, which has nothing to do with Lebanon.

“The president, the government, and parliament are false witnesses and they are covering the capture of Lebanon.”

Salam Yamout, head of the National Bloc Party, said that involving Lebanon in battles associated with regional disputes was a direct threat to the interests of the Lebanese and their battle to restore their sovereignty and dignity.



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10 hurt in Lebanon gas depot blast
Lebanon on the brink of a virus 'catastrophe'

Israeli prosecutors spell out allegations against Netanyahu

Author:

Associated Press

ID:

1609704469834298200

Sun, 2021-01-03 19:49

JERUSALEM: Israeli prosecutors on Sunday released an amended indictment spelling out detailed charges against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in a corruption case in which he is accused of trading favors with a powerful media mogul.

Netanyahu has been charged with fraud, breach of trust and accepting bribes in three corruption cases. One of them alleges that Netanyahu promoted regulations worth hundreds of millions of dollars to the owner of the Bezeq telecom company in exchange for positive coverage on its popular Walla news site.

In response to a request from Netanyahu's lawyers for more details, Israeli prosecutors released a letter Sunday alleging there had been 315 incidents of Walla being requested to make its coverage more favorable for Netanyahu and his family. They said there were indications that Netanyahu was personally involved in 150 of those incidents.

It said the requests included giving more time or prominence to positive articles about Netanyahu and his family, changing headlines and lowering or even removing unfavorable stories. It also included alleged requests for negative coverage of Netanyahu's rivals.

The document listed all 315 suspected incidents, which allegedly included numerous requests to publish flattering articles and photos of Netanyahu's wife Sara, to conceal reports of embarrassing expenditures and personal information about the Netanyahu family and attempts to embarrass his rivals. It quoted Bezeq's controlling shareholder at the time, Shaul Elovitch, as expressing concerns that Netanyahu would not approve lucrative business deals for the company if negative articles were published.

On Jan. 17-19, 2013, for instance, it said a Netanyahu associate persuaded Elovitch to publish stories saying that the wife of Naftali Bennett, head of a rival religious party, worked in a non-kosher restaurant. Several weeks later, Netanyahu, through the same associate, allegedly pressed Walla to remove critical articles about a lacy dress his wife had worn to the swearing-in of the new parliament and replace it with favorable reviews. The site consented to both requests, it said.

On another occasion, Elovitch, at Netanyahu's request, allegedly ordered Walla to halt a live broadcast of a rally by Netanyahu's opponents during the country's 2015 election campaign.

Netanyahu's trial began last year and is scheduled to resume next month. He denies all charges against him, saying he is the victim of a witch hunt orchestrated by a hostile media, police and prosecutors.



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Netanyahu says he greeted released US spy Pollard at airport
Israel may try to provoke war with attacks on US forces in Iraq: Iran's Zarif

[10 hurt in Lebanon gas depot blast](#)

Author:

Associated Press

ID:

1609703279924221200

Sun, 2021-01-03 18:52

BEIRUT: At least 10 people were injured Sunday when an explosion rocked a warehouse storing gas canisters near Lebanon's border with Syria, the Lebanese Red Cross and the army said.

The Red Cross said it dispatched several teams of rescuers to the village of Al-Qasr in the eastern Hermel region where the explosion occurred and rushed the injured to hospitals.

"We have responded to an explosion in a warehouse that stores gas canisters.

We have responded with three teams. Ten people have been wounded and transported to nearby hospitals," a Red Cross statement said. A Lebanese army spokesman told AFP the blast was caused by the explosion of gas canisters in a warehouse. The region of Hermel is known for its many illegal border crossings into Syria which are used by smugglers to move various types of contraband across the frontier. Smuggling takes places both ways, but has been stepped up from Lebanon into Syria since the start of the war there in 2011 and as the country faces a growing economic crisis and international sanctions. The Shiite movement Hezbollah, a key ally of the Syrian government, is often accused by Lebanese media and some political parties of running smuggling operations into Syria to the detriment of Lebanon which is grappling with its worst economic crisis since the 1975-1990 civil war.







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Lebanon on the brink of a virus 'catastrophe'
Car bombs kill six in pro-Turkey north Syria: Monitor

[UAE reports 1,590 new COVID-19 cases, 5 deaths](#)

Sun, 2021-01-03 22:14

DUBAI: The UAE on Sunday recorded 1,590 new coronavirus cases and five virus-related deaths.

Officials from the Ministry of Health and Prevention (MoHAP) said the total number of cases since the pandemic began had reached 213,231. The death toll is 679.

It was also announced that 1,609 people had recovered from the virus in the past 24 hours. The total number of recoveries is 189,709.

Officials at the Abu Dhabi Public Health Center (ADPHC), the Department of

Education and Knowledge (ADEK), and the Biogenics Laboratory, a member of G42 – one of the leading artificial intelligence companies – discussed efforts to develop rapid testing methodologies that reduce burdens on school children and their families, including conducting COVID-19 saliva tests, which produce fast and accurate results and are more child-friendly.

مسؤولون في مركز أبوظبي للصحة العامة ودائرة التعليم والمعرفة ومختبر بيوجينكس، إحدى شركات مجموعة "جي 42"، يتحدثون عن جهود تطوير منهجيات فحوصات سريعة تخفف الأعباء على أطفال المدارس وعائلاتهم، ومنها إجراء فحوصات "كوفيد-19" باستخدام اللعاب. pic.twitter.com/ItAWXANR4L

– مكتب أبوظبي الإعلامي (@admediaoffice) [January 3, 2021](#)

The three bodies have already performed saliva testing for more than 2,000 children in Abu Dhabi schools, "in order to adopt effective and advanced examination methodologies for COVID-19 and (for) maintaining a healthy learning environment."

"Saliva testing was offered for students aged four to 12 across 25 schools" in December, the Abu Dhabi media office said, adding that "the rollout comes after completing phase one of saliva testing in October."

Tariq Al-Ameri, director of the Licensing and Education Compliance Department at ADEK, said: "The health and safety of the school community in Abu Dhabi remains our top priority, and in line with our efforts to continue maintaining a healthy environment in private and charter schools in the emirate of Abu Dhabi, we were keen to conduct periodic COVID-19 checks for all school personnel as of the beginning of the academic year, while requiring all students over the age of 12 to submit a negative test result before returning to school."

Ashish Koshy, CEO of G42 Healthcare, said: "Regular COVID-19 checks have become a part of our lives, and we at G42 Healthcare and Biogenix Labs are eager to continue advancing additional innovation in COVID-19 testing for the wider community."

Meanwhile, Abu Dhabi Department of Economic Development said it has permitted licensed restaurants, cafes and tourist service facilities across the emirate to provide shisha (hookah) services, and that the move conformed with precautionary measures to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

Elsewhere, Kuwait reported 269 new coronavirus cases, raising the total number to 151,343. The death toll remained at 937 after no coronavirus-related deaths were reported in the previous 24 hours.

تعلمن [#وزارة_الصحة](#) عن تأكيد إصابة 269 حالة جديدة، وتسجيل 281 حالة شفاء، ولم تسجل أي حالة وفاة جديدة بـ [#فيروس_كورونا_المستجد](#) COVID-19 ، ليصبح إجمالي عدد الحالات 151,343 حالة pic.twitter.com/fhk200K3S5

– وزارة الصحة – الكويت (@KUWAIT_MOH) [January 3, 2021](#)

Oman's Health Ministry said that its total number of cases had reached 129,404 and the death toll was 1,501.

[#Statement](#) No. 258

January 3, 2021 pic.twitter.com/kcwcw3bm0w

– عُمان – وزارة الصحة (@OmaniMOH) [January 3, 2021](#)

In Bahrain, zero deaths was reported, keeping the death toll to 352, while 294 new infected cases were confirmed.

Out of 10515 COVID-19 tests carried out on 3 January 2021, 294 new cases have been detected among 149 expatriate workers, 127 new cases are contacts of active cases, and 18 are travel related. There were 128 recoveries from [#COVID19](#), increasing total recoveries to 90686 pic.twitter.com/6DnX4TDcT5

– مملكة البحرين | وزارة الصحة (@MOH_Bahrain) [January 3, 2021](#)



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[Biogenics Laboratory](#)

[G42](#)

[Ministry of Health and Prevention](#)

[Tariq Al-Ameri](#)

[Ashish Koshy](#)

Saudi Arabia records major decline in virus tally since March UAE reports 1,856 new COVID-19 cases, record increase for 6th straight day

In Somalia, COVID-19 vaccines are distant as virus spreads

Mon, 2021-01-04 01:44

MOGADISHU: As richer countries race to distribute COVID-19 vaccines, Somalia remains the rare place where much of the population hasn't taken the coronavirus seriously. Some fear that's proven to be deadlier than anyone knows.

"Certainly, our people don't use any form of protective measures, neither masks nor social distancing," Abdirizak Yusuf Hirabeh, the government's COVID-19 incident manager, said in an interview. "If you move around the city (of Mogadishu) or countrywide, nobody even talks about it." And yet infections are rising, he said.

It is places like Somalia, the Horn of Africa nation torn apart by three decades of conflict, that will be last to see COVID-19 vaccines in any significant quantity. With part of the country still held by the Al-Qaeda-linked Al-Shabab extremist group, the risk of the virus becoming endemic in some hard-to-reach areas is strong – a fear for parts of Africa amid the slow arrival of vaccines.

"There is no real or practical investigation into the matter," said Hirabeh, who is also the director of the Martini hospital in Mogadishu, the largest treating COVID-19 patients, which saw seven new patients the day he spoke. He acknowledged that neither facilities nor equipment are adequate in Somalia to tackle the virus.

Fewer than 27,000 tests for the virus have been conducted in Somalia, a country of more than 15 million people, one of the lowest rates in the world. Fewer than 4,800 cases have been confirmed, including at least 130 deaths. Some worry the virus will sink into the population as yet another poorly diagnosed but deadly fever.

For 45-year-old street beggar Hassan Mohamed Yusuf, that fear has turned into near-certainty. "In the beginning we saw this virus as just another form of the flu," he said.

Then three of his young children died after having a cough and high fever. As residents of a makeshift camp for people displaced by conflict or drought, they had no access to coronavirus testing or proper care.

At the same time, Yusuf said, the virus hurt his efforts to find money to treat his family as "we can't get close enough" to people to beg.

Early in the pandemic, Somalia's government did attempt some measures to limit the spread of the virus, closing all schools and shutting down all

domestic and international flights. Mobile phones rang with messages about the virus.

SPEEDREAD

Fewer than 27,000 tests for the virus have been conducted in Somalia, a country of more than 15 million people, one of the lowest rates in the world.

But social distancing has long disappeared in the country's streets, markets or restaurants. On Thursday, some 30,000 people crammed into a stadium in Mogadishu for a regional football match with no face masks or other anti-virus measures in sight.

Mosques in the Muslim nation never faced restrictions, for fear of the reactions.

"Our religion taught us hundreds of years ago that we should wash our hands, faces and even legs five times every day and our women should take face veils as they're often weaker. So that's the whole prevention of the disease, if it really exists," said Abdulkadir Sheikh Mohamud, an imam in Mogadishu.

"I left the matter to Allah to protect us," said Ahmed Abdulle Ali, a shop owner in the capital. He attributed the rise in coughing during prayers to the changing of seasons.

A more important protective factor is the relative youth of Somalia's people, said Dr. Abdurahman Abdullahi Abdi Bilaal, who works in a clinic in the capital. More than 80 percent of the country's population is under age 30.

"The virus is here, absolutely, but the resilience of people is owing to age," he said.

It's the lack of post-mortem investigations in the country that are allowing the true extent of the virus to go undetected, he said.

The next challenge in Somalia is not simply obtaining COVID-19 vaccines but also persuading the population to accept them.

That will take time, "just the same as what it took for our people to believe in the polio or measles vaccines," a concerned Bilaal said.

Hirabeh, in charge of Somalia's virus response, agreed that "our people have little confidence in the vaccines," saying that many Somalis hate the needles. He called for serious awareness campaigns to change minds.

The logistics of any COVID-19 vaccine rollout are another major concern.

Hirabeh said Somalia is expecting the first vaccines in the first quarter of 2021, but he worries that the country has no way to handle a vaccine like the Pfizer one that requires being kept at a temperature of minus 70 degrees Celsius.

"One that could be kept between minus 10 and minus 20 might suit the Third World like our country," he said.



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Death toll rises to 16 in overnight Somalia suicide bombing
Suicide bomb attack targeting Somalia prime minister's visit kills at least 15