

Lebanon's legal system celebrates 100th anniversary amid probe into judicial corruption

Author:

Tue, 2019-04-16 21:55

BEIRUT: The Beirut Bar Association on Tuesday celebrated its 100th anniversary with a ceremony in Beirut attended by Lebanese President Michel Aoun, Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri and Prime Minister Saad Hariri.

The association was founded a year before the creation, after the fall of the Ottoman Empire, of Greater Lebanon. The Lebanese Court of Cassation will celebrate its 100th anniversary in June.

The celebrations coincide with the launch of investigations by the political and judicial authorities into allegations of corruption involving many judges in Mount Lebanon and lawyers from a number of regions.

"No country (exists) without an independent, clean judiciary that seeks justice and truth," Aoun told the audience at the event, which included politicians, members of the judiciary, diplomats and legal professionals. "Purging the judicial body has been the first priority of our war on the corruption that ravages all our institutions.

"The judiciary must remain above suspicion and be an independent constitutional authority that self-purifies itself in accordance with the mechanisms adopted by law, without defamation, extortion or exploitation of any person."

Justice Minister Albert Sarhan said: "There can be no justice without an independent judiciary...We regret the defamation and abuse of the judiciary, but we believe that the judges' acquisition and exercise of the culture of independence, (as well as) their impartiality and competence in the conduct of their duties are the greatest immunity that protects them from all prejudice."

Andre Chidiac, the president of the Bar Association, warned that the legal profession might be affected by "volcanoes of inventions erupting in every field" and that "30 to 40 percent of freelance professions may be threatened with extinction."

He quoted French professor Louis Assier-Andrieu, who said: "Lawyers are at a crossroads, torn between the legacy that is still alive to defend public freedoms and the increasing impact of economic logic and technological progress."

Chidiac said that the legal profession in Lebanon was "catching up with modernity and confronting artificial intelligence, the robotic phenomenon and

digital-rights legislation through the formation of a committee to set a modernizing development professional strategy.”

Chief Justice Jean Fahed added: “The lawyers have never abandoned their roles; nor has the judiciary given up its role, either.”

Lebanese authorities are investigating justice officials, security officers and lawyers in connection with the release of detainees and the cleansing of files of individuals accused of drug trafficking. A small number of judges have appeared before the Judicial Inspection Authority. Lebanese news and media outlets have reported allegations of judges holding lavish parties and accepting foreign trips as judicial bribes.

Earlier, Justice Minister Sarhan attempted to reassure citizens, judges and judicial assistants that the investigation into corruption will be unbiased, saying: “The innocent will be proven innocent and the culprits will be punished. There will be no prejudice against anyone. Justice will prevail and we will eradicate the roots of corruption in the judiciary and other related departments.”



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Sudan military ruler sacks prosecutor general

Tue, 2019-04-16 18:41

KHARTOUM: The head of Sudan's ruling transitional military council has fired the three highest-ranking public prosecutors, after protesters demanded an overhaul of the judiciary as part of steps toward civilian government. The Sudanese Professionals' Association spearheading the revolt has issued a long list of demands for wholesale change to end repression and ease an economic crisis after the military deposed veteran autocrat Omar Al-Bashir last week.

In a statement, the military council said its chief Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan had sacked chief prosecutor Omar Ahmed Mohamed Abdelsalam and deputy public prosecutor Hesham Othman Ibrahim Saleh, as well as head of public prosecutions Amer Ibrahim Majid.

Alwaleed Sayed Ahmed Mahmoud was appointed to carry out Abdelsalam's duties, it said. Mahmoud's background was not immediately known.

In its first news conference on Monday, the SPA – which led weeks of protests that led to Bashir's overthrow after 30 years in power – called for the military council to be dissolved in favor of an interim civilian ruling council with military representatives.

It also called for Abdelsalam's removal along with the chief of the judiciary and his deputies, and added that mass protests would not cease until the demands were met. The judiciary chief was not mentioned in the council's statement.

On Tuesday, hundreds of University of Khartoum professors carrying signs reading "civilian transitional government" and "democracy" marched to a protesters' sit-in outside the Defense Ministry that began on April 6, a Reuters witness said.

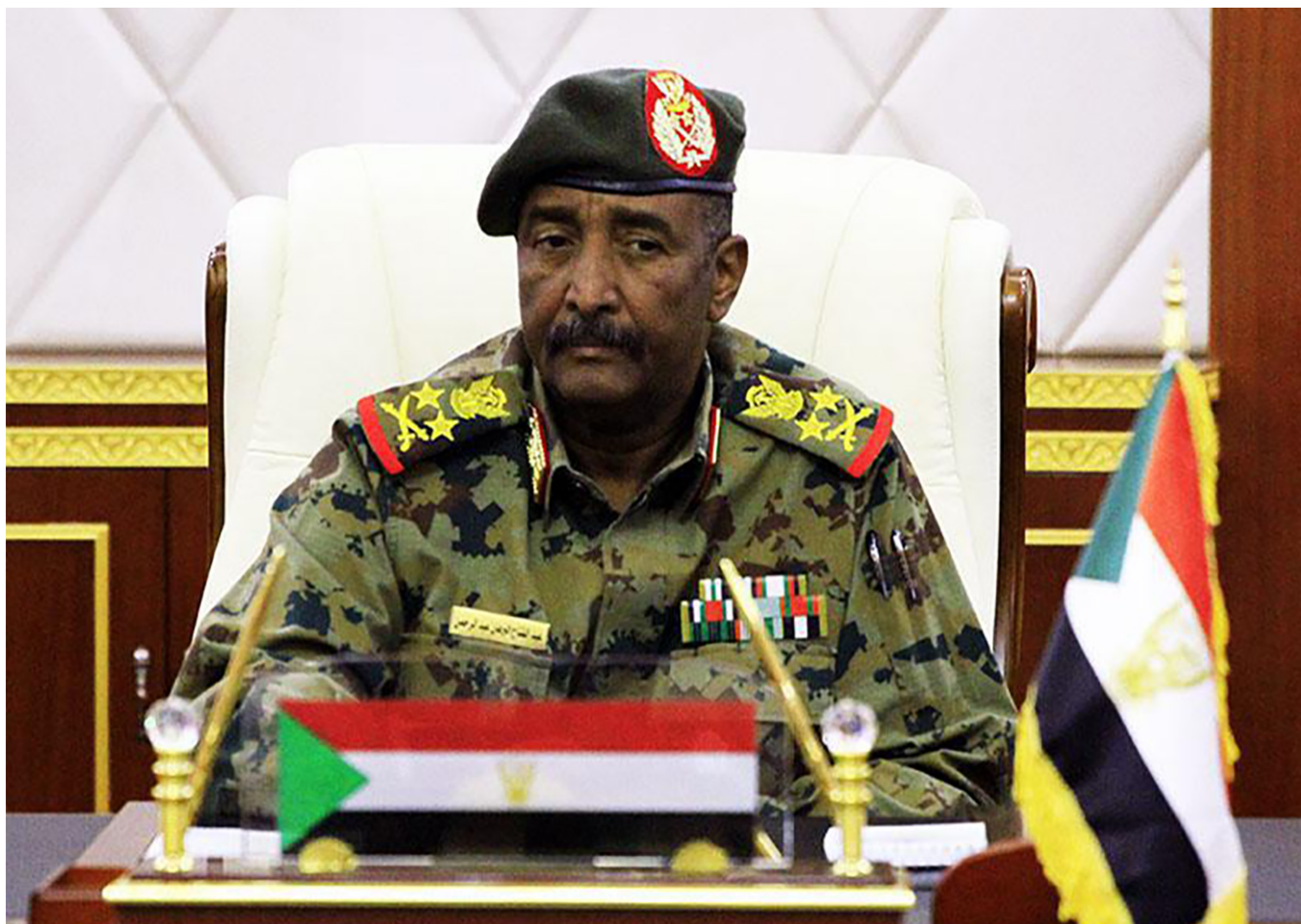
Academics are among the most respected groups in Sudanese society, adding powerful symbolism to the march.

Military council member Jalal Al-Deen Al-Sheikh met African Union Commission Chairman Moussa Faki Mahamat in Addis Ababa and gave him a letter from Burhan on the situation in Sudan and inviting Mahamat to visit, the state news agency SUNA said.

It quoted Sheikh as saying Mahamat had expressed "understanding" for the decisions the military council had taken so far.

On Monday, the AU's Peace and Security Council called for the military council to transfer power to a transitional civilian-led authority within 15 days or risk Sudan being suspended from the AU.

On Monday, Sheikh told a news conference in Addis Ababa, where the African Union is based, that the military council was already in the process of picking a prime minister for civilian rule – ahead of elections promised within two years.



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[Iranian commander Qassem Soleimani's Instagram account suspended](#)

Tue, 2019-04-16 17:18

JEDDAH: Instagram accounts believed to belong to three commanders from Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps have been shut down a day after a US terrorist designation for the force took effect.

The suspended accounts include those of Major-General Qassem Soleimani, the commander of the Quds Force, Maj. Gen. Mohammad Ali Jafari, commander-in-chief of the IRGC, and Brig. Gen. Mohammed Pakpour, commander of the IRGC Ground Forces.

The US announced last week that it would designate the IRGC a terrorist organization. Trump said the move "recognizes the reality that Iran is not only a State Sponsor of Terrorism, but that the IRGC actively participates

in, finances, and promotes terrorism as a tool of statecraft.”

An Instagram spokeswoman told Arab News that they were obligated to adhere to the US sanctions and may disable accounts associated with designated organizations.

“We operate under the constraints of US sanctions laws,” the spokeswoman said. “We work with appropriate government authorities to ensure we meet our legal obligations, including those relating to the recent designation of the IRGC.”

Soleimani’s Instagram account reportedly had 900,000 followers. He once used it to taunt Trump after the US president posted an image warning that “Sanctions are coming” in the style of Game of Thrones.

Soleimani responded with a similarly styled image of himself with the words “We will stand against you.”

Last year the account posted an image of Soleimani stood in front of an exploding White House.

On Tuesday, Iran’s lawmakers approved a bill labeling US forces in the Middle East as terrorist.

The US terrorist designation for the IRGC took effect on Monday.

The IRGC are Iran’s elite military force and are politically powerful domestically, oversee the country’s ballistic missile program and control huge sections of the economy.

Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries accuse the group and its foreign wing, the Quds Force, of destabilizing the Middle East with its interventions in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Yemen.



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Turkey, Qatar criticize US designation of IRGC as terror group
Saudi Cabinet welcomes IRGC terrorist designation by US

[Bahrain jails 138 for plotting to form Iranian-linked 'terror' group](#)

Author:

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Tue, 2019-04-16 13:36

DUBAI: Bahrain jailed 138 people and revoked their citizenship on Tuesday for plotting to form a "terror" group with links to Iran's Revolutionary Guards, the public prosecutor said.

The court, whose rulings can be appealed, handed the men prison terms of three years to life for having tried to build a Bahrain Hezbollah, similar to the Shiite militia active in Lebanon, said prosecutor Ahmad Al-Hammadi. Some members had received military training in Lebanon, Iran and Iraq, he said in a statement.

Bahrain repeatedly claims that Iran trains and funds cells in order to topple the government – an accusation Tehran denies.

Another man was also jailed but his citizenship was not revoked, while 30 others were acquitted, said the statement posted on the prosecution Instagram account.

The source also said that 111 were already in custody while 58 were sentenced in absentia.

In Tuesday's court ruling, the prosecutor said 69 defendants were sentenced to life in jail, 39 to 10 years, 23 to seven years and the rest to between three and five years imprisonment.

Ninety-six of the defendants were also fined 100,000 Bahraini dinars (\$265,000) each.



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Pompeo urges Lebanon to move away from Iran and Hezbollah's 'dark ambitions'

Algeria military chief 'looking at all solutions' to solve crisis

Tue, 2019-04-16 16:40

ALGIERS: Algeria's army chief said Tuesday the military was considering all options to resolve the country's political crisis and warned that "time is running out", after weeks of anti-government protests.

Lt. Gen. Ahmed Gaed Salah's remarks were the strongest indication yet that the military, which has said it supports a transition period after the resignation of President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, is losing patience.

In a speech broadcast on state television, Salah, who was speaking at a military base in the central town of Ouargla, urged protesters to avoid violence.

"All options are open in the pursuit of overcoming the different difficulties and finding a solution to the crisis as soon as possible, in a way that serves our nation's interests without regard to individual interests," he said.

Salah did not specify what options the army would pursue. But he said: "We have no ambition but to protect our nation."

Hours earlier, the chairman of Algeria's Constitutional Council, Tayib Belaiz, quit his post, state news agency APS said. That followed calls for his resignation by protesters who say he is part of a ruling elite they want abolished.

Bouteflika stepped down on April 2 after weeks of mass protests demanding an end to his 20-year rule. But his departure failed to placate many Algerians who want to topple the old guard and its associates.

Belaiz submitted his resignation to Interim President Abdelkader Bensalah, APS reported, citing a statement from the council.

Meanwhile thousands of demonstrators marched through the streets of Algiers and in cities across the country calling for political change in the eighth week of mass protests.

Belaiz's departure could herald that of other senior political figures who protesters want removed.

These include Bensalah, who was appointed interim president after Salah declared Bouteflika unfit for office and said the military would back a transition period leading to a presidential election on July 4.

Protesters are seeking radical change that would introduce sweeping political reforms in Algeria, an OPEC oil producer and major supplier of natural gas to Europe.



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Algerian rights lawyer Mustapha Bouchachi, a leading voice for changeAlgerian students announce a national strike in protest against the government