

UK court orders Lebanese banks to pay \$4m to saver

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ID:

1646237569357630000

Wed, 2022-03-02 19:15

BEIRUT: A London court has ordered two Lebanese banks to pay a depositor \$4 million of his money locked in Lebanon's crippled banking system by informal capital controls in place since a financial meltdown in 2019, the first such ruling in Britain.

The High Court of Justice, Queen's Bench Division, ordered Bank Audi and SGBL to make the payments, amounting to about \$1.1 million and \$2.9 million respectively, to claimant Vatche Manoukian by March 4, a copy of the ruling seen by Reuters said.

"Bank Audi will abide by the ruling of the British court," a Bank Audi official told Reuters.

SGBL did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Lebanon's financial system collapsed in 2019 after years of unsustainable financial policies, corruption and waste. Banks imposed tight controls on accounts, including a de facto ban on withdrawals of dollar-denominated deposits and limits on withdrawals in local currency.

These controls were never formalized with legislation and have been challenged in local and international courts, with mixed results.

A UK court in December ruled in favor of a Lebanese bank in a case brought by a depositor, considering the bank had discharged its debt to the plaintiff by issuing checks for the value of his deposits.

Many Lebanese banks have resorted to discharging dollar-denominated funds via banker's cheques which cannot be cashed out in dollars and are instead sold on the market at about a quarter of their value.

Just a week prior, a French court had ruled in favor of a saver residing in France in a case she brought against a bank which had also issued checks for her account balance, saying the unilateral move by the bank, opposed by the claimant, meant the bank had not fulfilled its obligations.



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Lebanon foils Daesh plan to carry out suicide attacks in Beirut
Lebanese judge issues subpoena for cenbank governor Riad Salameh

[Houthis pay a heavy price as coalition airstrikes hit convoy](#)

Wed, 2022-03-02 19:01

AL-MUKALLA: Dozens of Houthi militia have been killed in a series of airstrikes launched by the Coalition to Restore Legitimacy in Yemen amid heavy fighting between government forces and rebels in the provinces of Marib and Hajjah.

Coalition warplanes struck a Houthi military convoy in the northern Abes district as the vehicles attempted to reach the battlefields in Hajjah province, local media said.

A Houthi field commander was among the dead, while the airstrikes also destroyed military supplies and paved the way for government troops to repulse attacks by the Iran-backed militia.

The coalition on Wednesday said that 18 airstrikes in the past 24 hours destroyed 12 Houthi military vehicles and killed a large number of rebel fighters in Hajjah province.

Meanwhile, the international medical charity Medecins sans Frontieres on Wednesday announced it will withdraw its staff and suspend its activities in the Houthi-controlled Abes district of Hajjah, citing security concerns.

“MSF took the decision to withdraw its staff and temporarily suspend its activities in the Abes hospital, in Hajjah governorate as of March 1, 2022, while we are negotiating with the authorities to ensure the safety and security of our staff and patients,” the organization said on Twitter.

Separately, the Houthis on Wednesday criticized the UN Security Council over its decision to extend an arms embargo on the Iran-backed militia and label it a terrorist organization.

Hisham Sharaf, the Houthi foreign minister, called the decision “provocative.”

On Monday, the Security Council approved a resolution renewing an arms embargo on the Houthis, referring to the movement for the first time as a “terrorist group.”

In Aden, the interim capital of Yemen, the country’s internationally recognized government hailed the UN decision and its description of the Houthis as terrorists, saying that the blockade will curb the militia’s destabilizing activities in the Red Sea and its obstruction of peace initiatives.

“This resolution will help in reducing Houthi threats to safety and security of international shipping lanes in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, and it is a positive step to pressure Houthis to abandon the path of war and return to the peace track,” Yemen’s government said on Twitter.

UN Yemen envoy Hans Grundberg said on Wednesday that he had met with Yemeni and Saudi officials, the US Yemen envoy and ambassadors for the five permanent UN members to discuss pushing Yemeni parties into more constructive discussions with the aim of achieving an immediate truce and, eventually, a peaceful settlement to end the war.

Grundberg thanked Yemeni President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi for supporting his efforts to reach a deal in Yemen.

“We need to initiate an inclusive multitrack process that addresses short-

term and longer-term priorities, and that can lay the foundation for a peaceful and sustainable settlement to the conflict,” Grundberg said in a statement.



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Saudi Arabia welcomes Security Council's resolution to label Houthis terrorist group
Houthis recruit African migrants, refugees to shore up depleted ranks

[Arabs continue to bear the brunt of organized crime in Israel](#)

Tue, 2022-03-01 23:19

RAMALLAH: About a million and a half Palestinian citizens living in Israel are at the mercy of organized crime gangs operating largely with impunity in their communities. The activities of the gangs resulted in the deaths of 125 people in 2021, 62 of whom were below the age of 30, and another 14 have died since the start of this year.

According to police in Israel, seven criminal gangs are active in Arab communities. Some of their members previously worked as “contractors” for Jewish crime organizations but by 2016 many of these had been dismantled and Arab gangs filled the vacuum, with tens of thousands of weapons at their disposal.

A number of factors fuel organized crime and the violence that comes with it within Arab communities. Israeli banks will not give loans to people who do not possess construction licenses from the Israeli authorities, for example. Arabs instead seek loans from the black market or criminal gangs and families; if they fail to repay the money they owe on time, they are targeted with violence.

A career in crime is a tempting option for young people between the ages of 16 to 18 because it offers them quick and easy access to money.

The cash flows extend to arms trafficking, which is highly profitable: The price for a pistol ranges between \$3,086 and \$6,173, while an M16 assault rifle costs about \$21,605. The weapons offered for sale typically have been stolen from Israeli Army warehouses.

The majority of suspects arrested and prosecuted in connection with organized crime are the lower level “contractors,” not the gang leaders or those who fund the crimes.

A crucial obstacle to the efforts to tackle organized crime is the mistrust within the Palestinian community of the Israeli police and a belief that they do not adequately tackle crime in Arab areas. The police in turn blame the community for not cooperating with crime-fighting efforts.

Arabs say that if they do report the criminals, they are targeted by revenge attacks and the police do not protect them. They add that the police take action to confiscate weapons but do not arrest many suspects, and few of those who are arrested ever stand trial.

The police say they need sufficient evidence to prosecute suspects but this is difficult to obtain because they lack adequate staffing, budgets and technology.

There have been calls from some to use the Shin Bet, Israel’s internal security service, to assist the police but there are strong reservations about having the agency interfere in civil affairs.

Meanwhile, despite a pledge by Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett and Public Security Minister Omer Bar-Lev to crack down heavily on organized crime and illegal weapons, the violence continues largely unabated, though the Israeli police have established a unit called Saif to tackle violence within the Palestinian community.

According to a statement by the police obtained by Arab News, there has been a 36 percent decrease in the number of shootings since the start of this year.

Col. Yigal Ezra, head of the Anti-Crime Division in the Arab division of the Israeli Police, said: "The Israeli police have cracked several murders since the beginning of the year. We have filed indictments against 122 suspects who have been identified as the main perpetrators of the crime, and 102 of them have been arrested."

Israel's population of 9 million people, including 1.5 million Palestinian citizens, is currently policed by a 32,000-strong force. Law-enforcement authorities want to recruit more than 5,000 additional personnel, increase their budget and have access to better technology.

There are hopes that the police might step up their operations against organized crime in the Arab community because Arabs have recently started to move to Jewish towns adjacent to Arab villages, an issue the police cannot ignore.

In the meantime, organized crime and the violence that accompanies it continues in the Palestinian community, despite the claims by authorities about its decline. In fact the danger posed by the gangs has increased significantly with their adoption of car bombs as a weapon.

"There is an improvement in the performance of the police but it is less than what is required and they should redouble their efforts in combating crime and violence in the Arab community," Rida Jaber, director of the Aman Center, which monitors organized crime and violence in the Arab community, told Arab News.



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Israel freezes Palestinian evictions in East Jerusalem
Israeli forces kill Palestinian in West Bank

[US officials target corruption, terror funding in Beirut talks](#)

Author:

Tue, 2022-03-01 21:29

BEIRUT: A US Treasury delegation on Tuesday held talks with officials in Beirut on the Lebanese government's cooperation in combating money laundering and corruption, as well as the crisis in the Lebanese banking sector.

The delegation – headed by Paul Ahern, principal deputy assistant secretary at the US Treasury; his deputy Eric Meyer; and a group of experts in financial crime – was following up discussions the previous day on combating terror financing, and illicit drug and smuggling operations,

President Michel Aoun told US officials that Lebanese laws “are applied firmly and accurately in this field, and international financial institutions testify to that.”

Aoun said: “Lebanon actively participates in international efforts to combat money laundering, and plays its role in the Financial Action Group for this purpose in the Middle East region. It also established the National Coordination Committee for Combating the Financing of Terrorism and the National Anti-Corruption Commission.”

The Lebanese leader pledged that the fight against corruption “will continue unabated during the remainder of the presidential term,” and cited the forensic audit of the central bank's accounts as “one of its most prominent manifestations.”

Aoun said that the capital control bill targeting foreign transfers and cash withdrawals from banks in Lebanon is due to be approved by parliament before its mandate ends in May.

He also thanked the US for its support for Lebanon's army , as well as humanitarian, development, health and educational assistance.

The US delegation on Monday met Parliamentary Speaker Nabih Berri, Prime Minister Najib Mikati and Interior Minister Bassam Mawlawi to discuss the

fight against terror financing, and drug and smuggling operations, as well as the country's preparations for parliamentary elections in May.

Talks focused on sanctions against Hezbollah and figures close to the party over illegal finance operations.

According to Lebanon's Almarkaziya news agency, the meeting discussed the continuing investigation into Riad Salameh, the central bank governor, and its likely impact Lebanon's financial and monetary stability.

Observers said that the delegation's visit is proof that the US will refuse to tolerate any reluctance by political, financial and banking authorities in Lebanon to apply US sanctions, especially when it comes to corruption and terrorism financing.

US officials also discussed Hezbollah's financial arm, the Al-Qard Al-Hassan Association, which is subject to US sanctions.

Meanwhile, an IMF delegation headed by Ernesto Ramirez continued talks with Lebanese officials, including Mikati and Berri, on the country's financial and economic recovery strategy.

The IMF is waiting for Lebanese authorities to begin acting on promises of reforms required by the international community, including an electricity plan since this issue alone is responsible for about half of the deficit in the state's general budget.

Despite high-level talks during the past two weeks, the government has been unable to reach a final formula on the plan.

A Saudi-French agreement was announced on Monday following talks between French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian and his Saudi counterpart Prince Faisal bin Farhan to finance several humanitarian projects and provide direct assistance to several hospitals and primary healthcare centers.

Saudi Arabia will also donate \$36 million to Lebanon through the King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Center.



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[Libya parliament approves rival cabinet to unity govt: statement](#)

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1646150276457508200

Tue, 2022-03-01 19:02

BENHAZI: Libya's eastern-based parliament on Tuesday approved a new cabinet, in a challenge to the unity government of Abdulhamid Dbeibah in the capital Tripoli in the west.

The new administration, to be headed by former interior minister Fathi Bashagha, won the confidence of the House of Representatives with a majority of 92 members, speaker Aguila Saleh said.

Bashagha had been tasked in early February with forming a government to replace that of Dbeibah, deemed by the HoR as having outlived its mandate. But Dbeibah, the interim prime minister based in Tripoli, has repeatedly said

he will only cede power to an elected government.

The construction tycoon had been appointed a year earlier, as part of United Nations-led efforts to draw a line under a decade of conflict following the 2011 revolt that toppled dictator Muammar Qaddafi.

He was to lead the country to elections in December, but they were indefinitely postponed and Saleh, a rival presidential candidate, argued that his mandate was finished.

The House of Representatives, elected in 2014, is based in the eastern city of Tobruk while Dbeibah's administration is western-based in Tripoli, reflecting the deep and complex divisions that have plagued Libya in recent years.

The rise of Bashagha's government once again gives the country two prime ministers, and experts have warned it could spark violence.

Bashagha has said he will "reach out to everyone."



Main category:

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Libya rival PM says cabinet line-up ready
Libya interim PM, fighting ouster, promises populist spending plan