

Lebanese national jailed in Miami for sexual assault

Author:

Sat, 2022-01-08 22:56

CHICAGO: Lebanese national Marwan Habib, 32, has been jailed without bond after he was arrested on Friday for sexually assaulting a woman at a hotel in Miami, Florida.

He appeared in court on Friday before Miami-Dade 11th Circuit Court Judge Marisa Tinkler Mendez after he was taken into custody.

Habib met his victim at a club but later followed her to her hotel and then fraudulently convinced the clerk to give him a key to her room.

Police told reporters that Habib had entered the victim's room at Hotel Victor in South Beach on Friday night and then sexually assaulted her.

He faces the felony charge of "burglary with assault or battery," according to court records. He is also being held for an "immigration review" by the court.

Habib asked the judge if he could "pay a fine and go home," but Mendez responded: "You are not going home today, sir." She denied him bond, which would have allowed him to be free until his next court hearing.

Instead, he was ordered into the custody of the Miami-Dade Turner Guilford Knight Correctional Center, where he is being held pending further court appearances.

Police are investigating whether Habib tracked and sexually assaulted other women, according to Miami media reports.

Police said they are investigating several complaints from women who said they were harassed by the suspect.

Habib has reportedly alluded police in Lebanon, where he is suspected of rape and sexual assault.

According to court records, he could be extradited back to Lebanon, where he could face further charges.



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Philippines seeks to prosecute former US diplomat over sexual abuse of minor

[Lebanon power company says protesters behind national blackout](#)

Author:

AFP

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1641670064196295700

Sat, 2022-01-08 22:33

BEIRUT: Lebanon's state electricity company said Saturday that its power plants had stopped working after protesters stormed a key substation and tampered with the electrical equipment.

The small Mediterranean country is already grappling with round-the-clock power cuts that last at least 20 hours a day due to a financial crisis that has hampered key imports, including fuel for power stations.

Demonstrators angered by the blackouts stormed an Electricite du Liban substation in the Aramoun region north of Beirut on Saturday, EDL said in a

statement.

“Protesters disconnected a 150-220 kilovolt power transformer and opened circuit breakers connecting the Zahrani power plant to the Aramoun station,” it said.

“This caused disturbances on the electrical grid... which led to a total blackout across Lebanese territory as of 17:27 (1527 GMT).”

The disruption will pile more pressure on private generators that are already struggling to keep up with the near-total absence of state power.

Private generator owners have hiked prices and rationed supply in recent months, with costs surging after the government gradually lifted fuel subsidies.

The average generator bill for a Lebanese family usually costs more than the monthly minimum wage of 675,000 Lebanese pounds – now worth just \$22 as the local currency hits record lows against the dollar on the black market.

The international community has long demanded a complete overhaul of Lebanon’s ruinous electricity sector, which has cost the government more than \$40 billion since the end of the 1975-1990 civil war.

Lebanon has reached an agreement on bringing Jordanian electricity and Egyptian gas into the country via war-torn Syria, while Shiite movement Hezbollah has separately started hydrocarbon deliveries from Iran.



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General Labor Union president warns against 'certain catastrophe' in Lebanon amid economic crises UN peacekeepers attacked in south Lebanon near Israel border

[Eight killed in 'shocking' West Bank road crash](#)

Author:

Sat, 2022-01-08 01:37

RAMALLAH: Eight Palestinians died on Thursday when the van they rode in collided with a cement truck in the occupied West Bank, Palestinian official media said.

The two vehicles slammed into each other at a junction on Route 90, which runs up the Jordan Valley and is under Israeli security control near the northern West Bank village of Fasayil, according to the Wafa news agency. A medic with the Magen David Adom Israeli rescue services said in a statement that the scene at the crash site was "shocking." "We saw a truck and a private vehicle crushed on the side of the road," he said.

The victims were not officially identified but local news outlets reported they were teenagers between 14 and 17 years old.

HIGHLIGHT

Palestinian police said that the victims were workers from the town of Aqraba, near Nablus.

Wafa said that Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas declared a day of mourning to be observed on Friday across the Palestinian territories in honor of the victims.

Medics declared seven people dead at the scene, and Wafa later reported an additional victim. Three injured people were evacuated to Israeli hospitals via helicopter.

Israeli Defense Minister Benny Gantz issued a note of sympathy published in Arabic and Hebrew.

"I would like to convey my heartfelt condolences to the Palestinian families who lost eight of their loved ones today" in the crash, he said.

Neighboring Jordan also expressed condolences.

Palestinian police said that the victims were workers from the town of Aqraba, near Nablus.



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Head of Arab League Aboul Gheit condemns Israeli settlement expansion in Golan Heights
Israeli MP faces heat for remarks on settlers

[Syrians seek word of loved ones missing in regime jails](#)

Author:

AFP

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1641587953819946900

Fri, 2022-01-07 23:42

AZAZ, Syria: More than 70 families gathered in the rebel-held Syrian town of Azaz on Friday to highlight the plight of loved ones missing in the government's feared jail system.

Since civil war broke out in Syria in 2011, nearly one million people have been detained in the network of prisons and camps run by the various security services, according to Britain-based monitoring group the Syrian Observatory

for Human Rights.

Of those, around 105,000 have died in custody, while others have been released, but tens of thousands remain unaccounted for, according to Observatory figures.

Lama Andani said it was nine years since her husband was arrested.

For 18 months, she had received some updates indirectly, but then nothing.

"I know what it's like to be tortured in the jails of the regime," said Andani, who said she spent nine years in prison during a previous outbreak of political unrest in Syria during the 1980s.

"We came here in the hope of getting our message through to the international community... so that it isn't forgotten.

"I dream of seeing my husband... and of knowing what happened to him," she said, as she joined others in posting messages in a square in Azaz.

The northern town, hard by the border with Turkey, was occupied by Turkish troops in 2016 to prevent it falling to US-backed Kurdish forces, which had taken swathes of northern Syria from the Daesh group.

It has since been under the control of rebel groups supported by Ankara.

In 2013, a military defector known as "Caesar" smuggled more than 50,000 photographs out of Syria, many of them documenting the deaths of prisoners in detention centers or military hospitals.

The name went on to be used in the title of US legislation that provides for economic sanctions against Syria.

Despite efforts to open dialogue about the missing on both sides of the conflict, little progress has been made on establishing their fate.



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[Civil war](#)
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Car bombing kills 19 in Syria's Azaz: monitor Turkey won't let Kurds take control of Syria's Azaz town

General Labor Union president warns against 'certain catastrophe' in Lebanon amid economic crises

Author:

Fri, 2022-01-07 22:40

BEIRUT: General Labor Union President Bechara Al-Asmar has warned against "a certain catastrophe, since hospitalization is now accessible to the wealthy only."

At a press conference on Friday, he commented on the multitude of crises facing the Lebanese, including "the ongoing madness in the dollar exchange rate, insane increases in fuel prices, electricity bill, the removal of medicine subsidies and the loss of the depositors' savings as a result of bank circulations – viewed as organized robbery."

He warned that "the draft budget included a provision for raising the customs dollar, which would raise the prices of goods by 30 percent, and raise all taxes and duties."

He added: "This is unacceptable because it entails the removal of subsidies on everything in exchange for nothing, which is surrendering to the IMF conditions without any supervision."

The fresh warning came as the ruling elite attempted to resolve its many conflicts that are blocking political and administrative progress.

President Michel Aoun has signed a decree calling on parliament to hold an extraordinary session starting from Monday and ending on March 21.

This will restore the parliamentary immunity of the ministers charged for the crime of the Beirut port blast, including current MPs, one of whom had an arrest warrant issued for him in absentia and that has not yet been executed.

The parliamentary session sets the stage for the transfer of power from a judicial investigator to a parliamentary body for the prosecution of ministers and deputies allegedly to blame for the explosion.

Lawyer and activist Hassan Bazzi said that “the key parties to the settlements are Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri, Prime Minister Najib Mikati and President Michel Aoun.”

This follows the intense political discord between Aoun and Berri that reached its peak last week.

Bazzi said the settlement moved Aoun to sign a decree calling on parliament for a special session.

He also said that the parliamentary session’s agenda includes amending the law under review before the constitutional council – approving only six seats for expatriates’ voting instead of letting them participate in nationwide elections.

Bazzi also indicated that parliament was likely to approve the amendment to the code of criminal procedure, setting up a judicial parliamentary panel to look into appealing the decisions of Judge Tarek Bitar who has issued arrest warrants for several ministers.

While Cabinet is called to convene under this basis, Bazzi said the appointments for the panel would be made on a quota basis, where “the diaspora loses the opportunity for change and the political system regains control.”

Berri and Aoun tried to hide the parameters of this settlement by sparking a new debate concerning the special parliamentary session.

Although the main title of the urgent session is the discussion and approval of the two draft budgets, the presidential decree – bearing the signature of Prime Minister Najib Mikati – has on its agenda “the ratified laws that the president may request to be reconsidered and drafts or proposals of urgent and necessary laws related to the parliamentary elections.”

Berri indicated in a statement on Friday that “parliament is independent and is not restricted to any description of projects or proposals that the bureau of the parliament decides to put forward and the president has the right to respond after they are issued by the General Authority.”

The statement added: “This is the constitution’s provision and jurisprudence.”

The president’s team replied indirectly through unidentified sources that “they do not want to get into a debate with Berri.”

They added that article 33 of the constitution “stipulates that the parliament may be convened to extraordinary sessions by a decree setting their opening, end and agenda.”

Parliamentary sources replied to Aoun’s party that “the procedural authority may certainly set for the parliament the agenda it wants to look into in this extraordinary session, provided that parliament’s work is not limited to this agenda only.”

The settlement meant to be followed requires the re-convening of the Cabinet.

However, Hezbollah's bloc of MPs ignored the issues of governance and only supported the opening of an extraordinary parliamentary session extending until the date of the ordinary session, in view of the urgent need to adopt laws relating to "rescue, accountability and state regularity."

Questions remain over whether this settlement will allow the Cabinet to convene.

Political observers indicated that the settlement between Aoun and Berri – which was fostered by Hezbollah – might require the absence of Hezbollah and Amal movement's ministers from the next Cabinet session, except for the minister of finance, because the Cabinet was expected to discuss the general budget.

They added: "This is to further tie the ongoing conflict to the resumption of the Cabinet's work and to the withdrawal of the port's file from Judge Bitar."



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