

Lebanon prepares to mourn victims of Aug. 4 blast on first anniversary

Author:

Wed, 2021-07-28 21:48

BEIRUT: Lebanon has declared Aug. 4 a national day of mourning ahead of the first anniversary of the deadly Beirut blast.

As part of the mourning, all public administrations and government institutions will be closed and flags will fly at half-mast.

Regular scheduling of radio and television will also be changed to commemorate the tragedy, which was caused by a massive explosion of ammonium nitrate stored in the Port of Beirut.

The blast killed 215 people, injured more than 6,500 and destroyed large swathes of the city.

An investigation into the blast has failed to deliver an indictment so far, with judge Tarek Bitar waiting on a request to lift immunity from three former lawmakers and ministers as a first step toward formally charging them.

A strike by lawyers in Lebanon has also served as an excuse for the defendants to avoid appearing with their attorneys before Bitar.

The Cassation Public Prosecution on Wednesday told Bitar to "take the necessary measures to determine the suspicions and evidence against Gen. Abbas Ibrahim, director general of the General Security, before prosecuting him."

The Lebanese Cabinet announced on Wednesday that it cannot permit the prosecution of Maj. Gen. Tony Saliba, director general of State Security, and that instead, the Supreme Defense Council must grant permission.

If given permission, Bitar will be entitled to question both officials and prosecute them along with caretaker Prime Minister Hassan Diab and many others, including former army commander Gen. Jean Kahwaji.

Charges likely to result from court cases range from omission and negligence offenses to constructive malice of murder, because several defendants were allegedly aware of the large quantities of ammonium nitrate in the port, but did not act to prevent an incident.

Bitar is preparing to simulate the explosion and had earlier set a date for the simulation at the end of July. But according to Arab News' sources, "the simulation process is related to the weather conditions and other logistics related to the Customs and General Security."

The Aug. 4 blast left thousands of people in Beirut homeless and damaged areas surrounding the city, with streets left covered with glass and blood.

Debris remained across the city for several days.

A year after the blast, many of the wounded are still undergoing surgery.

Salwa Baalbaki, a journalist at An-Nahar newspaper, told Arab News: "My right hand has been operated upon twice so far, as the tendons were ruptured by the broken glass that fell in my office, across the port."

She is still receiving physical therapy and cannot hold a pen properly.

Baalbaki said that she moved to a village in the south of the country and is working remotely as she cannot return to the An-Nahar building, which is still undergoing restoration and renovation work.

She added: "I went to Beirut two days ago and headed to the An-Nahar building, but I started shivering and had a panic attack. I cried a lot. I am devastated and the current crises have only made it worse for me. I can't sleep at night.

"Specialists at the American University of Beirut told me all those who were wounded by the blast are feeling the same way and have not been able to return to their normal lives yet.

"Every time I watch the news about the Beirut blast or listen to the families of the victims speaking, I get emotional and start crying. The civil war failed to do what the blast did to me. I have been losing my focus and forgetting a lot. Everything reminds me of the explosion. I think I am going to have to see a therapist."

Baalbaki said that she paid for her own physical therapy, as "nobody cares for us."

She noted her resentment toward Lebanon's political class "as they committed their crime and left us to pay the price for it.

"I wish I could leave the country for good and never have to hear anything about it again, but my father is old and cannot travel and that is what is keeping me here, but this country does not mean anything to me anymore," she said.

Heritage buildings in residential areas surrounding the port have remained destroyed and deserted, while residents have returned to other buildings that were restored by local private associations through foreign support.

Brazilian football star Ronaldinho arrived on Tuesday in Beirut to support and stand in solidarity with the Lebanese people on the first anniversary of the blast.

He visited the Beirut Fire Brigade headquarters in Karantina and the Civil Defense center at the port, which lost 10 personnel who were trying to extinguish a fire in the silo at the source of the explosion.

Ronaldinho lay a wreath for the victims and met officials from associations

that helped in the reconstruction and relief of the affected.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Lebanon](#)

[Beirut blast](#)

Angry relatives of Beirut blast victims attempt to storm minister's residence
Massive fire 'almost under control' in north Lebanon

[Massive fire 'almost under control' in north Lebanon](#)

Wed, 2021-07-28 20:03

BEIRUT: A massive fire broke out in the Qobayat area north of Lebanon on Wednesday and spread so fast that many families were stuck in their properties.

A spokesperson for the Lebanese Civil Defence (LCD) told Arab News the blaze was a result of high temperatures, humidity, and winds but was "almost under control" after more than 16 firefighting brigades responded to the fire.

"Fire brigades from Tripoli and Beirut have been extinguishing the enormous flames that we face every summer season," the LCD spokesperson said. "The head of LCD operations is supervising the fire-extinguishing process."

Meanwhile, a spokesperson for the Lebanese Red Cross (LRC) told Arab News it also dispatched teams to the Qobayat area when the fire broke out.

“We evicted families including women, children, and the elderly as our teams remain on the ground,” the LRC spokesperson said. According to the LRC Twitter account, 17 people were evicted, 25 were treated at the site and eight were hospitalized as a result of the fire. Lebanese President Michel Aoun ordered the Lebanese Army and LCD to exert all efforts to extinguish the fire and prevent it from reaching homes and properties. He also gave orders to evict any families that could be in the path of the fire. Aoun asked local authorities to communicate with Cypriot authorities for assistance if the fire escalated. The National News Agency (NNA) said the Lebanese Army rescued a number of citizens from their cars after they were surrounded by fires that broke out near the Qobayat-Rowaymah Highway. One of Qobayat mayors, Youssef Nader, told Al-Jadeed TV that 60 percent of the fire that surrounded residential areas had been brought under control, but blazes in the nearby fields “remain out of control.” One wounded person was transferred to the Al-Salam Hospital Emergency Department in Qobayat. Lebanese Army helicopters, civil defense teams, and volunteers from Qobayat and other areas in Akkar continued to battle the blaze on Wednesday, which expanded towards new areas in Mount Akroum, the NNA reported.



Main category:
[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Lebanon](#)

[Qobayat](#)

[fire](#)

Lebanon's MTV slammed over deepfake video of Beirut port blast victims Aoun says Lebanon is keen to maintain best relations with Arab countries

[British woman arrested for smuggling cash to Dubai](#)

Author:

Tue, 2021-07-27 19:46

LONDON: A 30-year-old British woman has been jailed for almost three years over money laundering offences worth more than £5 million (\$6.8 million).

Tara Hanlon, from the north of England, was arrested on Oct. 3 while boarding a flight to Dubai and carrying £1.9 million of cash hidden in five suitcases.

She pleaded guilty at a London court in June having previously admitted to three counts of removing criminal property relating to cash amounts.

When arrested, Hanlon had been travelling with a friend to Dubai for a holiday with pals and told arresting officers that she had many suitcases because she "wasn't sure what to wear" while away.

British border officials said the seizure was the biggest cash capture that the force had made in 2020.

Hanlon had hidden the cash in vacuum-packed bags surrounded by coffee to keep sniffer dogs off the scent.

She told investigators it was her first trip, but when they searched her phone and checked with her airline, they found she had made three previous visits as a courier. These were in July and August 2020, and she was paid approximately £3,000 for each trip.

Hanlon had texted friends that her job gave her the "perfect life," and said: "Few days in the sun and a few at home." She also bragged about her job and added: "Three big ones ... with this wage and the next my debts go bye."

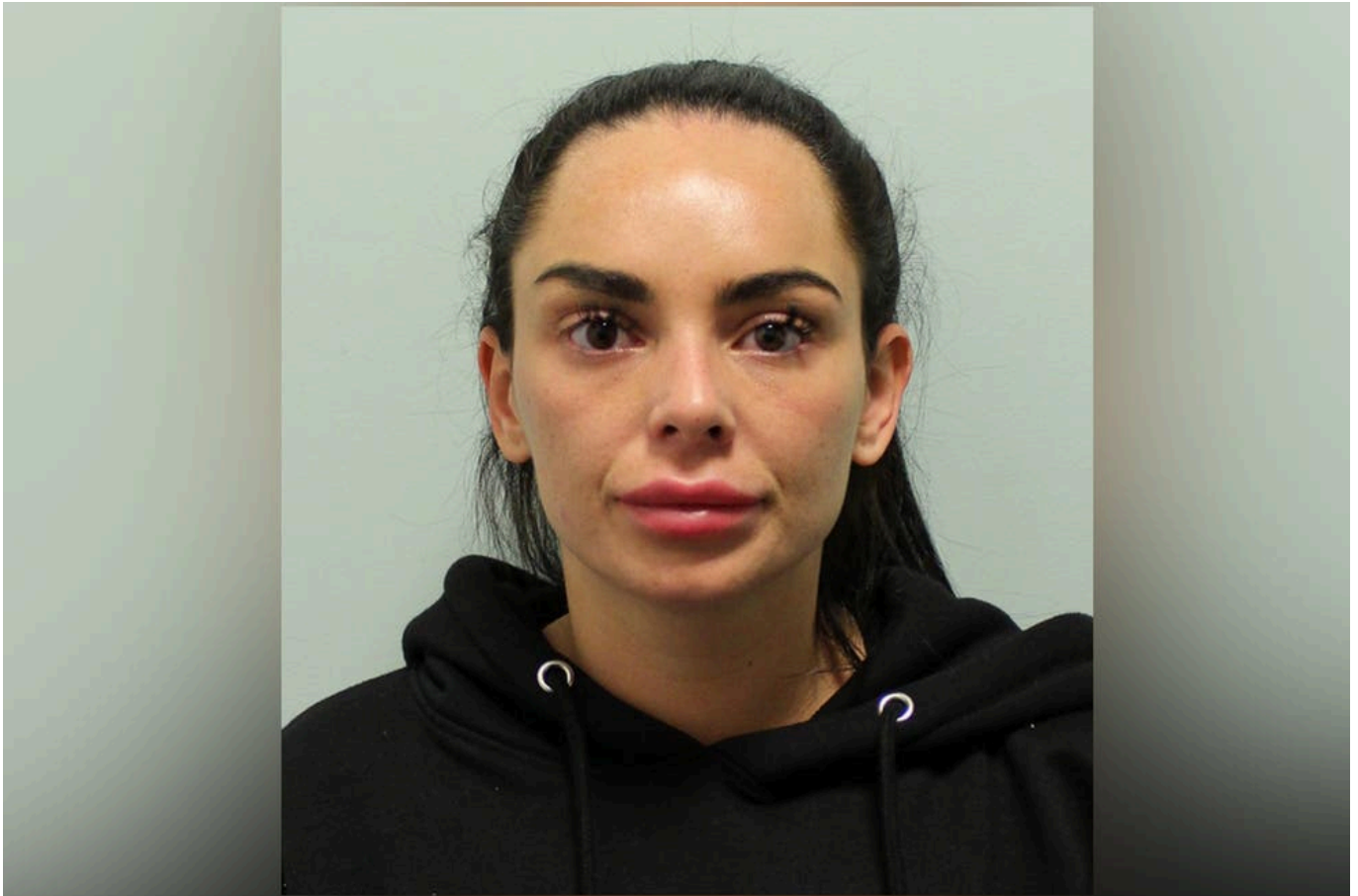
Hanlon's lawyer argued in court that she was vulnerable at the time of the offences because the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic meant that she had lost access to work. He added that her crimes were committed shortly after the unexpected death of her mother in March.

Judge Karen Holt said: "Although you were vulnerable at the time, I don't

find that you have been exploited and find that you knew what you were doing.”

National Crime Agency (NCA) senior investigating officer, Ian Truby, said: “Tara Hanlon thought that she was going to be living a jet-set lifestyle, instead she is now serving a prison sentence.

“I hope her story is a cautionary one for others who would consider doing the same. Stopping the flow of illicit cash is a priority for the NCA and our partners.”



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[UAE](#)

[Dubai](#)

[UK](#)

[smuggling](#)

Saudi customs seize \$24 million illegal cash since early 2020
New e-payment system to cut costs, cash smuggling

Egypt reiterates commitment to Gaza reconstruction

Author:

Tue, 2021-07-27 19:24

CAIRO: Egyptian Ambassador to Palestine Tariq Tayel said Cairo is in constant dialogue with other nations over the reconstruction of Gaza and efforts to stabilize the truce between Hamas and Israel following the conflict in May. Fighting broke out after Jewish settler groups tried to evict and confiscate the property of long-time Palestinian residents in East Jerusalem.

On May 10, armed Palestinian groups in Gaza started to launch rockets toward Israel. The Israel Defense Force retaliated, firing on Gaza with aircraft, drones and artillery.

Tayel said Cairo would continue its efforts for reconciliation at a function on Monday at the Egyptian Embassy in Ramallah, where he highlighted the work accomplished so far in removing the rubble of destroyed buildings in Gaza to pave the way for new projects.

He said the Palestinian cause will remain the central issue in the Middle East.

“Work has been done on two levels; the first is the launch of the tripartite cooperation formula between the people in Egypt, Jordan and Palestine, with the aim of developing a common vision to deal with the challenges facing the issue and the revival of the Arab Peace Initiative,” he said.

“As for the second level, it is pushing toward reviving the peace process at the international level and working to conduct international contacts within the international determinants ... to achieve peace,” Tayel added.

The Arab Peace Initiative was drawn up by Saudi Arabia in 2002, with Arab nations offering Israel normalized ties in return for a statehood deal with the Palestinians and full Israeli withdrawal from territory captured in 1967. Emphasizing the strength of Egyptian-Palestinian relations, Tayel said they “most often go beyond what governments can achieve individually, or what traditional diplomatic work can accommodate, as it is a direct relationship between two fused peoples.”

Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh, referring to the ties between the two people’s since Egypt’s revolution on July 23, 1952, said: “The July Revolution is a turning point in the history of Egypt and the entire Arab region. This revolution raised the values of freedom, social justice and self-reliance.

“During the July Revolution, we found the Arab commitment to Palestine, and it strengthened the blood bond between the Egyptian people and its national forces, and between the Palestinian people and its revolutionary forces. Egypt has a firm position in support of Palestine, its people, its cause and its leadership,” Shtayyeh said.

“We are partners with Egypt in the political solution toward ending the occupation, establishing an independent Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital, and the right of return for refugees. We are partners in saying and believing that the Palestinian legitimacy is represented by the Palestine Liberation Organization and its fighting forces,” he added.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Cairo](#)

[Gaza](#)

[Reconstruction](#)

Human Rights Watch: Israeli war crimes apparent in Gaza war

[Italy fears current crisis in Tunisia may lead to new waves of migrants](#)

Author:

Tue, 2021-07-27 16:33

ROME: Italian authorities fear that the ongoing political turmoil in Tunisia may result in a drastic increase in migrants arriving from Tunisia, with numbers potentially reaching up to 15.000.

Despite bad sea conditions, yesterday nearly 200 people arrived on dinghies and small boats from the Tunisian shores to Lampedusa, the tiny Italian island in the Mediterranean, where the local holding center known as the “hotspot” and designed to accommodate only 100 people came under pressure once again.

However, in the next few days, the situation could progress from strained to intolerable. As weather forecasts announce calm seas, this could significantly incentivize migrants to depart from Tunisia toward the Italian shores.

"We are seriously worried about this situation," Adm. Giovanni Pettorino, chief of the Italian Coast Guard, told Arab News.

"Our primary mission is saving lives at sea. In the past 10 years, 900,000 people have crossed the Mediterranean, and we have always made every effort to save them. We will continue to do so, but solutions to the issue of migrant flows must be found on land and not at sea. Every time a boat leaves the coasts of North Africa overcrowded with people, it's a defeat for everyone. The solution must go beyond rescue," he added.

A source in the Italian Interior Ministry believes that "the political turmoil could exacerbate the economic crisis in Tunisia, which is already severe due to the impact of the pandemic."

The same source added: "If Tunisia faces social unrest, protests, or even civil war or a new dictatorship, as it is realistic to expect, the impact will immediately be felt in Lampedusa with a surge in arrivals by sea."

Since the beginning of the year, 5,805 Tunisians have arrived in Italy. Italian intelligence services told Arab News they estimate that over 15,000 Tunisians could reach Italy by the end of the year if the situation in the country does not improve.

Italian Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio immediately called on the EU Commission for help, asking for increased cooperation with Tunisia to solve the local economic crisis and discourage the departure of migrants. The government is also worried about the Italian community in Tunisia, comprising 3,537 nationals.

"In this situation, we can only show great concern for what is happening now in Tunisia. We believe that this crisis can be solved through democracy," Di Maio said.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Middle East](#)

[Italy](#)

[Tunisia](#)

[migrants](#)

Video of Italian police abuse of Tunisian migrants goes viral
Tunisia rescues 166 migrants at sea, 16 dead