

EU to place legal framework for sanctions on Lebanese leaders – France

Mon, 2021-07-12 19:40

LONDON: France said the European Union had reached a consensus to sanction Lebanese leaders to pressure them to form a stable government, the French foreign minister said on Monday.

“Lebanon has been in self-destruct mode for several months,” Jean-Yves Le Drian said. “Now there is a major emergency situation for a population that is in distress.”

A political crisis has left the country without a functioning government since the last one resigned after a massive explosion killed 200 people and destroyed swathes of Beirut in August 2020.

Speaking during an EU Foreign Affairs Council meeting, Le Drian said: “For several months now, we have been urging the Lebanese authorities to form a government, to make the necessary reforms to get the country out of the tragedy into which it is going to enter and there is now a political consensus to put in place a legal framework and sanctions before the end of the month.”

He said this will happen before the “unfortunate anniversary of the explosion in the port of Beirut on Aug. 4.”

The French foreign minister said the legal framework “will serve as a tool to pressure the Lebanese authorities to form the government, and to advance in the implementation of the essential reforms that this country is waiting for.”

Josep Borrell, EU foreign policy chief, also confirmed that the 27 nations gave the green light to establish the legal framework.

“The objective is to complete this by the end of the month,” Borrell said, adding: “The economy’s imploding and the suffering of the people of Lebanon is continuously growing.”

“They need to have a Lebanese government in order to avoid the breakdown of the country, (one that is) fully able to implement reforms and protect this population.”

Lebanon is mired in what the World Bank has called one of the worst economic crises since the 1850s. The state is struggling to buy enough fuel to keep the lights on.

The economic crisis has seen the Lebanese pound lose more than 90 percent of its value against the dollar on the black market, and left more than half the population living below the poverty line.

In April, France imposed sanctions by restricting entry of Lebanese figures it says are responsible for the political crisis.

(With Reuters and AFP)



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Lebanon power station to restart after fuel delivery

[Egypt tightens punishment for sexual harassment](#)

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Reuters

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Mon, 2021-07-12 19:21

CAIRO: The Egyptian parliament on Monday approved harsher penalties for sexual harassment and related crimes and upgraded them to felony offenses, aiming to curb sex-related assaults in a nation where women have long felt disadvantaged.

Sex crimes have been an increasing topic of conversation in recent years in the conservative, Muslim-majority nation, with several high profile court cases coming to varying conclusions.

Dozens of Egyptians began posting accounts of sexual assault on social media last year, but campaigners say there remains a deep-rooted bias in Egypt to place more blame on women for behavior deemed provocative than on men for sex crimes.

Public prosecutors in May shelved a case over a woman's allegation that she was gang raped at a luxury hotel in Cairo in 2014 because of "insufficient evidence" against the defendants.

Referring to earlier laws passed in 2014, a parliamentary committee said in a report on Monday that "although the punishments listed were a quantum leap at the time, they did not achieve the necessary deterrence."

In the measure approved on Monday, the penalty for sexual harassment was increased from a minimum of one year in prison to a minimum of five years, or a penalty of up to 300,000 Egyptian pounds (\$19,100), up from 20,000 pounds. In situations where a power imbalance was in place because of a professional or familial relationship, or in cases involving the use of weapons or accomplices, the penalty was increased from a minimum of two to a minimum of seven years, in addition to a 10-fold increase of the maximum fine to 500,000 Egyptian pounds.

The penalties for stalking and general harassment were also increased substantially.

In August, the parliament approved a law protecting the identity of victims of sexual harassment and assault, after a social media campaign led to the arrest of a suspected sex offender.



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[Egypt's foreign minister meets Israeli counterpart in Brussels](#)

Sun, 2021-07-11 19:15

LONDON: Egypt's Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry met his Israeli counterpart Yair Lapid in Brussels on Sunday for the first time since Israel's new cross-party coalition took office last month.

Shoukry said "urgent action was needed to resolve the current stalemate between the Palestinian and Israeli sides, leading to just and comprehensive peace negotiations," Egypt's foreign ministry spokesperson said on Twitter. The meeting was held on the sidelines of Shoukry visit to the Belgian capital where he held talks with European counterparts on the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam issue.

Both ministers are also in Brussels to attend the European Union foreign ministers' summit.

During his visit to Brussels, FM [#Sameh_Shoukry](#) meets his Israeli counterpart, Yair Lapid, and stresses the need to resolve the current stalemate between the Palestinian and Israeli sides, leading to a just and comprehensive peace negotiations. [@yairlapid](#)

pic.twitter.com/VEdDT5gcSB

– Egypt MFA Spokesperson (@MfaEgypt) [July 11, 2021](#)

On Thursday, Lapid, foreign minister in a cross-partisan coalition that ousted long-serving conservative Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government a month ago, held his first meeting with his Jordanian counterpart Ayman Safadi.

Lapid said the countries also agreed to explore increasing Jordan's exports to the West Bank to \$700 million a year, from \$160 million now.

"The Kingdom of Jordan is an important neighbor and partner," Lapid said in a statement. "We will broaden economic cooperation for the good of the two countries."

(With Reuters)





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Israel again demolishes Palestinian village in West Bank
Ethiopian intransigence over dam project led Egypt, Sudan to approach UN: President El-Sisi

Yemeni FM condemns Houthi militia's continued rejection of proposed peace initiative for a cease-fire

Sun, 2021-07-11 16:15

RIYADH: Yemen's foreign minister condemned on Sunday the Houthi militia's continued "intransigence and rejection" of a proposed peace initiative for Yemen.

Ahmed Awad bin Mubarak warned that the continued escalation and military aggression by the Iran-backed Houthis, especially against civilians in Marib, exacerbates the country's humanitarian catastrophe and increases the suffering of the displaced.

Saudi Arabia proposed in March a peace initiative that included a comprehensive cease-fire, reopening Sanaa airport and returning to political negotiations.

However, the Houthis responded by continuing a brutal offensive on oil and gas-rich Marib province. The attack sparked international condemnation as the province had served as a safe haven for around 2.7 million displaced persons who had been fleeing the fighting since the conflict began seven years ago. Bin Mubarak's comments came during a meeting with Cathy Westley, the charge d'affaires of the US embassy to Yemen, to discuss the latest developments in the war and the political process.

The foreign minister called for the need to complete the implementation of the Riyadh Agreement for the south of the country and said Yemen's government appreciates the support and efforts made by Saudi Arabia in order to ensure the full implementation of the deal, state-run Saba news agency reported. The agreement was signed between the internationally-recognized Yemeni government and southern separatists in the Saudi capital in December 2019, and called for the formation of a new government, disarmament of militia groups, the demilitarization of the temporary capital Aden, and improving the economy.

Westley said the US calls on the Houthis to immediately accept a cease-fire and enter into negotiations.

She also reiterated the US position in support of the legitimate government and the security, unity and stability of Yemen.



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Yemen troops seize key Al-Bayda area as Houthis flee Saudi deputy defense minister discusses Yemen, Horn of Africa with US officials

[Shell lands near coalition base in eastern Syria: monitor](#)

Author:

Sun, 2021-07-11 12:42

BEIRUT: A mortar shell landed in a gas field in eastern Syria housing coalition forces, a war monitor reported on Sunday.

It fell in the Conoco gas field in Deir Ezzor province, near a base of the

US-led coalition battling Daesh group remnants, said the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

The war monitor said a blast was heard in the area but there were no immediate reports of casualties.

It said pro-Iran militias were likely responsible for the incident that followed a series of recent attacks on the nearby Al-Omar oil field, which also houses coalition forces.

The state-run SANA news agency said an explosion was heard from the area of the Conoco gas field, but did not provide additional details.

The coalition was not immediately available for comment.

The latest incident came amid heightened tensions following US strikes last month against three targets Washington said were used by pro-Iran groups in eastern Syria and western Iraq.

On Wednesday, Syrian Kurdish forces said they repelled drone attacks near a major coalition base at the Al-Omar oil field.

Last Sunday, Kurdish forces said two unidentified rocket-propelled grenades landed on the western side of the Al-Omar oil field, without causing casualties.

The Observatory blames pro-Iran militias for both attacks.



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