

Turkish police detain pro-Kurdish lawmaker who lost his seat

Author:

Reuters

ID:

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ANKARA – Turkish police on Friday detained a former lawmaker from the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), the party said, after his parliamentary status was revoked last month over a finalized sentence on terrorism charges.

Omer Faruk Gergerlioglu, a human rights activist, was sentenced to 2-1/2 years in prison for terrorism propaganda, in a ruling later upheld by the top appeals court.

The charges were related to a link he shared on Twitter to a news story that included comments by the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). Gergerlioglu denies any wrongdoing.

"This is a shame for Turkey. This is a shame for the ruling party. I am being punished for opposing injustice," Gergerlioglu told broadcaster Arti TV, adding that police were waiting outside his door to take him away.

HDP said it expected Gergerlioglu to be sent to jail.

Thousands of members of the HDP, Turkey's third-largest party, have been tried as part of a years-long crackdown on the party over alleged links to the PKK.

Many prominent members of the party have been jailed, including its former co-leader Selahattin Demirtas, one of Turkey's most well-known politicians. Last month, a top prosecutor moved to shut down the party, after months of calls from President Tayyip Erdogan's nationalist MHP allies.

Critics say Turkish courts are influenced by politics, while Erdogan and his AK Party say they are independent.

Turkey's top court sent the indictment calling for the HDP to be closed back to the prosecutor on procedural grounds this week. But it can be re-submitted after the necessary changes.

HDP denies links to terrorism and has described the move to ban it as a "political coup."

The PKK is designated a terrorist group by Turkey, the United States and European Union. It has fought an insurgency against the state in mainly Kurdish southeast Turkey since 1984.

More than 40,000 people have been killed in the conflict.



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Gergerlioglu stripped of MP status in Turkey
Turkish court upholds jail sentence for pro-Kurdish lawmaker

[US calls on Iran to release all American citizens wrongfully detained](#)

Fri, 2021-04-02 21:22

LONDON: The US on Friday reiterated previous calls for Iran to release all American citizens detained in the country.

The safe return of those detained in Iran or elsewhere was a “top priority” for Washington, Jalina Porter, State Department spokeswoman, said.

“This weekend marks 2,000 days since Iran arrested Siamak Namazi for being a US citizen, she said, adding he “was a businessman living in Tehran when he was arrested in October of 2015.”

His father Baquer Namazi, 84, was also arrested when he traveled to Iran to

help free his son. They have both been sentenced to 10 years in prison on “baseless charges.”

She said “as a result, the Namazi family has suffered for five and a half years while the Iranian government continues to treat their husband, father, son, and brother as political pawns. This terrible milestone should offend all who believe in the rule of law.”

She called on the Iranian government to also “immediately and safely release” Emad Sharghi, and Morad Tahbaz, who is a British citizen

“Iran must also account for the fate of Robert Levinson and other US citizens who are missing or abducted in Iran,” said Porter, adding: “The abhorrent act of unjust detentions for political gain must cease immediately, whether in Iran or anywhere around the world.”

On Wednesday, Ned Price, State Department spokesman, said that the Biden administration had made clear early on that it has “no higher priority than the safe return of Americans who are unjustly detained around the world, and that includes the Americans who are unjustly detained or who are missing in Iran.”

Price added that the US will continue to stress to the Iranian regime that these practices are “unacceptable.”

Porter’s latest comments come as the US and Iran said on Friday they would hold indirect talks in Vienna from Tuesday as part of broader negotiations to revive the 2015 nuclear deal between Tehran and global powers.

Former US President Donald Trump pulled out of the nuclear pact in 2018 and reimposed sanctions on Iran, prompting it to violate some of the accord’s nuclear restrictions. His successor Joe Biden wants to revive the agreement but Washington and Tehran have been at odds over who should take the first step.

(With Reuters)



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[Turkey records 42,308 new coronavirus cases, highest level yet](#)

Author:

Reuters

ID:

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Fri, 2021-04-02 16:59

ANKARA: Turkey recorded 42,308 new coronavirus cases in the last 24 hours, health ministry data showed on Friday, the highest level since the beginning

of the pandemic.

Cases have surged since the government eased measures to curb the pandemic in early March.

On Monday, President Tayyip Erdogan announced a tightening of measures, including the return of full nationwide weekend lockdowns for the Islamic fasting month of Ramadan, which starts on April 13.

The total number of cases stands just above 3.4 million, the data showed. The latest daily death toll was 179, bringing the cumulative toll to 31,892.



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[Biden's gestures to Palestinians only 'symbolic,' says PLO's Hanan Ashrawi](#)

Thu, 2021-04-01 23:53

CHICAGO: Former Palestinian spokesperson Dr. Hanan Ashrawi said newly elected US President Joe Biden is merely pursuing “symbolic changes” in reversing only some of the policies imposed by his predecessor, Donald Trump.

During an interview with the Ray Hanania Radio show – sponsored by Arab News and broadcast in the US – on Wednesday, Ashrawi said that Biden will most likely keep the most contentious changes, such as the US recognizing Jerusalem as Israel’s capital, and moving its embassy from Tel Aviv to the city, in place.

Ashrawi said she resigned from her role as the official spokesperson for the Palestinian delegation to the Middle East peace process, which began with the Madrid Peace Conference of 1991, in order to make room for a younger generation to take over, and has no plans to run for any office in the May 22 Palestinian elections.

“No thank you. I have been running for office since I was in the General Union of Palestine Students as an undergraduate,” she said. “I ran for every office, whether it was for legislative council and until the executive committee of the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization) which is the highest political body.

“I just resigned at the end of 2020 because I felt we needed to make room for the younger generation for young men and women, and because I was calling for reform. We do need to change ... within our own body politic and within our system, we do need to intervene, and reform.”

Ashrawi said that the policies of the Biden administration are clearly different from what she termed “the destructive policies” of the Trump administration. She said not to expect Biden to undo many of the things that Trump did while in office, though, other than a few issues such as returning badly needed US funding and expanded discussions with the administration on economic needs and pursuing the two-state solution.

“When they are saying ‘we will undo some of the things’ it means they are keeping the major issues in place, like moving the embassy to Jerusalem, which is unacceptable,” Ashrawi said.

“Unfortunately, the Biden administration seems to think they can just do a few symbolic gestures, give us a few handouts ... \$15 million for coronavirus relief. Of course, we spend much, much more than that. Actually, the occupation costs us \$10 billion a year in terms of what (Israel) steals from us.”

Making history as the first woman to hold a seat in the highest executive body in Palestine, Ashrawi was elected as member of the Executive Committee of the PLO in 2009 and most recently in 2018.

Ashrawi said that despite the increasing challenges facing Palestinians, the only real goal is to end the occupation.

“Remove the occupation. What we need is to get rid of this illegal, cruel, unacceptable, unconscionable condition where one country has absolute rights over a whole nation – our lands, our resources, our air space, our waters, our borders, our lives,” she said. “Israel devalues, dehumanizes Palestinians and Palestinian lives and gets away with it.

“The moment you address the issue of Israeli impunity and preferential treatment, and address the issue of Palestinian vulnerability and the need for real protection, we are not asking for anything else. That is what is needed: To understand there has to be parity. There has to be equality, and ... the law has to prevail. This strategic alliance with Israel is not only unholy but it is extremely destructive.”



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[Germany to propose Beirut port reconstruction with 'strings attached'](#)

Author:

Reuters

ID:

1617308633144783200

Thu, 2021-04-01 23:36

PARIS/BERLIN: Germany will next week present a multi-billion-dollar proposal to Lebanon to rebuild the Beirut Port as part of efforts to entice Lebanese politicians to form a government capable of warding off financial collapse, two sources said.

A chemical explosion at the port last August killed 200 people, injured thousands and destroyed entire neighborhoods in Lebanon's capital, plunging the country deeper into its worst political and economic crisis since the 1975-1990 civil war.

According to two diplomatic sources with knowledge of the plans, Germany and France are vying to lead reconstruction efforts. Berlin will on April 7 outline a proposal that the European Investment Bank (EIB) has agreed to help fund that would clear the area and reconstruct facilities, they said. One of the sources estimated EIB funding in the range of 2 billion to 3 billion euros.

A senior Lebanese official confirmed that Germany was due to present a comprehensive port reconstruction proposal.

Neither the German foreign ministry nor consultancy firm Roland Berger, which the diplomatic sources said put the plan together, immediately responded to requests for comment. The EIB was not immediately available for comment.

The sources said Lebanon's political elite first need to agree on the make-up of a new government to fix public finances and root out corruption, a condition which donors, including the International Monetary Fund, are also insisting on before they will unlock billions of dollars in aid.

"This plan is not going to come without strings attached," said one of the sources. "Germany and France want first to see a government in place committed to implementing reforms. There is no other way around it and this is good for Lebanon."

Eight months after the port disaster, many Lebanese who lost family, homes and businesses are still waiting for the results of an investigation into the causes of the blast. Lebanon is on the verge of collapse, with shoppers brawling over goods, protesters blocking roads, and businesses shuttered.

Foreign donors have said the new government must have a firm mandate to implement economic reforms, including a central bank audit and an overhaul of the wasteful power sector.

Prime Minister-designate Saad Hariri and President Michel Aoun have been unable to agree on a ministerial line-up, however. The outgoing cabinet, which quit after the explosion, has stayed on in a caretaker capacity. The IMF has said there have been no program discussions with Lebanese officials, only technical assistance with the Ministry of Finance and some state-owned enterprises.

In addition to the port itself, Germany's proposal would look to redevelop more than 100 hectares in the surrounding area in a project that the two diplomatic sources said would be along the lines of the post-war reconstruction of central Beirut.

As in that redevelopment, the plan would involve the creation of a publicly-listed company similar to Solidere, which was set up by former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in the 1990s and remains on the Lebanon stock exchange.

The sources put the project cost at anywhere between \$5 billion to \$15 billion, and said it could create as many as 50,000 jobs.

The Lebanese official said France and French ports and container shipping group CMA CGM were also interested in the reconstruction project.

One of the diplomatic sources noted that France had sent several missions, including one in March that included CMA CGM, that showed an interest in playing a role in the reconstruction. That mission focused on specific clear-up operations rather than a broader redevelopment, however, the source said. France's foreign ministry declined to comment immediately. CMA CGM declined to comment.

The Lebanese official put the onus for getting the project underway on the Europeans agreeing who would be the lead.

"This is a European decision at the end of the day, because they have to decide on it among themselves. Then when it comes to it, the Lebanese government can go ahead," the official said.

The diplomatic sources said Germany wanted to work closely with France on the issue, but that Paris was pursuing its own initiatives for now.

"The irony of all this is that on the one hand the Europeans are talking about putting pressure on the political class while on the other fighting each other over these potential contracts when the vultures are still circling," one said.



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A Lebanese businessman recalls the bittersweet experience of rebuilding after the Beirut blast 'We have no bread': Beirut protesters' plea to minister