

Lebanon's 'doctor for the poor' dies after hospital demanded money for car crash treatment

Tue, 2021-03-30 21:13

BEIRUT: A prominent figure in Lebanon's anti-government protests nicknamed "doctor of the poor" has died after he was unable to pay a \$39 hospital fee. Dr. Mohammed Ajami became a nationwide sensation for supporting poor people at protest sites during the October 2019 demonstrations against Lebanon's ailing government. He was often seen providing free medication and treatment to those unable to afford care in hospitals.

Ajami was injured in a car accident on Sunday and left the hospital after he was asked to pay 500,000 Lebanese pounds (\$39), according to his friends and family.

The doctor and his close friend, Ali Moughnieh, had taken part in a demonstration at Beirut's Martyrs' Square in the afternoon. As he returned to his village, Maarakeh, in southern Lebanon the car he was traveling in suffered a burst tyre, hit a barricade and overturned.

Ajami was conscious when he was rushed to Ala'eddine Hospital in Al-Saraf near the Beirut-Tyre highway.

Moughnieh said Ajami had coughed up some blood but was "awake and conscious" when taken to the hospital.

In an emotional video he said they waited for three hours for Ajami's son to bring money to them.

"They (the hospital) had denied him admission without money," Moughnieh said.

The hospital's director Dr. Hassan Ala'eddine denied that Ajami had been refused admission for treatment.

He said Ajami arrived at the hospital at 6.30 p.m. with head trauma and abdominal pain and asked to be treated without undergoing a scan.

However, he returned within an hour with more pain and swelling in his abdomen and looking pale.

Scans showed that Ajami had bleeding in the spleen and liver along a rupture of the main arteries. He was admitted for urgent surgery, but later died in intensive care from a cardiac arrest.

Ajami's nephew, Ahmad Suleiman, who is also a doctor, told Arab News that his uncle became irritated when the hospital asked him for money for a scan and so he left.

“Later he returned when his situation worsened,” Suleiman said.

He said the hospital should have admitted his injured uncle immediately, especially given that the car had overturned several times.

He said they would ask the health ministry to investigate.

Ajami, an ear, nose, and throat specialist, became well-known in Lebanon through his constant presence in almost every demonstration since protests erupted in 2019.

He often appeared in social media videos at protests, calling for the removal of corrupt politicians and demanding for the poor to have access to free medication and improved health care.

Suleiman said that despite his uncle’s own financial state, he always helped the poor.



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Lebanon’s collapse puts financial strain on students studying abroad
Lebanese protesters back on the streets... in their cars

US announces nearly \$600m in humanitarian aid to Syrians

Tue, 2021-03-30 21:04

CHICAGO: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced nearly \$600 million in humanitarian assistance to Syria.

Blinken made the announcement during a conference on “Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region” in Brussels.

“There is no military solution that will bring peace, security, and stability to Syria, and the region,” he said in a statement.

“Systemic corruption and economic mismanagement at the hands of the Assad regime have exacerbated the dire humanitarian crisis, which has been further compounded by the challenge of COVID-19.”

US Ambassador to the UN Linda Thomas-Greenfield said during a press briefing attended by Arab News on Tuesday: “This funding brings the total US government humanitarian assistance to nearly \$13 billion since the start of the decade-long crisis, including nearly \$141 million in support of the COVID-19 pandemic response in Syria and the region.”

She added: “US assistance will benefit many of the estimated 13.4 million Syrians inside Syria in need of humanitarian assistance, as well as 5.6 million Syrian refugees in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt.”

Richard Albright, acting principal deputy assistant secretary of the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration, said 75 percent of the more than 4 million displaced Syrians in the northwest of the country depend on humanitarian aid to survive.

“Our assistance doesn’t go to governments. It goes to people who depend on it ... The assistance flows through UN agencies and NGOs,” he added.



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'Shame on us' if the suffering of Syrians continues, Blinken tells UN UN seeks \$10 billion for Syrians as humanitarian needs soar

[Lebanon's collapse puts financial strain on students studying abroad](#)

Author:

Tue, 2021-03-30 20:58

BEIRUT: Families of students studying abroad protested on Tuesday against Lebanese banks for their procrastination in implementing the "Student Dollar" law that enables families to transfer funds to their children at universities in other countries.

In the Beirut neighborhood of Hamra, protesters prevented employees from

entering the banks and blocked traffic with burning tires. Other protesters attempted to raid a closed bank while staff worked inside.

Parents cannot transfer money due to the sudden rise in the exchange rate of the dollar. As a result, some students studying abroad have been expelled from their universities and their residencies have been canceled, while others await the same fate.

In October 2020, the Lebanon Parliament approved the Student Dollar law, which allowed Lebanese banks to dispense up to \$10,000 according to the official exchange rate (LBP 1,515 to the dollar). That money would go to every Lebanese student enrolled in a foreign university or technical institute prior to the 2020-2021 academic year. The law also included students who did not have a bank account.

According to the Association of Families of Lebanese Students Abroad, 200 students have been expelled from universities so far. A majority of the students were enrolled in Europe or Russia.

Banks are refusing to implement the Student Dollar law because no decrees have been issued.

Meanwhile, the families of prisoners in Lebanon also took to the streets on Tuesday to protest authorities who have reduced the volume of meals for inmates. Due to the rising prices, meals have reportedly been served to prisoners without meat.

Families protested near Roumieh Prison, the country's largest correctional facility.

As protests rage in the streets of Lebanon, thefts have also swelled to unprecedented levels, according to a security source. One suspect, who is already in custody, allegedly stole more than 100 Kia and Hyundai cars and was trying to resell them in Syria.

"He also formed a robbery gang and there are many arrest warrants and prison sentences against him," an official security report said.

A Lebanese soldier, who was later identified as a member of the army intelligence forces, was arrested along with one of his relatives for a robbery attempt in Aley. The soldier said his salary was not enough, which forced him to resort to theft.

"The owner of a livestock farm arrested the robbers after they seized iron scaffolding and then he handed the suspects over to the municipal police. One suspect was found to be carrying a military card," the Progressive Socialist Party said.

Meanwhile, French Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs Jean-Yves Le Drian spoke with Lebanese President Michel Aoun, Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri and Prime Minister-designate Saad Hariri on Monday night.

"Le Drian has deplored the months-long total deadlock in the discussions

aimed at forming a government in Lebanon,” the French Embassy said in a statement.

Le Drian reiterated that Lebanon’s political forces as a whole bear complete responsibility for this impasse and stressed that any deliberate blocking of government formation must end immediately.

On another note, Lebanon’s private sector opened its first coronavirus vaccination campaign on Tuesday as the operation targeted Middle East Airlines employees, airport staff and workers.

“The goal is to continue working in companies and institutions that have seen a decline in productivity due to employees and their families contracting the virus,” said Jacques Sarraf, Pharmaline chairman, who played a major role in bringing the Sputnik V vaccine to the private sector in Lebanon.

“If the private sector wants to wait for the state to vaccinate its employees, it has to wait for more than a year.”

Lebanon began its state-run inoculation campaign in mid-February after finalizing a deal for some 2 million doses with Pfizer, the Associated Press reported. The first batch of 50,000 doses of Sputnik V vaccines arrived last week, making Lebanon one of few nations where the COVID-19 vaccine rollout is being boosted by the private sector.



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Lebanon approves crisis funding to avert power blackout
Lebanon could sink 'like Titanic' if no government formed, warns parliament speaker

France reopens its embassy in Tripoli

Tue, 2021-03-30 00:29

TRIPOLI: France has reopened its embassy in Libya after a seven-year closure as insecurity swept the country following its 2011 revolution, in another sign of a gradual return of stability.

Its representative resumed operations behind a tall compound wall in a new building on the outskirts of Tripoli.

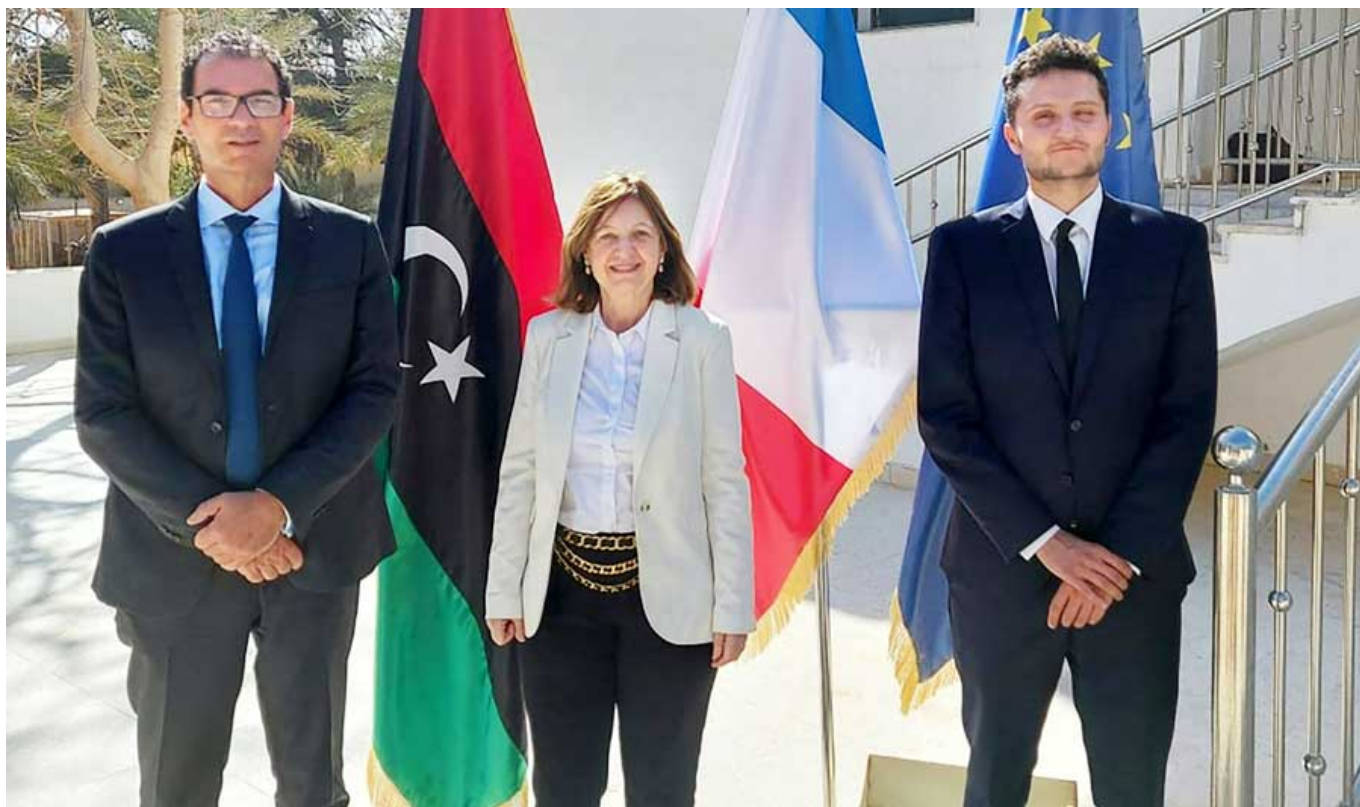
French President Emmanuel Macron announced the reopening last week after talks in Paris with the head of Libya's newly installed presidential council, Mohammed Al-Manfi.

Libya descended into chaos after its leader Muammar Qaddafi was toppled and killed in a NATO-backed uprising a decade ago, leaving multiple forces vying for power. Most diplomats and other foreigners left the North African country after repeated attacks and kidnappings, notably a terrorist assault on the US Consulate in the eastern city of Benghazi in September 2012 that killed ambassador Chris Stevens and three other Americans.

The French Embassy was targeted in an April 2013 car bombing that wounded two gendarmes, after which it was moved to a hotel before relocating in July 2014 to Tunis, like most other foreign missions.

Fighting only came to a halt last summer, and a formal ceasefire in October was followed by the establishment of a new Government of National Unity (GNU).

Italy already returned its embassy to Tripoli in 2017, while several other countries, such as Egypt, Greece and Malta, are to follow France's lead.



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Egyptian president says 'all mercenaries' must be removed from Libya
France's Macron and Egypt's El-Sisi discuss Libya, GERD

[UN experts withdraw corruption claims against Yemen central bank](#)

Mon, 2021-03-29 23:42

AL-MUKALLA: A UN panel has retracted money laundering and corruption claims against Yemen's central bank, according to a government official.

In January, the UN Panel of Experts on Yemen accused the Aden-based institution of embezzling funds from a hefty Saudi deposit, which was allocated for buying food, and helping Yemeni conglomerates to rack up millions of dollars in profits.

Last week, after an internal review, the experts informed the government they were withdrawing their accusations about the central bank and promised to update the report.

"They informed us about the withdrawal of their accusations on March 25," the

government official told Arab News on Monday, speaking on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to brief reporters.

The experts' accusations caused uproar in Yemen, prompting the government to assign an international auditing company to look into the financial activities of the central bank and accusing the panel of using a wrong mechanism during its investigation.

Parliament also formed a committee of financial officials to investigate the accusations.

The government said that the Saudi deposit had alleviated the humanitarian crisis, helped steady the Yemeni riyal and lower the price of foodstuffs.

In its report on Friday, the Sanaa Centre for Strategies Studies said it had found "serious" flaws in the UN report regarding the government's management of the Saudi deposit and its impact on the stability of the local currency and food prices.

"While Yemenis have suffered from currency depreciation and price inflation throughout most of the conflict, they received a relative reprieve from the end of 2018 to the end of 2019, when the average price of a minimum food basket decreased slightly year-on-year and the Yemeni riyal exchange rate was generally stable," the report said, responding to the panel's assertions that the central bank's management of the deposit did not benefit the Yemeni people and did not lead to a decrease in prices.

The center demanded that the UN Panel of Experts on Yemen "immediately" fix errors in its report, review the mechanism that had led to their wrong conclusions and seek help from Yemeni financial experts.

The retraction came as fighting between government forces and the Houthis intensified in the central province of Marib and the western province of Hodeidah, state media said on Monday.

In the province of Marib, the government's Executive Unit for IDP Camps said that nine displaced people, including seven women, were wounded when a barrage of shells and rockets fired by the Houthis ripped through three displacement camps on Sunday.

The unit urged the UN Special Envoy for Yemen Martin Griffiths and international aid organizations to pressure the Houthis to stop attacking the camps in Marib.

It said that more than 17,000 people had been displaced from homes and camps since last month, when the Houthis launched a major offensive to capture Marib city.

"We demand all human rights and humanitarian organizations and the relevant authorities to visit the (targeted) camps to document violations," the unit added.

Fighting also broke out in the Red Sea city of Hodeidah, where government

forces repulsed a Houthi attack in Kilo 16, which links the city with Sanaa.



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