

Lebanese activist released after 10 months in jail for collaborating with Israel

Tue, 2021-03-16 23:35

BEIRUT: A Lebanese social media activist serving a three-year prison sentence for “collaborating” with Israel, was granted bail on Tuesday, her lawyer told Arab News.

Kinda Al-Khatib, in her twenties, was arrested in June and charged with collaborating with “the enemy,” entering the occupied Palestinian territories and collaborating with Israeli spies.

Lebanon is technically still at war with Israel and forbids its citizens from traveling there.

Al-Khatib was sentenced to three years in prison in December.

Her lawyer Jocelyne Al-Rai told Arab News on Tuesday that Al-Khatib was granted bail and released after she had appealed the primary ruling against her client.

“The upcoming hearing will be held on April 8 before the Military Cassation Court. We have documents that prove my client’s innocence,” Al-Rai said.

The lawyer said that as part of her defence argument she would seek to acquit her client before Chief Judge Tani Lattouff.

Al-Khatib had pleaded innocent, said Al-Rai who expects the higher court to overturn the primary judgment and acquit her client of all charges.

“The military appeals court on Tuesday decided to release the activist Kinda Al-Khatib in exchange for a bail of three million Lebanese pounds,” (\$1,990 officially, \$200 at the market rate), a judicial source told AFP.

Since mass protests erupted in Lebanon in October 2019, several social media activists have been detained.

Al-Khatib’s family and activists denounced her arrest at the time as “political” and a reaction to her tweets against those in power.

Al-Khatib had used her Twitter account to criticize Hezbollah.

Lebanese media and activists drew a parallel between Khatib’s case and that of actor Ziad Itani, who was also accused of “collaborating” with Israel in 2017.

Itani was declared innocent and released several months later, and a high-ranking security officer was then charged with “fabricating” the case.



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[Kinda Al-Khatib](#)

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Lebanon jails activist Kinda Al-Khatib for 'collaborating' with Israel
Protests against detention of Lebanese activist Kinda Al-Khatib

[UAE looks to UK drone researchers for rainfall boost](#)

Author:

Tue, 2021-03-16 22:43

LONDON: British researchers have been tasked by the UAE to explore ways to induce rainfall in the Gulf by using drones that beam electricity into clouds.

The UAE has paid \$1.4 million to the UK team to test how an electric charge can expand and merge water droplets to develop into rainfall.

This is a new move to promote "cloud seeding" in a country that uses aircraft that drop chemicals into clouds to boost rainfall by up to 30 percent, according to its own figures.

Some 80 percent of the UAE's food supply is imported, promoting concerns about sustainability for the oil-rich nation.

But researchers at the University of Reading hope to buck the rainfall trend by using drones to deliver pulses of charged ions into the atmosphere.

They believe that using low-power electrical bursts on cloud droplets could encourage raindrops to form.

Many countries have used alternative methods to spark rainfall, including spraying salt compounds, silver iodide and dry ice into the atmosphere.

China made headlines before the 2008 Olympic Games opening ceremony in Beijing for influencing the weather with similar methods.

Alya Al-Mazroui, director of the UAE's rain enhancement science research program, said the remote-controlled drones developed in the UK will be tested at a flight center in Dubai.

"Equipped with a payload of electric charge emission instruments and customized sensors, these drones will fly at low altitudes and deliver an electric charge to air molecules, which should encourage precipitation," she said.

Dr. Keri Nicoll, an associate professor at the University of Reading who is involved in the project, said: "If you emit a charge within a cloud, very quickly the charge will be gathered up by the water droplets. Our theory and modeling work has shown that charging these small droplets can increase the likelihood of them merging through electrostatic forces, and ultimately help them become raindrops."

With average rainfall of only 100 mm per year, the UAE is investing heavily in this new research to raise freshwater supplies.

Al-Mazroui said it is too early to predict the efficacy of the study, which is one of nine "rain enhancement" projects that were given \$15 million of funding from the UAE's Ministry of Presidential Affairs in 2017.



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UAE carries out 219 cloud seeding operations in H1 2020 Experts clear air on 'cloud seeding' mechanism

[All Palestinian factions attend Cairo dialogue](#)

Tue, 2021-03-16 21:40

CAIRO: The Palestinian national dialogue sessions began with the participation of all factions on Tuesday in Cairo.

A few days ago, Egypt sent calls to the Palestinian factions to complete the national dialogue on March 16 and 17 before the candidacy process began for legislative council elections. This process starts in five days and focuses on rebuilding and restructuring the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).

The factions that arrived in Cairo, using the Rafah land crossing, confirmed they would discuss the foundations and mechanisms through which the formation of the new Palestinian National Council would be completed, and that any obstacles that may still exist before the elections would be removed.

"Activating, developing and rebuilding the Palestine Liberation Organization has been a national demand for 16 years," Khalil Al-Hayya, a member of the political bureau of Hamas, said. "We hope that we have reached this important milestone to restore respect to the Palestinian cause and stand together in front of the challenges."

Factions also confirmed that the dialogue would discuss Palestinian National Council elections, integrating the rest of the factions within the PLO framework, and discussing in detail the criteria for forming the council, whether it would be by consensus or by conducting direct elections, and the final number of its members.

The meeting will also discuss the development and activation of the PLO so that all factions can enter into the principle of political partnership.

Jamil Mezher, a member of the political bureau of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, said: "The importance of this round is the agreement to reconfigure the Palestinian National Council, and then the Central Council and the Executive Committee, and discuss the separation of authority from the organization as the organization is the political reference."

An agreement was signed on Feb. 9 between the Palestinian factions, sponsored by Egypt, to hold legislative, presidential and national elections for the first time in nearly 15 years.

It was also agreed to complete the dialogue sessions and discuss procedures related to elections and the council.

Faction officials said they viewed the Cairo dialogues as very important.

Mohammad Al-Hindi, a member of the political bureau of Islamic Jihad, said his movement had a proposal aimed at building a new national council through an election.

Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh expressed hope that the factions would be able to add the final touches to the national consensus to hold the elections.

He thanked Egypt's efforts in hosting the sessions and for its contribution to facilitating the holding of elections.

Hisham Kahil, executive director of the Central Election Commission, confirmed that the committee would participate in the next round of dialogue because the most prominent topic it would discuss was securing the elections.



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UAE sets up \$10bn fund to invest in Israel

[Assad responsible for Syrian suffering – joint US, European statement](#)

Tue, 2021-03-16 01:22

LONDON: Syrian President Bashar Assad and his backers bear responsibility for the years of war and human suffering that followed, the US and a number of European countries said on Monday.

“The Assad regime’s response has been one of appalling violence,” the foreign ministers of the US, UK, France, Germany, and Italy said in a joint statement issued on the 10-year anniversary of the Syrian uprising.

“We praise the brave individuals and organizations who over the last ten years have exposed the truth from Syria, documented and pursued abuses, mass atrocities, and grave violations of international law to hold the perpetrators accountable and delivered vital assistance to communities,” they said.

The United States stands with the Syrian people and continues to call for an end to violence, accountability for atrocities, and a political resolution to end this conflict.

pic.twitter.com/qWN2v6bEHk

– Department of State (@StateDept) [March 15, 2021](#)

The foreign ministers also said that a decade of conflict, widespread corruption, and economic upheaval have left the Syrian economy “broken.” More than half of the population, nearly 13 million Syrians, depend upon humanitarian assistance, the statement said.

“Continued conflict has also led to space for terrorists, particularly Daesh, to exploit,” they said, adding that preventing Daesh’s resurgence remains a priority.

The US and Europe said the Syrian regime and its supporters must “engage seriously in the political process and allow humanitarian assistance to reach communities in need.”

Syrians have suffered horrific violence and conflict for 10 years.

The UK has provided vital aid to those in need from the start.

Today we have announced new sanctions against members of the Assad regime

We continue to push for an end to the conflict. <https://t.co/vFeNkAF8G5> pic.twitter.com/vVLk0sbwFe

– Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (@FCDOGovUK) [March 15, 2021](#)

On the proposed presidential election this year, the foreign ministers said they would neither be free nor fair, and should not lead to any normalization of ties with the Syrian regime.

“Any political process needs the participation of all Syrians, including the diaspora and the displaced, to enable all voices to be heard,” they said, adding they must be under the auspices of the UN.

Millions of Syrians have fled the fighting over the last ten years, the majority of which are hosted by Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, and Egypt, in addition to those who are internally displaced and are unable to return home.

What began with peaceful demonstrations against the Syrian regime 10 years ago is now a conflict with an international dimension.

Here, we provide answers to the 7 most important questions.

<https://t.co/2EkpyPvr2E#Syria10> [#WithSyria](#) <https://t.co/xbuHUt3vKt>

– GermanForeignOffice (@GermanyDiplo) [March 15, 2021](#)

“We will not abandon the Syrian people (and) our nations commit to reinvigorating the pursuit of a peaceful solution which protects the rights and future prosperity of all Syrians, based on UN Security Council Resolution 2254,” the statement said.

The foreign ministers added that they would not tolerate impunity or non-compliance with the Chemical Weapons Convention, firmly continue to press for accountability for crimes, and welcomed the “ongoing efforts by national courts to investigate and prosecute crimes within their jurisdiction committed in Syria.”

France stands with the Syrian people through these tragic times:

- Humanitarian assistance and stabilization programmes
 - The fight against impunity for crimes committed in [#Syria](#)
 - Defence of international law and [#UNSC](#) resolutions
- pic.twitter.com/rkkjIflYoe

– France Diplomacy (@francediplo_EN) [March 15, 2021](#)

They also called for a nationwide cease-fire, unhindered aid access to those in need, and the release of those arbitrarily detained.

“We reiterate our firm support for UN Special Envoy for Syria Geir Pedersen’s efforts as the only way to resolve this conflict, the statement said, adding: “We cannot allow this tragedy to last another decade.”



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Thousands rally in Syria's Idlib to mark 10 years since uprising
UK sanctions allies of Syrian President Assad, including foreign minister

[Palestinian delegations plan to meet in Cairo to discuss elections](#)

Author:

Tue, 2021-03-16 00:45

RAMALLAH: Palestinian rival factions Fatah and Hamas will hold a new round of talks on Tuesday in the Egyptian capital to push on with plans for forthcoming elections.

The meeting, announced on Monday by Hamas and Fatah, will come more than a month after the two factions agreed in Cairo talks on "mechanisms" for the polls.

The parliamentary and presidential polls are set for May 22 and July 31, respectively, and will be the first Palestinian elections in 15 years.

Hamas, blacklisted as a terrorist group by the EU and the US, won an unexpected landslide at the last elections in 2006, a victory not recognized by President Mahmoud Abbas' Fatah.

That led to bloody clashes the following year and a split in Palestinian governance.

Fatah has since run the Palestinian Authority in the Israeli-occupied West Bank and Hamas has held power in the Gaza Strip since 2007, the year Israel imposed a devastating blockade on the coastal enclave.

To avoid a repetition of the tensions and violence that erupted in 2009, the two groups met in Cairo in February and agreed a series of steps, including setting up an "electoral court" to oversee the polls.

SPEEDREAD

The parliamentary and presidential polls are set for May 22 and July 31, respectively, and will be the first Palestinian elections in 15 years.

They also declared they were committed to respecting the results of the forthcoming vote.

On Tuesday in Cairo, the two sides will discuss “key issues linked to the elections,” Hamas official Khalil Al-Khalil said.

“After the legislative elections, we would like to form a national unity government ... and we would prefer to reach consensus on just one national candidate for the presidential vote,” he said.

A spokesman for Abbas, meanwhile, stressed that the Palestinian Authority president is determined to see through the elections despite tensions within Fatah.

Last week, Fatah expelled prominent member Nasser Al-Kidwa from the movement after he announced he would seek the Palestinian presidency in what was seen as an affront to Abbas.

Kidwa is a nephew of the iconic late Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat.



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Fatah sacks longtime party member over Palestine election breakaway bid