

Turkish court upholds jail sentence for pro-Kurdish lawmaker

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ANKARA: Turkey's Court of Appeal has upheld a prison sentence for a pro-Kurdish lawmaker and activist.

A two-and-a-half-year jail term is being sought for Omer Faruk Gergerlioglu, who is also a member of a parliamentary commission responsible for monitoring human rights violations and has consistently drawn attention to allegations of rights abuses.

"We are with him until the end," his supporters tweeted.

Gergerlioglu is a deputy in the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), which the government accuses of having links with the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party.

He was convicted on charges of "making terrorist propaganda" for retweeting a T24 news story about the Kurdish conflict and the collapse of the peace process.

His conviction over a social media post had the "hallmark of an attempt to silence him," Amnesty International's Turkey campaigner Milena Buyum told Arab News.

"The extent of the dissenting opinion of the appeal court judge confirms this concern," she added. "No one should be subjected to judicial harassment for highlighting allegations of human rights violations."

Gergerlioglu said last December that female suspects and detainees had been subjected to humiliating strip searches by police in provinces across Turkey.

While his allegations were supported by thousands of prisoners who told dissident media outlets about their experiences of systematic sexual violence at the hands of the police, Interior Minister Suleyman Soylu denied them and accused Gergerlioglu of being a "terrorist."

The lawmaker is also a doctor, but was dismissed from the profession by presidential decree.

"After my dad was dismissed from his medical profession a couple of years ago, he was punched in the middle of the street by someone who claimed that my dad was a terrorist," Gergerlioglu's son Salih told Arab News. "I remember very well the big bruise on his face. He was so calm but I wasn't. He explains to everyone that he was on the right track."

The ruling government had "instrumentalized statehood for consolidating its power" rather than reaching out to people in need, he said, and had prioritized the party over society by criminalizing dissident people. "We need to communicate with every vulnerable segment of society, be it Armenians or Kurds, in order to heal these fault lines in society. It is a must. Struggling for a cause starts with knowing the land you live in. Thanks to my dad, I have been immersed in the struggle for defending human rights from my

childhood. I owe him a lot.”

Salih founded the Movement of the Others with friends who felt alienated in Turkish society because of reasons connected to their identities.

“This society will change one day,” he added, “and this transformation will be realized with the cooperation and mutual understanding between those who are oppressed. Whatever they do, they cannot silence my dad, who keeps telling me to gauge my justness all the time with fairness and not to give up my cause if I am right.”

Prosecutors have prepared summaries of proceedings against nine HDP lawmakers over investigations into 2014’s Kobani protests. They have been submitted to the Justice Ministry and the lawmakers will go before a court if they are stripped of their parliamentary immunity.



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Fears of crackdowns on Turkey’s Kurdish parties and voters
Turkey targets jailed activist’s cultural organization

[**Russian air assault kills 21 Daesh**](#)

militants in Syria

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BEIRUT: A wave of air strikes by government ally Russia killed at least 21 Daesh militants in the Syrian desert over the past 24 hours, a monitor said Saturday.

The 21 were killed in at least 130 air strikes "carried out over the past 24 hours by the Russian air force targeting Daesh in an area on the edge of the provinces of Aleppo, Hama and Raqqa," the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

The raids, which continued into Saturday, follow a series of Daesh attacks Friday on government and allied forces that killed at least eight members of a pro-Damascus militia, the Britain-based monitor said.

In recent months, the vast desert, know in Arabic as the Badia, has been the scene of increasingly frequent fighting between the extremists and government forces backed by Russian air power.

Daesh overran large parts of Syria and Iraq and proclaimed a cross-border "caliphate" in 2014, before multiple offensives in the two countries led to its territorial defeat.

The militants continue to launch attacks, mostly in the Badia desert which stretches from the central province of Homs to the border with Iraq.

More than 1,300 government troops have been killed in these clashes, as well as 145 pro-Iran militia members and more than 750 Daesh militants, according to the Observatory.

Since Syria's civil war broke out in 2011, more than 387,000 people have been killed and millions forced from their homes.



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[Sudan slams Ethiopia over 'insulting' border crisis statement](#)

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Sat, 2021-02-20 14:35

DUBAI: Sudan's Foreign Ministry slammed a statement issued by the Ethiopian Foreign Ministry accusing Khartoum of serving the "interests of a third party" in the border crisis, state news SUNA reported on Saturday. The Sudanese Foreign Ministry described the Ethiopian statement as a "betrayal to the history of Ethiopia's relations with Sudan and a denial to the mutual relations between the people of the two countries," the report said.

In condemning Sudan's recent military actions, the Ethiopian Foreign Ministry said in a statement that "the Ethiopian government strongly believes that the conflict being trumpeted by the Sudanese government's military wing could only serve the interests of a third party at the expense of the Sudanese people," the statement read."

The Sudanese National Army "violated the basic principles of international law and peaceful settlements of disputes by unceremoniously invading Ethiopia" in early November 2020, the Ethiopian statement claimed.

Ethiopia stated that Sudan had "overturned and undermined" the efforts of the joint boundary committees that have been working to finalize the re-demarcation process for the border. Ethiopia also accused the Sudanese army of looting properties, burning camps, attacking and displacing thousands of Ethiopians and controlling vacated Ethiopian Military Camps.

In response, however, Sudan referred to the statement as "unfortunate" and "insulting", and that it "betrayed the history of Ethiopia's relations with Sudan."

Sudan stated it was "keen" to continue and develop its relations with Ethiopia for the benefit of the citizens of the two countries and to "enter into future partnerships that contribute to achieving security, stability and economic growth."

Sudan's statement called on Ethiopia to take the available legal options, regionally and internationally, not to threaten the international security, affirming Sudan's sovereignty over the land that Ethiopia claims sovereignty over.

Amid the escalating tensions between the two countries, the Sudanese Foreign Ministry said last week that it had summoned its ambassador to Ethiopia for consultations as tensions between the two neighbors had escalated in recent weeks over border disputes.



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[New Lebanese prosecutor to lead probe into Beirut blast](#)

Fri, 2021-02-19 22:52

BEIRUT: Lebanon's top judicial body on Friday named a new judge to lead the investigation into last year's massive explosion at Beirut's port, officials said, a day after his predecessor was removed following legal challenges by senior officials he had accused of negligence that led to the blast.

The High Judicial Council named judge Tarek Bitar as the new prosecutor after he was proposed for the post by Minister of Justice Marie-Claude Najm, said the officials. They spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak to the media.

Despite the fast appointment of Bitar, who has been described by colleagues as respectable and having no political leanings, the removal of his predecessor by the country's top court this week will likely further delay the investigation into the horrific explosion that killed 211 people, wounded

over 6,000 and damaged large parts of Beirut.

Families of the victims and survivors of the Aug. 4 blast have accused the ruling political class of corruption and negligence that led to the explosion of ammonium nitrates, a highly explosive material used in fertilizers that had been improperly stored in the port for years.

"Tarek Bitar is a young judge who is competent and enjoys a good reputation," tweeted lawyer Nizar Saghieh, who usually deals with anti-corruption cases. "The test will be whether he will be allowed to carry out his mission without interference or pressure."

Earlier on Friday, families of the victims rallied near the justice ministry in Beirut, denouncing the removal of Judge Fadi Sawwan from the probe and calling it an "execution of justice" by a politicized judiciary.

The families read a statement, burned tires and said the new judge will have to read "thousands of papers" in order to get up to speed on what Sawwan had done over the past six months.

Sawwan's removal came after legal challenges by senior officials he had accused of negligence that led to the blast, considered one of the largest non-nuclear explosions in history. Sawwan was formally notified earlier on Friday that he would no longer lead the probe.

The families' spokesman Ibrahim Hoteit, whose brother Tharwat was killed by the blast, said the removal blew up "what remains of conscience and confidence between us and this rotten judiciary."

The Beirut port explosion has been one of the most traumatic national experiences the Lebanese have faced and families of those killed are skeptical that any investigation into the explosion can be transparent and independent in a country where a culture of impunity has prevailed for decades.

Judge Sawwan had accused and summoned for questioning Lebanon's caretaker prime minister and three former ministers on suspicion of negligence that led to the deadly explosion. Two of the former ministers challenged him in court in December, accusing him of violating legal and constitutional procedures and asking that he be recused, a challenge that brought the probe to a halt. At the Beirut rally, the victims' families also warned that in the future, they would resort to the street to pressure the judiciary to do its work, as well as politicians who refuse to show up for questioning.



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[Briton held in Iran 'completely shut off' after losing phone access](#)

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LONDON: A British-Iranian dual citizen being held prisoner in Iran has lost access to a phone, depriving him of his lifeline to sanity and the outside world, according to his wife.

Anoosheh Ashoori "is completely shut off, and the daily phone conversations were his route to sanity and what was going on in the world, including how

the campaign was going for his release. He is completely dependent on those calls," his wife Sherry told [The Guardian](#) newspaper.

Ashoori, 66, is serving a 10-year sentence for allegedly spying for Israel – charges he denies. The father of two insists he is being held hostage and has attempted suicide in jail.

He previously sent pleas to British Prime Minister Boris Johnson to do more to secure his release from Evin prison – infamous for its role in holding political prisoners and foreign nationals.

While detained, Ashoori has given first-hand accounts of a typical day in Evin, and also spoken out about the spread of coronavirus in the prison. Iranian authorities are said to have strongly objected to a message he sent out in December that was picked up by Persian media and touched on the pandemic and his treatment.

He had recorded two other messages that discussed the impact of prison on dividing families, and the lavish lifestyles of Iranian officials' children living abroad – though his wife did not distribute them to protect his safety. It is possible that authorities heard those recordings.

Rights groups and the UN have long criticized Tehran's seemingly arbitrary detention of foreigners and dual nationals.

In a 2019 report, the UN special rapporteur on human rights in Iran, Javaid Rehman, expressed deep concern about the continued "arbitrary arrest, detention, ill-treatment and denial of appropriate medical treatment of dual and foreign nationals." He said they are often subject to sham trials and used to obtain "diplomatic leverage."

Iran is currently detaining a number of dual nationals. British-Iranian Nazanin Zaghari-Ractliffe is nearing the end of her five-year sentence, but has previously been threatened with fresh charges. Her husband says Tehran is holding her hostage.

German-Iranian Nahid Taghavi has been held in Evin since October 2020. She has serious medical conditions, including diabetes and high blood pressure, putting her at high risk from COVID-19.

Amnesty International has called her detention "arbitrary," saying: "She is a prisoner of conscience and must be immediately and unconditionally released."



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