

# Lebanon high court says prosecutor can resume port probe

Author:

AP

ID:

1610399205348339200

Mon, 2021-01-11 15:37

BEIRUT: Lebanon's highest court said Monday the prosecutor investigating last year's massive explosion at the Beirut port that killed dozens and injured thousands can resume his work after a three-week pause following legal challenges to his authority.

The Court of Cassation's decision gives the green light to Judge Fadi Sawwan to question officials and civil servants over the Aug. 4 explosion of nearly 3,000 tons of ammonium nitrate, a highly explosive material used mostly as a fertilizer. The blast killed more than 200 people, injured over 6,000 and damaged entire neighborhoods in the capital.

The court's decision, reported by the official state news agency, is likely to ease concerns by members of the public who feared the investigation might end given Lebanon's decades-long culture of impunity.

Nearly 30 people, most of them port and customs officials, have been arrested since the blast. Last month, Sawwan filed charges against caretaker Prime Minister Hassan Diab and three former ministers, accusing them of negligence leading to the deaths of hundreds of people.

Diab and the three former ministers did not show up for questioning following the charges.

The summoning sparked concerted criticism from most of Lebanon's top politicians and the militant Hezbollah group, which urged Sawwan to reconsider his decision, describing it as politically motivated.

Sawwan paused his investigation to allow him to respond to accusations that he violated legal and constitutional procedures by summoning for questioning Diab and the three former ministers.

Many critics have seen the attacks on Sawwan as an attempt by the political elite to prevent setting a precedent that might bring accountability at the highest level.

Two of the accused former ministers, who are currently members of parliament, challenged Sawwan's decision to question them and asked the Court of Cassation to replace him, citing "legitimate suspicion" over its legality.

The court, the highest in the country, had not decided on the matter regarding the two ministers as of Monday, state-run National News Agency said.



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## [Intimidation mars Working Journalists' Day in Turkey](#)

Author:

Mon, 2021-01-11 23:27

ANKARA: Turkey marked Working Journalists' Day on Jan. 10 as media workers in the country face increasing curbs on press freedom.

Currently there are about 62 journalists in Turkish prisons, mostly facing trials under the Anti-Terror Law and Turkish Penal Code.

According to Press in Arrest, a volunteer group monitoring trials of Turkish

journalists, at least 352 journalists have been prosecuted in 230 press trials over the past two and a half years.

The country ranked 154th among 180 countries in Reporters Without Borders' 2020 World Press Freedom Index.

A report by Turkey's main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) revealed that journalists appeared 479 times in court over the past year for their journalistic activities.

"We even didn't experience such oppression during the coup of 1980," Kemal Kilicdaroglu, leader of the CHP, said in a press statement.

Olay TV, a private news channel with a reputation for independent and objective reporting, was shut down by governmental pressure after being on air for only 26 days at the end of last year.

About 90 percent of the media landscape is controlled by pro-government conglomerates in Turkey.

Despite the deteriorating conditions for press freedom in the country, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan released a message to mark Working Journalists' Day, saying: "We will never allow this concept to be abused and used for black propaganda against our country both within our country and abroad."

In a new book, Turkish journalist Serdar Akinan has claimed that then Prime Minister Erdogan squeezed his neck in 2005 during a press conference in Abu Dhabi. "My neck hurt, but I couldn't say anything," he wrote in his book.

Erdogan recently targeted an opposition newspaper, saying "I don't read Sozcu newspaper. Nobody buys it." The warning was seen as a clear sign of pressure over the media in the country.

Last year, Turkish radio and TV channels failed to cover the news about the resignation of Finance and Treasury Minister Berat Albayrak, Erdogan's son-in-law, for 27 hours for fear of drawing government's ire.

The Turkish Health Ministry removed a female journalist from its online communications group over her critical questions about social distancing rules in gatherings of state officials.

Utku Cakirozer, a lawmaker from the CHP who is a journalist by profession, said the ruling government cannot tolerate the slightest opposition to its official narrative and tries to suppress the media's role in informing people.

"If they are sincere in their reform commitments, they should start by bringing more freedom to the media sphere. However, the trials and arrests against journalists keep increasing and journalism is still seen as a 'major crime' in Turkey," he told Arab News.

Cakirozer noted that the government uses the judiciary as leverage over the

media, and that political intervention into the judicial sphere further undermines press freedom in the country.

“Turkey must end the public ad bans on independent newspapers that curbs their independent journalism. However, the government uses its stick all time over them,” he said.

Last year, five dissident newspapers were banned from receiving advertisements for a total of 333 days.

Cakirozer criticized the current practice in the government’s provision of press cards to the media officials.

“Independent and dissident journalists are often denied access to this press card that guarantees them social security provisions in performing their job. Press cards should be provided by professional organizations, not state authorities,” he said.

After publishing a controversial book based on investigations about the state apparatus, two journalists from the dissident news site Oda TV potentially face a total of 158 years’ imprisonment for charges mainly filed by Erdogan’s lawyers over claims made in the book.

Ozgur Ozel, another senior lawmaker from CHP, recently claimed that the deputy of the presidency’s Communications Director Fahrettin Altun called all the mainstream TV channels on Jan. 5 to tell them to end their live broadcast of the CHP’s weekly group meeting at the parliament. The directorate denied the claim.



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## [Yemeni government calls for global efforts to stop Houthi assaults in Taiz](#)

Sun, 2021-01-10 23:37

AL-MUKALLA: Yemen's internationally recognized government has called for pressure to stop the Houthi offensive and siege on several villages in the southern province of Taiz, the official Saba news agency reported.

Prime Minister Maeen Abdul Malik Saeed said during a phone call with the Taiz governor, Nabil Shamsan, that Houthis crimes against civilians would be "expired by the statute of limitations." He vowed to bring the Houthis to justice.

Malik urged the international community to condemn the attacks against civilians in Taiz and other areas across Yemen. His remarks came as local government officials and activists said on Sunday that civilian deaths from the continuing assault on Haima village in Taiz had risen to 12.

Col. Abdul Basit Al-Baher, a Yemeni army spokesperson in the city of Taiz, said the Houthis had moved on their Haima offensive for the fifth day, killing 12, wounding 30 and raiding 63 houses.

"The Houthis have launched a hysterical attack on Haima," he told Arab News. "They have stormed more than 20 houses, taken 50 civilians as hostage and shelled the villages with heavy weapons. They are committing a cleansing against residents." Farmers and other laborers had stayed indoors to avoid Houthi shells and checkpoints, he added.

Houthi media and affiliate accounts on social media said Sunday that the military assault on Haima came to an end after clearing the villages of "criminals and terrorists."

## **SPEEDREAD**

**Iranian-backed militias attacked the Haima village to suppress a rebellion by residents who refused to pay taxes and allow the group to establish military bases on their agricultural land.**

But Yemeni army officials said that, in addition to capturing military officers loyal to the government, the Houthis had attacked Haima to suppress a rebellion by residents who refused to pay taxes and allow the group to establish military bases on their agricultural land.

"The Houthis cruelly assaulted the villages to be a lesson to other Yemeni areas that might think of challenging their rule," Al-Baher said.

Yemen's Information, Culture and Tourism Minister Muammar Al-Aryani accused the Houthis of launching a "barbaric bombardment" on residential areas in Haima, executing civilians and abusing their bodies.

"The Houthi militia is committing these crimes and violations that are more horrific than those committed by terrorist groups under the nose of deafeningly silent international community and human rights organizations," he tweeted on Sunday.

Yemeni military experts called for intensifying army operations against the Houthis in Taiz and other areas under their control.

Military analyst Brig. Yahyia Abu Hatem said on Sunday that the Yemeni army and allied forces must march toward areas under Houthi control in Taiz to shore up residents who revolted against the militia.

“The (army) troops must move in Taiz to completely liberate the province, rescuing Haima and weaken (military) capabilities of the Houthi militia,” he tweeted.

During its second meeting in Aden, the country’s interim capital, Yemen’s new government on Sunday reiterated commitments to end the Houthi coup, restore state bodies and apply reforms to boost the economy and fight corruption, Saba reported.



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Houthi shelling kills 6 in Taiz as UN Yemen envoy visits Aden

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[Renaissance Dam talks resume after](#)

# Sudanese blockage

Author:

Zaynab Khojji

ID:

1610309179690458500

Sun, 2021-01-10 23:06

CAIRO: Negotiations between Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia on the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) resumed on Sunday to discuss disagreements regarding the rules for filling and operating the dam.

The six-day meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Irrigation of the three countries will follow up on the outcomes of the last meeting headed by South Africa – current president of the African Union (AU) – with observers and experts in the AU Commission.

The Sudanese delegation said it demanded a comprehensive agreement that addresses all issues related to the dam.

It also said that the AU should play a more effective leadership role in the negotiation.

Sudan's statement raised concerns about the recurrence of defects of single fillings in many sectors that have been directly affected, such as the breakdown of drinking water stations in the Sudanese capital, Khartoum.

Ministers from Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan discussed the GERD on a Jan. 3 meeting headed by South Africa. They agreed to extend the negotiations for one week, provided that another six-party ministerial meeting will be held. Ethiopia sent an invitation to hold a meeting on Jan. 4, in which the ministers, technical and legal delegations from Egypt and Ethiopia, and observers and experts appointed by the AU Commission took part.

Sudan did not participate in the meeting and accordingly it was terminated. Future steps were set to be discussed during the six-party meeting on Sunday to consider the outcomes of the tripartite negotiation round.

Egyptian Minister of Irrigation Mohamed Abdel Aty met with the US Secretary of the Treasury Steven Mnuchin last week to review negotiations on the GERD and Egypt's desire to complete the negotiations.

They also discussed Egypt's wish to preserve its water rights and to reach a fair and binding legal agreement that meets the aspirations of all three countries.







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Egypt summons Ethiopian diplomat over dam comments

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## [Palestinians say vaccines could come in March, accuse Israel of shirking duty to supply them](#)

Author:

Reuters

ID:

1610309096910454000

Sun, 2021-01-10 17:14

GAZA: The Palestinian Authority said on Sunday it expects to receive its first COVID-19 vaccine doses in March under a deal with drugmaker AstraZeneca, and accused Israel of shirking a duty to ensure vaccines are available in occupied territory.

While Israel has already become the world leader in vaccinations per capita, Palestinians in the Israeli-occupied West Bank and the Gaza Strip have yet to secure their first supplies.

Yasser Bozyeh, the Palestinian general director of public health, told Reuters that in addition to reaching an agreement in principle with AstraZeneca, the Palestinians had also sought supplies from Moderna, Johnson & Johnson and Russia, which has developed the Sputnik V vaccine.

Supplies would also come through a World Health Organization vaccine program for poor and middle income countries.

There was no immediate response from AstraZeneca to an emailed request from Reuters for comment.

The Palestinian Foreign Ministry said in a statement Israel had been "ignoring its duties as an occupation power and committing racial discrimination against the Palestinian people, depriving them of their right to health care."

"The search by the Palestinian leadership to secure the vaccines from various sources doesn't exempt Israel from its responsibilities toward the Palestinian people in providing the vaccines," it said.

Under interim peace accords with Israel, the Palestinian Authority exercises limited self-rule in the West Bank. Hamas Islamists run the Gaza Strip. Israel's vaccination program covers the country's Arab citizens and Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem.

On the West Bank, it has given vaccines to Israeli settlers, but not to Palestinian residents, who receive health services from the Palestinian Authority.

Human rights groups including Amnesty International say Israel has a legal obligation to provide vaccines for Palestinians under occupation. Israeli officials say they could share vaccines with the Palestinians once Israel's own needs are met.

A WHO official said on Sunday the organization had held "informal discussions" with Israel over allocating some supplies to the Palestinians to inoculate health workers. The official, Gerald Rockenschaub, head of the WHO office in the Palestinian territories, said Israel indicated it would explore the option.



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