

Former Algeria premiers back on trial for corruption

Author:

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ALGIERS: Two former Algerian prime ministers went on trial again Saturday on appeal for corruption, the official APS news agency said, after the supreme court annulled their earlier convictions.

Ahmed Ouyahia and Abdelmalek Sellal both served under former president Abdelaziz Bouteflika.

APS said they were involved in a corruption scandal and accused of covert financing of Bouteflika's final re-election bid.

The new proceedings in the capital Algiers come after the supreme court in November accepted a defence appeal.

Several former ministers and other well-known figures are also on trial over the same affair, APS said.

The trial of Ouyahia and Sellal in December 2019 was the first in a series of high-profile corruption cases launched after Bouteflika resigned earlier that year.

It was also the first time since Algeria's independence from France in 1962 that former prime ministers had been put on trial.

Ouyahia was prime minister four times between 1995 and 2019, and had been sentenced to 15 years behind bars.

Sellal, who served from 2012 to 2017 and managed four of Bouteflika's election campaigns, was sentenced to 12 years in jail.

Their sentences were confirmed on appeal in March.

The pair were sentenced to further jail time in separate cases last year.

Bouteflika, who was Algeria's longest-serving president, was forced to resign in April 2019 after losing the backing of the army amid enormous street protests against his decision to seek a fifth term.

Following his departure, authorities launched a string of investigations against high-ranking former officials and business figures, several of whom have been convicted.

Some see the trials as little more than score-settling between rival clans among the ruling elite, however, rather than a genuine reform effort.



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Algerian jailed for 3 years for political protest memes
Two Algerian soldiers killed in clash with extremists

[‘People are begging for help,’ says tearful Lebanese doctor](#)

Author:

Sat, 2021-01-09 22:25

BEIRUT: A senior Lebanese health official broke down in tears while describing how stricken coronavirus patients had begged him for a vacant hospital bed so that they would not die at home in front of their families.

Dr. Joseph Al-Helou, director of the Ministry of Public Health’s medical care directorate, said that hospitals in Lebanon are rapidly being overwhelmed but are receiving hundreds of calls from seriously ill people pleading to be admitted.

“Hospitals are under great pressure as there are only a few vacant beds,” Al-Helou said in a video address that was widely shared on social media platforms.

His comments came as the rise in coronavirus cases exceeded even the bleakest predictions, with more than 5,400 new infections reported on Thursday and Friday, and warnings that case numbers could reach 9,000 on Sunday.

Revealing the suffering of medical staff unable to offer beds to patients, a tearful Al-Helou said: “We are receiving hundreds of calls from people who want to be admitted, even if only to the emergency departments. If we tell them that they have to wait for a vacant bed for five, 10 or even 24 hours, they accept. Today, there are 41 people waiting in emergency departments.

“We are working until past midnight to provide transport for patients. Some people decided to celebrate New Year’s Eve in restaurants – isn’t that a grave crime?”

Al-Helou said that a nurse had come to him in tears, saying that a priest had died in front of her.

“I have never cried, but this is unbearable,” he said. “A man begs me, a woman pleads with me to let her die on the street and not in front of her children. How can that be? Medical personnel are drained. Some people are dying at home, and others lack oxygen at home.”

Aida Al-Noori, a nursing supervisor at the Al-Makassed Islamic Charitable Society Hospital in Beirut, told Arab News: “It is a terrifying scene in emergency departments. Doctors are giving patients prescriptions to get treatment at home, and we teach those who need oxygen how to use it at home. Patients in critical conditions stay here.”

She added: “In the coronavirus department, we have 21 intensive care beds and we are clearing another floor in order to dedicate 16 beds to coronavirus patients.”

Dr. Andre Kozaily, director of the Bouar Public Hospital in Keserwan, Mount Lebanon, said that medical staff are treating some coronavirus patients in cars because the facility has reached maximum capacity.

According to the Ministry of Health’s daily COVID-19 data, infected cases have reached their peak in Ashrafieh (Beirut), Haret Hreik (in the southern suburb of Beirut), Dekwaneh (Metn), Aley and Zouk Mosbeh (Keserwan), Jbeil, Saida, Zgharta, Riyaq (Bekaa), Hermel (Baalbek) and Abbasiyeh (in the south).

Dr. Sharaf Abu Sharaf, head of the Lebanese Order of Physicians, criticized the ministry, saying it had failed to adequately equip public hospitals for the past year.

“Doctors and medical personnel in the private sector are carrying out their duty to the fullest. Private hospitals cannot be blamed. I was in the Zahle Public Hospital today where only six of 120 beds are occupied. Why weren’t people directed to go there? Where is the money that has been paid to the

ministry to equip hospitals? Nothing has been prepared.”

Lebanon has 30 government and 130 private hospitals.

Abu Sharaf said that there is a shortage of doctors available to treat the rising numbers of patients.

Hamad Hassan, the caretaker health minister, called on people to “refrain from going anywhere, unless absolutely necessary, during the lockdown.”

Lebanon still has not received any vaccine while the country waits on parliament to adopt a law protecting vaccinated people who might suffer from complications.

Lamia Yammine, the caretaker labor minister, revealed on Saturday that she has been infected with the virus, while Information Minister Manal Abdel-Samad urged media companies to “intensify awareness-raising campaigns to reduce the number of infections.”

Petra Khoury, adviser to the caretaker prime minister on medical matters, warned that with cases peaking in Lebanon, every person has a moral duty to avoid infecting another person.”

“Wear masks,” she said.



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Lebanon begins new lockdown amid surge in coronavirus cases Lebanon hits daily

Tunisia arrests Al-Qaeda branch leader

Author:

Sat, 2021-01-09 01:16

TUNIS: Tunisia has arrested a suspected branch leader of Al-Qaeda in North Africa, along with several others suspected of planning "terrorist" attacks, a judicial spokesman said on Friday.

"Two dangerous wanted individuals, one of whom is an Al-Qaeda leader," were arrested in Tunis, Mohsen Dali said.

Authorities also arrested three others accused of providing material and logistical support for organizing "terrorist" acts, Dali added, without providing details of what type of operations were planned.

All five suspects were Tunisian, he said.

The Interior Ministry had said in a statement that the arrested branch leader had already carried out "missions" abroad in an area where jihadist groups operate, without specifying which country.

The Tunisian offshoot of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, or AQIM, is known as Okba Ibn Nafaa.

Initial investigations indicate the suspect had been consulting other leaders of the group to plan "terrorist operations in Tunisia," according to the ministry.

Authorities seized a weapon and ammunition during the suspect's arrest, it added.

The announcement of the arrests comes days after the sacking of Interior Minister Taoufik Charfeddine over high-level staffing changes he sought to make to some security agencies, according to a recent statement from Tunisia's prime minister.

Tunisia faced a rise in jihadist activity after its 2011 revolution, with attacks killing dozens of security personnel, civilians and foreign tourists. The presidency last month announced a six-month extension of Tunisia's state of emergency, in place since a 2015 attack on a presidential guard bus claimed by the Daesh group.



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Pandemic drives down Tunisia's tourism revenue by 65% Tunisian PM sacks interior minister, baring tensions with president

[Grievances, reborn as Daesh accusations, tie Iraqis to camps](#)

Author:

Sat, 2021-01-09 01:08

BAGHDAD: Languishing in a tent in northern Iraq, Nour yearns to return home but can't because she is accused of supporting jihadists – an allegation she insists has been designed to obscure a land dispute.

The 22-year-old's family is one of hundreds rights groups fear will remain stuck indefinitely in limbo due to long-standing wrangles being repackaged by neighbors or authorities into accusations they belong to the Daesh group. Exacerbating their situation, authorities have since autumn sped up long-stated plans to close displacement camps across Iraq where 200,000 people still live.

Nour's brother left their hometown near the northern city of Mosul and joined the jihadists in 2014, the year Daesh seized a third of Iraqi territory in a

lightening offensive.

But even before her brother's departure stoked unwelcome attention, the family had already been locked for years in a dispute with an influential local sheikh. "He resented us because we owned land that he claimed belonged to him," said Nour.

"The sheikh tried to discredit our family," she alleged, nervously stirring sugar into her tea before downing it in one gulp.

"Every time there was a problem in town, it was my father's or my brother's fault," she added.

Rights groups and others – including the International Organization for Migration – are worried about displaced families who stand accused of links to Daesh, sometimes falsely, and may face violent retribution if sent home. "We know there are at least hundreds of families and women in particular who cannot return to their areas of origin because of these accusations," said Belkis Wille of Human Rights Watch.

"Most of the time, the accusations are based on rumors, difficult to verify and often linked to tribal problems or problems between families," she said.



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Iraq issues arrest warrant for Trump over Soleimani killing

A Lebanese nonprofit strives to give women a stronger voice

Fri, 2021-01-08 22:44

BEIRUT: Lebanese women have long fought against gender discrimination in the system. While activists have made great strides this year in terms of political and social awareness, national legal protections from domestic violence and sexual assault remain inadequate. The country also has a weak framework for basic women's rights, especially in matters such as divorce, property rights and responsibility for children after divorce.

Rawan Yaghi, a former teacher based in Lebanon's northeastern region of Baalbek, set up social enterprise USPEaK in 2009 with the aim of giving the country's citizens a voice, particularly its women. The organization's main objective is to create a democratic community that engages citizens through education.



USPEaK founder Rawan Yaghi. (Supplied photo)

"In my earlier career as a teacher, I was very active in social activism," said Yaghi. "I was invited to International Women's Day in Washington. I saw women being celebrated and honored for the enterprises they had started and thought, 'oh, I can do that.'"

Yaghi registered USPEaK as an NGO in 2015. Since then, 2,600 women have been taught English and 1,200 have been taught about entrepreneurship. She has

also overseen the education of about 10,000 Lebanese 7th and 8th grade students, who are taught a set curriculum based on themes such as citizenship and democracy.

INNUMBERS

2,600 Lebanese women taught English by USPEaK.

1,200 Lebanese women taught about entrepreneurship.

2015 Year when USPEaK was registered as an NGO.

One of the main areas that USPEaK focuses on is teaching English. Yaghi believes the English language is one of the most important tools Lebanese women can have when seeking employment.

“It’s like a passport. When they learn English, they’re able to access information that they are not usually exposed to,” she said. “They can know more about the media and the social work of others and they can get inspired by different ideas.”

Yaghi used her savings and a bank loan to launch USPEaK. Around a decade later, her civil rights work is gaining recognition on a global scale, receiving funds and grants from Germany, the UK and the US among others.

“Many of our funds come from the US Embassy, especially for education – teaching English and (hosting) spelling bee projects,” said Yaghi. “We have other donors through UK Aid and ActionAid where we’re working on social cohesion.”



Some 2,600 women have been taught English and 1,200 have been taught about entrepreneurship via USPeaK since 2015. (Supplied)

Besides promoting democratic engagement, USPEaK is also focused on helping women reach positions of power in government. The enterprise has worked with 57 potential female candidates with the ambition that women will eventually make up a sizable proportion of elected representatives.

“We have supported independents in running for office,” said Yaghi. “I was training potential women candidates in many different places in Lebanon. We support all of our social work through low-cost English courses. We work on many different things related to women candidates – this is where you can speak up, raise your voice, and express yourself.”

USPEaK currently employs 10 full-time staff alongside four part-timers and 80 contractors. The mission is not only to increase general political awareness, but also to shed light on more serious subjects, such as preventing violent extremism, the role of women in raising their children to be non-violent citizens, anti-sectarianism, and preventing child abuse.



Nada Toufayli runs Debating and Community Service training for Teaching Women English Program teachers. (Supplied)

Reshaping the political landscape is a tall order for Yaghi and her team, but she believes a positive mindset is crucial for any social enterprise that wishes to achieve its goals.

“If you feel like you are a successful person, you will be a successful person,” she said. “If you have an inspiring idea, believe that it will be good; it will get money and be funded.

“Get the ideas, get the business plan, believe in yourself and go for it.”

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Tech entrepreneurs set to lead latest edition of Saudi Arabia's 'Misk Talk'
Mohammed Almousa, Saudi pharmacist, entrepreneur, and TV host