

Lebanon asks Interpol to issue arrest warrants for two Russians over Beirut blast

Fri, 2020-10-02 18:24

LONDON: Lebanon has asked Interpol to issue arrest warrants for two Russians who transported material into Beirut port which exploded on August 4.

Almost 3,000 tons of ammonium nitrates were shipped into the port in 2013 and stored there, which then subsequently exploded – killing 193 people, wounding more than 6,500 and causing billions of dollars of damage to the Lebanese capital.

Judge Fadi Sawwan referred the case to the state prosecution, which then asked Interpol to arrest two Russian citizens believed to be Boris Prokoshev, captain of the MV Rhosus which sailed from Turkey to Beirut, and businessman Igor Grechushkin living in Cyprus, who purchased the cargo ship in 2012, the National News Agency said.

Grechushkin had already been questioned by police on request of Interpol's Lebanon office back in August.

More than 20 people, including port and customs officials, have been arrested and questioned since the devastating blast, which is now considered to be one of the biggest non-nuclear explosions ever recorded.

The Rhosus set sail from Batumi in Georgia carrying more than 2,700 tons of ammonium nitrate destined for Mozambique, but was forced to make a detour to Beirut in November 2013.

Almost a year later, in October 2014, the explosive material was moved into the port's Warehouse 12, which holds impounded materials.

The ammonium nitrate remained in the warehouse until it exploded while the Rhosus never left the port and sank there in February 2018, according to Lebanese official documents.



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[Middle East](#)

[Beirut](#)

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[US defense chief's rare Algeria visit points to Sahel region threats](#)

Author:

Reuters

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Thu, 2020-10-01 20:30

ALGIERS: US Secretary of Defense Mark Esper made a rare visit to Algeria on

Thursday for talks with the president about war-torn Libya and the troubled Sahel region to the south of the Sahara.

Both countries are alarmed by the threat posed by Islamist militant groups in North Africa and the Sahel, and Algeria is weighing a more active military role against them outside its own borders.

Esper and President Abdelmadjid Tebboune held "talks on Libya and the Sahel and both parties agreed to maintain cooperation and coordination," a statement from Algeria's presidency said.

In a statement, the Pentagon said Esper voiced support for expanding military relations with Algeria during the meeting.

"The two leaders discussed security throughout North Africa and the Sahel and ways to advance our strategic military and diplomatic partnership," the Pentagon said.

Esper's visit is the first by a US Defense Secretary to Algeria since Donald Rumsfeld's in 2006 and he is also the most senior American official yet to meet Tebboune.

Tebboune took office in December after mass protests last year led the army to push his predecessor Abdelaziz Bouteflika to step down after 20 years in power.

The new president has proposed changes to the constitution aimed at mollifying the opposition protest movement, but the reforms would also give the army new powers to intervene in neighboring states.

"Mark Esper wants to discuss the Algerian army's possible role in the region once the new constitution is passed as it allows peace-keeping operations overseas," a Western diplomat in Algeria familiar with the matter told Reuters.

An Algerian source said the talks were expected to focus on Libya, where nine years of chaos after the overthrow of Muammar Qaddafi have created space for militants, and Mali, where French troops are trying to help quell an Islamist insurgency.

"Algeria has an influence in Mali. It showed it can help. The Americans understood that French military intervention did not curb terrorism," a senior Algerian security source, who asked not to be named, told Reuters.

"As for Libya, it is well known that Algeria maintains good ties with all the players including tribes and personalities," the senior source told Reuters.



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Algeria protest movement activists jailed
Algeria journalist acquitted after year in detention

[Egypt extends measures to boost country's struggling tourism sector](#)

Thu, 2020-10-01 22:45

CAIRO: The Egyptian government has extended the duration of a number of policies and incentives designed to boost the country's struggling tourism sector, which has been badly affected by the coronavirus pandemic.

The measures include the waiving of visa fees until April 30 next year for tourists visiting the governorates of South Sinai, the Red Sea, Luxor and Aswan.

Businesses that operate within the tourism industry, including hotels, will not have to pay any fees or electricity, water and gas bills until Dec. 31 this year. In addition, all debts owed by companies in the sector, including amounts accrued before the pandemic began, will be rescheduled, with no repayments due until Jan. 1.

A flight incentive program, which includes discounted airport fees for airlines, was extended until Dec. 31.

The government said that their decision to extend the measures beyond the previously announced end date of Oct. 31 is designed to support the winter tourism season, which runs from Nov. 1 until April 30.

The global tourism sector has been particularly badly affected by the effects of the pandemic. It is vital to the economies of many nations, including Egypt, but has effectively been closed down due to lockdowns and travel restrictions around the world.

Bassem Halqa, who represents workers in Egypt's tourism industry, said that the decision to waive visa fees for some of the country's most popular destinations is a very important step in efforts to encourage tourists to return, and will have a positive impact on sector.

However, he called for the initiative to be extended to cover additional destinations, such as Cairo, Alexandria and Giza. He also urged the government to allow public beaches and hotel gyms to reopen.



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Virus-free month lifts Egypt tourism hopes
Red Sea resorts drive Egypt tourism hopes

[Iraqis gather in Baghdad to mark anti-government protests anniversary](#)

Author:

Reuters

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Thu, 2020-10-01 18:29

BAGHDAD: A few hundred Iraqis gathered in Baghdad's central Tahrir square on Thursday to mark the anniversary of anti-government unrest that erupted last year and to put pressure on the authorities to meet their demands.

Protesters waved the Iraqi flag and chanted "free revolutionaries, we will continue the path."

Some sang patriotic songs while clapping.

"We are here to start the revolution again...We haven't forgotten about the blood of the martyrs," said Abbas Younis, 25, wearing an Iraqi flag as a cape and a surgical mask.

More than 560 people, mostly unarmed demonstrators but also some members of the security forces, have been killed since a spate of popular unrest began on Oct. 1, 2019, with both security forces and unidentified gunmen shooting people dead.

London-based Amnesty International called on the Iraqi government on Thursday to do more to "deliver justice to the hundreds killed in the course of exercising their right to peaceful assembly.

"Find the missing, deliver justice for lives lost," it said.

Protesters, most of them young, are demanding an overhaul of a political system they see as profoundly corrupt and keeping most Iraqis in poverty.

The protests have shaken the country out of two years of relative calm following the defeat of Islamic State insurgents.

Infighting between political parties clinging to power has fueled the crisis and threatens to kindle more unrest.

Last year's protests caused the resignation of Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi, who was replaced in May by Mustafa Al-Kadhimi, who pledged to investigate the deaths and incarceration of hundreds of protesters.

Demonstrators on Thursday gave the government until Oct. 25 to meet their demands by Oct. 25 or face a general strike.

"Our demands are simple and legitimate...We demand the killers of the

protesters be prosecuted,” said Mustafa Makki.

Dressed in combat trousers and wearing a shirt with an image of a slain protester and a necklace made out of an empty tear gas canister, the 24-year-old said he had four bullet wounds, and one of them had cost him his vision in his left eye.

Later on Thursday, dozens took to the streets in the southern cities of Diwaniyah and Najaf, waving the Iraqi flag and carrying photographs of demonstrators killed last year.

Kadhimi in July called an early general election for June 6, 2021, roughly a year ahead of when it would normally be held, a central demand of the protesters. But Iraqi’s parliament must still ratify the election date and amend the election law.

Kadhimi and President Barham Salih pledged to meet the demands of the protesters. “We affirm our loyalty to our people and to the roadmap imposed by the blood and scarifies of its youth,” Kadhimi said in a statement.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

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US says ‘can’t tolerate’ attacks by Iranian-backed militias in Iraq

Lebanon asks Interpol to detain 2 Russians over port blast

Author:

Thu, 2020-10-01 22:05

BEIRUT: The lead investigator into the August blast at Beirut's port that killed and wounded many people issued two arrest warrants Thursday for the captain and owner of a ship that carried thousands of tons of ammonium nitrate to Beirut seven years ago, the state-run National News Agency said. Nearly 3,000 tons of ammonium nitrates stored at Beirut's port exploded on Aug. 4, killing 193, wounding about 6,500 and causing damage worth billions of dollars.

The news agency said judge Fadi Sawwan referred the case to the state prosecution that asked Interpol to detain the two Russian citizens. NNA did not give the names of the two men but Boris Prokoshev was the captain who sailed the MV Rhosus from Turkey to Beirut in 2013. Igor Grechushkin, a Russian businessman residing in the Mediterranean island of Cyprus, bought the cargo ship in 2012 from Cypriot businessman Charalambos Manoli. Grechushkin has been questioned by police on request of Interpol's Lebanon office in August.

More than two dozen people, most of them port and customs officials, have been detained since the blast which is considered to be one of the biggest non-nuclear explosions ever recorded.

The Rhosus set out from the Georgian Black Sea port of Batumi carrying 2,755.5 tons of ammonium nitrate destined for an explosives company in Mozambique. It made an unscheduled detour, stopping in Beirut on Nov. 19, 2013.

In October 2014, the ammonium nitrate was moved into the port's Warehouse 12, which holds impounded materials. The ammonium nitrate remained at the warehouse until it exploded while the Rhosus never left the port and sank there in February 2018, according to Lebanese official documents.



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