

Storm in a teacup: Lebanon's president and 1.675 kilos of finest Ceylon brew

Wed, 2020-09-09 23:07

BEIRUT: So you're the president of a country with a ruling elite widely held to be inept and corrupt, the economy is collapsing, and swaths of your capital city have been reduced to rubble by a devastating explosion.

It must be tempting just to sit down and have a nice cup of tea. But President Michel Aoun of Lebanon can't even do that without getting into hot water.

The trouble started brewing when the president's office published a photo last month of Aoun receiving the Sri Lankan ambassador, who said Colombo had "donated 1,675 kilos of Ceylon tea to those affected by the Beirut blast."

All well and good. The beleaguered residents of Gemmayze may have no homes, but at least they can be refreshed.

On Wednesday, however, it emerged that Aoun had written to Sri Lankan president Gotabaya Rajapaksa thanking him for the gift, which "was distributed to the families of the soldiers in the Presidential Guard Brigade."

And that's when it all boiled over. Aoun has a new social media hashtag – #TeaThief – and his conduct has been described as shameful, although admittedly not for the first time.

"The tea was sent to the Lebanese, particularly those affected by the explosion," said independent MP Paula Yacoubian. "Of course it wasn't a present for those who don't need it. Distributing the aid to your entourage is shameful."

الشيء ارسل الى اللبنانيين بخاصة المتضررين من انفجاركم وطبعاً لم يكن هدية لمن لا يحتاجها
توزيع المساعدات على حاشيتك معيب #لبنان ينحدر مع عهدكم كما لم يفعل حتى في زمن الاقتتال في عهدكم السابق <https://t.co/XlweMGdYJu>

– بولا يعقوبيان (@PaulaYacoubian) [September 8, 2020](#)

One Lebanese Twitter user wrote: "Corruption in Lebanon continues. This government has 0 percent chance of changing."

Corruption in Lebanon continues. That government has 0% chance of changing. 100% wrong.

– Sunshine & Lollipops (@ljhinco) [September 9, 2020](#)



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TV network files lawsuit against Lebanon presidency
Bisri: Lebanon's dam of contention

[Cyprus repatriates 90 Lebanese](#)

Author:

Wed, 2020-09-09 01:28

BEIRUT: Cypriot authorities on Tuesday repatriated 90 Lebanese, including women and children, to Tripoli after they tried to enter the country illegally.

"Those repatriated were tested for COVID-19 and quarantined in preparation for their return home," said North Governorate District Commissioner Iman Al-Rafi.

Emigration from Lebanon is growing rapidly amid the dire economic situation

and spiraling unemployment.

According to Lebanon's National News Agency, Cypriot authorities will send a delegation to Beirut this week to discuss ways to "prevent boats loaded with illegal migrants from Lebanon sailing towards Cyprus."

Cypriot authorities said an "unprecedented number of boats" had been intercepted. "At least five boats carrying more than 150 migrants were stopped by authorities," Cypriot Interior Minister Nicos Nouris said, adding that his country "is on alert."



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Erdogan faces EU sanctions over escalating conflict with Greece, CyprusNew migrant crisis at sea as young Lebanese flee to Cyprus

[Turkey urged to release rights defender after European court ruling](#)

Author:

Wed, 2020-09-09 00:33

ANKARA: Turkey has been urged to release human rights defender Osman Kavala following a European court ruling that said his detention was unlawful.

The International Commission of Jurists (ICJ), Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and the Turkey Human Rights Litigation Support Project are among those campaigning for Kavala's freedom. He has been behind bars for more than 1,000 days.

Rights groups are trying to keep his case on the agenda and prevent the targeting and persecution of activists, dissident politicians and critical journalists from becoming the norm in Turkey.

Kavala has been imprisoned since Nov. 2017 on various allegations and charges. The lawfulness of his detention has been brought to the attention of Turkey's Constitutional Court.

The Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers recently ordered Turkey, which has been a founding member of the council since 1950, to ensure Kavala's immediate release.

The European Court ruled last December that Turkey was persisting in its violations of provisions in the European Convention on Human Rights, especially the rights to liberty, security and a speedy decision on the lawfulness of detention.

The court said that, by detaining Kavala since 2017 and prosecuting him, Turkish authorities had "pursued an ulterior purpose, namely to silence him as a human rights defender."

In an official visit to Turkey earlier this month, the head of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) Robert Spano spoke of the importance of implementing ECHR rulings by local courts in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, but without making any open reference to Kavala's case.

"Turkish authorities should have complied with the binding ruling of the European Court to free Osman Kavala some time ago," Amnesty International's Turkey researcher Andrew Gardner told Arab News. "Obviously, keeping an innocent person in prison on absurd charges for almost 3 years is in itself a very damaging stain on the reputation of Turkish judiciary and with respect to the human rights record in Turkey in general."

Gardner said the call from the Committee of Ministers to free Kavala had significantly increased the pressure on Turkish authorities. He added that Kavala's case was far from the only example of authorities imprisoning people in an "attempt to silence them and people they represent."

"He (Kavala) should never have been detained in first place. Ultimately, all members of the Council of Europe have to abide by the rulings of ECHR. If they don't, they face serious sanctions."

Spano has been criticized for not being tougher on Turkey's human rights record and the rule of law during his meeting with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and top judiciary members in Ankara.

The leader of Turkey's main opposition, Kemal Kilicdaroglu, said on Tuesday that Kavala was behind bars because Erdogan wanted it that way and that his

detention period would continue.

“Turkey as a party to the European Convention on Human Rights undertook the obligation to implement all judgments of the European Court of Human Rights,” Massimo Frigo, senior international lawyer at the ICJ, told Arab News. “Not doing so would put the country in breach of its duty of collaboration with the court.”

Turkey must implement several measures to execute the judgment but it must first of all release Kavala and not maintain his detention under charges issued just to delay his freedom, Frigo said.

“The case of Osman Kavala is crucial for the rule of law in Turkey,” he added. “Both a national court and an international court have ordered his release and he is still in jail. Genuine execution of courts’ decisions is an essential tenet of the rule of law.”



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Voting begins in decisive Egypt Senate elections

Author:

Wed, 2020-09-09 00:25

CAIRO: The run-off round for the 2020 Senate elections in Egypt began on Tuesday to determine 26 individual system seats in the country.

Fifty-two candidates for the runoff round come from 14 governorates: Giza, Qalyubia, Port Said, Ismailia, Menofia, Kafr El Sheikh, Damietta, Beni Suef, Assiut, Sohag, Qena, Luxor, Aswan and Matrouh.

The Senate, which was created in accordance with constitutional amendments approved last year, will act as an advisory chamber to the House of Representatives. It will sit in place of the Shoura Council, the upper house of parliament that was dissolved in 2014.

Voting by mail for Egyptians living overseas ended on Sept. 7.

The National Election Commission, headed by Lashin Ibrahim, said that 74 seats were decided by the single system in 13 governorates.

The National Unified List won after gaining more than 5 percent of the vote in each district during the first round last August.

Two-thirds of the Senate members are elected via the individual candidacy and closed party list systems, with the rest to be appointed by Egypt's president. The first session of the Senate is set to be held in October, with its first 5-year term due to end in 2025.

Senate proposals focus on supporting democracy, social values as well as public freedoms and duties.

The Senate's opinion is taken on proposals to amend one or more articles of the constitution, the draft general plan for social and economic development, peace and alliance treaties and all treaties related to the rights of sovereignty.

The Senate must inform the president and House of Representatives of its opinion on these matters, as organized by the house bylaws.



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Egypt to establish \$2bn investment fund for financial services, digital transformation
Egypt coronavirus cases top 100,000: ministry

[Jordan reopens main airport after six-month shutdown to combat coronavirus](#)

Author:

Tue, 2020-09-08 23:24

AMMAN: Jordan resumed regular international flights on Tuesday after being suspended for nearly six months because of the novel coronavirus epidemic, officials said.

They said Queen Alia international airport would initially handle six flights a day before expanding to ensure that airport authorities can enforce strict social distancing and other health rules.

The government had repeatedly postponed reopening Jordan's main airport, a regional hub which normally handles around nine million passengers annually, over fears that travelers could bring about an increase in infections.



Health workers wait for the passengers to check them at Queen Alia International Airport after a regular international flights resume after a closure due to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak, in Amman, Jordan, Sept. 8, 2020. (The Prime Ministry Office via Reuters)

The airport, however, was open for repatriation flights arranged for citizens in the Gulf and Europe and also for foreigners resident in Jordan who want to leave.

Passengers entering Jordan would need proof of a negative COVID-19 test within 72 hours of travel, alongside a compulsory test on arrival, officials said.

The rules would include a minimum of one week of self-isolation to a maximum two weeks of quarantine for foreign travelers depending on the severity of the pandemic in countries they came from.



A health worker checks a passenger arriving at Queen Alia International Airport after a regular international flights resume after a closure due to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak, in Amman, Jordan, Sept. 8, 2020. (The Prime Ministry Office via Reuters)

Although Jordan has seen a spike in infections in the last few weeks, the country remains one of the least affected in the Middle East, with 2,581 infections and 17 deaths.

The closure of the airport since mid March has worsened the economic damage wrought by the pandemic on Jordan's aid-dependent economy.

Tourism is a major source of foreign currency and had been enjoying an unprecedented boom before the pandemic.



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Jordan: schools closed, buildings isolated after COVID-19 cases reported
Jordan requires mandatory quarantine for airline passengers from yellow, red-listed countries