

# Ex-housekeeper sues Israeli PM's wife over abusive behavior

Author:

Fri, 2020-02-28 02:37

JERUSALEM: A former housekeeper at Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's official residence is suing the leader's wife Sara for pain and suffering allegedly caused during her employment there, the housekeeper's attorney said on Thursday.

Opheer Shimson says his client is demanding \$190,000 in damages for the abuse from Sara Netanyahu. He said the woman, an immigrant from France in her mid-50s and a mother of five who wished to keep her identity secret, worked at the residence for five months until last November, when she was injured from a fall caused by what he described as Sara Netanyahu's tyrannical demands.

He said the woman, a staunch supporter of the prime minister, kept a diary detailing the verbal abuse she endured from his wife.

"She adores the prime minister and saw her work at his home as a form of national service," Shimson told The Associated Press. "But she's been traumatized by her experience. Everyone knew what was going on there, and no one can say otherwise."

Sara Netanyahu has been accused of abusive behavior toward her personal staff before. This, together with accusations of excessive spending and using public money on her own extravagant personal tastes, has earned her an image as the Israeli Imelda Marcos, the Philippines' former first lady who became infamous for her massive collection of designer shoes.

Last year, Sara Netanyahu was convicted of misusing state funds after she reached a plea bargain settling allegations that she overspent some \$100,000 of state money on lavish meals. She'd previously been indicted for graft, fraud and breach of trust.

In 2016, a court ruled the prime minister's wife mistreated a housekeeper and awarded the man \$42,000 in damages. Several other employees have accused her of abuse, mistreatment and harassment. Another pending lawsuit alleges she forbade a former staffer to eat or drink on the job and required her to change her clothes dozens of times a day. The plaintiff, who is also seeking damages, says Sara Netanyahu also required her to wash her hands dozens of times a day and dry them with a towel separate from the one used by the Netanyahu family.

The Netanyahus have angrily rejected all the charges, calling them part of a media-orchestrated campaign against the family to oust them from power.

Israel heads to the polls next week for its third election in less than a

year. Two weeks later, Benjamin Netanyahu goes on trial for charges of bribery, fraud and breach of trust stemming from accusations he accepted lavish gifts from billionaire friends and promised to promote advantageous legislation for a major newspaper in exchange for favorable coverage.

The latest allegations against Sara Netanyahu include details on a bevy of berating comments she unleashed on those who worked for her. Shimson said the personal diary would be presented in court as evidence.

“Enough, save me, I want to die, the problem is that I don’t have any choice and everyone knows that,” reads one of his client’s entries, which was first published on Israel’s Channel 12 news. “It’s impossible to live every day with a psychopath. I’m dying to leave before it’s too late.”

In another entry, she said Sara Netanyahu screamed at her for forgetting to throw out the garbage, called her stupid and dirty and demanded she take a shower. The woman wrote that Sara Netanyahu accused her of trying to cause friction with the prime minister.

“She said to me: ‘What do you want? For me to be like you, divorced?’” she wrote. “Even the prime minister told her to stop. She was in a trance. In the afternoon she had a fit, lay down on the ground, screamed and screamed like a lunatic, and shook with rage. She rolled around on the floor, and said that all of that was because of me.”

The ruling Likud Party denounced the TV report about the lawsuit as a “cruel, false, recycled and gossipy piece that was timed for release on the eve of elections and whose purpose was to harm the Likud.”



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## [Former European leaders slam Trump peace plan](#)

Author:

Fri, 2020-02-28 02:14

LONDON: The Council for Arab-British Understanding (Caabu) has gathered 50 former European leaders and foreign ministers to jointly sign a letter condemning US President Donald Trump's peace plan for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

British signatories include former Foreign Secretary Jack Straw, former International Development Secretary Douglas Alexander, and former Foreign Ministers Sir Alan Duncan, Baroness Sayeeda Warsi, Peter Hain and Ben Bradshaw.

The sharply critical letter, published in British newspaper The Guardian, expresses deep concern over the plan, saying that "instead of promoting peace, it risks fueling the conflict."

The signatories note that the plan has been met with "widespread opposition in the region, in Europe and in the US."

The plan "allows for annexation of large and vital parts of the occupied Palestinian territory and legitimizes and encourages illegal Israeli settlement activity," the letter reads.

The plan "is not a roadmap to a viable two-state solution, nor to any other legitimate solution to the conflict."

The letter adds: "The plan envisages a formalization of the current reality in the occupied Palestinian territory, in which two peoples are living side by side without equal rights. Such an outcome has characteristics similar to apartheid – a term we don't use lightly."

The signatories believe that the annexation could lead to Palestinian enclaves reminiscent of South Africa's bantustans during the apartheid era.

The letter follows increased tensions between the White House and the Palestinian Authority, with Washington threatening to withhold aid as part of a diplomatic pressure campaign at the UN.

Chris Doyle, director of Caabu, told Arab News: “We’re delighted to see so many distinguished former European political figures signing up to what is historically a very strong letter about the plans for annexation. It also clearly references that it would produce apartheid-like conditions.”

He said: “That brings into sharp focus exactly how disastrous this plan is. Even if it isn’t implemented as per the document, the plans on the ground have already been enacted effectively.”

He added: “The only way forward are talks based on international resolutions and consensus that envisage a two-state solution based on the 1967 lines with a shared capital in Jerusalem and fair resolution of the refugee issue.”



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## [No plan for Erdogan-Putin meeting on Idlib, says Kremlin](#)

Fri, 2020-02-28 00:57

ANKARA: In a surprise move, the Kremlin on Thursday said Russian President Vladimir Putin does not have a scheduled meeting with his Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan on March 5.

Erdogan on Wednesday said he could meet Putin in Istanbul next week for talks on Syria's Idlib province. The meeting was expected to gather Russia, France, Germany and Turkey.

The Kremlin announcement is seen as yet another sign of deteriorating ties between Putin and Erdogan after the failure of a fragile cease-fire agreement in rebel-held Idlib.

Erdogan recently criticized Russian support for Damascus. At least 18 Turkish soldiers have been killed by Syrian regime airstrikes in recent weeks.

Security analyst Metin Gurcan said the Kremlin announcement "means that the coming three or four weeks will determine the outcome of the power struggle and regional dynamics on the ground."

Amid heavy clashes between Turkish and regime troops in recent weeks, Erdogan has given Damascus a deadline of the end of this month to withdraw behind Turkish observation posts in Idlib or face a military offensive.

Against this backdrop, talks between Turkey and Russia have continued for weeks without any concrete outcome so far.

Turkish government spokesman Omer Celik on Thursday said a meeting between Erdogan and Putin "needs to be held soon."

Meanwhile, Ankara is sending more reinforcements, including air defense units, to Idlib. The number of Turkish soldiers deployed since the beginning of February in Idlib and Aleppo has reached 7,800.

"Turkey has an intention and offer to meet with Russia to resolve the Idlib quagmire, but Turkish decision-makers keep announcing unconfirmed dates of summits without getting official acceptance from the Russian side," Aydin Sezer, an expert on Turkish-Russian relations, told Arab News.

Turkish Defense Minister Hulusi Akar talked to his US counterpart Mark Esper about Idlib on Thursday.

Samuel Ramani, a Middle East analyst at the University of Oxford, said Russia is deeply frustrated with Ankara's willingness to intervene militarily in Idlib, and is concerned about the implications for the regime's offensive there, given that the village of Nairab has fallen to Syrian rebels and the town of Saraqeb is at risk.

"The loss of these towns could have a cascade effect and give Turkish-backed rebels control over the M4/M5 highways and vital Syrian infrastructure once again," he told Arab News.

"While Russia is happy to send a delegation to Turkey to discuss the Idlib crisis, it feels that a meeting between Putin and Erdogan would be a sign

that Moscow is intimidated by Turkish conduct.”

Ramani said Russia is playing hardball on a Putin-Erdogan meeting, and is instead urging Turkey to commit to de-escalation in Idlib.

Ankara and Moscow agreed in September 2018 to turn the province into a “de-escalation zone.”

Ramani said: “Russia is fairly confident that Turkey will agree to de-escalation ... because it sees Ankara’s military intervention as unsustainable, as Turkey is committed in northern Syria and Libya, and is seeing its currency crisis worsen once again.”



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[Tunisian parliament debates new](#)

# coalition with economy in focus

Author:

Thu, 2020-02-27 01:10

TUNIS: Tunisia's parliament began debating on Wednesday and looked set to approve a new coalition government, after months of political wrangling that has slowed the north African country's efforts to tackle looming economic problems.

Elyes Fakhfakh, who was designated prime minister last month by President Kais Saied, has brought parties from across the political spectrum into his Cabinet – and they continue to disagree on several big policy areas.

His government is expected to pass a confidence vote later on Wednesday, however, though it may prove fragile after struggling to reconcile the differences over policy and Cabinet positions.

If it were to lose the vote, another parliamentary election would be held.

The last election, held in October, produced a deeply fragmented house in which no party won more than a quarter of the seats. An earlier attempt to form a government was defeated in a confidence vote in January.

Introducing his proposed government's program in parliament on Wednesday, Fakhfakh said its priorities would include fighting widespread corruption and reforming public services and the state phosphate producer.

It would work to maintain the value of the currency, which has recovered in recent months after years of decline, he added. Central Bank Governor Marwan Abbasi said this month that the International Monetary Fund (IMF) had been in favor of the dinar losing some value to bolster exports.

The new government would immediately face a major economic challenge after years of low growth, persistent unemployment, big government deficits, mounting debt, high inflation, a weak currency and deteriorating public services.

It will need to find new external financing after an IMF loan program ends in April, with no new support yet agreed.

Parliament Speaker Rached Ghannouchi said he would also start the process for voting judges onto the constitutional court, a body agreed in the 2014 constitution to arbitrate disputes between branches of government but not yet set up.



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## [Rival Libyan politicians meet for peace talks in Geneva](#)

Author:

Thu, 2020-02-27 00:51

GENEVA: Rival Libyan politicians met on Wednesday for UN-sponsored political talks in Geneva aimed at ending the latest round of fighting over the country's capital, Tripoli.

The resumption of political negotiations, one of three ongoing UN-mediated diplomatic tracks, followed an agreement this week between military officials to formalize a shaky cease-fire around Tripoli.

The declared cease-fire deal, now under review by Libya's competing leaders, addresses the return of thousands of displaced civilians to Tripoli. But it makes no mention of key points of contention, such as the withdrawal of eastern-based forces or the demobilization of formidable militias loosely allied with the UN-supported Tripoli government.

Peace negotiations have made halting progress over past weeks, as low-intensity clashes continue around Tripoli and weapons flow into the war-torn



country despite world powers' pledges to the contrary at a peace summit in Berlin last month.

## **Oli blockade**

Meanwhile, Eastern Libya's foreign minister said on Wednesday that his government, parallel to the Tripoli administration, could not force eastern tribesmen to lift an oil blockade that he said was a "popular decision."

The embattled Tripoli government has increasingly relied on Turkey to supply military aid, including air defenses and fighters deployed from nearby Syria, to repel Haftar's advances.

The commander of the eastern forces, Khalifa Haftar, and his followers, who control the country's east and south, launched an offensive to capture Tripoli last April. The fighting has displaced more than 150,000 people and killed hundreds of civilians.

"We cannot use our power to lift the blockade," Abdulhadi Lahweej told journalists in Geneva, alleging that the Tripoli government was using revenues from oil to pay for thousands of mercenaries he says have come from Syria to help them.

He also reiterated that his side, led by eastern commander Khalifa Haftar, would not participate in political talks due to begin in Geneva on Wednesday, saying there was no agreement with the U.N. mission on the composition of their delegation.

"The participation for the moment is suspended," he said.

The United Nations had planned to bring together lawmakers from both sides of Libya's conflict on Wednesday to end the fighting over Tripoli as part of a dialogue encompassing military, political and economic strands.



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Libya rivals announce will not take part in Geneva talks