

Controversial Egyptian lawyer believes 'no one is above the law'

Author:

Wed, 2019-10-09 00:14

CAIRO: Egyptian lawyer Samir Sabry is constantly associated with high-profile court cases that have ignited public opinion. That he shares the same name as the famed Egyptian actor certainly helped the lawyer to reach celebrity status. Sabry specializes in going after politicians and celebrities with the aim, many Egyptians believe, of gaining more fame for himself. In many instances, Sabry is more famous than the cases he prosecutes.

In September, Sabri sent more than one case to the general prosecutor. He accused fugitive contractor Mohamed Aly of stealing 12 million Egyptian pounds (\$735,000) from a contracting company. Sabry also charged Hassan Nafaa, a political analyst and professor of political science at Cairo University, of high treason for conducting a phone call with Al-Jazeera TV channel. Egypt has strained relations with Qatar, which owns Al-Jazeera. Sabry has also trained his sights on celebrities. Perhaps his most famous celebrity case was against Jennifer Lopez. Sabry accused Jennifer Lopez of wearing provocative clothes inciting debauchery and immorality at her concert in the Mediterranean city of El-Alamein in August. The lawyer, known for his morality crusades, demanded that she be prevented from entering Egypt again. Sabry pointed out that Lopez appeared in transparent clothes, which sparked controversy all over social media.

Another famous celebrity case was named the "Rania Youssef dress." In 2018, Sabry filed a case with the general prosecutor's office against Egyptian actress Rania Youssef who attended that year's Cairo International Film Festival wearing a body-hugging, see-through dress. Sabry said the actress's dress was too revealing, violating the public morals of Egyptians.

FASTFACT

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Sabry also took on singer Sherine Abdel-Wahab, accusing her of insulting Egypt while singing in a concert in Lebanon. During the concert, an audience

member asked Abdel-Wahab to sing “Mashrebtsh Men Nelha” (Haven’t You Drank from Its Nile) to which the singer replied: “You are going to get sick from bilharzia. You better drink Evian water.”

In his report, Sabry said that Abdel-Wahab had “badly insulted her country, causing panic for those who want to visit Egypt and the Nile River, Egypt’s most important touristic destination. Thus, she caused severe damage to the already suffering tourism business which had a negative impact on the Egyptian economy.”

Sabry shuns interviews. He rarely shows up on talk shows. He gave a brief statement to Arab News saying that throughout his career, he has filed more than 3,000 lawsuits seeking the best interests of the country. He affirmed that he does not exclude anyone within his purview, whether politicians, celebrities, dancers, football players, or even clerics, because, he said, the law should not exclude anyone.

Sabry said he only cares about his religion, his country, and the morals of society. He said many lawyers do not shake hands with him because, as he described it, they hold a grudge against him.



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Egypt loosens security after thwarting calls for protests
Small but rare protests in Egypt after online call for dissent

Lebanon skies a death trap for migratory birds: NGOs

Author:

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AGHBEH: Bird protection groups called Tuesday for urgent action to save endangered migratory species that are being decimated by illegal hunters over Lebanon.

For the 41 species in Lebanon listed as particularly endangered, “the situation is really critical,” said Fouad Itani, president of the Association for Bird Conservation in Lebanon.

“If nothing is done, their numbers will continue to drop and some species will simply disappear,” he told AFP.

According to official figures, 2.6 million birds from close to 200 species were killed illegally in the country in 2014. Itani believes the numbers killed have risen since then.

Lebanon lies on one of the world’s most important migration routes and for many species – such as storks, lesser spotted eagles and pelicans – the most dangerous part of their journey is flying over the small Mediterranean country.

“Hundreds of thousands of white storks are killed in Lebanon every year,” Itani said.

Bird protection groups have successfully raised awareness in some regions but the situation in the north remains “out of control,” according to a joint statement by the Association for Bird Conservation in Lebanon and the Committee Against Bird Slaughter, based in Germany.

The statement was released after a field visit organized for Lebanese and foreign officials Tuesday.

Itani said poachers in the north “are shooting for fun, big numbers. They shoot even at night, using spotlights... They have WhatsApp groups to track the birds together.”

Countries such as Poland and others along migratory routes have pressured Lebanon to take action.

Killing of birds has been reduced in some areas this year through the awareness campaigns and in cooperation with authorities, the statement said, but improved bird protection laws have yet to be enforced by the security forces.

The joint statement called for the creation of a professional and dedicated wildlife crime unit to curb poaching during migration periods.





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'A hunter's hope': Snaring birds in warring Afghanistan
Thousands of birds die at California's Salton Sea

[Israel's Gideon Saar challenges lengthy Netanyahu Likud rule](#)

Author:

Tue, 2019-10-08 21:04

JERUSALEM: With a simple tweet, Gideon Saar did what no Israeli politician from the ruling conservative party has done in more than a decade – openly challenge its chief, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

The brazen move against the long-serving Israeli leader has solidly positioned the 52-year-old Saar as the Likud party's leading candidate to replace Netanyahu, who is fighting for his survival amid a pending corruption indictment and post-election political paralysis.

A former aide and senior Cabinet minister under Netanyahu, Saar has long been considered a rising star in Likud and one of the lone independent voices in a party that has, in general, blindly followed its leader.

But that has begun to change. Netanyahu failed in two elections this year to capture a parliamentary majority, and the possibility of a criminal indictment in the coming weeks has hindered his efforts to head a coalition government. Seeking to solidify his status, the premier last week floated the prospect of a snap internal leadership primary in which he expected Likud to endorse him. But he quickly backed down after a two-word Twitter response from Saar: "I'm ready."

It was a risky maneuver in a party that fiercely values loyalty and has had only had four leaders in its 70-plus-year history. Saar followed it up with a more detailed tweet clarifying that he was not out to topple the prime minister, as Netanyahu has long claimed. Still, Saar left no doubt about his ultimate objective.

"No one is denying the prime minister's role as chairman of the Likud," Saar wrote on Twitter. "When there is a race for leadership of the party – as the prime minister himself initiated a few days ago – I will run."

For Saar, it was a move long in the making. A former lawyer and journalist, he was first brought into politics 20 years ago by Netanyahu, who made him his Cabinet secretary during his first term in office.

Saar then established himself as a staunch nationalist who opposed Israel's 2005 withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and resisted the prospect of a Palestinian state. He quickly rose in the Likud ranks, twice finishing first in internal elections for its parliamentary list and enjoying successful stints as education minister and interior minister after Netanyahu returned to power in 2009.

But as with others in Likud who saw their popularity rise, he too began to be perceived by Netanyahu as a threat. Their falling out was capped by Saar's active role in getting Netanyahu's nemesis Reuven Rivlin elected president, over the prime minister's objections.

With his advancement stunted, Saar abruptly quit politics in 2014 to spend more time with his new wife, Israeli TV anchor Geula Even, and their young children.

He made his comeback this year, chosen by Likud members for a senior position on the party's list of candidates in parliamentary elections. While campaigning hard for Likud, Saar has been its only top official to occasionally flaunt Netanyahu – resisting calls to legislate immunity for the prime minister and attending a media conference Netanyahu had called to boycott.

"Gideon has no fear and he's straight as an arrow," said Shimshon Shoshani, Saar's former director general in the Education Ministry.

Though he didn't share Saar's right-wing ideology, Shoshani said they worked in tandem on bold education initiatives and he saw a public servant fit to lead the country.

"He's a man who has a vision, and he knows how to translate that vision into concrete plans," said Shoshani, an 82-year-old veteran of the Israeli bureaucracy.

Despite his hard-line positions, Saar enjoys good relations across the political spectrum and is perceived as a potentially more comfortable partner for a unity government with the rival Blue and White party, which emerged as

the largest party in last month's election.

But neither it nor the Likud control a parliamentary majority. A coalition government between the two parties appears to be the best way out of the deadlock, but Blue and White's leader, former military chief Benny Gantz, refuses to sit with Netanyahu because of his expected indictment on corruption charges.

Saar's independent streak has drawn frequent fire from Netanyahu's lackeys, and Netanyahu himself last year accused Saar of orchestrating a "putsch" with Rivlin to unseat him.

Under Israeli law, if neither Netanyahu nor Gantz can form a coalition, a majority of lawmakers could theoretically choose an alternative as prime minister. Saar is widely seen as the politician most capable of winning such support.

With a primary election seemingly off the table for now, Netanyahu is talking about convening a Likud functionary body to stipulate he's the party's sole candidate for prime minister.

Netanyahu's office has refused to comment about his plans. However, Limor Livnat, a former Likud Cabinet minister and Netanyahu ally, decried the conduct against Saar as a show of weakness.

"Instead of cultivating potential successors, Netanyahu has neutralized every Likud member who has shown any independence and has surrounded himself with yes-men," she wrote in the Yediot Ahronot daily. "Since when is announcing one's candidacy in a party primary construed as a plot against the incumbent party chairman?"

Eran Davidi, a long-time confidante of Saar's, said Saar and Netanyahu have not met in five years and the enmity was likely to cost Saar a Cabinet post if Netanyahu succeeds in forming another government. But if he fails again, and the country heads to an unprecedented third election within a year, Davidi said he expected the long-hidden cracks to finally emerge within Likud.

While others have expressed interest in heading the party after Netanyahu voluntarily steps aside, Saar remains the only one who doesn't intend to wait till that happens.

"He has ambitions and he has said that he came back to politics to lead the country," Davidi said. "Eventually, the Likud members will appreciate that he had the courage to run. That's the qualities of a leader."



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Israeli officials wrap up Netanyahu's pre-indictment hearing
Israeli minister seeks 'non-aggression' pacts with Arab nations

[Egypt's Giza zoo loses Naima, its last elephant](#)

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CAIRO: The Egyptian capital's Giza zoo has announced the death of its last elephant, Naima, who spent around 36 of her 40 years in captivity. The African elephant, a star of the neglected zoo, died Sunday after suddenly falling ill, a day after having been active and playing with visitors. "Top veterinarians... gave her the required medications... but she did not respond," Mohammed Rajai, who heads the government's central authority for zoos, told AFP.

A forensics report showed she had suffered a severe clot in the heart. Her fans were quick to react on social media. "I loved her a lot," one user said in a Facebook post, while another wrote: "God relieved you, Naima darling".

Rajai said on television that elephants in captivity generally have shorter lives than those living in the wild. "Elephants especially are social animals who usually live among their community," he said.





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Cairo turns to Tokyo for a lesson on education

[High hopes as Hariri seeks UAE cash for ailing economy, Emiratis can now travel to Lebanon](#)

Author:

Reuters

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Mon, 2019-10-07 13:41

ABU DHABI: Lebanon hopes the UAE will inject cash into its central bank to

help shore up the ailing economy, Prime Minister Saad Al-Hariri said on Monday on a visit to the emirates in which leaders sought a deal behind closed doors.

Abu Dhabi is hosting a conference at which heavily indebted Lebanon is seeking partnerships and investments in food, infrastructure, oil and gas, and renewable energy.

The UAE economy minister said financing for Lebanon would be discussed, while one of Hariri's advisers said the mood was "positive" – though no formal announcements had been made by late Monday.

However, the UAE announced its citizens would be allowed to travel to Lebanon starting from Tuesday (October 8), according to an Emirates News Agency statement released on Monday.

Faced with one of the world's highest debt burdens, low growth and crumbling infrastructure, Hariri's government has vowed to implement long-delayed reforms. It is also seeking to curb a sharp loss of confidence among foreign investors and among depositors who are turning away from the Lebanese pound.

Asked on the conference sidelines whether Lebanon will see a cash injection for its central bank, Prime Minister Saad Al-Hariri told Reuters: "We are working on everything," adding: "Yes we are hoping, we will work on it."

Financial markets have tightened significantly this year, raising the costs for Lebanon of borrowing and insuring against default. But hopes for a deal boosted dollar-denominated bonds on Monday, which remain down some 15% this year.

The central bank has been drawing down its foreign exchange reserves to repay the state's maturing dollar-denominated debt, and said last week it was prepared to do more.

Central bank governor Riad Salameh, also attending the conference, said the bank was continuing to provide dollars to local financial markets, adding that Lebanon has "numerous possibilities" as it looks for assistance but it expects support from the UAE.

Lebanon's traditionally high reserves of foreign currency have been in decline because capital inflows into its banking system from Lebanese abroad have been slowing.

An adviser to Hariri, Ghattas Khoury, told Reuters the mood at the conference was positive and that there would be a meeting between the Lebanese premier and UAE authorities later on Monday.

Beirut, which has debt-to-GDP ratio, hopes its Gulf allies or regional sovereign wealth funds will offer support but no public pledges have so far been made.

UAE economy minister Sultan bin Saeed Al Mansouri told reporters his government believes Lebanon's investment climate is becoming more "settled."

He made no financing commitments, but said any financing would “be discussed with the government and they’ll make the right decision.”

Lebanon is preparing to sell a Eurobond of around \$2 billion this month, with cash raised earmarked for refinancing maturing debts and shoring up shaky public finances.

On Oct. 1, Moody’s put Lebanon’s Caal credit rating under review for downgrade, saying anticipated external financial assistance had not yet been forthcoming.

Ratings agency Fitch downgraded Lebanon to CCC in August, citing debt servicing concerns.

At the same time, S&P Global affirmed Lebanon at B-/B with a negative outlook, saying it considered foreign exchange reserves sufficient to service government debt in the “near term.”



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Lebanon’s Hariri calls for cabinet solidarity in budget debate
Lebanese PM Hariri denounces Hezbollah criticism