

[Calls to break silence on Lokman Slim assassination anniversary](#)

Fri, 2022-02-04 00:12

BEIRUT: Friday marks the first anniversary of the assassination of Lebanese researcher and publisher Lokman Slim, but his family is yet to receive any new information regarding the course of the judicial investigation to uncover the circumstances of the crime.

Slim, 58, was shot dead on Feb. 3, 2021.

His body was found in his car in the village of Aaddousiyyeh in southern Lebanon, the day after his family reported that they had lost contact with him while he was returning from visiting a friend in the area where Hezbollah has great influence.

Slim, who was known for his outspoken opposition to Hezbollah, had been threatened before his death.

Slogans accusing Slim of treason had been written on the walls of his home in the southern suburb of Beirut, with taglines glorifying “gun silencers” and expressions such as “Hezbollah is the honor of the nation.”

The Lokman Slim Foundation launched a campaign coinciding with the anniversary of his assassination calling for “breaking the silence surrounding political assassinations and opposing the culture of murder and impunity.”

The primary task of the foundation set up in Slim’s name is to document “political assassinations in the Middle East and North Africa.”

Activists and analysts say Lebanon’s modern history is replete with assassinations and assassination attempts against politicians, journalists, academics, clerics and activists, whose perpetrators remain unknown.

The latest of these crimes is the Beirut port explosion on Aug. 4, 2020, which killed 220 people, injured 6,500 others and destroyed part of the capital.

The Beirut port probe is still suspended by a political decision and obstructed especially by Hezbollah.

As no suspect has been arrested for Slim’s assassination, Human Rights Watch in a statement on Thursday criticized “the flawed investigations into politically sensitive murders.”

It called on donors to review the aid provided to the Internal Security Forces and the judiciary in Lebanon.

Aya Majzoub, Lebanon researcher at HRW, said: “The unsolved murders and

shoddy homicide investigations are a reminder of the dangerous weakness of Lebanon's rule of law in the face of unaccountable elites and armed groups.

"The security forces and judiciary, often generously funded and trained by donor countries, have the technical capacities to investigate murders, but have failed to identify any suspects in these sensitive cases or to follow obvious avenues of investigation."

The cases HRW examined are: Slim, a longtime Hezbollah critic; Joe Bejjani, a telecommunications worker and amateur military photographer shot on Dec. 21, 2020; Col. Mounir bou Rjeily, a retired customs officer found dead in his home on Dec. 2, 2020 from being struck with a sharp object on his head; and Antoine Dagher, the head of Byblos Bank's ethics and anti-fraud department and former head of its compliance unit, who was stabbed to death on June 4, 2020.

On the first anniversary of Slim's assassination, many officials denounced his killing and the failure to hold the killers accountable.

"We will never forget," former Prime Minister Saad Hariri wrote on Twitter, captioning a picture of Slim.

Former Justice Minister Ashraf Rifi tweeted: "Investigating the crime is forbidden and the killers are not held accountable."

"In the tutelage state, Lebanon's best are treacherously killed, at the hands of Iran's tools, but Lebanon remains stronger than them, and justice will prevail sooner or later."

The lawyers of the National Council to End the Iranian Occupation of Lebanon called on the security and judicial authorities to "publish the findings of the investigations to uncover the killer, who we believe is Hezbollah."

They added: "The martyr, comrade Slim, was assassinated in Hezbollah's area of influence. Either Hezbollah is the killer or it must come forward with information to expose the killers. The question remains: Does the state fear the truth, or does it fear Hezbollah?"

In this context, the Lebanon Debate news website published an article about what it considered the "fake achievement" of the ISF's Information Branch by recently busting 17 Israeli spy rings in Lebanon.

"After Hezbollah arrested an agent who was recruiting people in Lebanon by tempting them to work for an association and get paid in US dollars, and following in-depth investigations, the party believed the case was too complex and thus referred it to an officer with whom it was previously cooperating," the article read.

"This Information Branch officer then looked further into the case and discovered new leads, which allowed the arrest of the members of these spy rings.

"The fact that the Information Branch kept its investigations secret and did

not leak any information about it, prompted the party that leaked the information to leak the investigations to the media," Lebanon Debate pointed out.



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Lebanon: Hezbollah trolls harass critical Black news anchor with racist tweets
Fears grow over Iran influence in Lebanon after Hezbollah, Amal Cabinet decision

[Scraping a living: Salt offers women lifeline in Yemen](#)

Author:

Thu, 2022-02-03 23:59

Al-MUKALLA: Scooping up handfuls of white crystals from coastal pools, a group of women in Yemen harvest salt – a traditional industry proving to be a lifeline after seven years of war.

Zakiya Obeid is one among nearly 500 women who work in the industry in a village overlooking the Gulf of Aden, on Yemen's southern coast.

"We cooperate and take shifts because it is a sisterhood and we know each others' difficult circumstances," said Obeid said.

Employment is so scarce that the women work in rotation to allow more people to benefit.

She said the women are divided into two groups, with each working for 15 days while the others rest.

In bare feet and mud-spattered abaya robes, the women dig basins at low tide and return when the seawater has evaporated to dredge up the salt for packaging and selling.

The time-honored livelihood has been passed down from generation to generation.

It is now a means of survival, providing many families with their only source of income.

The women earn about \$100 per month for harvesting the salt and packing it in plastic containers.

Since the formation of the Al-Hassi Association for Sea Salt Production in 2020, the women are able to transport the salt to be ground, packaged and sold across Yemen.

"Before then, we used to do the same work but could only sell the salt raw," Obeid said.

"But that is no longer the case, with the association providing us with bags and transport."

The head of the Al-Hassi Association, Khamis Bahtroush, said the women, who produce between 20-30 tons of salt every three months, have come to rely on this industry.

"Production is lower in winter than in summer," he said.

"Each bag is sold for approximately 3,000 Yemeni rials (\$12) ... but we are struggling with inflation and do not have liquidity to give them raises.

"This is their only source of income ... they have nothing else. No farms, no livestock."

The UN Population Fund has said the loss of male breadwinners in the conflict has added to the difficulties faced by women.

“The pressure is even more severe where women or girls suddenly find themselves responsible for providing for their families when they themselves have been deprived of basic education or vocational training,” it said.



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[Morocco rescuers dig for boy trapped in well](#)

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Thu, 2022-02-03 23:44

BAB BERRED, Morocco: Moroccans waited anxiously Thursday as authorities said a dramatic operation to rescue a young boy trapped in a deep well for over two days was nearing its end.

The five-year-old, named as Rayan, fell down the narrow 32-meter (100-foot) deep well on Tuesday evening in his home village near Bab Berred in the rural northern province of Chefchaouen, local media said.

“The child’s rescue is approaching,” government spokesman Mustapha Baitas

said Thursday. "Our hearts are with the family, and we are praying that he will back with them as soon as possible."

The shaft was too narrow for rescuers to reach the bottom, so heavy diggers were dispatched to dig a hole alongside it.

Relief operations intensified as darkness fell for a third night with the boy deep down in the well, with diggers clawing out dirt under floodlights.

Rescuers reported they had dug down some 24 meters, but that around six meters still remained to reach the child.

The MAP news agency said rescuers had been able to send him oxygen and water via pipes.

Rayan's father told Le360 news website he had been repairing the well when the boy fell into it.

Lead rescuer Abdelhabi Temrani told Al Oula television that the diameter of the well was less than 45 centimeters.

Baitas said the nature of the soil meant it was too dangerous to try to widen the hole, meaning major excavations around it were the only solution.

The drama has sparked an outpouring of sympathy online, with the Arabic hashtag #SaveRayan going viral across the North African region, including in neighboring Algeria.

Moroccan footballer and PSG star Achraf Hakimi mentioned the rescue efforts on social media, alongside emojis of a broken heart and hands together in prayer.

The boy's fate has also attracted crowds of people to the site of the operation, putting pressure on rescuers operating in "difficult conditions," Baitas said.

"We call on citizens to let the rescuers do their job and save this child," he said.

Authorities have also prepared a helicopter to take the child to hospital once he is extracted, national news channel 2M said.



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63 migrants rescued off Morocco: activistsMoroccans protest mass vaccination rules; some skirmishes

[Washington threatens Houthi terror militia with new sanctions](#)

Thu, 2022-02-03 02:43

WASHINGTON: The US on Wednesday threatened Yemen's Houthi rebels with new sanctions after a series of drone and missile attacks on the United Arab Emirates.

"We've taken a number of such actions, including in recent weeks and months alone, and I suspect we will be in a position to take additional action given the reprehensible attacks that we've seen emanate from Yemen from the Houthis

in recent days and weeks,” said State Department Spokesperson Ned Price. President Joe Biden’s administration is under increasing pressure to again formally designate the Houthis as a “foreign terrorist organization,” a label withdrawn from the group one year ago after Biden became president, to engender peace negotiations in the war-torn country. But the war between the Iran-backed Houthis and the government, backed by the multinational Coalition to Restore Legitimacy in Yemen, has continued to rage. “You heard from the president last month that this is a decision that is under review,” Price told reporters. “We will not relent in designating Houthi leaders and entities involved in military offensives that are threatening civilians and regional stability,” he said.

fff/pmh/sst



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US Navy forces seize arms from Iran likely bound for Yemen
Tourists in UAE shrug off Houthi missile attacks

Turkish strikes Kurd targets in Iraq, Syria

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Wed, 2022-02-02 18:08

JEDDAH/BEIRUT: Turkey launched a wave of airstrikes by 60 warplanes early on Wednesday targeting Kurdish militia positions in northern areas of Iraq and Syria.

The Turkish military said the airstrikes hit Derik in northern Syria, and Sinjar and Karacak in northern Iraq. The targets were outlawed PKK militants, who have bases in Iraq, and the Syrian Kurdish YPG militia. Turkey regards both groups as terrorists.

Defense Minister Hulusi Akar said “many terrorists” were killed.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a monitor based in Britain, said four security staff died in an airstrike on a Kurdish-run power station near Al-Malikiyah in Hassakeh province.

Iraq’s military condemned what it called a Turkish infiltration into Iraqi air space as a violation of its sovereignty, although Baghdad is widely thought to be giving Ankara free rein to attack the militants.

It called on Ankara “to put an end to these violations,” and said “Iraq is fully prepared to cooperate (with Ankara) to stabilize the situation on the border.”

The US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), the semi-autonomous Kurdish administration’s de facto army, said four of its fighters died in the attack and vowed vengeance against Turkey.

The YPG – which forms the backbone of the SDF fighting IS in Syria – also condemned the Turkish airstrikes, which followed an attack by Daesh on a prison in Hassakeh province last month in an attempt to free their fighters.

“Turkey tries to continue what Daesh started,” the YPG said. “Everyone has to take action against this attack now.”

The YPG is viewed by Ankara as the PKK’s Syria offshoot.

On Wednesday, shelling on the Turkish-held city of Al-Bab in northern Syria killed eight people, including five civilians, according to the Observatory which relies on a network of sources inside Syria.

It didn’t specify who was responsible but Kurdish forces and Syrian regime troops are both deployed in the region.

Turkish forces escalated attacks in northeastern Syria on Wednesday evening, shelling “about 20 villages and sites... in the Hasakah countryside and north of Raqqa governorate,” the Observatory added later.

It said the attacks targeted residential areas and displaced a large number of people.

The Turkish strike came hours after hundreds of mourners gathered in Al-Malikiyah for mass funerals honoring Kurdish fighters killed in a week of battles with Daesh extremists who had attacked the Ghwayran jail on January 20.

Since the start of its military intervention in Syria in 2016, Ankara has sporadically bombed the YPG and carried out military operations targeting Daesh and Kurdish forces.

Turkey also routinely carries out attacks in Iraq, where the PKK has bases and training camps in the Sinjar region and on the mountainous border with Turkey.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who has threatened to “clean up” parts of northern Iraq, accuses the PKK of using the border area as a springboard for its insurgency.

In December, Turkey carried out retaliatory air strikes in northern Iraq after three Turkish soldiers died in a PKK attack.

(With AFP)



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Clashes near Syria prison leaves 332 dead, war monitor reports Daesh-Kurds battle after Syria prison attack kills over 120 in 4 days