

Lebanese politician in Beirut blast investigation under fire over daughter's wedding

Sat, 2021-08-21 00:35

BEIRUT: A Lebanese former minister wanted for questioning over his alleged involvement in the August 2020 Beirut blast has sparked anger for requesting anti-riot police to guard his daughter's wedding.

A leaked Internal Security Forces' (ISF) document showed Youssef Fenianos had asked for the security presence at the church where his daughter gets married on Saturday in case of political demonstrations.

The document, published by VDL (Voice of Lebanon) news website, said the ISF agreed to dispatch two anti-riot units to Fenianos's hometown of Ehden in northern Lebanon.

The request provoked fury in Lebanon because Fenianos is being investigated over the explosion last year that killed more than 200 people. There is also widespread anger at the ruling class, which is seen as corrupt and responsible for the country's economic collapse.

Lebanon is now crippled by widespread power black outs and fuel shortages.

Fenianos was accused on social media of disrespecting the blast victims' families and using his political influence to protect the wedding from protests.

The massive explosion took place when 2,750 tons of ammonium nitrate was detonated by a fire at Beirut Port. The chemical had been stored at the site for more than seven years without proper safety precautions.

Fenianos, a former public works and transportation minister, was one of three MPs and former ministers charged by the blast's investigating judge Tarek Bitar.

The charges include "negligence" and "possible intent to murder" because they were aware of the ammonium nitrate "and did not take measures to spare the country the risks of an explosion."

Local media reported that a relative of Fenianos posted on Facebook an alleged death threat addressed to one of the victim's relatives who was expected to protest at the wedding.

The post is believed to have been addressed to William Noon, whose firefighter brother died in the Beirut Blast.

Commenting over the incident, famous Lebanese actress and producer, Carine Rizcallah said when the person in charge becomes afraid of his people and

asks for protection from the people “then he’s finished politically and that’s the case of most Lebanese politicians.”

Popular TV presenter Nabila Awad posted the security document on her twitter and commented “Shameless! Shameless and licentious!”

Fenianos was scheduled for questioning by judge Bitar on Friday but police said they had been unable to reach him at his office or residence due to blocked roads and could not deliver the subpoena due to fuel shortages.

Al Janoubia news said Bitar has rescheduled a session to question Fenianos.

A civil society activist told Arab News that the demonstration at the wedding was discussed within four to five WhatsApp groups used by protesters.

“The aim was to deliver a message to Fenianos that nobody is above the law and he cannot carry on with his life as if nothing has happened ... let him appear before the investigating judge, testify and clear his name,” the activist, who asked not to be named, said.

The ISF said the decision to dispatch anti-riot units to the wedding was taken to prevent “public disorder and unruly behavior.”

“Following a chain of social media posts about some activists’ intent to demonstrate during the celebration, which could eventually lead to acts of public disorder, ISF decided as part of its mission and duty to maintain public order to dispatch anti-riot units,” the statement said.

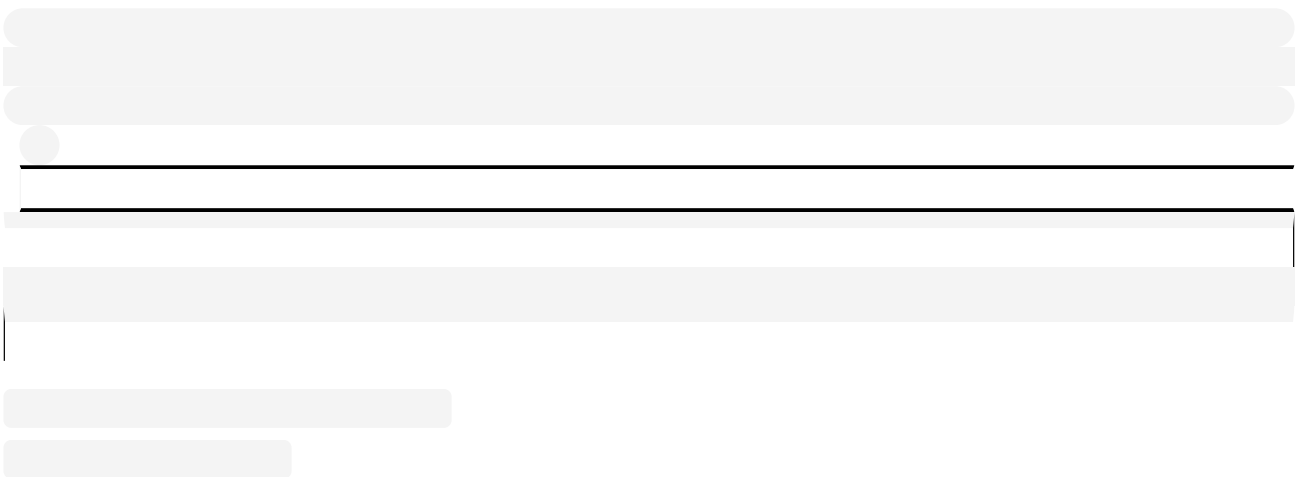
An ISF senior officer, who requested anonymity, confirmed to Arab News that the decision was a “standard procedure that ISF implements in similar situations and incidents and there’s nothing political behind it.”

The incident is the latest in which politicians’ extravagant family wedding plans have sparked public anger as the country continues towards meltdown.

Last month, the luxurious wedding of the daughter of former Hezbollah MP Nawwar Al-Sahili circulated online, stirring dismay as many people have seen the life savings evaporate in the crisis.



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A post shared by thawramap (@thawramap)



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Social media in Lebanon tells a tale of two different worldsAs Lebanese suffer crippling economic crisis, MPs celebrate daughters' lavish weddings

[UAE agrees to temporarily host 5,000 Afghans at US request](#)

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Fri, 2021-08-20 22:42

DUBAI: The UAE has agreed to host 5,000 Afghan nationals evacuated from Afghanistan on their way to other countries.

Following a request from the US, the UAE will host the evacuees temporarily after which they will travel to other nations, the UAE's Ministry of Foreign

Affairs and International Cooperation said on Friday.

The evacuees will travel to the UAE from Kabul on US aircraft in the coming days, Emirates News Agency (WAM) reported.

The UAE has so far facilitated the evacuation of 8,500 people from Afghanistan on its aircraft and through its airports, WAM added.

The initiative is evidence of the UAE's commitment to strengthening international cooperation, the Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation for International Development Affairs Sultan Mohammed Al-Shamsi said.

"The UAE is always seeking peaceful, multilateral solutions, and is keen to continue its work alongside its international partners to advance efforts to assist the Afghan people during this time of uncertainty," Al-Shamsi said.



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US evacuation flight from Afghanistan had record 823 passengers Putin says world must prevent 'collapse' of Afghanistan

Abu Dhabi closes its doors to the unvaccinated as it steps up COVID-19 safety rules

Fri, 2021-08-20 16:48

DUBAI: New COVID-19 safety rules came into force in Abu Dhabi on Friday, limiting the places unvaccinated people can enter.

Citizens, residents and tourists will have to show proof of vaccination, or exemption, to gain entry to a number of venues, including shopping malls, restaurants and cafes.

Other venues closed to the unvaccinated include sporting activities, museums, gyms, schools and universities.

Theme parks are also closed to the unvaccinated.

People will be required to use the Al Hosn testing and vaccination app to prove they are either vaccinated or exempt.

The ban does not apply to those who exempt from vaccination, or to children aged 15 and below.

The unvaccinated are effectively barred from entering any business in the UAE capital except for supermarkets and pharmacies.

The neighboring travel hub of Dubai has previously introduced some vaccination restrictions on mass entertainment and sporting events.

But malls and other businesses remain open to the unvaccinated.

The UAE's Ministry of Health and Prevention (MoHAP) announced that it conducted 311,295 additional COVID-19 tests in the past 24 hours, state news agency WAM reported.

The MoHAP announced 1,070 new coronavirus cases, bringing the total number of recorded cases in the UAE to 707,236 since the start of the pandemic.

The Ministry said the infected individuals were from various nationalities, and were in a stable condition, receiving the necessary care – the report added.

There were two deaths in the past 24 hours due to COVID-19 complications, bringing the total number of deaths in the country to 2,014.

The MoHAP said an additional 1,619 people had fully recovered from COVID-19, bringing the total number of recoveries to 687,644.



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UAE to host international humanitarian summit during Expo 2020 Dubai
Rebranded UAE Pro League set for an exciting start following busy transfer window

[Syrian air defenses intercept hostile targets in the sky of Damascus: State TV](#)

Thu, 2021-08-19 23:24

DAMASCUS: Loud explosions shook the Syrian capital late on Thursday as state media reported Israeli airstrikes around Damascus.

The state-news agency SANA said Syrian air defenses confronted the Israeli planes, while the pro-Syrian government Cham FM Radio reported airstrikes in

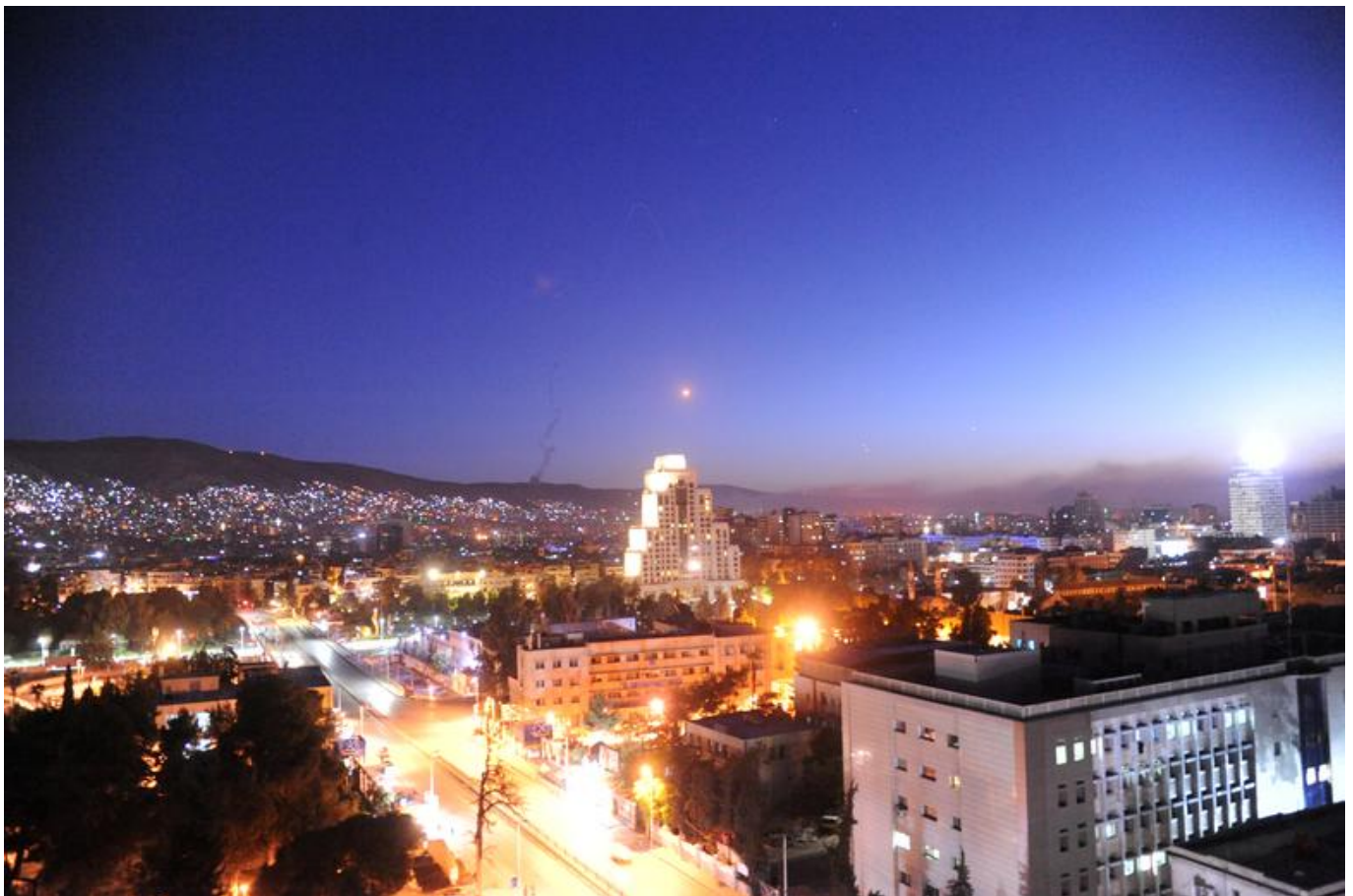
the Damascus countryside and in the central province of Homs.

Damascus residents reported hearing at least five loud explosions that shook apartment buildings over a 15 minute time span. The missiles appeared to have been fired from over Lebanon, jolting residents who heard them streak across the sky before striking targets in Syria.

There was no immediate comment from Israel, which rarely comments on its military operations in Syria. There were also no immediate reports of any casualties.

Israel has carried out hundreds of airstrikes inside Syria in the course of Syria's civil war, against what it says are suspected arms shipments believed to be bound for Lebanon's Iran-backed Hezbollah militant group, which is fighting alongside Syrian government forces. It rarely acknowledges or discusses such operations.

Earlier this week, Syrian state media reported that Israel carried out a missile attack on southern Syria late on Tuesday, targeting an unspecified military position.



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Syrian TV reports Israeli strike on suburbs of Damascus Loud bang heard in Damascus amid operation to clear explosives

Houthis abduct young journalist in Sanaa amid crackdown on dissent

Author:

Thu, 2021-08-19 23:03

ALEXANDRIA: Houthi rebels in Yemen have been holding a young journalist abducted in Sanaa for more than a week, as the militia's clampdown on outspoken academics, journalists and social media activists intensifies.

After detaining Younis Abdul Sallam, the Iran-backed Houthis waited more than 10 days before informing a local lawyer of his whereabouts, his family told Arab News on Thursday.

"Younis is being held in the intelligence service office," said a relative who asked to remain anonymous. "We do not know why they detained him and they refuse to answer our calls."

Abdel Majeed Sabra, a lawyer who defends abductees in Houthi jails, said abducted journalists face mistreatment at the hands of the notorious intelligence agency. He called on local rights groups and activists, including the Yemeni Journalists Syndicate, to put pressure on the Houthis to release Abdul Sallam immediately.

"The journalists' union should use all means to secure his release," he said in a message posted on Facebook.

Abdul Sallam, who is from the southern city of Taiz but has lived in Sanaa for several years, graduated from Sanaa University's College of Media in 2017. He is not a particularly high-profile journalist but has posted messages critical of the Houthis on social media.

"The moment one of their preachers shouts from a nearby mosque, warning of the dangers from America and Israel, the group begins targeting populated areas in Marib," he said in a message posted on Facebook on June 10, in which he criticizing the Houthis for launching a deadly offensive on the central city of Marib and targeting residential areas in the city. "How can normal human beings coexist with them?" he asked.

Based on his own horrific jail experience, Haytham Al-Shihab, one of five Yemeni journalists released from Houthi prisons during a prisoner swap in October last year, said Abdul Sallam will have been put in solitary confinement, had his name replaced on documents with a number, and been subjected to intense interrogations.

"During the evenings of the first month of his detention, he will be exhausted and tired from many long interrogations, accusations and fabrications that will deprive him of sleep," Al-Shihab said.

The Houthis are not only targeting journalists. Residents in Houthi-held Sanaa said the militia abducted academic and businessman Osama Al-Shibami weeks ago and refuse to say where he is being held. His friends and students condemned the Houthis for targeting a man they described as a good, apolitical person with no enemies, and called for his immediate release.

On Aug. 4, unidentified assailants shot and killed Mohammed Ali Naeem, a professor at Sanaa University, as he left a friend's house in the city. It happened shortly after he posted a message on social media demanding the Houthis and the Yemeni government increase the salaries of employees. The Houthis denied they were responsible and said they had captured a man who allegedly confessed to killing the professor over an old feud.

Residents in other Houthi-controlled areas, including Amran and Dhamar, said the militia has abducted several journalists and social-media activists who had criticized the rebels' crackdown on singing and weddings, and exposed corruption among the movement's officials.

According to analysts and authorities, Yemen has experienced the biggest displacement of journalists and activists in its history since the Houthis seized power in the country in 2014.

Najeeb Ghallab, an undersecretary at Yemen's Information Ministry and a political analyst, told Arab News that more than 1,000 journalists were forced to flee the country after the Houthis raided and looted media offices and suppressed their work.

"Due to problems, corruption, sabotage, systematic robberies and mismanagement by the Houthis in Sanaa, opposition began to grow, not only among journalists but intellectuals and academics," he added.



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Thousands of Yemeni children brainwashed in Houthi 'summer camps' Yemeni army liberates new areas in Al-Jouf from Houthi control