

# Turkish whistleblower who leaked alarming pollution study acquitted in court

Fri, 2021-04-30 19:47

ANKARA: Turkish academic and rights activist Bulent Şik has been acquitted of charges of “disclosing classified information” in an Istanbul court.

Şik, the former deputy director of a food safety center at Akdeniz University in Antalya, was accused of publishing the confidential findings of a research study commissioned by the Turkish health ministry on the connection between toxic pollution and high incidences of cancer in western Turkey.

The findings were published in the opposition daily Cumhuriyet in a four-part series in April 2018, and stirred a widespread debate about public health in Turkey and the link between toxic pollution levels and cancer.

Şik was involved in a scientific team that revealed dangerous levels of heavy metals and pesticides in several samples of water and food from western provinces.

He was handed a 15-month prison term in 2019, but appealed his conviction.

The Istanbul court ruled that the study could not be considered a “confidential document” due to the responsibility of the ministry to reveal all information about public health. The health ministry did not insert any confidentiality clause in the research document.

“The results of this survey interest millions of people. And no single public announcement was made so far about them since I disclosed them in my column three years ago. It is so important to inform the greater public on critical issues that interest public health and the environment,” Şik told Arab News.

According to the academic, government pressure pushes scientists into adopting ethical stances by making the public aware of negative trends that affect health.

“Therefore, I wrote these columns to inform and warn people about the health challenges they face in their daily lives and about the contamination of their water resources by toxic materials,” he said.

Last April, 614 scholars, world-renowned intellectuals and right activists, including Noam Chomsky, Robert Curl, Judith Butler, published an open letter expressing solidarity with Şik and demanding that the Turkish Court of Appeals reverse his conviction.

“We, the undersigned, express our solidarity with Dr. Şik, who acted as a responsible scientist defending public health. We encourage scientists and academics around the world to condemn the Turkish Ministry of Health and

academic institutions in Turkey that deliberately target academic freedom and freedom of speech,” said the letter.

Şik said that the trial exposed the cancer study and made it “much more visible” in domestic and international spheres, with several activists lending support.

“I knew that I was right and telling the truth. It was giving me the strength to stand this trial. Even if there is another appeal to this acquittal, this injustice will turn to be much more visible,” he said.

The case was defined as a “travesty of justice” by Amnesty International.

Turkey’s rapid economic growth has often come at the cost of environmental safety and public health.

Last year, urban water in a district of western Turkey was revealed to contain levels of arsenic 350 times greater than World Health Organization standards. The rate of arsenic in drinking or utility water in the city was ranked number one in the world.

Cancer-related deaths in the region are three times higher than average rates elsewhere.

“The reality still stands there. Millions of people keep living in these areas where toxicity threatens their lives,” Şik said.



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Turkey doctor gets 15 months for revealing pollution cancer risk  
Turkish doctors turn detectives to track virus

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## France's Le Drian to head to Lebanon May 5-6 for crisis talks

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Fri, 2021-04-30 18:59

PARIS/BEIRUT: French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian will visit Lebanon next week to discuss the political crisis there with senior officials, two sources aware of the matter said on Friday.

The trip comes after Paris said it had started putting in place measures to restrict entry to France for some Lebanese officials on the grounds that they were blocking efforts to find a solution to Lebanon's political and economic crisis.

The two sources said Le Drian would travel on May 5 and hold meetings on May 6.

He has requested meetings with President Michel Aoun and Shiite Hezbollah ally and Speaker of the Parliament Nabih Berri, according to a note sent by the embassy.

Le Drian has also asked to meet Gebran Bassil, the leader of Lebanon's biggest Christian political bloc and Aoun's son-in-law, who is under US sanctions for alleged corruption and his ties to Hezbollah.

France has spearheaded international efforts to rescue Lebanon from its deepest crisis since the 1975-1990 civil war, but after eight months has failed so far to persuade squabbling politicians to adopt a reform roadmap or form a new government to unlock international aid.

France's foreign ministry did not confirm or deny Le Drian's planned trip. With the European Union, Paris has been working on creating a sanctions regime for Lebanon that could ultimately see asset freezes and travel bans. However, that is likely to take time. As part of efforts to raise pressure on key Lebanese actors, France intends to stop issuing visas to certain officials, diplomats have said.

Diplomatic sources have said that Bassil could be one of those targeted, although he has no specific ties to France.



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France's Le Drian urges EU to help steady Lebanon

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## [Iran 'toying with life' of dissident filmmaker: Amnesty](#)

Author:

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1619793668785502400

Fri, 2021-04-30 18:07

PARIS: Iran is "toying with the life" of dissident filmmaker Mohammad Nourizad who is seriously ill in prison after torture which allegedly included multiple injections of an unknown substance into his genitals, Amnesty International charged on Friday.

Nourizad, who has written and directed several films, has been serving since

August 2019 a prison sentence totalling over 17 years on charges of insulting supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, according to Amnesty.

Amnesty said his health has been deteriorating in Tehran's Evin prison due to "prolonged denial of access to adequate specialized medical care for his heart disease and diabetes."

Doctors have urged that he be admitted to hospital for treatment of a heart condition but the authorities have refused this so far, the rights group added.

"The Iranian authorities are cruelly toying with the life of" Nourizad, it said.

Amnesty cited a letter which it said Nourizad had written from Evin in April where he described how he had been injected with an unknown substance "eight times into my penis."

"I immediately wrote a letter to the head of the prison requesting that I urgently be sent to the Legal Medicine Organization for examination in order to reveal what substance I was injected with eight times. I have not heard from him since," it quoted him as saying.

Amnesty International said it was horrified that "he has been subjected to torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, including sexual violence and forced administration of chemical substances."

It also said that the lack of attention from the authorities had resulted in Nourizad resorting to self-harm in a plea for his demands to be answered.

His daughter said in a recording posted online that at the end of their prison visit in March 2021 her father made cuts to his face, head and neck with a razor, resulting in heavy bleeding.

Meanwhile, the authorities have also arrested his son, Ali Nourizad and have sentenced him to three and a half years in prison, Amnesty said, denouncing "an attempt to place further pressure on Mohammad Nourizad."



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Amnesty director slams Turkey over rights abuses  
Amnesty slams 'inhumanity of Iran's criminal justice system'

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## **Prince Muhammad bin Talal of Jordan passes away aged 80**

Thu, 2021-04-29 21:35

AMMAN: Jordan's Prince Muhammad bin Talal has passed away at the age of 80, the Royal Hashemite Court announced on Thursday.

Born in Amman on October 2, 1940, he was the second son of King Talal of Jordan and the younger brother of King Hussein of Jordan, and served as Crown Prince from 1952 until 1962.

"The Royal Hashemite Court mourns the passing of His Royal Highness Prince Muhammed bin Talal, the personal representative of His Majesty. Prince Muhammed, may his soul rest in peace, passed away on Thursday, 29 April 2021," a statement said.

The statement added that Prince Muhammad will be buried after prayers on Friday in the royal shrines at the Royal Guard Command Mosque.



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King Abdullah II declares Jordan 'strong' as defendants in 'sedition' case released  
Jordanian government to announce details of arrests

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## [Turkish opposition slams government for mismanaging vaccine supply](#)

Thu, 2021-04-29 20:29

ANKARA: Turkey is battling an acute shortage of vaccines as the country enters an 18-day lockdown to curb the highest coronavirus disease (COVID-19) infection rates in Europe.

Despite the shortage, which is expected to last for two months, Ankara is still sending vaccines to Libya, sparking opposition anger. It claims that the ruling Justice and Development Party cannot manage the pandemic effectively.

Meral Danis Bestas, group deputy chairwoman of pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party, said Turkey has been sending COVID-19 vaccines to the Free Syrian Army (FSA) militants, who have been deployed to Libya since early 2020 to fight alongside the Government of National Accord.

“Even when it is impossible to get vaccinated in exchange for a fee, the limited amount of vaccines are being sent the FSA in Libya,” she said.

Turkey has received 28 million doses so far, and only 8 million doses are left, which does not meet the needs of those waiting for a second dose.

Opposition parties have blamed the critical shortage of vaccines on the over-dependence on China. They accuse Beijing of using vaccine procurement as a bargaining chip to convince Turkey to extradite Uighurs who fled to the country.

The slightest disagreement between the two countries has led to occasional halts in vaccine supply.

“The negotiations about the vaccine were carried out by the foreign minister and not the health minister. Therefore, the failures in foreign policy have reached such a point that public safety is threatened,” Bestas said.

Turkey had only relied on using vaccines developed by China’s Sinovac. Ankara recently approved vaccines from Pfizer-BioNTech.

The country also increased intervals between two doses for Pfizer-BioNTech vaccines from four to eight weeks.

Elsewhere, in a long-awaited move, Turkey has signed a deal for 50 million doses of Russia’s Sputnik V vaccine, which will start arriving next month and should help address a short-term fall in supply. But it has been revealed that the Turkish company which signed the agreement with Russia is owned by a former AKP local official.

On Thursday, the Ankara office of Turkey’s Healthcare and Social Service Laborers Union advised Health Minister Fahrettin Koca to stop giving promises about vaccinations in the country and criticized him for being distanced from science and reality.

In September 2020, Koca publicly announced that 50 million doses of Chinese vaccines were coming, but a fall in supply soon followed.





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Doctors say Turkish COVID-19 outbreak worse than reported as hospitalizations swell