

Syrian Media on the Hariri Tribunal

Contributed by Saad Jarous, asharqalawsat
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Damascus, Asharq Al-Awsat- With the commencement of the International Tribunal of the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Al Hariri in The Hague yesterday, it was noticeable that the majority of Syrian media, both public and private, electronic and print, did not cover or report the Tribunal.

The leading news stories reported by the official Syrian Arab News Agency [SANA] on Saturday, and Sunday morning, were regarding the global financial crisis, and the heavy rainfall and snow seen throughout the country.

The three official Syrian newspapers; Teshreen, Al-Thawra, and Al-Baath, did not focus the International Tribunal, rather their front page stories dealt with the visit of Syrian Prime Minister Muhammad Naji al-Otari to Tehran, and the commencement of the Iranian- Syrian joint-committee.

Privately-owned Al Watan newspaper did report the International Tribunal, but not on its front page, and its articles questioned the tribunal's ability to achieve justice. Alwan Amin Al-Drin wrote "Will the International Tribunal be able to rise above money and external political interference? Will it rise above the clear distortion of its purpose, which has placed suspicion on people who have nothing to do with the crime of assassination Rafik Al Hariri? Questions that will be answered in the coming days by the conduct of the International Tribunal."

The opening session [of the International Tribunal] was not reported on by Teshreen newspaper on Sunday, but was covered by its sister publication Al-Thawra under the title "Peacemaking" and called for peace to be made by "resisting evil and confronting the enemy."

The official state television channel did not mention the tribunal at all, although Al Dunya TV announced that the International Tribunal had officially begun in The Hague, but noted that "the actual trial is not scheduled to begin before the end of the current year." Al Dunya TV also made reference to the "March 14 alliance's campaign to promote political information on the tribunal's work" and Hezbollah's demands to Judge Sakr Sakr not to succumb to political pressure and to release the 4 General [that are implicated in Al Hariri's assassination] saying that "their detention is…illegal."

Al Dunya's news story ended by recalling that "Chief Prosecutor Daniel Bellemare has stressed that the court is not acting in revenge, and will not be subject to any political pressure."

In addition to this, Syrian legal mediators expressed their satisfaction at Daniel Bellemare's pledge not to politicize the tribunal. Dr. Ammar Al Qurbi, a member of the International Coalition for the International Criminal Court [ICC] informed Asharq Al-Awsat that "From a political point of view, we respect this tribunal and hope that it will not become politicized, or influenced by political polarization."

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