

US to go ahead with asset freeze of Lebanese figures

Contributed by The Daily Star
Thursday, 01 November 2007

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BEIRUT: The US will carry out the provisions of an executive order issued by President George W. Bush over the summer to freeze the assets of those who hinder international investigations into the assassination of former Premier Rafik Hariri, starting with four Lebanese political personalities, according to a report in the daily An-Nahar.

A White House source told the paper that the US administration has been considering applying the executive order after several obstacles emerged concerning the Lebanese presidential election.

The action is designed to send a message to Syria and to political forces and individuals aligned with Syria that aim to hinder Lebanon's upcoming presidential elections.

The source said that meetings have been held in this regard between officials from the National Security Council, the State Department and the US Treasury, which normally handles announcing such sanctions.

The source added that the four individuals targeted for an asset freeze do not currently reside in the US, adding that the four "should be worried over their interests."

The source said the US aims to use such sanctions and the strengthening of the international front to support Lebanon in traversing this delicate period.

The order calls for the freezing of the accounts of individuals in US banks or financial institutions in the US or abroad as well as any other assets or property, the paper said. The names of the four have to date not been announced officially.

Bush issued the executive order on April 26 authorizing the secretary of the Treasury to freeze the US-based assets of anyone found to be involved in the Hariri assassination. The order also affects anyone involved in bombings, assassinations or assassination attempts in Lebanon since October 2004, and anyone who provided material support for those attacks and anyone hindering the international investigation into the Hariri assassination.

Bush noted in the order that the commission investigating the Hariri assassination concluded in its October 2005 report that evidence points to both Lebanese and Syrian involvement in the attack. It also said several people interviewed by the commission, including a senior Syrian official, had provided false or misleading testimony.

The investigation into the assassination is ongoing. Chief investigator Serge Brammertz interviewed Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and Vice President Farouk al-Sharaa about Syria's alleged involvement April 25.

The order did not specify any individual by name but authorized the secretary of the Treasury, in consultation with the secretary of state, to determine who should be subject to its provisions. - The Daily Star

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