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Women attack STL investigators in Dahiyeh



At a furniture store on the outskirts of Dahiyeh, Mr. Moussa was drawn to his shop window this morning by a crowd of yelling

women. They had gathered to verbally and physically assault two Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL) investigators and their interpreter who came to question Dr. Iman Charara.

“The women were yelling ‘you are American, Israeli!’” Moussa said. “They were cursing the investigators and asking them to leave.”

State Prosecutor Said Mirza **announced** this afternoon that he launched an investigation into the incident.

March 14 politicians are saying the incident is the latest attack on the tribunal, which was established by the UN to investigate the murder of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri.

“The assault on the international investigators is a dangerous part of March 8’s larger war against the tribunal,” Lebanon First Bloc MP Farid Makari told NOW Lebanon.

One Hezbollah source, who spoke on condition of anonymity, told NOW Lebanon that the party is not in any way linked to the incident.

The clash occurred around 9 a.m., locals said. It erupted unexpectedly when a crowd of women surrounded the door outside of Charara’s first-floor gynecology clinic. The STL investigators were inside the clinic and intended to question Charara to get information about some of her patients.

Several witnesses of the incident told NOW Lebanon that there were between 25 and 50 women present, and Charara herself told AFP there were around 30.

“There were about 25 women in the beginning, and later more and more people gathered to see what was happening,” said a local pharmacy employee, who preferred not to give his name due to the sensitivity of the incident.

One of the women reportedly snatched one investigator’s briefcase. The question the country now faces is how today’s eruption will affect the ongoing work of the tribunal.

The STL’s Office of the Prosecutor, which is investigating Hariri’s assassination, declined to comment. “The Office of the Prosecutor takes this incident very seriously and we are currently looking into it,” the STL’s media relations unit told NOW Lebanon via email. “We cannot disclose more information at this time.”

Some Hezbollah analysts believe the clash was organized by the Party of God to covertly attack the STL. Reports unconfirmed by The Hague-based Tribunal have surfaced over the past several months suggesting that Hezbollah members will be accused of involvement with Hariri’s murder.

“This is a new, secret (or open secret) arm of Hezbollah where they hide behind the civilian population when Hezbollah does not dare to move forward directly,” said Lokman Slim, an activist who works with the Shia community. “It’s a very clear message of a camouflage strategy that Hezbollah has been using for several years.”

Slim said the organization used similar tactics in 2006, when Hezbollah members and fighters more literally hid behind civilians,

leading to the destruction of much of Lebanon's residential south.

"Civilians are a new military section within the Hezbollah strategy," he said.

Another analyst and researcher, Mona Fayyad, cited a **July 2010 incident** involving the United Nations Interim Forces in Lebanon. "This is very similar to what happened in the South when the 'people' moved against UNIFIL," she said. Groups of South Lebanon residents gathered on two occasions in July to throw stones at French contingent forces. Fayyad suggested this was organized by Hezbollah.

"I think the general situation in the country is creating a lot of tension," Fayyad said. "Everyone is tense, and it is affecting the performance of the Lebanese in general... We should look into what is causing these groups of people to act, because it is dangerous for them before it is dangerous to anyone else."

Not everyone saw a direct Hezbollah hand in the incident, but nonetheless view it as a message for the STL.

"In my opinion, this is an indirect statement from the Dahiyeh community against the STL," Kassem Kassir, a journalist at *An-Nahar* newspaper who writes frequently on Hezbollah, told NOW Lebanon, echoing a **statement** by Amal MP Yassine Jaber. For their part, people who live and work near the clinic noted that following the incident, police did not appear on the scene until well after the attack occurred. "It was like an Arab movie," Moussa said. "Police officers come at the end of the action."