

Witness intimidation is a criminal act: Hariri

BEIRUT: Former Prime Minister Saad Hariri slammed as “a criminal act” the publishing of a list of alleged witnesses in the assassination case of his father, statesman Rafik Hariri.

“Intimidation of witnesses [whose names] are supposed to be kept secret, is a criminal act,” Hariri told reporters in Paris following talks with Maronite Patriarch Beshara Rai late Wednesday.

“Two days ago the names of some witnesses in the [Special Tribunal for Lebanon] were leaked. Just to be clear, the international Tribunal will carry on its work and those who killed Rafik Hariri and other martyrs of the Cedar Revolution will pay the price,” Hariri vowed.

Hariri called on the Lebanese government to act in regard to the leak.

On Tuesday, the website of Hariri’s Al-Mustaqbal newspaper was hacked with its front page replaced with a list of names under the title “secret witnesses in the Special Tribunal for Lebanon (Group #1)” from a website called “Journalists for The Truth.”

The website, by a “group of journalists seeking to unveil corruption in the Special Tribunal for Lebanon,” also lists a series of “instructions to STL witnesses.”

The STL said Wednesday the list of witness names was inaccurate.

The U.N.-backed court has indicted four Hezbollah members in the 2005 assassination of five-time Prime Minister Rafik Hariri.

Hezbollah has denied the allegations, with the party’s chief Sayyed Hasan Nasrallah describing the suspects as honorable men who have fought against Israel.

Nevertheless, Hariri said his hand is stretched forth toward Hezbollah.

“Hezbollah is a core component in the country, just as the Future Movement is,” he said after a late Wednesday meeting with Rai at Raphael Hotel in Paris.

“Our doors were never closed in the face of anyone. We are not against dialogue but we are for a constructive dialogue that leads to optimum results for the country, and we are ready for a constructive dialogue,” he said.

On the government formation process, Hariri said he backs Prime Minister-designate Tammam Salam in his efforts to form a Cabinet to oversee the upcoming parliamentary elections.

“We have a basic goal in Lebanon: that elections take place,” he stressed.

Regarding the new government’s policy statement in light of the disputes over the political equation “the army, the people, the resistance,” Hariri pointed to the Baabda Declaration which “all political parties agreed on.”

The Baabda Declaration – adopted by the government of caretaker Prime Minister Najib Mikati – calls for distancing Lebanon from regional developments and crises, particularly Syria.

With regard to the different views on the shape of the new government, Hariri said: “We support everything he [Salam] says.”

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