

France Implicated in Hariri Murder Case

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A witness who gave false testimony in the case of the murder of the former Lebanese premier says France had provided him with a forged passport to help him get away with perjury.

A report by the Volatairenet website said that France had provided Mohammed Zuhair Siddiq — the key witness in the case of Rafiq Hariri's murder — with a forged passport to grant him immunity from prosecution.

The report came amid accusations by the US and Israel against Syria and Hezbollah, claiming that traces of their involvement were found in Hariri's assassination in 2005.

According to the report, a UN probe committee headed by German prosecutor Detlev Mehlis had relied on the testimony given by Siddiq, who claimed to be a former senior Syrian intelligence official.

In his testimony, Siddiq had accused the Syrian and Lebanese presidents of masterminding the murder. He also accused seven Syrian and four Lebanese generals of organizing the assassination.

After presenting his testimony, Siddiq took refuge in the Spanish property of Rifaat al-Assad, who is the pro-US uncle of incumbent Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

Siddiq was then offered support by the French General Directorate for External Security (DGSE).

While being under the protection of DGSE, the French police department eavesdropped on his telephone calls and found out that Siddiq had lied to the tribunal tasked with probing Hariri's murder case that he was a senior Syrian official.

It was later reported in Lebanese media that Prime Minister Saad Hariri and Lebanon's Druze leader Walid Jumblatt had paid him to commit perjury.

In their defense, Hariri and Jumblatt denied paying for perjury, but admitted to having encouraged Siddiq to testify, believing he was sincere.

Siddiq was then arrested in France under an international arrest warrant issued by the Lebanese judiciary but was later released with Paris refusing to extradite him to Lebanon.

He was living in Paris for a while but later vanished into thin air in March 2008. The French government did not provide any explanation on the issue.

Siddiq was then traced in the UAE, where he was arrested and sentenced to six months in prison for carrying a forged Czech passport.

After being released from prison in the UAE, Siddiq told reporters that he received his passport from the office of French President Nicolas Sarkozy to escape Lebanese justice.

Hariri was Lebanon's most prominent politician since the end of the 1975-1990 civil war. He was killed in a massive truck bombing that set off a spiral of political turmoil in Lebanon.

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