

Belgian PM rejects resignation by two key ministers

25/03/2016 10:38 by admin

Brussels: Belgian Interior Minister Jan Jambon and Justice Minister Koen Geens on Thursday presented their resignations, but their offers were declined by Prime Minister Charles Michel.

Jambon and Geens reportedly offered to resign amid mounting concern that Belgium failed to act on warnings about Ibrahim El Bakraoui before he blew himself up at the Brussels airport, according to The Guardian.

Xinhua said the decision of the ministers followed the revelation of a file about Brussels airport bomber El Bakraoui. He was convicted in Belgium and released on parole that he did not respect. El Bakraoui was then arrested in Turkey on the Syrian border in 2015.

With his extradition having not been sought by Belgium, El Bakraoui was deported to the Netherlands in the summer of 2015.

Jambon explained his decision on Thursday to Belgian newspaper Le Soir.

"I have submitted my resignation. Mr. Geens has done the same. They were rejected. We continue. There were two kinds of error. At the justice ministry and at the Turkish liaison office, which involves the interior and justice ministries. But for now, we continue our work," Jambon was quoted as saying.

A ministerial committee met on Thursday afternoon to look at the case of El Bakraoui, after Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan announced that Turkey had warned Belgium about El Bakraoui's dangerous nature and suspected jihadist tendencies when he was expelled from Turkey in 2015, bound for the Netherlands.

According to reports, Erdogan has said that Belgium and the Netherlands did not take the threat seriously.

The La Libre Belgique newspaper said El Bakraoui was known to Belgian judicial authorities and was sentenced to 10 years in prison in 2010 on charges of robbery and firing at police. He was later released on bail against the advice of the prison service.

Michel said on Thursday: "The government will work with the parliament to ensure total transparency."

The Belgian Terrorism Committee will meet on Friday, followed by a joint committee with the internal affairs, justice and interior ministers to discuss the case. An investigatory committee is scheduled to be set up following that meeting.

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