

Banque du Liban responds to political pressure by adhering to banking secrecy

Author:

Wed, 2020-11-04 21:28

BEIRUT: Banque du Liban Governor Riad Salameh is using banking and professional secrecy laws to avoid delivering documents to consultancy firm Alvarez and Marsal for its audit of the bank's accounts.

Alvarez and Marsal Managing Director James Daniell met with the Lebanese Minister of Finance Ghazi Wazni on Wednesday to discuss the contract signed by the firm and the government to carry out the process, and will meet President Michel Aoun on Thursday.

Aoun and the country's caretaker government, headed by Hassan Diab, are waging a political battle against Salameh to recover seized money, blaming the economic collapse of the country on financial engineering pursued by the governor.

Minister of Justice Marie Claude Najm has issued a circular requiring Salameh to provide Alvarez & Marsal with the necessary information and documents to conduct a financial audit, based on "the fact that the banking secrecy stipulated in Lebanese law does not apply to state accounts and the accounts of the Banque du Liban, especially since these funds are non-confidential under the law on the right to access information."

The bank announced on Wednesday in a statement that it had "handed over all its accounts to the minister of finance" according to due process.

"Concerning state accounts, the Lebanese state can request a detailed statement of its entire accounts and subsequently hand it over to the parties it deems appropriate to inform them, which makes the Banque du Liban avoid the violation of the legally binding secrecy laws, and whose violation will entail penal consequences," it added.

The bank said it regretted "the leakage of information and data provided to Alvarez and Marsal on social media, which violates the law and the provisions of the contract signed with the company."

Alvarez and Marsal had informed Lebanese officials that "the documents it received from the Banque du Liban (were) so far insufficient to continue their criminal audit duties."

But Deputy Speaker Elie Ferzli has refused to lift banking secrecy over the case, saying it would "harm the country's economic interests."

In a statement in Parliament, Ferzli said: "We lift banking secrecy when it comes to money laundering and terrorism, not because of indiscriminate

accusations.

“What is the purpose of systematically destroying what little confidence remains in the international community in Lebanon, due to banking secrecy, to satisfy this person or that? If banking secrecy is lifted in the future, can you tell me: Where do we get what we live on? From apples and grapes? Think about Lebanon’s best interests.”

The Free Patriotic Movement (FPM), led by Gebran Bassil, organized a symbolic car rally on Wednesday in Baabda to demand the criminal audit go ahead.

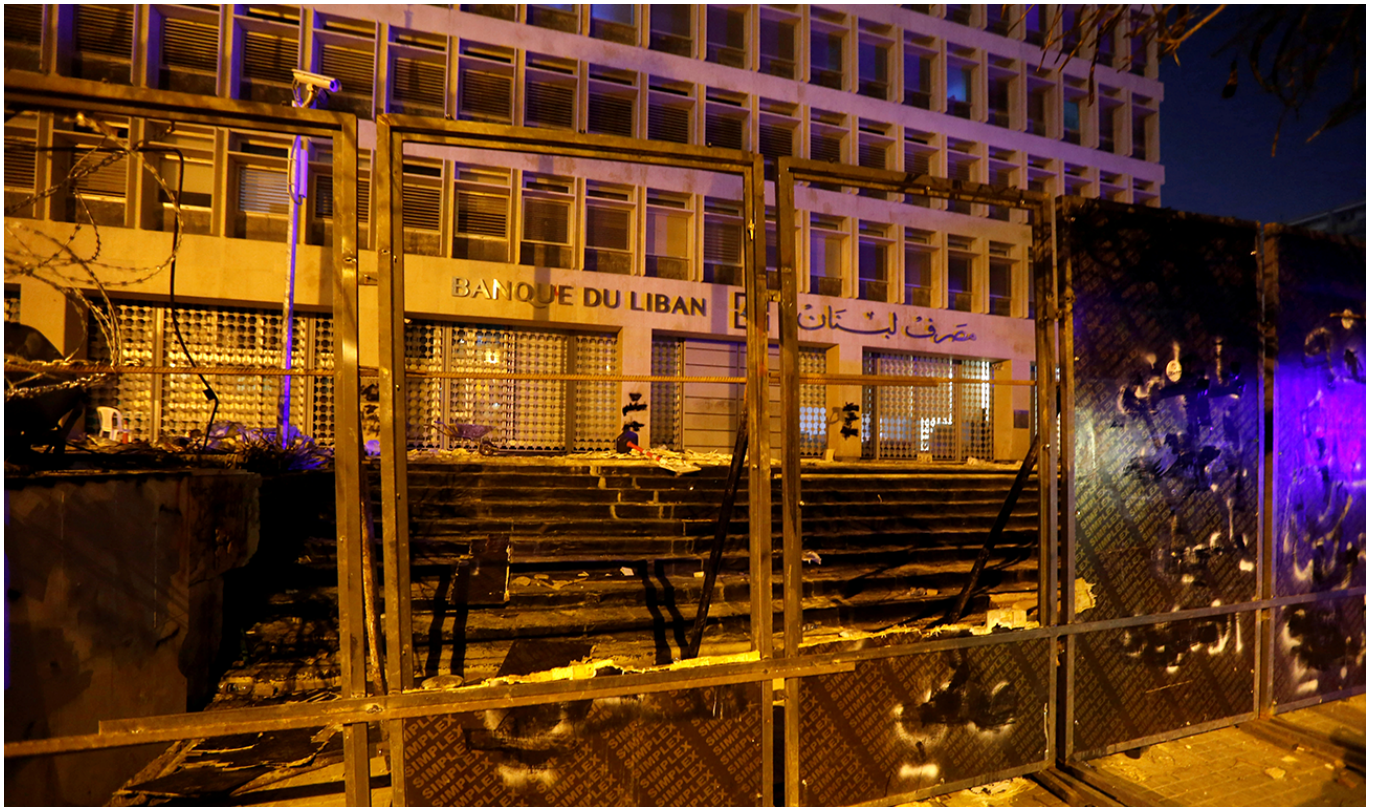
Dr. Jassim Ajaka, an economist, told Arab News: “The Banque du Liban, according to the law, does not have the right to disclose any information. The contract signed between Lebanon and the auditing company (Alvarez and Marsal) provides for auditing only the accounts of the bank, and does not include ministries or any other official institutions.

“Therefore, what is required is not to pressure the bank’s governance to reveal its information, but to go to Parliament to propose a law to amend banking secrecy, or to refer any request to audit anyone’s accounts to the judiciary or the Audit Bureau, two bodies entitled to lift banking secrecy.”

Ajaka added: “What is required is to start with the accounts of the ministries of energy and communications, for example, as the Banque du Liban is the bank of these ministries.”

Former Justice Minister Ibrahim Najjar said: “The government’s decision to sign a contract with Alvarez and Marsal for criminal auditing goes beyond the role of the Audit Bureau, which has the task of auditing public accounts. Moreover, there is no authority of the Council of Ministers over the bank, which enjoys complete independence like that enjoyed by central banks in most countries of the world, especially since the accounts of the bank are subject to the Monetary and Credit Law, specifically Article 15 on Banking Secrecy Law in Lebanon.”

A source close to Wazni told Arab News that the ideal scenario would be to pause the contract. “The current caretaker government cannot hold a Cabinet session or decide on any action against the Banque du Liban,” the source said. “This means that the suspension will be for a month or two, provided that Lebanon does not pay the cost of this suspension to the company. The source added that canceling the contract before its implementation would require the government to pay Alvarez and Marsal \$150,000.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Banque du Liban](#)

[Lebanon](#)

[Alvarez & Marsal](#)

Banque du Liban governor: State spenders must be held accountable Firm hired to audit Lebanon central bank has not received all requested info – sources

[**Egypt resumes negotiations on Renaissance Dam, despite Ethiopian obstinacy**](#)

Author:

Wed, 2020-11-04 21:05

CAIRO: Despite continued Ethiopian intransigence, Egypt resumed negotiations on the filling and operating of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam on Wednesday.

“The three countries agreed that each would present its views during the meeting of the Egyptian, Sudanese and Ethiopian irrigation ministers, scheduled to be held Nov. 4, 2020,” spokesman for the Egyptian Ministry of Water Resources and Irrigation said.

On Nov. 2, Sudan demanded the necessity of abandoning the previous “unproductive” method in the negotiation process on the Renaissance Dam between itself, Egypt and Ethiopia, with the aim of speeding up the process of reaching an agreement.

The Sudanese negotiating team suggested moving forward with negotiations according to a specific timetable and a clear list of outputs to be submitted to the African Union (AU) Commission.

Negotiations had resumed under the auspices of the AU after they were paused in August, and after statements from US President Donald Trump, who claimed Egypt might blow up the dam.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Egypt](#)

[Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam](#)

Renaissance Dam negotiations between Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan resume
Egypt blames Ethiopia for US failure to resolve Renaissance Dam crisis

[**Egypt closes Rafah crossing after**](#)

monitoring violations by Hamas

Wed, 2020-11-04 20:58

CAIRO: Egyptian authorities have closed the Rafah Border Crossing with the Gaza Strip after monitoring violations by Hamas.

The border was shut to goods and vehicles, and those stranded will continue to be deported until Thursday morning.

The move came two days after the Palestinian Embassy in Egypt announced that the Egyptian authorities had informed it to resume work at the Rafah crossing in both directions for the travel and return of citizens for the four days from Monday to Thursday, provided that travelers carried a certificate proving that they had tested negative for the coronavirus disease (COVID-19).

"On Tuesday morning, several buses carrying passengers from the Gaza Strip left through the Rafah land crossing, on the first day of opening it exceptionally in both directions, while the returnees' buses arrived," a statement from the Egyptian Ministry of Interior said.

Groups that had fulfilled the rules and conditions of departure would be allowed to do so, most prominently patients who needed treatment in Egypt and abroad, university students, and holders of residency in foreign countries.

The border closure also comes just days after a Hamas delegation left Cairo, where it had held a series of meetings with Egyptian officials about Palestinian reconciliation, ways to end the division and achieve national partnership, the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, and efforts to alleviate the suffering of its residents.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[_Egypt](#)

[Rafah Border Crossing](#)

[Gaza strip](#)

Egypt opens Rafah to let Palestinians return to GazaRafah crossing remains closed

[UAE opens consulate in Morocco-controlled Western Sahara](#)

Author:

AFP

ID:

1604510257407397700

Wed, 2020-11-04 17:04

LAAYOUNE: The United Arab Emirates on Wednesday became the first Arab country to open a diplomatic mission in the Moroccan-controlled area of the disputed Western Sahara.

The inauguration of the consulate general in the northern coastal city of

Laayoune brings to 16 the number of missions opened in the region since late last year.

The UAE move “reinforces a dynamic of recognition of the ‘Moroccan identity’” of Western Sahara, with “increasing support from the international community,” Moroccan Foreign Minister Nasser Bourita told AFP on Wednesday after the opening.

Western Sahara, a vast swathe of desert on Africa’s Atlantic coast, is a disputed former Spanish colony.

Rabat controls 80 percent of the territory, including its phosphate deposits and its fishing waters.

The Algerian-backed Polisario Front, which fought a war for independence from 1975 to 1991, demands a referendum on self-determination.

Morocco, which maintains that Western Sahara is an integral part of the kingdom, has offered autonomy but insists it will retain sovereignty.

Since late 2019, 15 African countries have opened diplomatic missions in the former colonial capital Laayoune and in the fishing port of Dakhla, further south.

“It’s not an insignificant act, it’s an act that has political, legal and diplomatic meaning,” Bourita said of the UAE move.

Negotiations involving Morocco, the Polisario, Algeria and Mauritania have been suspended for several months.







Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Morocco](#)

[UAE](#)

[Western Sahara](#)

Morocco says seized almost 5 tons of cannabis resin UAE announces 1,008 new cases of COVID-19 and six more deaths

[Egypt to suspend education in event of COVID-19 second wave](#)

Author:

Wed, 2020-11-04 02:33

CAIRO: Egypt's education minister has warned that an expected second wave of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) could see a suspension of education in the country.

But Tarek Shawky gave reassurances that should such measures be necessary alternative arrangements would be made to complete the school year.

He said: "The ministry is fully prepared for the second wave of the coronavirus if it occurs in the coming months.

"All educational directorates in various governorates have instructions from the ministry to tighten precautionary measures inside educational facilities and schools, to limit the spread of the virus.

"Protecting students in various classrooms is one of our most important priorities, and we are always working to provide distinguished, high-quality education to the masses of students," he added.

Shawky pointed out that canceling the new academic year 2020-2021 due to the pandemic was not an option and that all transfer and certification examinations would be held on their scheduled dates.

The minister said school attendance rates were high, coinciding with the third week of the new academic year, and that remedial groups were running in a disciplined manner with no problems detected.

"The situation in all schools nationwide is excellent and is proceeding as planned. There is constant follow-up in schools, to ensure the regularity of the school day and the absence of any obstacles affecting the progress of the educational process," he added.

Teachers and students in Egypt have been following strict precautionary measures including the wearing of face masks throughout the school day.

An official source in the Egyptian Ministry of Education said that the number of COVID-19 deaths in educational facilities was three per million, with only 75 cases reported among 25 million students, teachers, administrators, and other individuals working in the country's education system.

The source added that precautionary measures were constantly being monitored and reviewed in coordination with the Ministry of Health.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Egypt](#)

[COVID-19](#)

Egyptian government warns of danger of new coronavirus lockdown
Egyptian NHS doctor fears deportation after COVID-19 trauma