

# Politically motivated currency rumors blamed for Lebanon unrest

Sat, 2020-06-13 01:01

BEIRUT: Lebanon's leaders on Friday focused on curbing the sudden rise in the dollar exchange rate following a stormy night of protest into the early hours of Friday morning around the country.

The Cabinet meeting chaired by President Michel Aoun agreed to an interim adjustment to address the crisis.

From Monday, the Banque du Liban will pump \$5-9 million per day to category-A money-changers so that they can gradually reduce the dollar exchange rate from 3,850 to 3,200 Lebanese pounds, provided a security crackdown on black-market money-changers is implemented in parallel.

Before the session Prime Minister Hassan Diab met the money-changing syndicate, a delegation from the Association of Banks and the head of the security services.

Sources close to the parties at the meeting said that "news about the dollar exchange rate reaching 7,000 Lebanese pounds on Thursday night was just a rumor," stressing that "the dollar exchange rate did not exceed 5,300 Lebanese pounds, and that the purpose of this rumor was political."

"This became clear when the protesters demanded one thing only in front of the media, which was the dismissal of the central bank's governor, Riad Salameh, and they attacked the bank's branches," the sources added.

"The agreed mechanism will allow category-A money-changers to get dollars from the central bank. The number of these money-changers does not exceed 50, and the 250 category-B money-changers will not be able to purchase these dollars from the central bank."

The Banque du Liban defines the function of category-B money-changers as "buying and selling foreign currencies against any other foreign currency or against the Lebanese currency, buying and selling metal coins and gold bars below 1,000 grams, and selling traveler's checks, provided the value of the checks still to be collected does not exceed \$10,000 or its equivalent in other currencies at any time."

The sources told Arab News: "There are ministers who objected to the proposal that requires businessmen to deal with category-A money-changers and present invoices from these money-changers to the banks they deal with in order to make transfers in dollars so as to prevent businessmen from dealing with the black market."

Some ministers considered this proposal impractical because there are businessmen who keep their money in their homes and use it in their transfers, so they cannot provide invoices to prove the money's source. Discussions during the Cabinet meeting focused on tackling the financial chaos by implementing strict security measures and reducing the media that accompanied the protests.

After his meeting with President Aoun and Prime Minister Diab at Baabda Palace, Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri was keen to declare that "it was agreed to reduce the value of the dollar against the Lebanese currency, starting today, to less than 4,000 Lebanese pounds until it reaches 3,200

Lebanese pounds. It was also agreed to communicate with the International Monetary Fund using one language under the auspices of the parliament." When asked whether the dismissal of the central bank's governor, Riad Salameh, was discussed during the meeting, Berri replied: "We need everyone aboard today, we do not need to dispense with them."

On Friday, money-changers refrained from making dollar purchases or sales, pending the outcome of the meetings.

Aoun wondered during Cabinet's session if the aim of the rise in the dollar exchange rate on Thursday was to bring people to the streets and cause the disturbances.

He also wondered if this was a political or a banking game or something else. He said that three parties were accountable for the financial chaos: The government, the Banque du Liban, and the banks, highlighting that "the losses should be borne by these parties, not the depositors."

Prime Minister Diab said: "The country cannot stand further turbulence, and strict measures are required to stop any person or entity that resorts to this method."

The security services announced the arrest of five money-changers in Beirut, Chtaura, and Tripoli as well as an Ethiopian in the locality of Dora who were involved in illegal money-changing.

Former Prime Minister Saad Hariri described intimidation calling for the dismissal of Riad Salameh as "an economic, political and constitutional madness that will slaughter the Lebanese economy."

He wrote: "They are searching for a way out to save themselves from the evil of their own decisions and actions, not for a solution to save the economy." "This is a malicious and vengeful mentality that is looking for a scapegoat to absorb the people's righteous anger and cries of hunger from all regions," he said.

Samir Geagea, head of the Lebanese Forces Party, said on Twitter: "As long as Hezbollah, the head of the Free Patriotic Movement, Gibran Bassil, and their supporters are in power, prepare for further deterioration every day."

Former Minister Mohamed Choucair said: "The rod, threats, and the imprisonment of money-changers cannot reduce the dollar exchange rate. Even the decision to pump dollars into the market will not produce anything and will only drain the foreign exchange reserves. Achieving this requires two main factors: the citizens' confidence in the government and its performance and securing liquidity in dollars from abroad. Everything else is useless." Activists in the civil movement are preparing for a huge demonstration on Saturday. It will start outside the Ministry of Finance in Beirut and go to Riad Al-Solh Square.

It is not known whether supporters of the parties in power will join the protesters opposing the government at the weekend.

Amal and Hezbollah supporters joined the protests on Thursday night, and demonstrations were seen in the southern suburbs of Beirut for the first time since the uprising started in October.

However, their only demand was to hold the governor of the Banque du Liban accountable.

This demand was raised in the Cabinet weeks ago by the Free Patriotic Movement and was later passed over in order to prevent any financial tensions.



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Palestinians welcome opposition to Israel's West Bank annexation plan  
Lebanon to re-open Beirut international airport from July 1

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## [Palestinians welcome opposition to Israel's West Bank annexation plan](#)

Author:

Sat, 2020-06-13 00:55

AMMAN: Palestinian officials have welcomed the international community's opposition to Israel's West Bank annexation plans, but want the pressure to be permanent.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has announced that he will annex parts of the West Bank, including the strategic Jordan Valley and dozens of Jewish settlements, in line with President Donald Trump's Middle East peace plan. Netanyahu has signaled he will begin moving forward with annexation next month.

The Trump plan envisions the creation of a Palestinian state, but on reduced territory and without meeting the key Palestinian demand of having its

capital in east Jerusalem.

Hanan Ashrawi, a member of the PLO's executive committee, said there needed to be a complete stop to the annexation policy.

"What we need is nullifying the policy of annexation and undoing earlier annexation both de facto and de jure," he told Arab News.

Ashrawi said that Palestinians accepted the compromise of the two-state solution, but that the international community had yet to apply any serious pressure in that direction.

"Recognizing the Palestinian state is neither punishment for Israel or reward for Palestinians. They should have recognized Palestinians on the '67 borders long ago because that is the fulfillment of international law, the right of self-determination and their own people's decisions in their respective parliaments."

The PLO official argued that it had taken Palestinians a lot of effort and persuasion to reach this position, and warned that Israel might expect rewards if it walked back on its actions.

**The question is not the size or location of the annexation but the very concept of annexation of someone else's land, which is contrary to international law and an affront to the will of the international community which Israel so far has treated with utter contempt.**

**Hanan Ashrawi, Member of PLO executive committee**

"There is another problem looming now, that Israel might reduce its annexation to settlement clusters or decide to postpone its actions and will want the world to reward them. The question is not the size or location of the annexation but the very concept of annexation of someone else's land, which is contrary to international law and an affront to the will of the international community which Israel so far has treated with utter contempt."

The escalation of opposition to Israel's annexation plans have come from different quarters.

Germany, which sent its foreign minister to meet with leaders of Israel, Jordan and Palestine, has talked about the possibility of sanctions if the Israelis act unilaterally against international law.

The ambassador of the UAE to Washington, Yousef Al-Outaibi, wrote to the Israeli people in the Yediot Aharonot newspaper and recorded a video calling on them not to support annexation.

"For years, the UAE has been an unfailing supporter of Middle East peace," he said. "We have consistently and actively opposed violence on all sides: We designated Hezbollah a terrorist organization, condemned Hamas incitement and

denounced Israeli provocations. I was one of three Arab ambassadors in the East Room of the White House when President Trump unveiled his Middle East peace proposal in January.”

More recently Saudi Arabia’s Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan, said the annexation plans were a “dangerous escalation” that threatened the peace process, while the World Council of Churches called on the EU to impose sanctions if Israel violated international law and annexed Palestinian territory.

Senior Fatah leader Jibril Rajoub said that Palestinians would fight annexation on all fronts, but that their opposition would be done in a principled way.

“We are approaching a turning point and we need to put aside all our differences and work on all fronts,” he told Arab News. “This must be a priority for all. We need to focus attention on stopping this grave violation of our rights. With all humility, we are ready to lead in a principled way. We want to apply the techniques of the popular struggle, to begin with protests and end with civil disobedience. We need to be unified, we want to change the reality and we want to live in our own state and we want the world to be with us.”

Rajoub, a leader of the Palestinian intifada, said there would be no rush to any action that could affect the global consensus that was forming in support of an independent Palestinian state. “We lived both intifadas and we have been struggling to end the Israeli occupation,” he added.

Some have said that it is possible that Netanyahu might opt to annex one or more of the settlements near the greenline that once separated Israel from the occupied West Bank.

Lawyer and human rights specialists Dalia Qumsieh told Arab News that Israel was expanding Highway Number 60, which connects West Jerusalem to the Gush Etzion settlement. It could be one of three settlements, in addition to Maaleh Adumim and Ariel, that Israel might annex as a first step starting July 1.



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Saudi foreign minister declares Israel's plans to annex West Bank a 'dangerous escalation' German FM warns Israel against West Bank annexation plans

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## [Qatar's bad-boy Sheikh told to maintain low profile because of lawsuits](#)

Fri, 2020-06-12 22:07

CHICAGO: Playboy race-car driver – and accused killer and bully – Sheikh Khaled bin Hamad bin Abdullah Al-Thani has been told to keep a low profile and is restricted to the royal family's beach house in Qatar, sources say.

Several witnesses in a lawsuit filed last year accuse Sheikh Khaled, the brother of Qatari Emir Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, of personally killing an Indian employee assigned to help his wife, and ordering the killing of other individuals, including motor-racing industry rivals and employees the Sheikh

believes betrayed his trust. That lawsuit is being expanded to include five witnesses who will testify to the Sheikh's violent and abusive behavior.

The order for Sheikh Khaled to maintain a low profile follows another major lawsuit filed in New York June 10 on behalf of 10 American victims of Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad terrorism. This lawsuit names the Al-Thani royal family's Qatar Charity, which is funded by the Qatar Foundation and gave more than \$1.5 billion in grants to US journalism schools and think tanks.

Also named are two banks controlled by the Al-Thani family, Masraf Al-Rayan and Qatar National Bank, which are accused of funding terrorism. Sheikh Khaled is a board member of Qatar National Bank but sources say he was recently removed.

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Although the two lawsuits involve allegations of unrelated acts of violence, they are linked by the alleged involvement of the Al-Thani family. Sources associated with the first lawsuit said the publicity over the past year has fueled a dispute between the emir and his unruly, violent brother.

"Sheikh Khaled has been kept out of sight at the royal family beach house due to the new news. They want him away from Doha and out of sight," said a source familiar with the royal family.

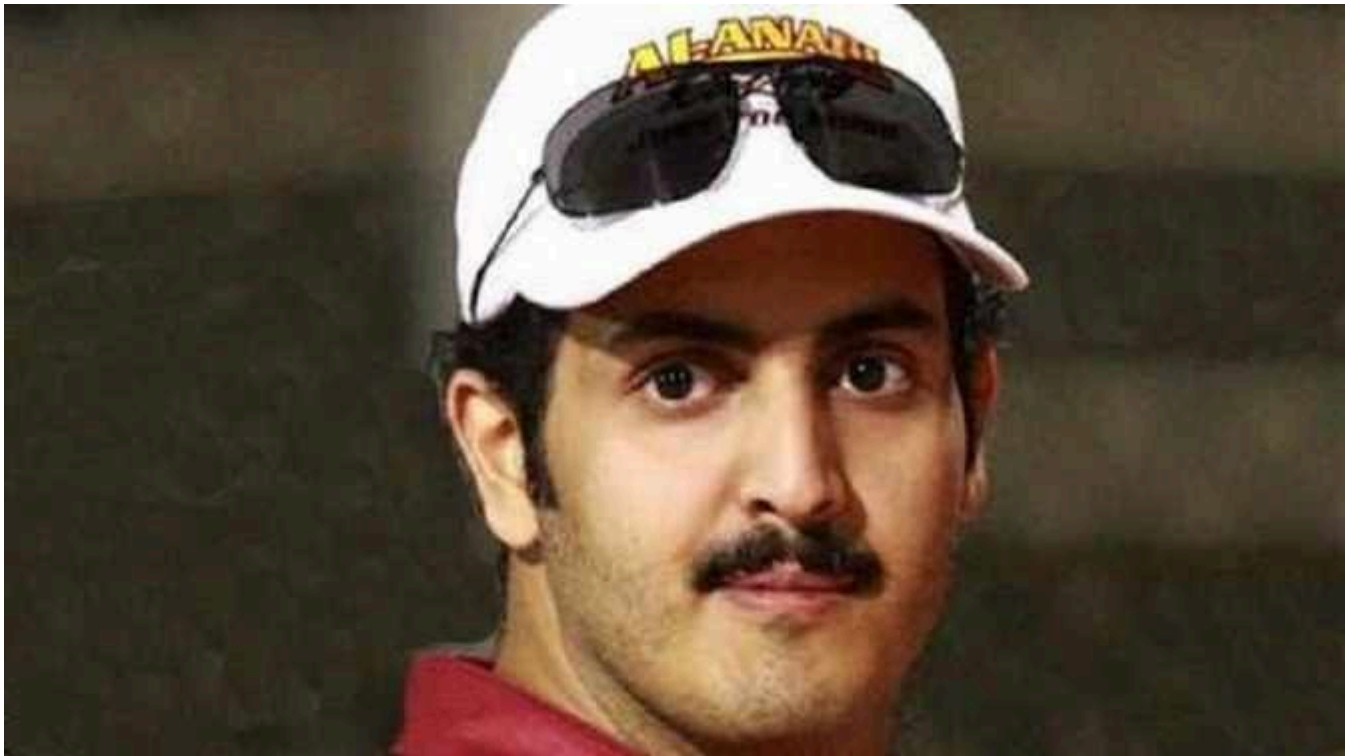
"I have been told that Sheikh Khaled has told his family, 'If you turn on me I will rat you all out.' This, I believe, has to do with the family's other activities."

The lawsuit alleging Qatar's royal family was the source of funding for much of the violence perpetrated by Hamas and PIJ, which has resulted in the deaths or maiming of at least 10 American citizens, raises questions about Qatar's investment activities in US journalism schools, universities and think tanks through the Qatar Foundation, while also allegedly funding terrorism through Qatar Charity. Both the Qatar Foundation and Qatar Charity are owned by the Al-Thani family.

The royal family has fought to prevent disclosures about its funding; for example, it has given more than \$225 million to Texas A&M University since 2011. Critics have also raised concerns about Georgetown University's Qatar campus and its head, Ahmad Dallal, who US think tank the Middle East Forum describes as a long-time and enthusiastic supporter of "US State Department-designated terrorist group, Hezbollah."

The Qatar Foundation also funded the creation in 1997 of "Education City" in Al-Rayyan, Qatar. Hundreds of millions of dollars have gone to a number of international universities with campuses there, including Texas A&M, Virginia

Commonwealth University, Weill Cornell Medicine, Carnegie Mellon University, Georgetown University, Northwestern University, HEC Paris and Hamid Bin Khalifa University.



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## [Palestinians stranded by virus seek way home](#)

Author:

Fri, 2020-06-12 02:30

JERUSALEM: Thousands of Palestinians stranded around the world by the coronavirus are still seeking a way home, months after countries closed their borders and grounded flights in the face of the pandemic.

Aseel Bader touched down in Tuscany in January, after winning a scholarship for a master's program at the University of Florence.

Just weeks later Italy imposed a nationwide lockdown as the coronavirus

spread rapidly, prompting Bader to look for a way back to Hebron in the occupied West Bank.

“I tried to book to come to Palestine, but the response was to stay where you are because it’s safer,” the 26-year-old said. Bader said staff at the Palestinian Embassy in Rome had been very responsive, “but their response isn’t helpful” as they have no information on when she can travel.

The Palestinian Authority says 6,000 people want to come home, but the logistics are incredibly complicated. “Maybe we are the only government in the world that can’t bring back its own students” and others stranded, Prime Minister Mohammed Shtayyeh said.

“Why? Because we don’t have an airport, we don’t have planes, we don’t control our borders. This has been a real pain for us,” he said.

West Bank residents usually travel via Jordan, an easier route than getting the Israeli permit needed to pass through Tel Aviv airport. But the frontier with Jordan remains closed and the PA has no say in when it will open, as Israel controls the border.



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## [Iran virus cases top 180,000 in four months](#)

Author:

Fri, 2020-06-12 02:22

TEHRAN: More than 180,000 people have been infected in Iran's coronavirus outbreak since it first emerged nearly four months ago, an official said on Thursday.

As the figures were announced, President Hassan Rouhani called on Iranians to stick to guidelines aimed at stopping the spread of COVID-19.

"If everyone follows the health instructions exactly, then all jobs can be reopened," he said in remarks broadcast on state television.

"We are progressing slowly and step by step (because we don't want) our people to think that the coronavirus era has passed.

"This would pose a major health problem for us," Rouhani said.

Health Ministry spokeswoman Sima Sadat Lari said 2,238 new infections in the past 24 hours took the total to 180,156.

She said 78 new deaths brought the overall toll to 8,584.

Iran reported its first COVID-19 cases on Feb. 19 – two deaths in the city of Qom.

The government has struggled to contain what quickly became the Middle East's deadliest coronavirus outbreak. Since April, however, it has gradually lifted health protocols in order to reopen its sanctions-hit economy.

That has coincided with a fresh surge in cases, which the government denies amounts to a second wave, saying they are due to increased testing.

Meanwhile, Iran insists it is ready to resolve any issues with the UN nuclear watchdog, expressing "disappointment" in a note circulated over the IAEA's latest report complaining of blocked access.

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said in a report that Iran has for months blocked inspections at two sites where nuclear activity may have occurred in the past.

The Vienna-based agency noted “with serious concern that, for over four months, Iran has denied access to the agency ... to two locations.”

In a note to the IAEA dated June 8, Iran said it had held meetings with agency representatives in Tehran on April 29 and May 16 to discuss the access issues, followed by written correspondence and a fresh proposal to meet with IAEA representatives.

In the note circulated by Tehran’s mission to the UN in Vienna on Thursday, Iran insisted it “continued its constructive engagement with the agency during the past two months, with a view to reach a common understanding ... which would pave the way for the resolution of concerned issues.”

Iran argues that the requests for access are based on “fabricated information,” accusing the US and Israel of trying to “exert pressure on the agency.”

The IAEA has said previously that its access requests were based on “concrete information” that had been validated.

In its note, Iran expressed “deep regret and disappointment” at the IAEA’s latest report.

The report is expected to be discussed at a meeting of the agency’s board of governors starting next Monday.

In a separate report, also to be discussed during the board meeting, the IAEA warned that Iran’s enriched uranium stockpile is now almost eight times the limit set in the nuclear deal the country signed with world powers in 2015.

Iran has been progressively breaking restrictions laid down in the 2015 deal in retaliation for US withdrawal from the accord in 2018 and its subsequent re-imposition of sanctions.



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Health official says 15mln Iranians may have had coronavirus  
One in five Iranians may have had virus, says health official