

Lebanese leaders meet to stem crisis over mountain shoot-out

Author:

Thu, 2019-08-08 22:31

BEIRUT: Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri expressed optimism about the chances of putting an end to the political crisis that has paralyzed the Cabinet for more than five weeks.

After meeting with President Michel Aoun in the presence of Lebanon's Security Chief Maj. Gen. Abbas Ibrahim, Hariri said: "Solutions are near to fruition and I am more optimistic than before. The meeting was very positive. We must just wait a little and we will be hearing good news soon."

Maj. Gen. Ibrahim conducted the mediation between the Progressive Socialist Party (PSP) and the Lebanese Democratic Party (LDP) to find a solution to the crisis caused by a shoot-out between Druze factions in the Chouf Mountains on June 30. He simply said: "The atmosphere is excellent."

This development, that is expected to end the political impasse in Lebanon, took place one day after the strong statement issued Wednesday by the US Embassy in Beirut, warning against "any attempt to exploit the tragic incident that took place in Kabreshmoun to promote political objectives" and stressing "the need for the Lebanese authorities to handle the case in a way that achieves justice without inciting sectarian and regional conflicts with political backgrounds."

PM Hariri is expected to visit to the US shortly, where he may meet with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo.

While the positive results reached by the Aoun-Hariri meeting remained unknown, an adviser to Hariri, Dr. Ammar Houry, told Arab News that the "atmosphere was positive," expecting a Cabinet session to be held "soon."

Lebanese media outlets said the session's agenda "will not include referring the Kabreshmoun incident to the Judicial Council," the subject that sparked the inter-Druze clash and then the disagreement between the PSP and Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) in the first place.

The Hezbollah parliamentary bloc condemned what it considered "any foreign interventions in the internal affairs, whatever their source was, as they do not serve the national interest and do not want to do the country any good."

"Sparring and fighting cannot lead to a solution nor resolve the problem, and amid the ongoing economic bleeding, we demand to find a solution for the political deadlock."

Lebanon's English-language daily newspaper, the Daily Star, expressed in its Thursday's issue the impasse of political, economic and social situation in a very stark form.

The front page of the print edition was completely black, with the word "Lebanon" written across the middle in white. The 10 inside pages were bare except for a black strip across the middle bearing the following phrases: Government deadlock; Sectarian rhetoric increasing by the day; Trash continues to pile up in the streets; Pollution at alarming levels; Unemployment rate at 25 percent; Illegal weapons abound in the country; Public debt close to \$100 billion; Bankruptcy threatens businesses; and Local currency in jeopardy.

The last page read: "Wake up before it is too late."

The Daily Star's Joseph Haboush told AFP: "We wanted to deliver a message to politicians and officials about the dangerous level the situation has reached."

In October, Lebanon's most renowned newspaper, Annahar, protested at the deteriorating situation in the country, where contending parties had failed to form a government, and published 11 blank pages.



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National security is a 'red line,' warns Lebanese president
Lebanese losing faith as politicians fumble over economy

Bodies of bomb victims returned to their families

Author:

Thu, 2019-08-08 22:23

CAIRO: Forensic examinations of the victims of the terrorist car-bomb attack outside the National Cancer Institute in Cairo on Sunday have been completed and the bodies returned to their families.

Tests are still being carried out on the remains found in the car that caused the explosion to determine whether they belong to one or more persons. They include a leg, scalp and parts of a face and back.

Egyptian security forces are continuing to investigate the incident, which left 22 people dead and dozens injured. The public prosecutor has received preliminary forensic reports based on examinations of the victims, which found traces of explosive material on their bodies.

According to witness statements given to prosecutors, a car being driven in the wrong direction along the Nile Corniche collided with two cars before exploding, causing windows at the National Cancer Institute and other nearby buildings to shatter.

Repair work has started at the institute, which was damaged in the attack but hopes to be operating again at full capacity as soon as possible. A number of construction companies, including Arab Contractors Company, have begun the external repairs.

"Damage to the institute is estimated to be 8 percent in some parts and 10 percent in others," said Dr. Hatem Abulkasem, the dean of the institute. In addition to the exterior damage, the explosion also damaged internal walls and ceilings, along with patients' rooms and operating theaters. The first and second floor sustained the worst damage.

Abulkasem said the institute is operating at 50 percent capacity and that outpatient clinics are operating, along with chemotherapy and radiation treatments and laboratory testing.

Dr. Amr Al-Demairi, director of outpatient clinics at the institute, said it treats about 25,000 patients per month. He added that doctors and nursing staff who were working at the institute at the time of the attack had continued to treat patients despite the chaos. He said that many off-duty medical staff rushed to the institute to help as soon as they heard about the attack.



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Family members recall tragic stories of Cairo car-bomb attack victims20 killed after explosives-filled car crashes in central Cairo

[Yemen government blames separatists for Aden clashes](#)

Author:

Thu, 2019-08-08 19:45

ADEN: Southern separatists and presidential guards fought for a second day on Thursday in Aden, with at least one person killed, residents said.

That followed three deaths and nine injuries when gunfire erupted between the rivals on Wednesday.

The separatists are nominally allied with President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi in a coalition battling the Iran-aligned Houthis. But they have rival agendas for Yemen and the separatists accused a Hadi-allied party of complicity in an attack last week on their soldiers.

Hadi's internationally recognized government Thursday blamed the separatist leaders for the flare up that "threatened the safety and stability of citizens and security and stability in general."

After Wednesday's funeral for some of the troops killed in last week's missile strike on a parade, separatist supporters fought with guards near the hilltop presidential palace in the Crater district of the southern port city, witnesses said.

Thursday's fatality came when fighting flared again and a stray bullet hit a man walking in the street, witnesses and his relatives said. Sounds of gunfire and heavy weaponry echoed into the evening while smoke and fire could be seen rising.

The UN envoy for Yemen and a senior UAE official have both called for calm in the city.





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internal probes of UN in Yemen should be publicized

[P&O cancels Gulf cruises due to tensions](#)

Author:

AFP

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Thu, 2019-08-08 15:10

LONDON: US-owned British company P&O Cruises on Thursday said it was canceling its program in the Gulf between October 2019 and March 2020 to guarantee the safety of guests and crew.

The move comes amid a spike in tensions in the region.

Iran has seized three tankers in strategically-important Gulf waters since last month, including a British-flagged vessel.

Britain on Monday said it would form a joint maritime taskforce with the United States to protect merchant vessels.

“The increased tension in the region... means as a British company flying the Red Ensign it is not advisable for us to maintain our planned Dubai and Arabian Gulf program this winter season,” P&O Cruises president Paul Ludlow said in a statement.

“We have therefore taken the unusual step of withdrawing Oceana from the region for the upcoming season,” he said.

The Red Ensign is the flag used by British merchant and passenger ships. Guests would be given full refunds and the Oceana cruise ship will be used on alternative cruises, including to Spain, Portugal and the Caribbean. The company said it was still planning Dubai and Arabian Gulf holidays for the 2020/2021 winter season.

P&O Cruises is owned by US-based Carnival Corporation.



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Saudi Arabia and US to counter maritime threats in Arabian GulfChina 'might escort ships' in Gulf under US proposal

Tunisian minister submits bid to run for president

Author:

Wed, 2019-08-07 23:40

TUNIS: Tunisian Defense Minister Abdelkarim Zbidi submitted his candidacy for a presidential election on Sept. 15 as an independent on Wednesday and said he would resign from government.

Zbidi, 69, who has the support of secular parties including Nidaa Tounes and Afek Tounes, is likely to emerge as one of the frontrunners in the election, which was called early after the death of President Beji Caid Essebsi last month.

Zbidi, a technocrat and medical doctor by training, is considered by many to be above the party politics and infighting that has held back badly-needed economic reforms in Tunisia in recent years.

He looks set as the most serious rival to Prime Minister Youssef Chahed, who will run as a candidate for the liberal Tahya Tounes Party.

After Ben Ali's overthrow in 2011, Zbidi was appointed defense minister until he quit in March 2013 while serving in a Cabinet led by Ennahda. In 2017, Chahed re-appointed Zbidi as defense minister.

Tunisia's president controls foreign and defense policy, governing alongside a prime minister chosen by Parliament who has authority over domestic affairs.

Tunisia's biggest political party Ennahda Movement nominated its vice President Abdel Fattah Mourou as a candidate on Wednesday. He is the first presidential nominee from the moderate party since Tunisia transitioned to democracy after the 2011 uprising.

"The party's advisory council has voted by a majority of 98 votes in favor of Abdel Fattah Mourou's candidacy at the presidential election," Ennahda said in a statement.

Mourou, 71, was appointed interim parliamentary speaker following the death of President Essebsi.

The Ennahda politician had previously served as the deputy speaker, and changed roles after the then parliamentary head Mohamed Ennaceur stepped up as interim president.

The party's announcement marks "the first time in its history that the movement puts forward a candidate for the presidential elections," spokesman Imed Khmiri said.

Ennahda won the first polls after the 2011 uprising which ousted President

Zine El-Abidine, and is currently the largest party in Parliament.

Mourou is known as a moderate and is one of the founding members of Ennahda, which was launched in 1981.

Presidential hopefuls have until Aug. 9 to register, ahead of the election on Sept. 15.

So far 27 people have submitted their candidacy to the electoral commission, including media magnate Nabil Karoui.

He was charged with money laundering in July, after stating his intention to stand in the polls.

Karoui is a fierce rival of Prime Minister Chahed, who is standing in the presidential vote with his Tahia Tounes party.

They have been joined in the race by Abir Moussi, who heads a group formed from the remnants of Ben Ali's ruling party.



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Tunisia Islamist-inspired party announces presidential candidate
Tunisia presidential hopefuls line up for September polls