

Summit was attended by heads of government, ministers and bankers from Arab and foreign countries

Thu, 2019-05-02 22:35

BEIRUT: Lebanon is committed to “carrying out the required economic reforms despite the existing difficulties,” Prime Minister Saad Hariri said in his opening address at the 27th Arab Economic Forum in Beirut.

The task is “not easy, especially if we want to fight corruption and waste,” he added. His speech came after Lebanon’s labor union called a strike to protest austerity measures.

“Waste is a huge calamity in Arab countries, and the real waste lies in the time we’re wasting every day without developing our laws. When our energy bill reaches \$40 billion, this too is waste,” said Hariri, who spoke of “optimistic reform plans.”

He added: “These reforms are in the interest of Lebanese citizens and the youth who can’t find jobs.” He promised to rebuild the country as his father did when he was prime minister.

There is a need to “tighten the belt because our financial situation is worn out, so either we all sink or we put an end to the economic decline for everyone’s sake,” Hariri said at a Cabinet session this week.

“Any action in this sense isn’t against any Lebanese group, but aims to protect all the people of Lebanon.”

Addressing the Arab Economic Forum, he said: “Today, we have a choice to make in Lebanon: Do we want to reach a point of economic collapse, or do we want to look at a country like Egypt and say this is the experience we must implement? This is the change we must make.”

He added: “There are changes and openness (in the Arab Gulf states), which we also see in Egypt. We hope this change is contagious and expands to the entire Arab world so that we all work together as one team.”

At the forum, Egypt’s Prime Minister Mostafa Madbouli outlined his country’s efforts in recent years to implement economic reforms in order to achieve comprehensive and sustainable economic, social and environmental growth.

“Egypt has begun to reap the fruits and positive results of the reforms, the most important of which was achieving an annual economic growth rate of 5.3 percent during the fiscal year 2017/2018, the highest in 10 years,” he said.

“The balance of payments has generated a surplus of about \$12.8 billion, and the extent of foreign exchange reserves held rose from \$14.9 billion in June 2014 to \$44 billion in February 2019, covering about eight months of

commodity imports after it used to cover three months only.”

Arab League Secretary-General Ahmed Aboul Gheit spoke of the region’s need for about 50 million more jobs by the middle of the century.

“We need to create jobs that are suitable for the education and expertise of the youth,” he said. “Unemployment rates are dramatically rising among the educated youth, and we can’t remain indifferent toward this phenomenon.”

SPEEDREAD

Egypt’s Prime Minister Mostafa Madbouli outlined his country’s efforts to implement economic reforms to achieve economic, social and environmental growth.

Mohamed Abdo Saidou, president of the Federation of Arab Chambers of Commerce, said: “Strengthening reliance on the digital economy would contribute more than \$3 trillion to the growth of Arab GDP (gross domestic product).”

He urged Arab governments to strengthen the private sector’s role so that it acts as the driver and largest employer of Arab talent. He also called for inter-Arab alliances to provide parallel development.

Joseph Torbey, chairman of the Association of Banks in Lebanon and the World Union of Arab Bankers, said: “In light of current and forthcoming developments, the pressures on Arab banks and the challenges facing them, including the continuing slowdown in deposit growth and the decline in asset quality, are expected to continue.”

He called for “formulating economic development and reform plans in our region through diversifying sources of economic growth, entering into a new generation of reforms, promoting entrepreneurship, strengthening sources for financing SMEs (small and medium enterprises) and start-ups, and developing the knowledge economy as a key growth engine.”

Torbey said: “The banking sector in Lebanon is a key player in Lebanon’s economic life, and has helped maintain monetary stability over the past quarter-century, curbed inflation, and protected the purchasing power of salaries, wages and low-income groups. Therefore, the banking system and its deposits shouldn’t be subject to seasonal tax on every occasion.”



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Prime Minister Hariri: Lebanon should learn from Egypt's economic development
UN force says third tunnel crossed Lebanon-Israel border

[War on the phone front: Combat game all the rage in Libya](#)

Author:

Thu, 2019-05-02 21:43

TAJOURA, Libya: It's a day of rest from fighting on the front line in Libya and Abdelaziz and his comrades down their weapons only to pick up their phones and resume combat.

"(Khalifa) Haftar's guys are coming to get us," shouts Abdelaziz, referring to the military commander who launched a bid to capture Tripoli last month.

The eyes of the young men are fixed on mobile phones as they shoot it out in PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds, or PUBG, a brutal "battle royale" game in which the winner is the last survivor.

The online multiplayer video game is among the world's most popular with more

than 360 million downloads.

The Iraqi Parliament voted last month to ban the game for “inciting violence” and it has also been outlawed in Nepal and the Indian state of Gujarat.

In Libya, PUBG is all the rage, especially on the front line in the suburbs of Tripoli and around the city where forces loyal to the internationally recognized Government of National Accord have been fighting Haftar’s Libyan National Army for the past month.

“We play it when we come back from the front, and sometimes even on the front,” the burly Abdelaziz says in his raspy voice.

The 25-year-old and his fellow fighters from a “katiba” or battalion in Misrata are battling alongside other pro-GNA forces in Ain Zara, a district in Tripoli’s southern suburbs.

That afternoon, they rested at their camp in Tajoura, a coastal town in the eastern part of the capital.

Under a large awning, Abdelaziz and his comrades – mostly in their 20s – put their Kalashnikov assault rifles patched up with tape and their rocket-propelled grenade launchers on a table.

They reach for their phones, go online and fire up the game with their carefully selected outfits and avatars, some more colorful than others.

They jump out of planes along with 100 other players and are parachuted onto an island where they collect weapons and eliminate each other until the last one is standing.

“I discovered the game a year ago thanks to these guys. I tried it out of curiosity and fell in love,” says Abdelaziz.

“At night, we play. You don’t sleep,” another player says with a laugh.

Mohamed Shaafi, a 19-year-old in a camouflage cap, chips in.

“Whether it’s morning, afternoon or night, we have to play,” he says.

“It excites us and we can even learn tricks (for the real battlefield): where to look, how to crawl, how to train.

“It motivates us when we play it before going to the front line,” he says, looking from under the visor of his cap raised like a cyclist’s.

Around the table, the first crackles of gunshots are heard from their phones.

Without ever taking their eyes off their screens, the four young men talk to each other as though in battle.

“There’s someone under the tree: Watch out!,” “Get down!,” “You’re far away!,” “You don’t have a gun? I’m here, don’t worry.”

For Abdelaziz, his virtual opponents are the same as “Haftar’s guys” who he fights in the potholed streets of Ain Zara.

“The front is PUBG in real life. That’s why we love this game,” Akram says with a smile, his combat helmet still on his head, as he watches the gameplay.

Abdelaziz says “there’s a big difference between real life and gaming.”

“In gaming, when you die, you can come back. In real life, it’s over.”

Mohamed, on the other hand, almost prefers the reality of the front.

“In the game, when you get hurt and call for help, no one comes, but on the battlefields, someone comes to help you,” says the young man with a bandage on his leg.

After 10 minutes of play, one of the players finally lifts his head from his screen.

He appears upset as he drops his phone on the table, before saying: “I’m out of battery.”



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Merkel to push for single EU stance on Libya crisis UAE says ‘extremist militias’ control Libyan capital

Arab coalition rejects Yemen allegations

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Thu, 2019-05-02 20:30

RIYADH: The Joint Incidents Assessment Team (JIAT) of the Arab coalition on Thursday rejected allegations over airstrikes and rights violations in Yemen. It investigated three claims that were reported in the media and rights groups about the coalition's operational conduct in the conflict.

Saudi Arabia leads a coalition of nations to support the internationally recognized government in Yemen in its fight against the Iran-backed Houthi rebels.

JIAT spokesman Mansour Al-Mansour said the team concluded that the procedures followed by the coalition were proper and safe, taking into consideration the rules of engagement and international humanitarian law.

Al-Mansour referenced cases raised by Human Rights Watch.

In 2016 coalition forces were alleged to have attacked two warehouses in an industrial area in the port city of Hodeidah. Bombs were dropped on warehouses and production workshops. The first attack hit a warehouse for foodstuffs, said Al-Mansour, while the second hit a warehouse for vehicle spare parts. There were no civilian casualties, he added.

The JIAT examined the incident and reviewed all documents, including procedures and rules of engagement, daily mission schedule, after-mission report, mission video recordings, satellite images, provisions and principles of international humanitarian law and customary rules, and assessment of evidence. It found that, based on the intelligence report received by coalition forces, the Houthi militia had seized and were using the warehouses as weapons and ammunition storage.

It also found that coalition forces had taken "feasible precautions" to avoid casualties or any accidental damage to civilian objects, minimizing the possibility of damage, through several measures. These included choosing the right time on target and using guided bombs.

In 2017 coalition forces were alleged to have attacked a military police camp in Sana'a, which was seized and controlled by the Houthi militia with prisoners trained to fight against the legitimate government. Al-Mansour said the JIAT investigated the incident and reviewed all documents. It found that, based on the availability of verifiable intelligence information, Houthi militia had seized and controlled the police camp and were preparing for combat against the government.

Coalition forces carried out an air mission using precision bombs and took all necessary precautions in accordance with the Geneva Conventions, he said. The JIAT concluded that the procedures followed by coalition forces to target the detention camp were correct and in accordance with international

humanitarian law and its customary rules.

Al-Mansour turned his attention to the report of the National Commission to investigate allegations of human rights violations in Yemen. He said it was stated that, in December 2017, coalition forces bombed houses in the village of Al-Qataba, Al-Khawkhah Directorate in Hodeidah, killing 21 people.

The JIAT verified the incident and reviewed all documents. It found that, in the course of armed clashes with the Houthi militia, coalition land forces requested close air support (CAS) because they were under direct fire. The militia were in two buildings, making these a legitimate military target of high value.

The CAS struck three military targets, the two buildings where the armed groups had fortified and the shooting site, using guided bombs.

The JIAT studied the claim. It was found that the nearest target area was 11.7 kilometers away from the coordinates of the claim and the time of the strike differed by four hours from what was stated in the claim.

The JIAT also verified the actions taken by coalition forces to target Houthi armed militia.







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US Senate sustains Trump veto supporting Arab coalition in Yemen
Houthis detain 10 journalists in Yemen on 'trumped-up spy charges'

[Sudan orders Bashir interrogated over suspected money laundering, terrorism financing](#)

Thu, 2019-05-02 21:07

KHARTOUM: Sudan's public prosecutor has ordered the interrogation of ousted President Omar Al-Bashir on suspicion of money laundering and financing terrorism, a judicial source told Reuters on Thursday.

In April, the prosecutor began investigating Bashir over accusations of money laundering and possession of large sums of foreign currency without legal grounds. Large sums of money were found in suitcases in his home.



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Arab states support Sudan transition, want stability: UAE minister
Sudan army rulers, protest leaders differ on joint council make-up

[Merkel to push for single EU stance on Libya crisis](#)

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Thu, 2019-05-02 14:44

OUAGADOUGOU: Europe must adopt a common position to resolve the Libyan crisis, which has boosted unrest in the Sahel, German Chancellor Angela Merkel said Thursday in Burkina Faso, a country hard-hit by jihadist violence.

Her visit coincided with a summit of the leaders of Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger – the “G5 Sahel” group set up to manage a coordinated response to jihadist attacks.

“We must now work on a political solution for Libya... which will be important for the future of your region,” Merkel told students at the University of Ouagadougou.

“What the presidents of the G5 Sahel explained to me once again yesterday, and they are right to say so, is that Europe must agree on the approach as there are still diverging perspectives within the European Union,” said Merkel.

“I will do my best to ensure that the Italian position and the French position are consistent and that there are no different voices or positions in Europe.”

The two neighbours have differences over how to respond to the Libya crisis. There is also anger in Rome at France’s perceived lack of support for the influx of African migrants arriving from Italy’s former colony.

Last month, Libya’s UN-backed Government of National Accord appealed for Europe’s support against military strongman Khalifa Haftar, waging an offensive on Tripoli.

Libya has been in turmoil since NATO-backed forces overthrew former dictator Muammar Qaddafi in 2011.

“As Europeans, we will not find a solution for Libya by ourselves, we will need the expertise of the African Union,” Merkel told the students in a near-two-hour exchange.

The chancellor expressed concern over the security situation in Burkina Faso, and said “we try to build links, to assist Burkina Faso in the fight against terrorism, so that you can have opportunities in your own country, so that you can live in security, well-being, and better prosperity.”

Merkel was due in Mali later Thursday, to meet hundreds of German soldiers deployed there as part of UN force MINUSMA, then to Libyan neighbour Niger.



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