

Lebanon political factions gear up for May elections

Author:

Sun, 2022-03-13 23:10

BEIRUT: More than 500 candidates, including 69 women, have applied to contest Lebanese parliamentary elections on May 15, with the country's Ministry of Interior expecting the number to rise dramatically before the midnight deadline on Tuesday.

A total of 517 candidates had submitted applications by late Friday.

The 2018 elections were contested by 976 candidates, including 113 women, but the number fell after the closure of registrations. As a result, 597 candidates, including 86 women, continued in 77 lists across Lebanese constituencies.

The outlook of this year's election will become clearer after the completion of electoral lists on April 4. Voters will head to the polls on May 15, with candidates competing for the country's 128 parliamentary seats across 15 electoral districts.

A number of the main parties will officially announce their candidates on Monday.

Speaker Nabih Berri will reveal his candidates, including current MPs and defendants in the Beirut Port explosion hearings, at a press conference.

The Free Patriotic Movement announced its candidates during its seventh annual conference on Sunday. In an address, the party's leader, Gebran Bassil, attacked his political opponents, including the March 14 Alliance and the civil movement, which he called "a false revolution," adding that "they will fall."

Bassil defended Hezbollah and said that its partnership with the FPM in the electoral lists, to be formed later, "is not a program partnership, but a process of integrating votes."

Hezbollah seeks to ensure that the FPM reaches parliamentary seats with the least possible losses. Hezbollah officials have said: "Whoever fails the Amal Movement and Hezbollah is a partner in the largest regional and international attack that wants to destroy Hezbollah, which protects Lebanon."

MP Wael Abou Faour of the Progressive Socialist Party said that "the project of the March 8 Alliance (including Hezbollah and its allies) in the elections boils down to obtaining two-thirds of the members of Parliament and thus imposing their spoiled candidate as president of the Republic, (referring to MP Gebran Bassil), controlling constitutional amendments, changing the system and turning the issue of the de facto weapons into a constitutional reality, which will not be the will of the Lebanese."

The Lebanese Forces party will launch its campaign on Monday to coincide with the anniversary of the Cedar Revolution on March 14.

Candidates representing Lebanon's Sunni sect are expected to include a number of independent personalities, even those loyal to the late prime minister Rafik Hariri, after the Future Movement asked its members to resign from the party if they decided to run for Parliament.

Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati is likely to back out of the elections. Three MPs from the FM – Rola Tabsh, Mohammed Hajjar and Asim Araj – said they would do the same, confirming their loyalty to Saad Hariri.

Six groups of civil activists on Saturday launched a joint project to unite progressive oppositional forces in one electoral front. The rally set the stage for the drafting of a joint working paper through which the candidates will be announced early next week.

However, parliamentary elections continue to be threatened by Lebanon's deepening economic crisis and the prospect of the country sliding further toward collapse in the two months leading up to the May 15 poll.

President Michel Aoun has been quoted as saying that "the money for the elections is not yet available."

Opinion polls carried out by several private institutions on an almost weekly basis showed a decline in voter enthusiasm for candidates, as well as an increase in political ambivalence and resentment of ruling authorities.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Lebanon Elections](#)

Cash or card? Confusion rages over Lebanon's new payment system
Lebanon central bank seeks names of those who failed to repatriate funds amid crisis

[El-Sisi affirms Egypt's support for UNRWA](#)

Author:

Sun, 2022-03-13 15:40

CAIRO: President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi affirmed Egypt's "absolute support for the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees to continue to play its role in providing basic and necessary services to Palestinian refugees."

During his meeting with UNRWA Commissioner General Philip Lazzarini, El-Sisi said the agency "is the only mechanism that carries out the important humanitarian responsibility of improving the conditions of Palestinians in the Palestinian territories, especially in the areas of education and health."

He added: "Egypt stresses during its contacts with all regional and international parties the importance of providing the necessary support to UNRWA, especially with the conditions it faces and the negative repercussions of the coronavirus pandemic, with the aim of maintaining the continuation of its work in the required manner."

He alluded to Egypt's readiness to support some of the agency's relief projects, especially through the Egyptian Initiative for the Reconstruction of Gaza.

El-Sisi and Lazzarini reviewed UNRWA's role and the challenges it faces. The latter stressed Egypt's historic role in mobilizing the support of the international community for the agency to continue to support Palestinian refugees.

Lazzarini also praised the high priority that Egypt attaches to improving conditions in the Palestinian territories, especially the Gaza Strip.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

[Greek, Turkish leaders seek common ground over Ukraine war](#)

Author:

Associated Press

ID:

1647176247689616800

Sun, 2022-03-13 12:55

ISTANBUL: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis held talks in Istanbul on Sunday, seeking a rapprochement against the backdrop of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

"The meeting focused on the benefits of increased cooperation between the two countries" in view of "the evolution of the European security architecture," the Turkish presidency said in a statement after two hours of talks.

"Despite the disagreements between Turkey and Greece, it was agreed... to keep the channels of communication open and to improve bilateral relations," the statement added, saying the two leaders discussed the conflict in Ukraine and their differences in the eastern Mediterranean.

"We are facing so many challenges at the moment... that the most important thing is to concentrate on what unites us rather than on what divides us,"

the Greek prime minister told journalists after the meeting.

"We stressed the need to forge a positive agenda," Mitsotakis said.

The meeting between the leaders of the neighboring NATO members came as Ankara seeks to shore up its credentials as a regional power player by mediating in the conflict.

Last Thursday, the Turkish resort city of Antalya hosted the first talks between Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba since the start of Russia's invasion.

They failed to broker a cease-fire.

The Turkish and Greek leaders met on Sunday mindful that the burgeoning conflict in Ukraine looms larger than the long-standing tensions between Athens and Ankara.

"From the standpoint of both countries, having a potentially new crisis between them would certainly be very unwanted at this particular point in time," Sinan Ulgen, president of the Center for Economics and Foreign Policy Studies in Istanbul, told AFP.

The Aegean Sea neighbors and NATO allies entered a dangerous stand-off in 2020 over hydrocarbon resources and naval influence in the waters off their coasts.

Mitsotakis then unveiled Greece's most ambitious arms purchase program in decades and signed a defense agreement with France, to Turkey's consternation.

Senior Turkish officials continue to question Greek sovereignty over parts of the Aegean Sea, but last year Ankara resumed bilateral talks with Athens.

"Obviously, Turkey is pursuing a very clear wave of normalization with regional rivals, after several years of having pursued a sort of very assertive foreign policy and being regionally isolated," said Asli Aydintasbas, a fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations.

"I think that both Turkish and Greek leaders understand that the world is changing and the European security order is challenged in ways they have not imagined three months ago," she added.

This week, the Israeli president also visited Ankara after more than a decade of diplomatic rupture.

Antonia Zervaki, assistant professor of international relations at the University of Athens, says Sunday's meeting in Istanbul would provide an opportunity to "bring the two countries closer together" after a fraught period in relations.

Before his trip to Turkey, Mitsotakis had said he was heading there in a "productive mood" and with "measured" expectations.

"As partners in NATO, we are called upon... to try to keep our region away from any additional geopolitical crisis," he told a cabinet meeting on Wednesday. Alongside its European partners, Athens strongly condemned the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, calling it a "revisionist" attack and "flagrant violation of international law."

Before lunch, Mitsotakis attended a celebration at the Orthodox St. George's Cathedral, Turkey's largest, in Istanbul.



Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis, fifth right, talks to Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, fifth left, after attending a ceremony for Orthodox Christians at the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, in Istanbul on March 13, 2022. (AP)

The Greek government spokesman this week said Mitsotakis was already due to visit the Istanbul-based Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew on Sunday and had been invited to lunch by Erdogan at the presidential mansion on the banks of the Bosphorus.

Bartholomew, who has said he is “a target for Moscow,” called during the mass for an “immediate cease-fire on all fronts” in Ukraine.

In 2018 the patriarch recognized an independent Ukrainian Orthodox church, a huge blow to Moscow’s spiritual authority in the Orthodox world.

On Sunday he praised the “vigorous resistance” of the Ukrainians and “the courageous reaction of Russian citizens.”



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Greece](#)

[Turkey](#)

[Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis](#)
[Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan](#)
[Istanbul](#)

Turkey, Armenia vow to continue normalizing relations
Israeli president ends Turkey trip with synagogue visit

[Chad peace talks start in Qatar](#)

Author:

AFP

ID:

1647167475957744300

Sun, 2022-03-13 10:23

DOHA: Chad's military government and dozens of opposition groups started peace talks on Sunday in Qatar as a first step toward ending a rebellion and holding elections.

The landlocked African nation was thrown into turmoil by the killing of longtime leader Idriss Deby Itno in battle with rebels in the country's north last April.

His son, Mahamat Idriss Deby Itno, took over the country after his death, fronting a 15-member military junta and vowing to hold free elections.

Chad's Prime Minister Albert Pahimi Padacke and African Union Commission head Moussa Faki Mahamat told the opening of the conference that both sides would have to make "concessions" for the talks to succeed.

But the process risks being protracted and complicated.

Some 44 armed rebel and opposition groups were invited to the Doha meeting – though some were missing at the opening, which had already been delayed from February 27.

Diplomats said these "precursor" talks could take weeks and that a planned "national dialogue" due to start on May 10 may have to be delayed.

Under the younger Deby's plan, the dialogue would be a prelude to agreeing on a new constitution and then holding elections.

Chad has a long history of volatility since gaining independence from France in 1960 and tens of thousands have died in various conflicts.

It has a large and shifting constellation of armed opposition groups.

"The situation in Chad is very serious, we have to deliver this," the African Union's Faki said in his address to the government and armed groups.

Padacke said that "peace requires more courage and maturity than war."

"Real courage does not mean brandishing your weapon but to have the courage to lay it down," added the prime minister.

He also said success in the talks would help stabilize the whole Sahel region where radical Islamist groups have staged regular attacks.

Libya's Foreign Minister Najla Al-Mangoush also said that the peace process would be crucial to improving stability and help "fight terrorism" in the Sahel.

As a condition for the Doha talks, Chadian rebels called for a general amnesty and the release of “prisoners of war” and the return of confiscated assets.

The military government says it has released hundreds of prisoners and amnestied several prominent leaders.

However, it has so far excluded the Front for Change and Concord in Chad (FACT) – the Libya-based group that launched the offensive in which Idriss Deby Itno was killed.

FACT leader Mahamat Mahdi Ali was not at the talks.

Mahamat Idriss Deby Itno, a 38-year-old four-star general, took the helm last April.

The elder Deby himself came to power at the head of a rebel force in 1990. In 2008 and again in 2019, columns of fighters came close to forcing him out, but each time were thwarted by French military power.





مفاوضات السلام التشادية في الدوحة Chad Peace Negotiations in Doha Les Négotiations de Paix du Tchad à Doha

الدوحة ١٣ مارس ٢٠٢٢م - Doha, 13 March 2022



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[chad](#)

Chad junta accuses rebel head of seeking Russian mercenary help
Chad to halve its troops fighting Sahel militants

[Cash or card? Confusion rages over Lebanon's new payment system](#)

Author:

Sat, 2022-03-12 22:11

BEIRUT: Supermarket owners in Lebanon have blamed “hard-line measures” from the Banque du Liban for the introduction of a new payment system for their customers.

The central bank's change requires the payment of 50 percent of the value of purchases in cash, and 50 percent through bank cards, on account of “low liquidity” in markets, according to Nabil Fahed, head of the Syndicate of Supermarket Owners.

This development came the same day as gas station owners decided to stop accepting full payments for fuel via bank card.

Dr. Jassem Ajaka, an economist, described the repercussions as “economically catastrophic, as long as the amount of banknotes in Lebanese pounds that a citizen can withdraw from banks is limited while prices are rising.”

This situation, he claimed, would make people consume less, causing a decline in GDP and a larger contraction in the economy.

Charles Arbid, president of the Economic and Social Council, said that Lebanon “is experiencing inflationary depression: That is, consumption and economic movement are stalled.”

Operational prices are also rising for sectors such as energy and transportation, developments which, he said, require the immediate launch of a three-dimensional participatory dialogue at government level with employers and workers to devise solutions and take action.

He added: “No solutions are magical and readily available.”

The Association of Banks in Lebanon, meanwhile, will pay the government-approved social assistance to public sector employees, including the military.

This assistance is equivalent to half of an additional salary per month, with a minimum of 1.5 million Lebanese pounds (\$993) and a maximum of 3 million pounds. Sixty percent of this is paid in cash, and other means of payment are being adopted to transfer the remaining 40 percent by bank card or check.

Nawal Nassr, president of the Public Administration Staff Association, said: “We can no longer afford to be approached with this level of absurdity.

“So far, we are committed to a day of attendance and we will stop doing so if this procedure is applied.”

The repercussions of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, which has exacerbated the world’s oil crisis and its derivatives, have also reached Lebanon.

A gallon of gasoline in the mediterranean country currently costs 500,000 pounds, and must now be paid for in cash.

Abdo Saade, head of a group of private generator owners, warned on Saturday that monthly subscription charges would increase between 30 percent to 40 percent due to the high price of diesel for his generators.

Prices currently range between 800,000 and 2 million pounds, and possibly even more depending on consumption, he said,

“After March 15, we may turn off generators in most areas because of people’s inability to pay consumption fees and (the) lack of liquidity,” Saade added.

The severe economic crisis that Lebanon has faced for two years has prevented

bank transfers abroad, with several banks introducing new rules to manage deposits.

Withdrawal ceilings in Lebanese pounds and dollars are no longer commensurate with the amount of money that citizens need to pay for their expenses.

Traders argue that they have resorted to this procedure because they pay importers in cash for their goods.

Ajaka explained: "Why do they want to pay cash? The first reason is that suppliers accept only cash, meaning that the problem is with the supplier, whose reasons to do so need to be investigated. The second reason is that traders work with illegal people. The third reason is to keep the money in cash as a safety margin in the event of a deterioration in the situation."

He pointed out that traders "argue that banks ask them to put their daily income in (the) banks for them to transfer money in cash to their employees when paying their salaries."

Ajaka added that reliance on cash increased tax evasion, because traders then declare less of their business, and deprived the banking sector of resources to pump back into the economy.

One Beirut bank manager, who declined to be named, told Arab News that the BdL "works by activating a banking text to dry the market from the Lebanese lira (pound), in addition to taking other measures aimed at curbing the black market that manipulates the dollar exchange rate.

"At the same time, it has decided not to respond to the banks' requests for liquidity in the Lebanese lira, asking them to get it from the market."

The bank manager added: "The central bank believes that the liquidity in lira that came out of it in huge quantities did not return to the central bank through the circulation. So where did this money go? It either went to storage or to supply the black market."

The source said although Greece adopted this measure during its economic crisis, it cannot be adopted for a long time.

Ajaka believes that the authorities are likely to "issue laws and decrees to oblige traders to accept payment by bank cards because it is not possible to continue with cash in this way."



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Lebanon](#)

[Lebanon fuel crisis](#)

[Banque Du Liban \(BDL\)](#)

Lebanon central bank seeks names of those who failed to repatriate funds amid crisis
Will the debate over 'mega centers' delay Lebanon's parliamentary elections?