

Saad Hariri expects the worse for Lebanon

Mon, 2022-02-14 22:41

BEIRUT: The situation in Lebanon is deteriorating, said former Prime Minister Saad Hariri during a meeting with his parliamentary bloc on Sunday.

Hariri met his supporters after he had paid his respects at the grave of his father, Rafik Hariri, on the 17th anniversary of his assassination in Beirut.

Prime Minister Najib Mikati and former premier Fouad Siniora also prayed at the grave.

Hariri said that his home in Beirut will remain open, and the Future Movement will continue to work with the people and provide services and assistance to them, and it will never abandon its people.

The anniversary is a few weeks after Hariri announced he was leaving politics for now and would not run in upcoming parliamentary elections.

Thousands gathered in front of Hariri's tomb in Beirut for a moment of silence at 12:55 p.m., to commemorate the murder.

The supporters raised blue Future Movement banners and pictures of Saad Hariri, cheering and waving as he walked past them.

One supporter said: "How will become of life in Lebanon? The day of the assassination was a dark one, and it has gotten darker with Hariri's withdrawal from political life."

A woman from Tariq Al-Jadida said: "They killed the father and betrayed the son, so we became orphans, but we will never hand over our fate to them."

The size of the crowd at Martyrs' Square in downtown Beirut surprised event organizers.

People climbed the stairs of the Al-Amin Mosque next to the tomb and filled the parallel road.

The Future Movement did not invite its supporters to participate but supporters rallied for the commemoration on social media.

The annual gathering was different this year, as Hariri did not give his usual speech.

He simply recited Al-Fatihah in front of his father's tomb, along with his aunt, MP Bahia Hariri, her husband and some family members.

He seemed very moved as he waved to the people who waited for him to greet them.

"The scene at the tomb says it all," Hariri told the media.

Political, religious, diplomatic, social and economic figures visited Rafik Hariri's tomb to mark the occasion. They included a Russian delegation, headed by Minister Plenipotentiary at the Russian Embassy in Lebanon Ivan Medvedsky.

Japanese Ambassador to Lebanon Takeshi Okubo tweeted on Monday, "We commemorate PM Rafik Hariri's efforts with many countries, including Japan, for the reconstruction of Lebanon."

Walid Jumblatt, head of the Progressive Socialist Party, said after visiting the tomb: "It was written for us to recite Al-Fatihah in Moukhtara, and in Beirut in Martyrs' Square every year. It was written for us to persevere and we will."

Former Future Movement MP Mustafa Alloush said: "We are seeing the results of the project that began with Rafik Hariri's assassination, which is the invasion of the entire region that led to the destruction of Syria, Lebanon and Yemen."

MP Mohammed Al-Hajjar noted: "Seventeen years have passed, and we are witnessing a state of denial and rejection of all calls for reform and commitment to Lebanon's interests."

"Some still insist on dragging Lebanon away from our Arabism and true belonging. President Michel Aoun said we were going to Hell and Rafik Hariri's assassination was certainly the gateway."

Addressing his bloc MPs on Sunday, Hariri reaffirmed his withdrawal from political life, which he announced on Jan. 24.

He called on the Future Movement to take the same step and not to run for parliamentary elections or submit any nominations in the movement's name.

He reportedly said: "Regardless of my political position and my decision, but my personal reading of the situation is that it will get worse, and my advice to you as a brother and not as a leader, is not to run for elections, because nothing portends positivity; spare yourselves the insults."

Hariri had expressed his conviction that this step was correct because "there is no room for any positive opportunity for Lebanon, in light of Iranian influence, international confusion, national division, the rise of sectarian tensions and the deterioration of the state."

When the MPs asked what they should do in the next stage in parliament, Hariri said: "Everyone must abide by their legislative duty, not boycott parliament. Participate in sessions and discuss the draft budget."

"Should there be a decision to extend the parliament mandate, then the bloc must boycott the session. The option to resign from parliament entirely would then be discussed."

Hariri reportedly told MPs who wish to run for elections: “Every person who wants to run, believes they can win and has the financial, political and popular requirements to fight the electoral battle, can do whatever they want, but without using the name of Saad Hariri or the Future Movement.”

He added: “I will not provide cover for anyone and I do not want to be on anyone’s side.

“Make the alliances you believe serve you best, but you know who I do not want you to ally with.”

The bombing on Feb. 14, 2005, killed Rafik Hariri and Minister Bassem Fleihan and dozens of people who were in the Ain Al-Mraisheh area at the time.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Saad Hariri](#)

[Lebanon](#)

[Rafik Hariri assassination](#)

Lebanon commemorates Rafik Hariri assassination amid political dispute Pope seeks to visit Lebanon this year

FAO official sounds warning against Arab region's overreliance on imported food

Mon, 2022-02-14 20:57

NEW YORK CITY: Food security in the Near East and North Africa could be strengthened immeasurably if regional nations weaned themselves off their heavy reliance on foreign imports, Abdulhakim Elwaer, assistant director-general and regional representative for the Near East and North Africa at the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN, told Arab News.

Countries in the NENA region rely extensively on imported food items to feed their domestic populations. In fact, FAO predicts that the region will meet 63 percent of its caloric demand through imports by 2030, leaving it even more exposed to supply-chain disruptions and price fluctuations.

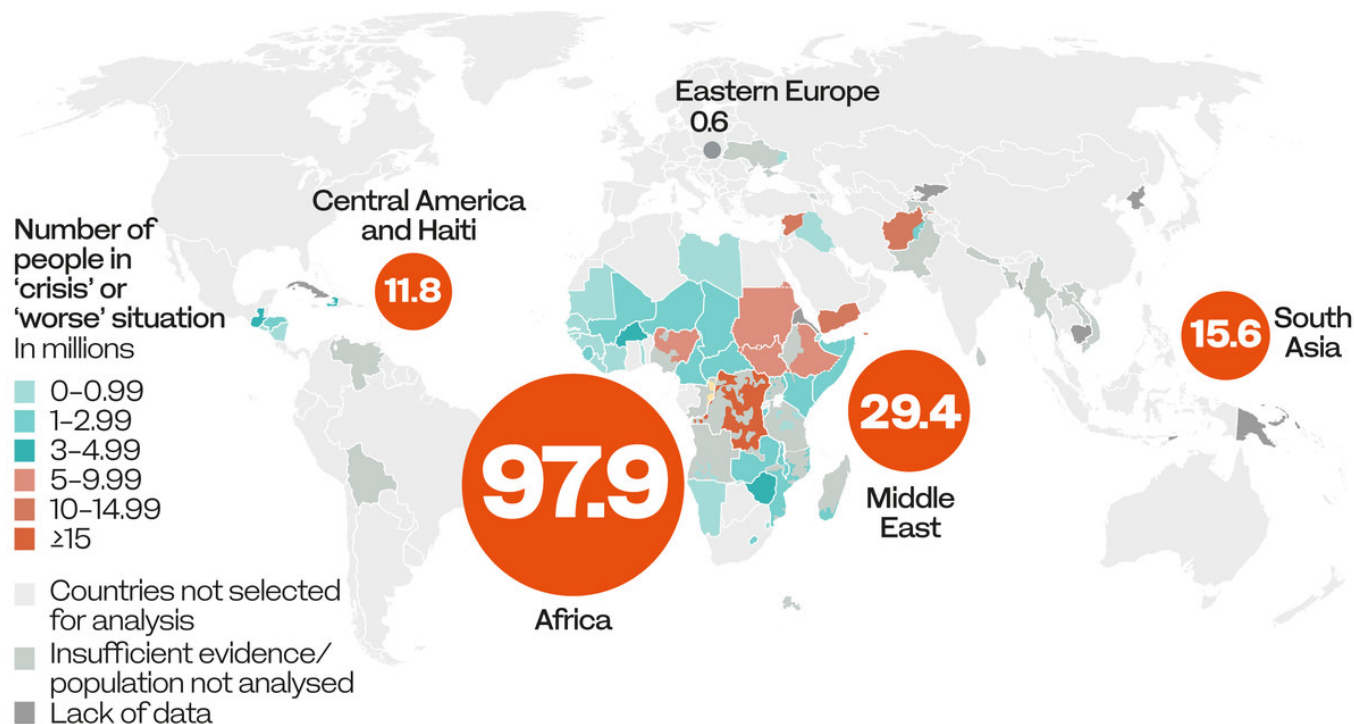
"This situation renders the region vulnerable to supply-side shocks caused by economic or natural factors, such as COVID-19 and inherent regional and country-level stressors such as protracted conflicts, political instability and climate change," said Elwaer, speaking ahead of the 36th session of FAO's Regional Conference for the Near East, NERC 36, which was held in the Iraqi capital Baghdad on Feb. 7-8.

"The region is particularly weak when it comes to intra-regional trade. For example in 2019, only 15.4 percent of the Arab region's food imports were from within the region," said Elwaer, attributing this to "the lack of harmonization of regulatory systems, weak logistics infrastructure and trade facilitation mechanisms."

"It is therefore imperative to recognize, internalize in national policies, and optimize the role of trade in food security in the NENA region. By bridging demand and supply, trade could play an important role in climate change adaptation and mitigating external shocks."

WORLD FOOD SITUATION

155 million people were in a 'crisis' or 'worse' situation in 2020, about 20 million more than in 2019



Source: Global Report on Food Crises

ARAB NEWS

The region's excessive reliance on food imports has become entrenched through decades of crisis, instability and neglect of agriculture.

For example, Iraq imports almost 50 percent of its food needs. In the event of global food supply chain shocks or the collapse of the state budget owing to war or a drop in oil prices, the food system becomes vulnerable.

The imbalance is even more pronounced in the UAE, whose exposure to global food price fluctuations is borne out by the quantity of imported food as a percentage of the overall mix in 2019: 80-90.

From conflict and socio-economic upheaval to environmental degradation, the list of challenges facing food-producing communities throughout the NENA region seems to grow with every passing year.

With just 5 percent of the region's land deemed arable, and freshwater supplies depleting rapidly, the result has been a steady flow of internal migration from the villages to the cities, further undermining domestic food production in favor of imports.



The NENA region's excessive reliance on food imports has become entrenched through decades of crisis, instability and neglect of agriculture. (AFP/File Photo)

One knock-on effect has been a deteriorating standard of nutrition, with cheap, high-energy carbohydrates taking the place of more costly fresh fruits and vegetables on the dinner tables of deprived households, creating health problems associated with vitamin deficiencies.

Matters have been made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has upset supply chains and destroyed livelihoods, raising the number of undernourished people in the region by a further 15 percent to 69 million in 2020.

“The recent trends in hunger and food insecurity suggest that it will be enormously difficult for the region to achieve, by 2030, UN Sustainable Development Goal number two: Zero hunger,” Elwaer said.

Indeed, the region was well behind on matters of food security long before the pandemic struck.

INNUMBERS

*** 15.4 percent – Proportion of the Arab region's food imports that originated from within the region in 2019.**

*** 63 percent – Estimated proportion of NENA region's caloric demand met through food imports by 2030.**

“The region had already been off-track in eliminating hunger and food insecurity because of pre-existing vulnerabilities and exposure to multiple shocks and stresses, such as climate change, water scarcity, conflicts and protracted crises, agriculture productivity and yield challenges, social inequalities and poverty, and, at present, rising food price,” Elwaer said.

NERC 36, held in a hybrid format under the theme “Recover and Restart: Innovations for better, greener and more resilient agri-food systems to achieve the sustainable development goals,” examined how the region might transform its agri-food systems to guarantee the public’s access to an affordable and nutritious diet.

Elwaer said this could be achieved through FAO’s Strategic Framework, the so-called Four Betters: “Better production, better nutrition, better environment and better life, leaving no one behind.”

The framework was endorsed by the region’s agricultural ministers at the conclusion of NERC 36, along with FAO’s priorities for the region, which focus on “generating employment opportunities for rural youth, promoting food security and healthy diets for all through trade, food safety, doing more to reduce food loss and waste, greening agricultural practices to ensure environmental sustainability.”

Regardless of what policies governments enact, however, Elwaer said that climate change remains the single greatest threat to regional agriculture and food systems – particularly as it exacerbates existing water shortages.



Abdulahakim Elwaer, assistant director-general and regional representative for the Near East and North Africa at the Food and Agriculture Organization of

the UN. (Supplied)

“Already having the lowest per-capita freshwater availability, global warming and desertification of arable lands are only going to exacerbate this threat,” he said.

“Increasing population and food demands, both the quantity and quality, coupled with rapid urbanization in our region, is yet another threat to our agri-food systems, as we may not be able to meet such demands from existing resources.”

Climate change has contributed to soil degradation by changing weather patterns, negatively impacting crop cycles, reducing yields and productivity.

“Climate change threatens our ability to ensure regional food security, eradicate poverty and achieve sustainable development,” Elwaer said.

Various initiatives have been advanced by FAO on climate change mitigation and adaptation, while the agency’s regional network of trade experts has worked with governments to help shock-proof their supply chains.

“This, however, needs to be complemented by development-related efforts at all levels,” Elwaer said.

FAO officials believe inclusivity is the first pillar of any agri-food system transformation, particularly the empowerment of women. “Women are at the core of everything we advocate and work for,” Elwaer said.



Climate change remains the single greatest threat to regional agriculture and

food systems – particularly as it exacerbates existing water shortages.
(AFP/File Photo)

“At FAO, we have a specific gender empowerment track that runs across all of the programs and projects. We have inbuilt gender markers to ensure that our interventions are supporting gender inclusion.

“In our region, we need to enhance the role of women in agri-food systems not only from a production perspective but also from a nutrition angle. In order to ensure healthy diets for all, we feel that a woman as head of the household is the most important stakeholder to ensure that the family opts toward healthy diets.”

Elwaer said that regional governments have been receptive to FAO’s recommendations, which could go some way toward fostering more regional trade, shock-proofing supply chains and reducing malnutrition.

“I believe that there is a genuine interest and focus by the governments in our region. We have seen that the governments have shown keen interest in ensuring food supplies and have been subsidizing the food sector heavily, though the merit of such subsidies is a different subject,” Elwaer said.

“For sure, the respective government knows best what it should do. I am here to support them in their goals and aspirations and provide technical assistance when and where needed.

“What we have been advocating, including through this regional conference, is to adopt the agri-food systems approach so that we cover all aspects with defined and agreed goals and targets.

“The holistic approach for agri-food systems risk management means adopting policies and pathways which map the risks and externalities facing the agri-food systems, particularly the inclusiveness, efficiency, resilience and sustainability of these systems, and then outline the mitigation and adaptation mechanisms in order to keep the transformation of agri-food systems on track and ensure continuity thereafter.”

Twitter: [@EphremKossaify](https://twitter.com/EphremKossaify)



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[food security](#)

[NENA](#)

[Food and Agriculture Organization \(FAO\)](#)

[UN](#)

[Editor's Choice](#)

How COVID-19 crisis undermined MENA states' food security progress
A Saudi-led initiative aids the study of climate change's potential impact on food security

[Attacks on Palestinian homes by Israeli police, settlers in East Jerusalem leave 31 injured](#)

Mon, 2022-02-14 20:38

RAMALLAH: Dozens of people were injured in violent clashes in East Jerusalem on Sunday night as settlers continued their attempts to forcibly evict Palestinian families from their homes.

For the second day running, Israeli police took to the streets of the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood, closing streets and alleyways near to the home of Fatima Salem and her family, and using water, cavalry teams, stun grenades and rubber bullets to disperse the crowds.

The attacks by settlers on Jerusalemites in the neighborhood continued into the early hours, with groups throwing stones at houses, spraying pepper gas and raising Israeli flags. Others roamed the streets provoking locals, singing and dancing.

According to the Palestinian Red Crescent, 31 people were injured after being hit by stun grenades, rubber bullets and pepper gas. They included three paramedics, a journalist and two foreign activists. Police arrested 11 Jerusalemites.

Tensions in the neighborhood increased after Itamar Ben Gvir, an Israeli far-right member of the Knesset, set up his office there in solidarity with the settlers who are trying to seize Palestinian homes.

After the provocation turned to violence, Israeli police and border guards – who were deployed mostly to protect the settlers – joined in the attacks on Palestinian citizens, which caused the conflict to escalate further.

Abdulfattah Eskafi, one of the 28 homeowners in Sheikh Jarrah who have been under attack, said the situation was getting worse.

“There was an escalation in the settlers’ violence against us after they failed to evacuate us as a group,” he told Arab News. “They are trying to single us out and evict us house by house.”

He described the events of Sunday night as a “street war,” adding that the Israeli police had protected the settlers and attacked the Palestinians with “excessive force.”

“They want to take control of the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood, which they have no right to, through every possible method,” Abdulfattah Eskafi said.

Palestinian factions, including Fatah, Hamas and Islamic Jihad, threatened a violent response if the attacks by settlers and the police continued.

Fatah spokesperson Osama Al-Qawasma told Arab News: “Fatah demands its members and our people to be present in Sheikh Jarrah to confront the settlers directly and the occupation forces who seek to Judaize Sheikh Jarrah and expel the families from their homes.

“We are in the first trench, defending every inch of Palestine with all our capabilities.”

Fatah Central Committee Secretary-General Jibril Rajoub said that “Israeli terrorism” was to blame for the ongoing tension in Sheikh Jarrah.

He told Arab News that he condemned Israel’s “ethnic cleansing of everything related to Islam, Christianity and Arabism in occupied Jerusalem.”

Meanwhile, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas spoke to Fatima Salem, whose home has been under attack, over the phone to express his support for her and her family.

“We stand with you heart and soul, and our hearts and minds are with you, and the occupation will end soon,” he said.

Abbas also praised the sacrifices of Jerusalemites and their steadfastness in the face of the arbitrary measures of the Israeli occupation forces.

The latest attacks on Palestinians have sparked fears of a repeat of the violent conflict between Hamas and Israel that lasted for 11 days in May last year, following similar provocation by settlers and supporters of Bin Gvir.

Abdulatif Al-Qanou, a Hamas spokesperson, told Arab News: “The Sheikh Jarrah people are not alone. Rather, the Palestinian resistance is ready to defend them, and it is closely following this Israeli behavior.

“We cannot allow the occupation to repeat the experience of displacement from the neighborhoods and areas of occupied Jerusalem.”

The Israeli government is trying to evacuate about 100 families from 28 properties and give them to the settlers. About 100 people from 19 Jewish families currently live in three houses in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood.

The events of recent days in Sheikh Jarrah have made headlines on social media platforms used by Palestinians.

The neighborhood has a high significance because it is located in Jerusalem, and any event that takes place in the city has greater resonance than those that happen in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Because of its location, the Israeli police cannot resort to deadly force against Palestinians as used by the armed forces in the West Bank and on the borders with the Gaza Strip, which means the protests in Sheikh Jarrah are more drawn out.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[East Jerusalem](#)

[Sheikh Jarrah](#)

[Mahmoud Abbas](#)

[Palestinians](#)

New eviction standoff in flashpoint Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood of East Jerusalem
UN urges Israel to stop demolitions and evacuations in Sheikh Jarrah in West Bank

[Coalition destroys Houthi communications system being used to control drones for hostile operations](#)

Mon, 2022-02-14 00:57

RIYADH: The Coalition to Restore Legitimacy in Yemen on Monday said it has destroyed a Houthi communications system in Sanaa that was being used to control drones for hostile operations.

In a series of tweets, the Coalition said the communications system was located at the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology in the Yemeni capital.

“The Houthis are militarily using Yemeni state institutions and ministries to launch hostile operations,” it said, adding that the site had been linked to the February 10 drone attack on Saudi Arabia’s Abha International Airport.

Twelve civilians were injured in the attack on the airport, located in the Kingdom’s southwestern border with Yemen.

Prior to launching a strike to take down the Houthi communication system, the Coalition took pains to call on civilians in the site to evacuate.

“We made a call via landline to one of the ministries and asked to evacuate civilians to a site in Sanaa,” the Coalition said.

Analysts say the Houthis have long evaded retaliatory strikes from Coalition forces by hiding behind populated areas of and civilian facilities. But the Coalition has said that subterfuge has to end.

“Cross-border attacks require more effective response within the framework of international law,” the Coalition said in its statement.

The Houthi militia, tagged as a proxy of Iran’s mullah regime in Yemen, has also stepped up its attacks on civilian targets in the United Arab Emirates in January following battlefield victories by Yemeni government forces backed by the Coalition.

UAE-trained Yemeni forces known as the Giants Brigades have played key roles in driving the Houthis out of several cities and towns in central Yemen, inflicting heavy losses on the terrorist militia that had earlier seized wide swaths of territory since 2014.

The Coalition was organized in 2015 to restore the UN-recognized government of Prime Minister Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi, which sought exile in the Saudi capital.

Efforts by the UN to broker peace talks between the warring parties in Yemen have been not prospered as the Houthis have refused to cooperate.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Houthi militia](#)

12 civilians injured in Houthi drone strike on Saudi Arabia's Abha airport
Strikes target Houthi sites in Yemeni capital, Coalition says

[Lawyers in Netanyahu trial say no illegal phone taps found](#)

Author:

Sun, 2022-02-13 23:16

JERUSALEM: Prosecutors in the high-profile corruption case against former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Sunday that police have found no unlawful use of phone surveillance technology against witnesses in the trial.

The state attorney's response to the court came a week after an Israeli newspaper report alleged that police used spyware to hack the phones of numerous former ministry directors, mayors, and protest leaders.

Among the alleged targets were a key state witness in the trial against Netanyahu and some of the former prime minister's close aides.

The prosecutor's office told the Jerusalem District Court that police

officials who looked into the matter did not find any cases of surveillance without a court order in the three corruption cases involving Netanyahu.

It asked the court for additional time for a probe conducted by the attorney general's office to investigate the allegations more comprehensively before responding.

Netanyahu is on trial for alleged fraud, breach of trust and accepting bribes in three separate cases.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Israel](#)

[Benjamin Netanyahu](#)

Netanyahu negotiating plea deal in corruption trial
Israel's Netanyahu faces key witness in court