

Lebanese officials busy themselves with border dispute discussions against backdrop of port blast anger

Thu, 2022-02-10 23:28

BEIRUT: Lebanese officials on Thursday began internal discussions in preparation for a response to US envoy Amos Hochstein, who has urged them to settle a maritime border dispute with Israel.

Hochstein conveyed ideas for advancing the negotiations, which have been stalled for several months.

After he met Prime Minister Najib Mikati on Thursday, presidential adviser and former minister Elias Abi Saab said: "We evaluated the meetings that took place, where is Lebanon's interest, and what are the next steps for this visit. There is a step forward in what the mediator presented, but nothing is final yet, and we will see how its results will be.

"Some things must be completed internally, and there are things that Hochstein will present later."

Hochstein, who is the US State Department's senior adviser for global energy security, arrived in Lebanon on Tuesday to revive talks between Lebanon and Israel over a maritime border dispute that is holding up oil and gas exploration.

While the ideas he conveyed to the Lebanese side were not revealed, it was reported that he had "made a positive offer regarding Line 23, giving Lebanon the area of 860 sq. km that it demands, in addition to preserving the entire Qana field."

Before leaving Lebanon on Wednesday evening, Hochstein said that Lebanon had an opportunity to reach a deal. "We are at the moment of bridging the gaps in the maritime delimitation file," he said.

He linked reaching an agreement with addressing the economic crises that Lebanon is mired in, emphasizing that Lebanon needed to support itself. "Let's see something that works, that the reforms that are necessary are passed, are in place, and are serious, and then the international community will support Lebanon," he said.

The head of the Lebanese Phalange Party, Sami Gemayel, said in response to the visit: "In a failed state, the international negotiator must negotiate with all the political and security authorities and turn into a judge of peace among them."

Businessman Bahaa Hariri tweeted: "The time has come for the maritime border demarcation file to witness the birth of a solution that is far from the political class's quotas and the mistakes that Lebanon made as a result of

its influence.

“Reaching an agreement as soon as possible may be a step toward mitigating the severity of the economic collapse.”

Retired soldiers staged a sit-in at the intersection of the Presidential Palace in Baabda, coinciding with a Cabinet session.

They called on the Cabinet not to approve the 2022 draft budget because it did not guarantee “justice, equality and the right to a decent life, livelihood and medicine.”

They said the draft budget did not secure the “life needs and concerns of the military in active service and retirement, but rather imposes additional taxes and fees that they cannot bear.”

The movement of retired service personnel extended to Tripoli, in north Lebanon, where protesters staged a sit-in in front of the Tripoli Finance Building branch and marched to the home of Mikati.

Others staged a sit-in in front of the house of Finance Minister Youssef Khalil in the southern city of Tira, and a similar move was carried out in front of the Zahle Saray in the Bekaa.

Also on Thursday, dozens of families of the Beirut port blast victims stormed the Justice Palace in Beirut to demand faster court decisions in the case.

They were objecting against the delay in deciding on requests for response against the investigator, Judge Tarek Bitar, to enable him to resume his investigations into the crime and issue the indictment.

Riot police tried to prevent the families from entering the building and a stampede broke out.

The families managed to enter the palace, holding pictures of their loved ones, the Lebanese flag, and banners calling for “support for justice and for Judge Rola Al-Masry to speed up the response requests that obstruct the investigation and justice process.”

They stressed the need for Bitar to resume his work and investigations.

Judge Suhail Abboud, the first president of the Courts of Cassation, met the protesters upon the insistence of the families and the activists accompanying them.

He told the activists that Al-Masry was studying the case carefully and she would retire only in April and not this month.

The families’ spokesman William Noun, who is also a brother of one of the blast victims, expressed his fear of the issue becoming diluted through the way the case was being dealt with.

“This is totally unacceptable by the families of the martyrs,” he said.



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US urges Lebanon to resolve maritime border issue with Israel
Families of Beirut port blast victims demand accountability

[Egypt seeks to advance cooperation with Algeria: El-Sisi](#)

Thu, 2022-02-10 19:37

CAIRO: Egypt's president has reaffirmed the fraternal relations between his country and Algeria, as well as Cairo's aspiration to advance bilateral cooperation at various levels.

During a phone call he received from his Algerian counterpart Abdelmedjid Tebboune, Abdel Fattah El-Sisi expressed his "pride in the visit of his brother" to Egypt on Jan. 24.

It was Tebboune's third foreign trip since taking office in December 2019. The visit included discussions on economic, political and strategic files.

El-Sisi said Egypt seeks to increase trade and investment with Algeria, and to strengthen security and military ties.

They discussed regional issues of common interest, especially the situation in Libya. They agreed that Libyan state institutions should be supported, as should efforts to achieve security and stability, and to preserve the country's unity and sovereignty.

Bassam Rady, spokesman for the Egyptian presidency, said Tebboune expressed his appreciation for the warm reception and hospitality he received during his visit, which witnessed fruitful discussions.

Tebboune said: "Algeria is proud of the close and distinguished ties it has with Egypt at the official and popular levels, and its interest in intensifying bilateral cooperation in all fields, especially economic and security."



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Egyptian, Algerian presidents hold talks in Cairo
Algeria declares former PM Tebboune winner of presidential election

[Unilever expects new Ben & Jerry's 'arrangement' for Israel by year-end](#)

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Reuters

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Thu, 2022-02-10 19:11

LONDON/BOSTON: The board of Ben & Jerry's aims to work out a "new arrangement" for sales in Israel before the end of the year, Unilever PLC's CEO said on Thursday.

This comes after the US-based independent ice cream brand last year committed to halting sales in Israeli-occupied Palestinian territories.

"Our absolute focus right now is to figure out what the new arrangement will be for Ben & Jerry's," CEO Alan Jope said on a conference call with journalists after the company announced earnings.

Jope's comments were the most specific he has given about the actions of the ice cream brand, based in the state of Vermont.

Ben & Jerry's said in July that it would halt sales in Israeli-occupied Palestinian territories, a protest against Israeli settlements that has sparked some backlash including divestments by US pension funds.

Jope did not directly criticize the sales limit but said, "On subjects where Unilever brands don't have the expertise or credibility, we think its best that they stay out of the debate."

"Ben & Jerry's is a great brand – most of the time they get it right – they have a great track record of campaigning on important issues that are relevant to their consumers," Jope added.

Investors are watching the ice cream controversy as a test of Jope's ability to balance his emphasis on marketing tied to social issues with financial results.

Speaking before Jope's remarks, Kevin Dreyer, a portfolio manager at Gabelli Funds, whose parent GAMCO owns about 225,000 Unilever shares, said that while many Unilever consumers like its green-labeled products, some political activism by Unilever's brands could alienate some consumers.

Jope has previously said Ben & Jerry's board acted independently and that Unilever does not support efforts to isolate Israeli, where it employs nearly 2,000 people. Ben & Jerry's had said it would continue to sell ice cream in Israel "through a different arrangement."

Ben & Jerry's accounts for about 3 percent of the world's ice cream market. The brand's sales grew 9 percent last year, Unilever said, outpacing overall underlying sales growth of 4.5 percent. The company did not give further details on sales.

"I definitely would not make a connection between those (Ben & Jerry's) statements and its sales growth," Jope said on the call.

"The growth that we're seeing on Ben & Jerry's is driven much more by their innovation program," Jope added.



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Jewish founders of Ben & Jerry's back West Bank boycott decision
American Jewish groups support Ben & Jerry's decision to end sales in Occupied Territories

[Libyan prime minister unharmed after assassination attempt: Al-Hadath TV](#)

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Thu, 2022-02-10 03:19

RIYADH: The Libyan Prime Minister Abdulhamid Dbeibeh escaped unharmed after an assassination attempt in Tripoli, Al-Hadath TV reported early on Thursday.

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With elections delayed again, Libya's endless transition angers its people
Libyan parliament interviews prime minister candidates

[Sudan arrests leading anti-coup bloc figures](#)

Author:

AFP

ID:

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Wed, 2022-02-09 00:19

KHARTOUM: Sudanese security agents on Wednesday arrested two leading figures including an ex-minister from the opposition Forces for Freedom and Change (FFC), the civilian group driving protests against last year's military coup. The men are the latest in a long line of activists detained since the October 25 military takeover led by army chief Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan, in which the civilian leadership and FFC figures were ousted.

Plain-clothed officers arrested Khaled Omar Youssef, a former minister of cabinet affairs, during a meeting of the FFC bloc at the headquarters of the Sudanese Congress Party, senior member Mohamed Hassan Arabi said. Officers said they were affiliated with a police station in Khartoum without elaborating, Arabi added.

Also arrested was Wagdi Saleh, a leading figure of the protest movement and an FFC spokesman, according to FFC leader Omar Al-Degeir.

The reasons for their arrest were not immediately clear.

The arrests come a day after the two men joined an FFC delegation for talks with UN special representative Volker Perthes, as part of efforts launched last month hoped to resolve the deepening crisis.

Leading FFC figure Yasser Arman said the latest arrests "will affect the UN process."

Youssef and Saleh were among the figures who were detained immediately after the coup, before they were released weeks later.

Since the coup, the authorities have launched a deadly crackdown on regular mass anti-coup protests, leaving at least 79 people killed and hundreds wounded, according to independent medics.

The October military power grab, the latest coup in Sudan since the independence, has sparked wide international condemnation and punitive measures.

The United States, which suspended \$700 million in assistance, has warned there would be "consequences" if a crackdown by the authorities continues. "Arbitrary arrests and detention of political figures, civil society activists and journalists undermine efforts to resolve Sudan's political crisis," Lucy Tamlyn, the US charge d'affaires in Sudan, wrote on Twitter late Wednesday.

The BBC said three of its reporters were also briefly arrested on Monday while covering anti-coup protests in Khartoum, but the trio were released later that day.

Multiple journalists have been targeted while covering the protests.



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Sudanese envoy in Israel to promote ties, source tells ReutersBBC says Sudan arrested 3 of its journalists amid protests