

# Lebanese elections: Former PM Hariri in key meetings

Author:

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BEIRUT: Just four people have submitted their candidacies for Lebanon's parliamentary elections planned for May since the nomination process opened on Jan. 10.

The next house of representatives will elect a new president in October, five months after the parliamentary elections.

Some 250,000 Lebanese expats have registered abroad to vote in the upcoming elections to choose 128 MPs.

Only one-third of them registered for the previous elections, reflecting enthusiasm for change.

Zeina Helou, an expert in local affairs, told Arab News that those who submitted their candidacies belonged to the opposition.

Helou said there was a delay in the process because opposition figures had been questioning the possibility of parliamentary elections going ahead.

There were further delays due to the electoral law requiring candidates to join electoral lists to qualify as a contestant.

## **FASTFACT**

**The parliamentary elections are expected to be heated as the Lebanese people are motivated for political upheaval in a system accused of corruption.**

Candidates are also required to deposit LBP30 million (\$19,800), which is far higher than the LBP8 million deposit for previous parliamentary elections. Helou said that things might take shape when registration of the candidates' lists begins, with the deadline set between Mar. 16 and April 4.

Amid the low candidacy numbers, the ruling political forces were still studying the possibility of maintaining their electoral allies, with several alliances broken up as a result of the political crisis.

The mystery surrounding the position of former Prime Minister Saad Hariri, who returned to Beirut on Thursday morning, has increased their frustration. He left Lebanon last June following his refusal to form a government.

Hariri met with the members of his bloc, with reports indicating that he will not nominate himself for the upcoming elections, leaving his bloc's MPs the choice to participate or not.

Former MP and Vice-President of the Future Movement Mustapha Allouch told Arab News: "So far, we haven't been informed of Hariri's decision and all the other matters affiliated to that decision."

Allouch said Hariri was holding several meetings and the picture might be clearer next week.

The political rumor mill has suggested that Hariri's political allies, led by Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri and Leader of the Progressive Socialist Party

Walid Jumblatt, will seek to convince him to run for elections or to let the Future Movement participate, as their absence will leave a void on the Sunni scene.

There are mounting fears regarding Sunni representation as influential figures are reluctant to run for elections. Former Prime Minister Tammam Salam announced on Thursday that he was unwilling to run for parliament. Nazih Njeim, a member of the Future Movement, revealed that a number of the party's MPs will not run for elections if Hariri does not put himself forward.

He said: "When the Sunni component is not doing well, this reflects badly on the country."

Public affairs expert Dr. Walid Fakhreddin said: "Hariri's decision not to run for elections seems to be settled, knowing that he partly bears responsibility for the collapse of the country and specifically for the settlement that brought about Michel Aoun as the president."

He added that other political forces in power were also hit at the core. "The Free Patriotic Movement is destroyed at the grassroots level, and at the internal level, there will be fights between rivals of the same party on the same seat. The Progressive Socialist Party will re-nominate its deputies."

He said: "We can also say while the popularity of Hezbollah and the Amal Movement was affected in some districts, it is no longer impossible to break it in other districts."

"We will witness a confrontation between the ruling class and the opposition. The ruling parties will fight each other, and the opposition may have more than a list in a few districts."



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## [Sudanese judges, US denounce deadly crackdowns on protests](#)

Author:

Sat, 2022-01-22 01:28

KHARTOUM: Sudanese head of judiciary and judges condemned violence against anti-military protesters in a rare public statement, while the US said it would consider unspecified steps against those holding up efforts to resolve Sudan's political crisis.

At least 72 civilians have died and more than 2,000 have been injured as security forces have cracked down on frequent demonstrations since a military takeover on Oct. 25, according to medics aligned with the protest movement. Angered by the killing of seven civilians earlier this week, protesters took to the streets once more on Thursday in eastern Khartoum and other locations across Sudan.

Military leaders have said that the right to peaceful protest is protected and have commissioned investigations into the bloodshed.

The violence has deepened the deadlock between pro-democracy groups and the military leadership.

In a statement, Sudan's ruling council affirmed the need for national dialogue, a technocratic Cabinet, and adjustments to a transitional constitutional document negotiated after the ousting of former leader Omar Bashir in a 2019 uprising.

The document formed the basis for a power-sharing arrangement between the military and civilians that was halted by the coup.

### **BACKGROUND**

**Military leaders have said that the right to peaceful protest is protected and have commissioned investigations into the bloodshed.**

After a failed bid by former Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok to salvage some civilian control following the coup, the UN has been trying to facilitate dialogue between opposing factions.

Late on Thursday, military leader Gen. Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan announced the

appointment of 15 Cabinet ministers, most of whom had been promoted to acting roles by Hamdok.

No prime minister or defense or interior ministers were named.

The coup drew condemnation from Western powers that largely froze badly needed economic assistance to Sudan.

That assistance would only be restarted if violence ended and a civilian-led government was restored, visiting US Assistant Secretary for African Affairs Molly Phee and newly appointed special envoy David Satterfield said.

Condemning the use of force on protesters, they "made clear the United States will consider measures to hold accountable those responsible for failure to move forward" with a political transition and an end to violence, a US statement said.

A statement from 55 Sudanese judges to the judiciary chief said military leaders had "violated agreements and covenants since the Oct. 25 coup, as they have carried out the most heinous violations against defenseless protesters."

They called for an end to the violence and a criminal investigation.

In response, the head of the judiciary said in a statement that the ruling sovereign council must do the utmost to prevent violations.

"We in the judiciary affirm that we will not hesitate to take the measures we have at hand to protect the lives and constitutional rights of citizens," the statement said.

Separately, more than 100 prosecutors announced they would stop work from Thursday to call for security forces to cease violations and lift a state of emergency. They said prosecutors had been unable to carry out their legal duty to accompany police to protests and determine the acceptable use of force.

It is unusual for Sudan's judges and prosecutors to make public statements about the conduct of the security forces.

Asked for comment, acting Information Ministry Minister Nasreldin Ahmed noted that Gen. Al-Burhan had ordered an investigation into protester deaths on Monday and a probe was underway.

Protesters in the capital could be seen pulling up paving and barricading a main road and several side streets.

One, a student named Taysir, said they were doing so to protect themselves from security forces.

She dismissed Gen. Al-Burhan's moves to appoint a caretaker Cabinet.

"He doesn't want to give up, but we don't want to give up either," said another protester, who gave her name as Muzan.



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Sudan military chief announces ministerial appointments as anti-coup protests continue  
US won't resume assistance to Sudan without civilian government

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## [Gulf Arab embrace of Jewish minority reflected in Bahrain cemetery-restoration project](#)

Sat, 2022-01-22 00:03

DUBAI: For more than a century, a small cemetery in the heart of Manama has served as the final resting place for members of Bahrain's tiny Jewish community, which is the most established of its kind in the Gulf Cooperation Council area.

Located a short distance from The House of Ten Commandments, the oldest synagogue in the Gulf, the cemetery receives fewer visitors these days than

the nearby Christian graveyard at St Christopher's Cathedral. But for Jews in Bahrain it remains a cherished part of their heritage.

Thanks to a new donor-funded initiative, efforts have begun to restore the site, which is recognized as the only Jewish cemetery in the Gulf. The project, launched by the Association of Gulf Jewish Communities on Jan. 16 to coincide with the Jewish holiday of Tu B'Shevat, aims to finance renovation and maintenance work at the site. The AGJC was founded in 2021 as a network of communities to develop Jewish life in the GCC area.

"For more than 100 years, our family members have been buried in the Jewish cemetery in Bahrain," Ebrahim Dawood Nonoo – president of the AGJC, chairman of the Board of Trustees of The House of Ten Commandments and head of Bahrain's Jewish community – told Arab News.

"One component of our community planning is ensuring that our cemetery is properly maintained for generations to come. We are very thankful that the AGJC chose this for its Tu B'Shevat project."

As part of the renovation project, weathered headstones are being cleaned and trees planted.

"We are planting trees in the Jewish cemetery of Bahrain, which is akin to bringing life back to those that have lived in the beautiful community in Bahrain for centuries and made their resting place in Bahrain for eternity," Rabbi Elie Abadie, the most senior Jewish cleric in the GCC area, told Arab News.



Located a short distance from The House of Ten Commandments, the oldest synagogue in the Gulf, the cemetery remains for Jews in Bahrain a cherished part of their heritage. (Supplied)

“Trees offer life; they provide shade, oxygen and nutrients. We are planting

trees in the cemetery, the final resting place to the spirits, as a revival to them. Trees take time to grow so we are not growing them for this generation, but for the upcoming one as our forefathers did for us.”

The readiness of Bahrain to embrace its Jewish minority and celebrate its heritage has made it a trailblazer for the region. The island kingdom’s former ambassador to the US, Houda Nonoo, is a prominent member of the Jewish community in the Gulf.

In June 2019, Bahrain hosted the “Peace to Prosperity” workshop in Manama, during which US President Donald Trump’s administration presented the economic aspects of his plan for peace between Israel and Palestine.

In August the following year, Bahrain and the UAE issued a joint declaration with Israel called the Abraham Accords, which led to the normalization of relations between the two Arab countries and Israel. The agreements also paved the way for warmer ties between Israel and Oman, Morocco and Sudan.

Israel considers itself a “Jewish and democratic state,” while Islam is the official religion of the UAE and Bahrain. Abraham Accords was chosen as the name for the agreement to signify the shared origin of belief between Judaism and Islam, both of which are Abrahamic religions that strictly espouse the monotheistic worship of the God of Abraham.

Since the signing of the accords, the UAE and Bahrain have invested a great deal in their bilateral relationships with Israel, and encouraged the celebration of Jewish history and heritage in the region.

## **FASTFACTS**

**\* The Association of Gulf Jewish Communities is an umbrella organization for communities of Jews in the GCC area.**

**\* Each of the communities is independent but they share a common goal: To see Jewish life flourish in the region.**

**\* The AGJC oversees services such as Jewish court the Beth Din of Arabia, the Arabian Kosher Certification Agency and life cycle events.**

At the same time, Gulf leaders have enhanced their political ties with Israel. Late last year, for example, Naftali Bennett, the Israeli prime minister, visited the UAE where he met Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed, Abu Dhabi’s crown prince.

Bennett also met Bahrain’s Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad Al-Khalifa on the sidelines of the COP26 climate summit in Glasgow, Scotland, in November.

The modern Jewish community in Bahrain was established in the 1880s when hundreds of Jews arrived from Iraq and Iran in search of a better life. Many settled in the Al-Hatab neighborhood of Manama, where they initially worked

in the clothing industry.

## RELATIONS BETWEEN ISRAEL AND ARAB COUNTRIES



Source: AFP

ARAB NEWS

In 1935, as the community began to thrive, an Iranian immigrant named Shimon Cohen established a synagogue. However, the building was destroyed in 1947 during disturbances linked to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Until the Abraham Accords were formally signed on Sept. 15, 2020, in Washington, D.C, Bahrain's remaining Jewish community of about 50 people practiced their faith largely behind closed doors. Since then, however, their synagogue has been renovated at a cost of 60,000 Bahraini dinars (\$160,000) and religious services are once again taking place openly.

Bahrain is not the only regional state that hosts a Jewish minority. About 1,000 Jews, all of them expatriates, are thought to live in the UAE. As trade ties with Israel are enhanced and Israeli tourists continue to flock to the Emirates, that number is expected to increase, in parallel with economic, technological, cultural and security cooperation.

"I went to Dubai twice last year and I would like to go to Bahrain," said Yossi Levy, 41, an Israeli who lives in Jerusalem. "We felt safe and so did all my friends. I'm interested in the heritage aspect – and the shopping is out of this world."



Ebrahim Dawood Nonoo, president of the AGJC and head of the Jewish Community in Bahrain, speaking to an AFP reporter at the House of Ten Commandments Synagogue in the capital Manama last year. (AFP/File Photo)

Israeli tour groups have become more common in Dubai in the past two years. And until COVID-19 restrictions put the brakes on international travel, the city's hotels were serving a growing Israeli clientele.

According to the Israel's foreign ministry, about 200,000 Israelis have visited the UAE since relations between the two countries were normalized in 2020.

"There will be many more when COVID-19 finally disappears," said Levy. "I hope we can develop the heritage links. It's important."

In most parts of the Arab world, however, Jewish populations are on the brink of vanishing. Iraq, once home to one of the world's oldest Jewish communities, now hosts only four members of the faith. Last year, their patriarch, Dhafer Eliyahu, died.

Baghdad has one a semi-functional synagogue but it does not have a rabbi and no services have been held there since before the 2003 US-led invasion. An estimated 220,000 Jews of Iraqi descent now live in Israel.

Both Turkey and Iran have small Jewish communities, while Lebanon, Syria and Egypt are thought to have only a few dozen Jewish residents between them. It is estimated that Yemeni Jews number in the low hundreds, at most.

Against this bleak backdrop, Bahrain is seen by many in the Jewish community

as a particularly successful example of peaceful interfaith coexistence.



Rabbi Elie Abadie speaks during an event commemorating the Jewish Holocaust on May 26, 2021, at the Crossroad of Civilizations private museum in the Gulf city of Dubai. (AFP/File Photo)

“The revival of the Jewish community in Bahrain and the development of one in the UAE is just beautiful,” Rabbi Abadie told Arab News. “It is nostalgic, after decades of the absence of Jewish presence.”

Abdullah Issa, a 39-year-old Muslim and Bahraini national, said his country has set a strong example that others should follow.

“Bahrain and other GCC countries have proven to the world that coexistence and the values of human fraternity as a whole can be achieved through will and resolve,” he told Arab News.

“Although changing perceptions and attitudes can be difficult, by the simple gesture of planting a tree both the government and people of Bahrain showcase that coexistence and demonstrate that human fraternity must be achieved.”

AGJC president Ebrahim Nonoo said he is thrilled to welcome Muslim visitors to the House of Ten Commandments, which is helping to advance the goal of cultural dialogue.

“It’s all very heartwarming,” he told Arab News. “You have Muslims coming into the synagogue all the time. They see the Ten Commandments, which are also written in Arabic, and they say it’s like in the Qur’an. The similarities make them comfortable.”

“The situation in Bahrain is unique. It’s something people have a lot to learn from. The coexistence here is just wonderful.”



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[Iran using pandemic to 'further](#)

# geopolitical objectives, exert domestic control': Report

Fri, 2022-01-21 21:57

LONDON: Despite being the “epicentre” of COVID-19 infections in the Middle East and North Africa, the Iranian regime “has repeatedly utilised the pandemic to further geopolitical objectives and exert domestic control,” according to a new report by London-based political risk advisory firm Sibylline.

The report said Iranian cases accounts for 40 percent of the region’s 15 million cases, and with an official death toll of 132,000, the country also dominates the region’s 250,000 fatalities.

Despite the toll that the virus has taken on Iran, it lags behind other regional states – such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE – in vaccination rates.

Tehran’s response to the virus has contributed to the sky-high toll it has taken on the Iranian people, the report said.

“Mismanagement and false information have been symbolic of the country’s strategic response to the health crisis, with skewed medical advice and inconsistent figures severely underestimating the true epidemiological landscape of the country,” it added.

“Furthermore, Iran’s hard lined and ultraconservative President Ebrahim Raisi has exploited the health crisis to bolster anti-Western sentiments, spread conspiracy theories and state-sponsored media campaigns.”

Throughout the pandemic, Iran has been rocked by protests in many regions and the capital. In response, Tehran has enhanced domestic repression and cracked down on platforms used to organize protests or spread messages that counter regime narratives.

It “blocked Signal, a messaging app which gained popularity following concerns surrounding the state surveillance of WhatsApp, on 25 January 2021,” said the report.

Rhiannon Phillips, associate analyst for MENA at Sibylline, told Arab News: “Whilst the rest of the Middle Eastern region, and world, are increasingly adopting a strategy which promotes gradually easing measures and ‘learning how to live with COVID-19,’ the Iranian government will almost certainly seek to maintain repressive domestic measures, despite the trajectory of infection rate.”

This trajectory, she added, can be attributed to the country’s “anti-Western ideology.” This is exemplified “by their refusal to import Western vaccines until urged during their fifth wave of the pandemic in late 2021,” she said.

There is little hope that Tehran will change its trajectory to address the

crisis, she added. Instead, “the Iranian population will continue to suffer under worsening socio-economic conditions amid US sanctions and the ongoing health crisis.

“Such conditions will inevitably drive an increase in protest activity which are met with heavy state repression.”



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COVID-19 deaths set new daily record as curbs lifted

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## [Britain's Prince William to visit Dubai next month](#)

Fri, 2022-01-21 20:00

LONDON: Britain's Prince William will visit Dubai next month as part of Expo 2020's UK National Day, Kensington Palace has announced.

The Duke of Cambridge will travel to the UAE on Feb. 10 at the request of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.

His trip, which coincides with the UAE marking its 50th year, will be his first to the emirates and his first major overseas visit since a 2019 tour of the Middle East.

"The bond between the UK and the UAE is deep and strong and Prince William's visit will highlight and build upon these links as he has the opportunity to engage with young Emiratis, leaders from government and committed conservationists," the palace statement said.

During the UK National Day at Expo 2020, the Commonwealth Games 2022 baton relay, launched by Queen Elizabeth II from Buckingham Palace last October, will parade through the site while stopping at the national pavilions of Commonwealth nations.



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