

# Lebanese president, PM and parliament speaker express satisfaction with Saudi-French agreement

Author:

Mon, 2021-12-06 00:30

BEIRUT: Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati has affirmed his government's commitment to honoring its undertakings for reform.

Mikati said that his joint phone call on Saturday with Saudi and French leaders was "an important step toward restoring historic brotherly relations with Riyadh."

A joint Saudi-French statement, following the joint phone call between Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and French President Macron with Mikati, linked "economic aid to Lebanon with the implementation of the required reforms."

The statement reiterated demands that Lebanon should "implement comprehensive reforms, monitor borders, abide by the Taif Agreement, limit arms to the legitimate state institutions and not be a launching pad for any terrorist acts that destabilize the region (nor) a source of drug trafficking."

Mikati also said: "I thank President Macron and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman for their keenness in maintaining the friendship toward Lebanon."

Mikati called both President Michel Aoun and Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri and briefed them on the phone call.

Mikati's media office said that Aoun and Berri "expressed their satisfaction and stressed their adherence to the best relations with Saudi Arabia and all brotherly Arab countries, especially the Gulf Cooperation Council countries."

Mikati called "all parties in Lebanon to appreciate the sensitivity of the situation and circumstances and not to take any action or interfere in any matter that offends the Arab brothers and harms the Lebanese."

He added: "It is time to commit again to the policy of disassociation and not to involve ourselves and our country in what has nothing to do with us."

The Saudi position toward Lebanon left the Lebanese anxiously relieved about the extent of the seriousness of the ruling authority in implementing what was agreed on in Jeddah between French President Emmanuel Macron and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

Although Macron succeeded in opening the door to a solution to Lebanon's diplomatic and economic crisis with Saudi Arabia, and thus the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, after the resignation of Information Minister George Kordahi from the government following his statements about the

Kingdom, there is a fear that Hezbollah will continue to embroil Lebanon in regional politics.

However, MP Ali Darwish, who is from Prime Minister Mikati's parliamentary bloc, expects "positive signs to emerge in the coming days."

Darwish said that appointing a parliamentary committee to try presidents, ministers and MPs in return for allowing Cabinet sessions to take place was "one of the proposals."

Darwish told Arab News that "the Saudi-French move has undoubtedly breached the wall of stalemate in Lebanon's relationship with the Gulf, which Lebanon is keen to be extremely good in the midst of the conflict in the region."

On the implementation of the French-Saudi statement, Darwish said: "The reforms are contained in the ministerial statement of Prime Minister Mikati's government, and they are his government's agenda, and he is striving to achieve them."

Darwish added: "The most important thing now is to restore the connection that was cut off, to return the ambassadors to Saudi Arabia and some Gulf countries, and to return the Arab ambassadors to Lebanon."

Darwish said that the Mikati government would "never interfere in the judicial matter, as there is a separation of powers."

However, he indicated that activating the Parliamentary Council for the Trial of Presidents and Ministers was possible but it required steps to be taken by parliament.

Darwish added: "However, the trade-off between this matter and any other matter, especially the dismissal of the governor of the Banque du Liban, is not on the table."

Darwish said that Mikati's concern "is securing the livelihood of the Lebanese people in light of the current severe economic crisis."

He said work was "now focused on rounding the corners and bringing the views closer."



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## [Hoping virus won't wreck Christmas, Bethlehem lights up giant tree](#)

Author:

Mon, 2021-12-06 01:22

BETHLEHEM: Residents lit up a giant Christmas tree outside Bethlehem's Church of the Nativity, hoping that a new coronavirus variant does not ruin another holiday season in the traditional birthplace of Jesus.

The Palestinian city in the Israeli-occupied West Bank was all but closed last Christmas, losing its peak tourist season to the pandemic.

This December has seen Israel shut out foreign travelers for 14 days to try

to prevent the omicron variant taking hold, and the hope is that the ban will end as scheduled, in time for Christmas travel. In its last pre-pandemic winter, in 2019/20, Bethlehem hosted 3.5 million visitors.

The giant tree, topped with a bright red star, was lit up with hundreds of colored lights as red, white and green fireworks illuminated the night sky.

Mayor Anton Salman said the travel ban had prevented several foreign delegations attending.

Nonetheless, the audience in Manger Square in front of the church was far bigger than last year, when coronavirus restrictions kept even local spectators away.

“It is very joyful, a very nice evening. The air is full of hope, full of joy, full of expectation,” said Maria, a tourist from Finland who did not provide her full name.



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Silent night for Bethlehem as coronavirus keeps pilgrims away

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## Abu Dhabi crown prince, Blinken discuss regional issues

Author:

Sun, 2021-12-05 22:32

LONDON: Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed spoke with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Sunday to discuss "important regional matters," the US State Department said.

Sheikh Mohammed and Blinken "reaffirmed their countries' strong partnership and discussed ways to broaden and deepen their wide-ranging cooperation," spokesman Ned Price said in a statement.

"Blinken also thanked the crown prince for the UAE's generous support in hosting and facilitating the safe transit of US citizens, embassy personnel, and foreign nationals from Afghanistan to third countries, and commended the UAE for providing humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan," Price added.

Meanwhile, UAE Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed held separate talks with his counterparts from Oman, India and Sri Lanka on the sidelines of the two-day 5th Indian Ocean Conference, which kicked off on Saturday in Abu Dhabi.

During the meetings, Sheikh Abdullah discussed strategic relations and ways to enhance prospects for joint cooperation in all fields, as well as the latest regional and international developments.

Sheikh Abdullah welcomed Oman's Foreign Minister Sayyid Badr Al-Busaidi, and stressed the depth of the relations between the UAE and the sultanate.

India's Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar praised the strong friendship between the UAE and his country, and their strategic partnership which is witnessing continuous growth and development.

Sheikh Abdullah also welcomed Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Gamini Lakshman Pierce to Abu Dhabi and the two sides discussed bilateral relations and ways to support them in various fields, including tourism.





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## [Jordan's FM, US climate envoy discuss environmental protection](#)

Author:

Sun, 2021-12-05 22:12

LONDON: Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi held talks with US special envoy for climate, John Kerry, on Sunday to discuss environmental protection and confronting climate change.

"Safadi and Kerry stressed the importance of the strategic partnership between the kingdom and the US, and reviewed ways to enhance cooperation between the two countries," Jordanian state news agency Petra reported. Safadi praised the aid provided by the US to the Kingdom and its support for economic development, stressing the importance of its leading role in efforts to resolving regional crises and achieve peace and stability.

Kerry said that Jordan was a strong and essential ally of the US, and that his country appreciated the key role and efforts led by King Abdullah II to overcome regional challenges and achieve security, stability and peace. Kerry reiterated Washington's support for Jordan, including in the areas of environmental protection, facing the challenges of climate change, and developing clean energy and water sources.

"This engagement with government counterparts aims to accelerate global climate action following the 26th United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26) in November," the US State Department said in a statement.

It added that Kerry would discuss how the region could collaborate to reduce emissions and adapt to climate change.



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## [Aboul Gheit: Iran seeks to control Straits of Hormuz and Bab Al-Mandab](#)

Author:

Sun, 2021-12-05 21:36

CAIRO: The Secretary-General of the League of Arab States Ahmed Aboul Gheit has said that Iran aims to extend its control over the Straits of Hormuz and Bab Al-Mandab, either directly or through militias it funds.

During his participation in the seventh Rome-Mediterranean Dialogue, held in the Italian capital with the participation of senior officials, experts and economists from countries bordering the shores of the Mediterranean, he pointed to attacks carried out by Iran in the summer of 2019, as well as to the continuing threat posed by the Houthis to navigation in the Red Sea.

The secretary-general added that the stability of navigation in these strategic straits, especially in the transportation of petroleum products, represented a fundamental backbone of the global economy, and that maintaining freedom of navigation without threat was a global priority and not only for the Arab countries bordering it.

He said that Iran's behavior in the region, and its apparent tendency to dominate and interfere with Arab countries, was behind the difficulty in establishing a security system in the Gulf based on cooperation and the common welfare of the people.

He said that several initiatives had been put forward on this, but the main problem remained a lack of confidence due to Iranian policies that represented a threat to its neighbors.

Aboul Gheit said that Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons would trigger an arms race in the region. He hoped negotiations would succeed in dissuading Iran from achieving this goal to avoid a deterioration in the current security situation.

He said it was difficult to address the Iranian nuclear program without acknowledging that there was already a nuclear power in the region in Israel, especially in light of its insistence on destroying the two-state solution and wasting opportunities for its implementation.



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