

# Lebanese livid over fuel shortages and power outages as Hezbollah leaders face the heat

Author:

Sat, 2021-08-14 21:49

BEIRUT: Lebanon's army on Saturday seized fuel from petrol pumps to curb hoarding amid crippling shortages.

The country is grappling with a financial crisis and foreign currency reserves are fast depleting, while its national currency has lost more than 90 percent of its value on the black market.

Traffic in Beirut and other places was low on Saturday, and security forces temporarily closed the northern Aboudiyeh Border Crossing with Syria because of a power generator malfunction.

Dozens of institutions surprised their employees with a day of unplanned leave next Monday, while shops and institutions in Beirut's center were informed they would not be supplied with electricity because of the lack of diesel.

Activists shared a video on social media showing a crowd in the town of Ali Al-Nahri, in the Bekaa Valley, protesting around Hussainia Mosque, where Hezbollah member and former minister Hussein Hajj Hassan was giving a speech.

Eyewitnesses told Arab News that around 50 people objected to Hassan going up to the pulpit and speaking. "They called on him to get back, throwing insults at him and saying, 'We are hungry.'"

The MP had to leave the town, shortening his mosque speech, amid a heavy army deployment.

Army intelligence on Saturday arrested four of the people who had objected to Hassan's presence. But they were released due to popular pressure.

People objecting to the arrests blocked the road between Ali Al-Nahri and the eastern village of Massa, which is a vital road for Hezbollah.

This road helps the party access Syria's Al-Shaara region, where its military posts are located. Protesters accused Hezbollah of using the town as "a road to smuggle diesel to Syria."

Another video showed young men surrounding the house of MP Anwar Jomaa, who is a member of Hezbollah's political wing, in protest against the country's dire situation.

One of the protesters said: "We came to ask him what he is doing for us in light of this crisis. We are not sheep or dogs. He is considered one of us

and is not doing anything for us.”

Ibrahim Sareini, head of the Syndicate of Tanker Owners, said: “The attacks targeting tankers transporting fuel to bakeries, mills, hospitals and generators in all regions could force the owners of these tankers to stop transporting fuel.”

President Michel Aoun called on parliament to meet and take appropriate action following the Central Bank’s decision to end fuel subsidies, his office said.

But the Future Movement criticized Aoun, saying he was implementing the policy put in place by his son-in-law Gebran Bassil. It also warned the president against “continuing to violate the constitution.”

Bassil, who heads the Free Patriotic Movement, is an ally of Hezbollah.

Former MP Nadim Gemayel criticized Aoun on Twitter: “No electricity, no diesel, no gasoline, no water, no security and no stability... Michel Aoun, Leave.”

The Progressive Socialist Party supported the idea of putting an end to the “charade of senseless subsidies that actually benefit monopolies, monopolists, smuggling and smugglers. It also constitutes a lifeline for the Syrian regime at the expense of the Lebanese people, their money and livelihood.”

The fuel crisis has led a top private hospital to say it may have to close due to power shortages, warning this could cause hundreds of deaths.

In Lebanon, 78 percent of the population lives below the poverty line.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Lebanon](#)  
[energy](#)

Lebanon economic deterioration accelerates as fuel subsidy ends  
Angry citizens detain Hezbollah MP in Lebanon over deteriorating living conditions

---

## [Japan needs its solid ties with Arabs: Former Vice Foreign Minister Kazuyuki Hamada](#)

Sat, 2021-08-14 18:33

TOKYO: "I took my family several times to Arab countries including Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman," says former Japanese Vice Foreign Minister Kazuyuki Hamada, who has a Ph.D. in international political economics.

Hamada, while he runs the Research Institute for Future Technologies, is also a best-selling author whose most recent book, "Elon Musk: his Next Target is IOB (Internet of Bodies)" was published in July.

He has a lot to say, particularly concerning relations between Japan and Arab countries, Asia and the political situation in Japan. And he believes that Arabic food could help with the coronavirus pandemic.

A permanent solution, he says, “may take a few more years, and we must find a way to live with the virus.” He said that besides the vaccine, there are many ways to tackle the pandemic, such as eating traditional Arabic food that may strengthen the immune system. He also gave the example of Japanese dish natto, a traditional food made by fermenting soybeans.

“Natto has a long life,” he said. “I think we can easily export it to Arab countries.”

Hamada’s outlook is international and he emphasizes the need for close cooperation between countries.

“I am trying to build a comprehensive network of friends and supporters to promote more robust international networks,” he explained. “As long as Japan can survive, we need a solid and respectful working relationship with the international community – not only with the United States, but also with China and many other Asian and Arab countries.”

He accused the Japanese government and political leadership of “not caring much about the international community.” As such, he wants change.

“I believe that, based on my own experience as a vice foreign minister who was in charge of the Middle East and Europe, I am trying to pursue a new direction for Japanese diplomacy and economic and cultural exchanges with these countries. I am sure that these trustworthy international relations will strengthen Japan’s standing in the coming years. Now I am trying to get as many friends as possible from Japan and overseas, including the Arab countries.”

On future Arab-Japan relations, Hamada referred to the many serious challenges facing Japan and the world, including energy, the environment and human rights. In terms of cooperation with Arab countries in alternative energy, he said that Japan could be a good partner.

“Japan has a history of nature-friendly technologies. Many Arab countries, including Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Oman, have sprawling deserts. We have a special research institute for using natural sand for energy production. I am very interested in promoting this potential and co-working cooperation between Japan and the Arab countries.”

On the problems facing the world, he said, “No country can solve them alone. We need a robust partnership. Being a future political leader, I am trying to pave the way for making this kind of dream possible. Today, I am still working behind the scenes to find good, trustworthy friends, not only in Japan but also in many other countries and most of the Arab countries.”

Asked about his assessment of the Japanese government’s response to the coronavirus, Hamada said that Japanese politicians and government officials are “too influenced by media and exaggerated news coverage. They should be

more confident about what they are doing." He said that 99 percent of the 4,000 cases of coronavirus in Tokyo recovered naturally." He stressed the need for people to maintain a healthy lifestyle.

Hamada criticized the government's measures, including closing restaurants by 8 pm, stopping the sale of alcohol in restaurants and bars, and staying home, as measures that "frustrate and frighten people." But his words on vaccines were equally disturbing. "The safety of vaccines has not yet been proven," he said. "There are a lot of reports of side-effects." Hamada also criticized the vaccine gap between developed and developing countries.

"We were surprised that Prime Minister (Yoshihide) Suga invited the president of the US company Pfizer to attend the Tokyo Olympics and allowed him to stay in the Imperial Guest House. Not only did Suga meet him, but the minister in charge of the corona vaccine campaign, (Taro) Kono, also went so far as to demand an increase in vaccine supplies," he said. "It's a very prosperous business. They charge the Japanese government almost 15 percent higher than the regular price in the United States."

Hamada criticized patent protection for vaccines, as "those patents are made only possible for international support from the American government and Bill Gates' foundations." He added: "Humanity should be more cooperative. They donated 40,000 doses to the Tokyo Olympics but they are still demanding higher prices. Politicians need to pay attention to that." Hamada said that the Russian Sputnik 5 vaccine is "not so effective," and the situation in China was becoming worse.

Hamada was not impressed by Prime Minister Suga's decision to go ahead with the Tokyo Olympics. "He tried to convince the people that holding the Tokyo Olympics was good for the nation. But many people are worried about how to beat the virus. The situation is getting worse."

He said that opposition parties criticized the Suga government's response to the pandemic as a failure of risk management. Hamada expects that "if this situation continues, the possibility of Suga being re-elected as the president of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party of Japan is not so high."



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Middle East](#)

[Japan](#)

[Kazuyuki Hamada](#)

A deeper look into 'The Journey' the first Saudi-Japanese anime  
Saudi Arabian judoka praised by Japan media to play against Israeli player

---

## [Egypt has 'open budget' to fight coronavirus, says finance minister](#)

Author:

Sat, 2021-08-14 19:19

CAIRO: Egypt has an "open budget" to fight coronavirus, the country's finance minister said Friday, adding that the health sector's allocation exceeded the established constitutional entitlement, totaling EGP275.6 billion (\$17.5 billion).

The move followed presidential directives granting priority to preserving citizens' health, especially in the face of coronavirus, explained Finance Minister Mohamed Maait.

"We are ready to meet any additional appropriations for the health sector ... in order to contribute to strengthening its capabilities to combat the coronavirus and to provide the necessary funding to complete the purchase of

vaccines. There is an open budget for the health sector to combat the coronavirus, and to provide vaccines, so there is no complacency in the health of Egyptians.”

He said that EGP3 billion had so far been provided to purchase vaccines to ensure the largest number of citizens were immunized against COVID-19, especially in light of a fourth wave in some countries, and that scientific studies had confirmed the effectiveness of vaccines against any mutations of the virus.

A return to pre-coronavirus economic performance indicators and the expansion of the vaccination program were closely linked, he added.

The minister stressed that the economy would emerge from the pandemic stronger in light of the gains made by the economic reform program, which enabled the government to flexibly handle the health crisis.

Egypt recently received a new shipment of 1.7 million doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine through the global COVAX initiative.

“We are pleased to take a quick step to enhance efforts to vaccinate the Egyptian people in cooperation with the global COVAX initiative,” Health and Population Minister Hala Zayed said. “With the arrival of this new shipment we are able to ensure that the vaccines reach the growing numbers of Egyptians ... and we move forward with our efforts to recover from the effects of the pandemic.”

Egypt is aiming to vaccinate 40 percent of its citizens by the end of 2021.

Ministry workers have visited markets, public transport, places of worship, salons, cafes, shops, gathering spaces, and villages to educate people about the vaccine and encourage them to sign up for it.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Middle East](#)

[Egypt](#)

[budget](#)

[Coronavirus](#)

Egypt COVID-19 vaccine to begin distribution in mid-August  
Egypt COVID-19 cases could be '10 times higher' than reported figures

---

## [Iran tightens Covid curbs as cases, deaths surge](#)

Author:

AFP

ID:

1628953334823886300

Sat, 2021-08-14 18:07

TEHRAN: Iran on Saturday announced new curbs to combat the spread of Covid-19 as deaths and infections surge and as the country tries to speed up its vaccination campaign.

The Islamic republic is struggling to contain what officials have called a "fifth wave" of the virus caused by the highly infectious Delta variant. Hit by the Middle East's deadliest outbreak, Iran has officially recorded

more than 97,000 deaths and over 4.38 million infections, with numbers breaking daily records several times this month.

Health authorities acknowledge that the official figures underestimate the country's real toll.

Iran's national coronavirus taskforce announced Saturday that government offices, banks and non-essential businesses must close their doors countrywide from Monday until the end of next Saturday.

A ban on car travel between provinces will be in force from noon on Sunday (0730 GMT) until August 27, taskforce spokesman Alireza Raisi told IRNA state news agency.

The new measures coincide with two Shiite religious commemorations set for next week, though authorities said the measures would not impact ceremonies held in the open air.

Iran has avoided imposing a full lockdown on its 83-million-strong population, instead resorting to piecemeal measures such as temporary travel bans and business closures.

Authorities have recently tried to speed up the inoculation campaign amid criticism that it began too late and as the country's exhausted health system struggles to cope with rising case numbers.

A few thousand Iranians lined up on Saturday at a vaccination center at Tehran's sprawling Iran Mall, AFP journalists said.

The government announced recently that teachers, transport workers and Iranians aged over 53 were eligible to receive the jab.

"The vaccination pace is accelerating every day, thank God," said Bahare Karimi, a health ministry representative at the vaccination center, adding that health workers were "very tired now."

She told AFP that the center was currently distributing Sinopharm vaccines, but that the type of jab being administered might differ from day to day. President Ebrahim Raisi said that Iran needed an additional 60 million vaccine doses to "control the unfavorable coronavirus situation," according to the government's website.

Raisi told a Covid taskforce meeting on Saturday that 30 million doses would be imported and made available "in a short time."



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Iran](#)

[COVID-19 Delta Variant](#)

Iran will impose 6-day 'general lockdown' over coronavirusIran's Khamenei says halting Covid 'urgent' priority

---

## [Russia says all 8 die in water-bomber plane crash in Turkey](#)

Author:

AFP

ID:

1628951597543530400

Sat, 2021-08-14 17:37

Moscow: Russia on Saturday said all eight people onboard a Russian water-dropping plane died when it crashed in Turkey during a firefighting mission. Moscow's defense ministry said five Russian servicemen and three Turkish nationals were killed in the crash, news agencies reported. The Russian defense ministry earlier said the Be-200 plane went down around

1330 GMT with eight crew onboard.

The plane crashed near the southern Turkish city of Adana, it said.

Russian consular representatives and a defense ministry commission were on their way to the crash site.

In July, Russia said it would send Be-200 planes to Turkey to help it fight spreading wildfires.

Turkish state news agency Anadolu reported that rescuers had rushed to the scene with television footage showing a column of smoke rising from a mountainous zone.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Turkey](#)

[Russian](#)

[firefighting](#)

[plane crash](#)

New Russian war plane has Mideast orders in sights2 airplanes collide at Dubai's main airport; no injuries