

# Lebanon MPs meet in hall as protesters stage car convoy

Author:

Layal ABOU RAHAL | AFP

ID:

1587490004177685200

Tue, 2020-04-21 17:04

BEIRUT: Lebanon's parliament sat Tuesday in a conference hall to allow for social distancing between lawmakers amid the coronavirus pandemic, while outside anti-government protesters demonstrated in a car convoy.

As the country struggles with a battered economy, MPs approved the re-allocation of \$40 million from the World Bank to help fight COVID-19, which has officially infected 677 people and killed 21 nationwide.

It also passed a law to fight corruption in the public sector and set up a national body in charge of stamping out graft.

On the agenda of the three-day session were proposals for a divisive general amnesty, to legalize cannabis for medical use, and to lift immunity for ministers and lawmakers to allow prosecutions for corruption.

Outside the venue, dozens of protesters drove a noisy convoy of cars covered in slogans, drivers honking their horns and passengers brandishing the national flag and leaning out of the windows in face masks.

They took to the streets on wheels to protest deteriorating living conditions while maintaining social distancing, as they kept up the pressure on a political elite under fire since mass protests erupted last October.

"Today, instead of passing a general amnesty law... they could pass a law on the independence of the judiciary," Jad Assaileh, a young demonstrator said.

"We want to recover the stolen money," he said, referring to allegations that Lebanon's ruling elite transferred billions out of the country while regular citizens were prevented from withdrawing their savings by the banks.

Similar protests took place in the cities of Saida and Tripoli.

Lebanon's worst economic crisis since the 1975-1990 civil war is now compounded by the lockdown. Poverty has risen to 45 percent of the population, according to official estimates.

Protests had petered out after a new government took office in January, and demonstrators have largely remained at home since the coronavirus lockdown started mid-March.

But on Friday, hundreds again protested in Tripoli to mark six months since the street movement started to demand an overhaul of a ruling class widely deemed inept and corrupt.

The lawmakers met in a 1,000 seat conference hall at the UNESCO Palace in Beirut, as part of measures to halt the spread of the novel coronavirus.

Among their 66 items to discuss, legalizing growing marijuana for medical purposes was expected to be approved by a majority as it could generate revenue for the indebted state.

Lebanon bans growing, selling and consuming cannabis, but illicit production in the country's east has developed over decades into a multi-million-dollar industry.

No consensus was in sight, however, for a general amnesty to free thousands of detainees and to suspend arrest warrants for thousands more.

Supporters – which include Shiite movements Hezbollah and Amal as well as the Sunni Future Movement – say an amnesty could lessen overcrowding in jails housing 9,000 prisoners.

But its detractors, including the president's Christian parliamentary bloc, say the bill is merely an attempt to boost popular support.

The amnesty has long been a demand of the families of some 1,200 so-called "Islamist detainees," most of whom hail from the Sunni-majority city of Tripoli, where the former premier's Future Movement is dominant.

They are accused of carrying out crimes including fighting and assaulting the army, taking part in clashes in the city, and planning explosives attacks.

Families have also clamoured for the release of thousands more detainees from the eastern regions of Baalbek and Hermel, where Hezbollah and the parliament speaker's Amal Movement are powerful.

Most of these are accused of drug-linked crimes including growing hashish illegally, or other offenses such as stealing cars.

Lebanon, one of the most indebted countries in the world with a debt equivalent to 170 percent of its GDP, defaulted on payments for the first time last month.

As the country faces an acute liquidity crisis, banks have banned transfers abroad and gradually restricted dollar withdrawals until suspending them last month.

The Lebanese pound has for decades been pegged to the dollar, but in recent months lost half of its official value on the black market.

The official exchange rate remains 1,507 Lebanese pounds to the dollar.

The banks earlier this month set their rate at 2,600 pounds to the dollar, but money changers were offering more than 3,200 pounds for the greenback on Tuesday on the black market.

On Tuesday, the central bank asked banks to allow depositors with foreign currency accounts to withdraw their savings in Lebanese pounds at the "market rate," likely to signify 2,600 pounds to the dollar.



Main category:  
[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Lebanon](#)

[protest](#)

[Coronavirus](#)

No new corona cases in Lebanon in past 24 hours

---

## [Gunman shoots nine people dead in Lebanese village of Baakline](#)

Author:

Associated Press

ID:

1587481119747009600

Tue, 2020-04-21 14:44

BEIRUT: A gunman shot dead nine people Tuesday, including five Syrians, and left their bodies in several locations in a mountain village southeast of the capital Beirut, the prime minister and state news and said.

A motive for the killings was not immediately known, said the state-run National News Agency. It said the shooter fled to nearby fields and was being chased by security forces.

Such shootings in Lebanon, where many people keep rifles or pistols in their homes, are rare. Lebanon is home to more than a million Syrian refugees and other Syrians who are residents.

NNA said a pump action rifle and a Kalashnikov assault rifle were used in the shootings.

Prime Minister Hassan Diab "denounced the horrific crime," his office said in a statement. The prime minister called on security agencies and judicial authorities to accelerate the investigation to disclose its circumstances and identify the perpetrators.

The dead included five Syrians and four Lebanese whose bodies were left behind at several locations in Baakline, local LBC TV reported.

"It is similar to the shootings that happen in America," Marwan Hamadeh, a member of parliament from Baakline, told reporters in Beirut. He urged security forces to detain the shooter, saying "there are some indications that he might be a mentally unstable person."

Baakline's mayor, Abdullah al-Ghoseini, told the daily An-Nahar newspaper the motive behind the shooting was unclear, adding that it took place in an area that includes housing units for Syrian workers.

Al-Ghoseini later told LBC the shooting started at 3:30 p.m. (1230 GMT) and search operations for the shooter were still ongoing five hours later. He added that the Syrians who were killed had been living in the village for nearly 10 years.

The shooting comes as Lebanon experiences its worst economic and financial crisis in decades. A crash in the value of the local currency against the

U.S. dollar has led to a sharp increase in prices.  
Anti-government protests resumed Tuesday calling on the Cabinet to work on improving living conditions in the nearly bankrupt country.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Lebanon](#)

[Middle East](#)

[Shooting](#)

Canada's worst mass shooting leaves at least 18 dead  
Christchurch attack survivor says shooting 'damaged him for life'

---

## [Syrian war monitor says Israeli strike near Palmyra kills 9](#)

Author:

Associated Press

ID:

1587476710996646100

Tue, 2020-04-21 13:39

BEIRUT: An Israeli airstrike in central Syria killed nine fighters, including six who were not Syrians and some who were loyal to the militant Hezbollah group, an opposition war monitor said Tuesday.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights gave no nationalities for the foreigners who were killed on a military post in the desert near the historic central town of Palmyra. It said the dead included some fighters loyal to Lebanon's Hezbollah group.

Israel says it has been behind a series of airstrikes mainly targeting Iranian and Hezbollah forces in Syria that have joined the country's war fighting alongside the government. It rarely confirms the attacks and did not comment on Monday's airstrike.

Syrian state TV reported the country's air defenses shot down several missiles launched by Israeli warplanes Monday night. The station gave no further details about the attack, the latest of several to hit central Syria in the past three weeks.

The Observatory said late Monday the Israeli strikes targeted Iranian and Iran-backed fighters in the desert near Palmyra. It added that Israeli warplanes were also flying over neighboring Lebanon.

The strikes came hours after Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammed Javad Zarif was in the Syrian capital Damascus, where he met with President Bashar Assad and his Syrian counterpart.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Syria](#)  
[Israel](#)  
[Hezbollah](#)  
[Iran](#)  
[Palmyra](#)

Israel accuses Hezbollah of “provocative” activity Wearing face masks, Syria’s Assad and Iran’s Zarif condemn West at Damascus meeting

---

## [At least seven dead, 85 injured in Yemen flash floods](#)

Author:

AFP

ID:

1587473822036425300

Tue, 2020-04-21 12:46

SANAA: At least seven people have been killed and 85 injured in flash flooding in Yemen this month, the UN said Tuesday, as the coronavirus threat also looms over the war-torn nation.

Yemen announced its first case of COVID-19 on April 10, and aid organizations have warned that its health system – all but collapsed since a conflict between the internationally-recognized government and the Houthi militia broke out in 2014 – is ill equipped to handle the crisis.

“Heavy rains and flooding across northern governorates, including Marib, in mid-April led to casualties and damaged property and sites for internally displaced persons,” the UN humanitarian coordination agency OCHA said.

“Initial information indicated that seven people – five women and two children – were killed in the flooding and another 85 people were injured, including seven who were seriously injured and hospitalized.”

The Houthi-held capital Sanaa and districts in the same governorate “have been badly affected,” it added.

Storms also hit other provinces, including Ibb, Hajjah and Marib – which is the government’s last northern stronghold and currently the conflict’s “center of gravity.”

The UN special envoy for Yemen, Martin Griffiths, said last week that progress was being made toward a cease-fire after calls for a pause to face the coronavirus threat.

An estimated 24 million Yemenis – more than 80 percent of the population – depend on some form of humanitarian or protection assistance for survival, according to the UN.

More than three million people are displaced, many in camps that are especially vulnerable to disease.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Yemen](#)

[floods](#)

[Middle East](#)

Iran floods leave 21 dead  
Deadly floods drown pending fears of coronavirus in Yemen's Aden

---

## [Egypt reveals archaeological discovery online](#)

Author:

Tue, 2020-04-21 00:51

CAIRO: Egypt's Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities has revealed a new archaeological discovery to the world – announced online as part of the state's measures to prevent the spread of the coronavirus.

The discovery, posted on the ministry's official web page and social media networks, was at the sacred animal necropolis in Saqqara where there have been two other archaeological discoveries during the past two years. The most important of these were the gorgeously decorated tomb of Wahti and a cachette

of sacred birds and animals from which many animal mummies – some extremely rare – were brought to light.

According to the Ministry of Antiquities, the latest discovery was at the bottom of a 11-meter-deep shaft. Five sealed stone coffins/sarcophagi were found, and four niches in a room containing wooden coffins and late-era human burials.

## **HIGHLIGHTS**

- The discovery, posted on the ministry's official web page and social media networks, was at the sacred animal necropolis in Saqqara where there have been two other archaeological discoveries during the past two years.

- The most important of these were the gorgeously decorated tomb of Wahti and a cachette of sacred birds and animals from which many animal mummies – some extremely rare – were brought to light.

A massive anthropoid wooden coffin with hieroglyphs written in yellow pigment was discovered in one niche. "We found several other artifacts around the coffin," the ministry said. "They included 365 faience Ushabti figurines, some of which bear hieroglyphs texts; a small wooden obelisk about 40 cm tall, all four of its sides bearing painted scenes depicting the deities Isis and Nephthys, and the deity Horus; wooden statues of the god Ptah-Sokar-Osiris; and three pottery canopic jars in which the viscera removed during mummification was kept, in addition to many other artifacts."

Archaeological expert Abdel-Rahman Rihan said the latest discovery was at a site where work had been underway for more than three months.

Rihan said that the find dated to the late Pharaonic kingdom following the third transitional era and prior to the Ptolemaic Era, dating back to 332 B.C.

Egyptian archaeologists do not all agree on the beginning of the late era. However, they do agree that it was around the late 25th Dynasty and before or during the 26th Dynasty.

The 25th Dynasty rulers were from Sudan, particularly Sudan's northern area of Nabta, which was the capital of the kingdom of Kush in ancient times. The region is about 300 km from the capital Khartoum.

## **FASTFACT**

**A massive anthropoid wooden coffin with hieroglyphs written in yellow pigment was discovered. Several other artifacts around the coffin were also found.**

"The discovery is certainly very important as it coincides with the expected inauguration of the Grand Egyptian Museum, which is at the top of the Egyptian state's priorities after the coronavirus pandemic is over," Rihan said. The ministry was using technology to introduce its archaeological discoveries to the world, and these would be "awaiting visitors" after the

pandemic ended, he said.

During the past few years, the ministry has been focusing on improving services for visitors, especially at museums and archaeological sites.

"We have a plan to develop services in the pyramids area, which was very difficult to visit," Rihan said. "However now the venue is being provided with all that tourists need, such as cafeterias, eco-friendly and safe transportation, bathrooms and other amenities."

Minister of Tourism and Antiquities Khaled El-Anany said that his department was working on developing a guideline for visitors that would be unveiled when the coronavirus crisis ended.

"There will be a high level of hygiene in restaurants and hotels, and sanitization will be carried out differently," El-Anany said. "The entire world has learned a lot from this crisis and we will emerge stronger after we overcome it."





Main category:

[Middle-East](#)  
[Art & Culture](#)

Tags:

[Egyptian archaeology](#)

Egypt archaeologists clash over King Tut tomb theory  
 Egypt archaeologists find ancient writer's tomb