

# Israel stops plan for contentious east Jerusalem settlement

Tue, 2021-12-07 00:02

JERUSALEM: Jerusalem municipal officials on Monday froze plans to build a contentious large Jewish settlement at an abandoned airport in east Jerusalem.

The decision to halt the Atarot settlement plan came in the wake of heavy US opposition to the project.

Plans for the settlement called for building 9,000 housing units marketed to ultra-Orthodox Jews in an open area next to three densely populated Palestinian communities, one of which is behind Israel's controversial separation barrier.

The municipality's planning commission said that it had been favorably impressed with the plan but that an environmental impact survey should first be conducted before it could be approved.

Fleur Hassan-Nahoum, a deputy mayor, said the process is expected to take about a year.

The anti-settlement group Peace Now had waged a public campaign against the plan, citing the proposed settlement's problematic location.

"Let's hope they will use the time to understand how illogical this plan is for the development of Jerusalem and how much it damages the chances for peace," said Hagit Ofran, a Peace Now researcher who attended the meeting.

Earlier on Monday, Israel's foreign minister, Yair Lapid, indicated the Israeli government was in no hurry to approve the plan.

Speaking to reporters, Lapid said the plan ultimately requires approval by the national government, with "full consensus" of the various parties in the coalition.

"This will be dealt with at the national level and we know how to deal with it. It is a process and will make sure it doesn't turn into a conflict with the (US) administration," he said.

Israel captured east Jerusalem in the 1967 Mideast war and annexed it in a move not recognized internationally. The Palestinians want east Jerusalem to be the capital of a future state including the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, which Israel also seized in that war.

Israel views all of Jerusalem as its unified capital and says it needs to build housing to address the needs of a growing population.

The Palestinians view the continual expansion of Israeli settlements as a violation of international law and an obstacle to peace, a position with wide international support. The Atarot project is considered especially damaging because it lies in the heart of a Palestinian population center.

The Biden administration has repeatedly criticized settlement construction, saying it hinders the eventual resumption of the peace process, but Israel has continued to advance settlement plans.

More than 200,000 Israeli settlers live in east Jerusalem and nearly 500,000 live in settlements scattered across the occupied West Bank. Israel's current prime minister, Naftali Bennett, is a strong supporter of settlements and is opposed to Palestinian statehood.

There have been no substantive peace talks in more than a decade.



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Israel plans new east Jerusalem settlement  
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## [Mikati holds key meetings in effort to restore Arab trust in Lebanon](#)

Mon, 2021-12-06 23:24

BEIRUT: Lebanon's Prime Minister Najib Mikati on Monday held a number of meetings designed to help restore Arab trust in Lebanon, and the country's diplomatic and economic relationships with Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states.

It followed an agreement, announced in Jeddah on Saturday, by French President Emmanuel Macron and Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to work together to help the people of Lebanon.

The participants in extended meetings at the Grand Serail, the prime

minister's headquarters, included Defense Minister Maurice Selim, Interior Minister Bassam Mawlawi, Foreign Affairs Minister Abdullah Bou Habib, Agriculture Minister Abbas Hajj Hassan and Industry Minister George Boujikian.

Other officials who took part included Acting Director-General of Lebanon Customs Raymond Al-Khoury, Mohammed Choucair, the head of the Lebanese Economic Organizations, and representatives of the Federation of Lebanese-Gulf Businessmen Councils.

Choucair, who is also a former minister, stressed the need for the organizations to work on resuming exports to Saudi Arabia and said: "We discussed new ways of doing that."

During the meeting, Mikati said that "Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states are fed up of hearing slogans that are not implemented."

A number of people who were present told Arab News that Mikati stressed the "need to address the gaps," and that "some issues the Gulf states are complaining about are right. We must recommend measures to address them, such as the establishment of additional towers on the borders with Syria in order to control the border."

#### **FASTFACT**

Prime Minister Najib Mikati said that 'Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states are fed up of hearing slogans that are not implemented.'

Mawlawi said that discussions had focused on the issue of exports to Saudi Arabia and concerns about smuggling.

He said: "We will take practical measures for anything that might pose a threat to our relations with the Arab states, and I will follow up on all judicial proceedings related to smuggling and combating drugs and captagon.

"We must all take prompt action to control the borders, airport, port and all crossing points, and we must (address) the smuggling happening through Lebanon. We do not disclose all smuggling operations we bust."

Mawlawi added: "We intercepted a captagon-smuggling operation on Saturday. We are following up on it, and the people involved have been arrested.

"We will give practical answers to the smuggling taking place, and what might pose a threat to our relations with Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states in this regard."

He also noted that "in the case of seized narcotic substances, even if they are manufactured outside of Lebanon and brought to Lebanon to change the manufacturing company's name and repackage them, the company's license will be revoked, its work discontinued and its name announced."

Regarding a call for the restriction of weapons to Lebanese state institutions as a condition for the restoration of Saudi-Lebanese relations, Mawlawi said: “We are implementing the Lebanese state’s policy and highlighting its interests.”

Nicolas Chammas, head of the Beirut Traders’ Association, said that “the biggest problem remains contraband.” He added: “We will work to make Lebanon, once again, a platform for the export of goods, not contraband. We are required to take swift, serious measures and we will take successive measures in this regard.”

Fouad Siniora, a former president of Lebanon, described Saturday’s Saudi-French statement as being “of exceptional importance in these delicate circumstances.”

It “resolves the controversy regarding many issues raised in the Arab region, especially with regard to Iraq, Syria, Yemen and Lebanon,” he added.



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IMF delegation arrives in Lebanon, to meet PM Mikati on Tuesday  
France’s Macron says hoping for progress on Lebanon ‘within next hours’

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# 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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Opposition factions disagree on alliances needed for change in Lebanon

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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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Christmas cheer at Gaza Catholic school as war damage repairs go on  
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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