

Lebanon relaunches support programs for the vulnerable

Author:

Najia Houssari

ID:

1638389454498298300

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BEIRUT: Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati announced on Wednesday the launch of the ration card platform and the emergency social safety net project.

Funded and supported by the World Bank and the UN, the programs are intended to help the most vulnerable in Lebanon.

The ration card platform had faltered after it was announced by Hassan Diab's resigned government on Sept. 9 due to funding issues and objections by the World Bank.

The platform was supposed to be up before subsidies on fuel were lifted to limit protests.

In his announcement, Mikati addressed the obstruction of Cabinet sessions since Oct. 12: "If some people have the right to revolt in the street and get angry, then those who were and still are in power have no right to shirk responsibility and blame those who are currently trying to fight to save the country."

He noted that during the diplomatic meetings he held in the country and overseas, one expression was constantly repeated: "Help yourselves, and we will help you." If anything, this indicates the extent of the responsibility of all Lebanese officials and leaders to cooperate for Lebanon to move forward, he explained.

Mikati noted: "The beneficiaries of the two projects will be selected according to transparent criteria to secure the basic requirements for a decent life. The two-month registration phase will be closely monitored to prevent any exploitation, after which the payment process will begin early next year with a retroactive effect from January 2022."

FASTFACT

According to the Ministry of Social Affairs, 25 percent of Lebanese suffer from extreme poverty, while 70 percent are struggling to make ends meet, with the middle class almost becoming extinct amid Lebanon's economic and financial collapse.

The ministry is currently assisting 36,000 families suffering from extreme poverty by giving them a \$25 food card and a further \$15 for each family member. The children of these families are enrolled in public schools and receive free primary healthcare, thanks to EU funding. The ministry aims to start supporting 75,000 families.

“In the first phase, we will start implementing the social safety net program, which covers 150,000 Lebanese families and 87,000 children enrolled in public schools,” said Minister of Social Affairs Hector Hajjar.

He added: “These programs are not the solution; they are rather temporary support to help citizens survive until economic recovery is initiated.”

Mikati said that he had issued a decision “to form a technical committee to review the security and cyber aspects of the IMPACT platform and its subsidiary webpages, headed by the minister of interior, to prevent any data manipulation and ensure user privacy.”

Hajjar expected around 20,000 people to register on the platform daily.

More families are falling under the poverty line in Lebanon, a World Bank report revealed.

The share of the Lebanese population under the international poverty line is estimated to have risen by 13 percentage points in 2020 and is expected to further increase by as much as 28 percentage points by the end of 2021; amounting to 1.5 million Lebanese.

Meanwhile, 780,000 Syrian refugees are under the poverty line, and their share is estimated to have risen by 39 percentage points in 2020 and 52 percentage points in 2021.

The report also tackled the successive financial crises that have afflicted Lebanon, noting that “the Lebanese government’s hands are tied in terms of providing social assistance to citizens and residents alike.”

International institutions fear further repercussions as Lebanon is being assailed by compounded crises for the third year in a row, which may lead to widespread chaos and disturb the fragile security stability, especially in light of the significant rise in the prices of goods, fuel, transportation, medicine, electricity from generators, and other daily life necessities.

“Radical reforms are essential to achieve recovery and social protection programs are very helpful in mitigating the impact of multiple crises,” the World Bank said.



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Lebanon reintroduces some COVID-19 prevention measures Give Lebanon a break, politicians told

[Lebanon reintroduces some COVID-19 prevention measures](#)

Author:

Reuters

ID:

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Wed, 2021-12-01 20:57

BEIRUT: Lebanon will impose a night-time curfew starting Dec. 17 on non-vaccinated people for three weeks.

And full vaccination will be made mandatory for all workers in several sectors due to concerns over the spread of coronavirus, the COVID-19 committee said on Wednesday.

Vaccination will be mandatory for all civil servants and workers in the health, education, tourism and public transport sectors as of Jan. 10, the committee said.

A new coronavirus variant found in South Africa and detected in several countries was determined as a variant of concern by the World Health Organization last week and has led to strengthening COVID-19-related restrictions around the world.



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Lebanon's economic meltdown threatens to cancel Christmas
Lebanon's president in Qatar for talks over Gulf crisis

[Algeria's FLN narrowly wins local polls](#)

Author:

AFP

ID:

1638305037849618300

Tue, 2021-11-30 23:46

ALGIERS: Algeria's long-dominant National Liberation Front has narrowly won local elections, preliminary results showed Tuesday, in a vote seen as key in efforts to turn the page on late president Abdelaziz Bouteflika's rule. The FNL, which led the country's war of independence from France and was for decades its only party, won 5,978 seats nationwide, followed by its

traditional ally the Democratic National Rally (RND) with 4,584, electoral board chief Mohamed Charfi said.

Independents came third with 4,430 seats, Charfi told journalists. Saturday's vote was an important test for President Abdelmadjid Tebboune, elected in a contentious, widely boycotted 2019 ballot months after Bouteflika stepped down under pressure from the army and the Hirak pro-democracy protest movement.

Bouteflika died in September, aged 84.

In November last year, less than 24 percent of the electorate approved amendments to the constitution, while at parliamentary elections in June, voter participation hit a record low of 23 percent.

Saturday saw 36.6 percent turnout for the local elections and 34.8 percent for regional polls, Charfi said.

He had previously rejected any comparison with local ballots under Bouteflika, which were marked by widespread fraud.

The FLN won absolute majorities in 124 out of the country's 1,541 municipalities, but lost majorities in 479 of the 603 it had controlled. In 552 municipalities it will have to govern alongside its allies, including the RND, which won absolute majorities in 58 city councils.

Opposition veterans the Front of Socialist forces (FFS) won an absolute majority in 47 municipalities, many of them in the restive Kabylie region.



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recovering from COVID-19 and oil shocks, says IMF

Turkish opposition politician arrested for alleged espionage

Author:

AP

ID:

1638303856829507200

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ANKARA: Turkish authorities have arrested a prominent member of an opposition party over accusations that he engaged in “political and military espionage,” Turkey’s state-run news agency reported.

Anadolu Agency said late Monday that a court in Ankara ordered Metin Gurcan, a retired army officer and founding member of the opposition Democracy and Progress Party, or DEVA, jailed pending the outcome of a trial.

Gurcan, who wrote articles on Turkish foreign policy and defense issues, last year founded the DEVA party together with its leader, Ali Babacan – a former deputy prime minister who broke away from President Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s ruling party.

The politician and defense analyst is accused of selling alleged secret information to foreign diplomats, according to Hurriyet newspaper and other media reports. Gurcan rejected the accusations during his questioning, the reports said.

A trial date is expected to be set after the court approves a prosecutors’ indictment against Gurcan.

Babacan defended Gurcan in a late night television interview saying the analyst had “no means of accessing confidential information considered to be a state secret because he does not work for the state.”

“(Gurcan’s) studies consist of information compiled from open sources,” Babacan said.



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UAE, Turkey deepen economic ties with investment deals UAE announces \$10 billion fund for investments in Turkey

[Macron urges Raisi to respect nuclear obligations 'without delay'](#)

Author:

AFP, AP

ID:

1638303950439514600

Tue, 2021-11-30 23:25

PARIS: French President Emmanuel Macron called on his Iranian counterpart, Ebrahim Raisi, to return to fulfilling Tehran's obligations under the 2015 nuclear deal "without delay," Macron's office said, as negotiators seek to revive the accord through talks in Vienna.

During telephone conversations on Monday, Macron urged Raisi to engage in a "constructive manner" with the talks, which resumed this week after a suspension of almost half a year following the election of the hardliner to the Iranian presidency.

European powers are seeking to revive the nuclear deal, more formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. It has been moribund since the US withdrew from the agreement in 2018, prompting Tehran to ramp up nuclear activities as Washington reimposed sanctions.

France's objective is "to see Iran return to full respect for all of its commitments under the JCPOA and that the United States returns to the agreement," the French presidency said.

Macron also "underscored the need for Iran to engage constructively in this direction so that the exchanges allow a swift return to the agreement," it added.

"Iran must return without delay to compliance with all its commitments and obligations ... and quickly resume cooperation that allows the (UN atomic energy) agency to fully carry out its mission," it said.

Iran's top nuclear negotiator, Ali Bagheri, adopted a hard-line approach after just one day of the resumed talks, suggesting that everything discussed during previous rounds of diplomacy could be renegotiated.

Speaking to Iranian state television, he described all that has been discussed so far as merely a "draft."

He added: "Drafts are subject to negotiation. Therefore nothing is agreed on unless everything has been agreed on.

"On that basis, all discussions that took place in the (previous) six rounds (of talks) are summarized and are subject to negotiations. This was admitted by all parties in today's meeting as well."

Bagheri's remarks directly contradicted comments on Monday by EU diplomat Enrique Mora, who is leading the talks.

"The Iranian delegation represents a new administration in Tehran with new, understandable political sensibilities, but they have accepted that the work done over the six first rounds is a good basis to build our work ahead, so no point in going back," he said.

Another state TV report highlighted Bagheri in Vienna saying that Iran demands a "guarantee by America not to impose new sanctions" or reimpose previously lifted sanctions.

Mohammed Eslami, Iran's civilian nuclear chief, reiterated this demand in comments to Iran's official IRNA news agency.

"The talks (in Vienna) are about the return of the US to the deal and they have to lift all sanctions and this should be in practice and verifiable," he said.

Raisi's office said that he urged Macron "to strive with other parties in Vienna to conclude the negotiations and lift the sanctions against Iran."

Raisi said: "Sending a full team to the talks shows Iran's serious will in these talks."

Referring to the US, he added: "Those who have started to violate the nuclear deal must gain the confidence of the other party for the negotiations to proceed in a real and fruitful manner."



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