

Lebanese PM hopeful after crisis-busting move as calls grow for Kordahi's resignation

Sat, 2021-11-06 00:39

BEIRUT: Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati was on Friday awaiting the results of behind-the-scenes consultations aimed at bridging the gap within his government and mending ties with Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries, after they severed diplomatic and economic ties with Beirut in protest over statements made by Information Minister George Kordahi.

MP Ali Darwish, a member of Mikati's parliamentary bloc, told Arab News: "Through the roadmap that Mikati announced on Thursday, he put forward an initiative to defuse the crisis."

Darwish stressed that Mikati "is a moderate man by nature over whom there is consensus, which is essential in a country like Lebanon, so it is crucial for him to carefully and wisely handle issues."

Mikati had once again called on Kordahi to "follow his conscience and prioritize national interest."

Kordahi, however, is refusing to resign from the government.

Speaking about the possibility of Mikati's government falling if Kordahi and his political team stand firm, Darwish said: "Mikati understands the Lebanese situation and believes that as long as he is prime minister, he can help Lebanon maintain good relations with the Arab countries."

Darwish added: "If Mikati were to resign, Lebanon could face unimaginable consequences."

The MP also said the current government "is based on a formula that brings together all the Lebanese, and if we were to lose the executive authority, we would be stripping Lebanon of the decision-making authority."

Speaking on behalf of the anti-Hezbollah Sovereign Front, former Interior Minister Maj. Gen. Ashraf Rifi said: "Hezbollah formed governments based on its interests, controlled the state and took it hostage for Iran's sake."

He called on Mikati to resign, saying: "You are the prime minister of a dysfunctional government, and the country does not need more Hezbollah governments."

Rifi noted: "This entire regime needs to leave, starting with the president from Hell, Michel Aoun. We need to steer away from the axis of evil, and justice must be applied."

International support for the Mikati government grew on Friday when the

French Foreign Ministry announced that it is in "close contact with all parties concerned with the new conflict between Arab countries and Lebanon."

French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian called on "all parties, as well as Lebanese officials, to promote calm and dialogue for the sake of the Lebanese people and the stability of Lebanon," stressing that this is "critical for the region."

Le Drian said: "Separating Lebanon from regional crises is of fundamental importance. Lebanon must be able to count on all its regional partners to support it in implementing reforms."

After she met with Mikati on Friday, the UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon Joanna Wronecka expressed "full support for the work of the Mikati government," encouraging it to proceed with the required reforms.

On Thursday evening, US State Department spokesman Ned Price stressed that Lebanon must work with its partners for the sake of the Lebanese people, and leave diplomatic channels open with the Gulf countries.

Price added: "We look for ways to alleviate the suffering of the people of Lebanon."

MP Nicolas Nahas, a member of Mikati's parliamentary bloc, described the current political complications as "major," noting that efforts are ongoing to curb the escalation with the Gulf states.

He added: "The issue requires a clear and integrated roadmap to rebuild confidence, and the first step begins with Kordahi following his conscience.

"If he does not resign, the president, the prime minister and the parliament speaker would need to decide what measures to take."

Nahas stressed: "Serious work is required, and it is not permissible in any way for the people to pay the price for political disputes."

Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova also commented on the crisis.

Zakharova said: "Russia is looking forward to resolving the diplomatic conflict between Lebanon and the Arab Gulf states as soon as possible."

Zakharova pointed out that Kordahi's statements "were made at a time when he was not yet a minister representing the Lebanese state and its government."



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Lebanese prime minister urges information minister to resign

[From traditional to abstract, Arab pavilions at Expo 2020 Dubai seize the imagination](#)

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DUBAI: World Expos have a long and illustrious past, not least for their lasting contributions to urban skylines and architectural world-firsts. The Eiffel Tower and Chicago's Ferris Wheel are two of the most recognizable

examples.

Despite such permanent contributions, expos have mostly been temporary events, with elaborate pavilions representing countries from every corner of the world for a limited time, only to be unceremoniously removed at the end of the duration.

Chicago built an entire temporary city in grand neo-classical style for its expo in 1893. The famous White City ultimately provided planners with a blueprint for future growth – however, the buildings themselves were not retained.



This has been a common narrative of World Expos, with pavilion structures either unused or destroyed afterward.

Not so in Dubai. The Expo 2020 organizing committee has designed the site to include a dedicated pavilion for each nation, in addition to other participating organizations, which are intended to remain long after the event draws to a close.

Its novel concept has resulted in more than 200 pavilions across a site twice the size of Monaco, the sovereign city state on the French Riviera.

The site is divided into three “thematic districts” that mirror the sub-themes of the event: Sustainability, mobility and opportunity.



Algeria

Some of the pavilions have been designed and built by participating countries, showcasing their own national architecture and designs, while others occupy standardized buildings assembled by the host.

Many Arab countries have built their own pavilions and put substantial resources and effort into their development (with assistance from the UAE, in certain cases).

All Gulf Cooperation Council member countries – as well as Morocco, Algeria, Lebanon, Palestine and Egypt, among others – have self-built pavilions.

Many of these are in the Opportunity District, with prime locations close to the UAE and Saudi pavilions.

Since this is the first expo to be hosted by a Middle Eastern country, Arab states have pulled out all the stops to make their mark on the event.

Architecture across the site incorporates many elements of traditional Arabic design, but the overall impression is perhaps not as visually cohesive as Chicago's White City would have been.



Oman

Each country participating in Expo 2020 Dubai has been given the freedom to bring in its own unique design, with regional touches such as latticework, courtyards and shade structures applied throughout.

The result is a selection of powerfully individual pavilions designed to capture visitors' interest.

Arab pavilion designs and their associated architecture can be broadly defined as falling into two camps: Traditional yet innovative, with an emphasis on history and culture; and the expressive and inventive, with an emphasis on the abstract and experimental.

Falling into the former category is Algeria's pavilion, modelled on the Casbah (citadel) of its capital Algiers.

In a nod to the host city, the iconic blue and white palette of Algiers has been traded for desert shades.

The design of the pavilion references traditional Algerian style, with an interior courtyard and design elements to maximize air flow.

While the pavilion's interior courtyard provides a quiet protected space, the facade is dramatically stylized with designs resembling traditional Berber tattoos.



Bahrain

Also occupying the traditional-yet-innovative camp is Kuwait's pavilion, an eye-catching gold structure in the Sustainability District, constituting the Gulf kingdom's most ambitious expo contribution to date.

The design evokes the ecology of the desert, with video of camels and rolling sand dunes displayed on large external screens.

Textured gold exterior panels form a modern take on its desert terrain. In the center of the pavilion is a reproduction of a local water tower, used for the conservation of natural resources.

Another of the traditionalists is Morocco, which drew inspiration for its pavilion from its scenic earthen villages.

At 34 meters in height, spread across seven floors, it is among the tallest buildings at the expo.

The facade was built using rammed-earth construction methods, common to Morocco and inherently sustainable as the thick earthen walls keep the air inside cool.



UAE

The rooms are arranged around a central courtyard, complete with hanging gardens and other tributes to Moroccan regions and ecosystems.

Oman, too, pays homage to its traditional roots with a focus on the ancient frankincense tree, native to Dhofar governorate.

The exterior resembles the tree, with rich curved frankincense beams that required two to three years to create especially for the expo.

Oman also has among the most creative visitor experiences, with frankincense-scented sanitizing mist at the entrance and a photo area where floor panels emit sudden jets of faintly scented mist, so that the surprise of visitors is captured on camera.

Bahrain's pavilion is among the most striking and experimental of the expo. Designed by Christian Kerez Zurich AG, the pavilion appears from the outside to be a windowless metal box bristled with long metal rods, with no discernible entry or exit.

Instead, visitors are directed down a long ramp that takes them deeper and deeper underground, where the air becomes cooler and the sounds of the surface world recede.



Morocco

The descent is described by the architect as “a transition between the outer and inner worlds of the pavilion.”

When visitors enter the pavilion proper, they are greeted by a cavernous ceiling and bright light.

The metal rods visible on the outside are revealed to be part of a forest of floor-to-ceiling columns.

The pavilion design is intended to explore the concept of density – both in reference to the world’s growing urban density, and as a nod to the densely woven fabrics of Bahraini craftspeople.

Another nation whose pavilion design has pushed the boundaries is Saudi Arabia – the expo’s second largest after the UAE’s and an obvious crowd favorite.

The structure is a ramp angled up toward the sky, implying the ambition of the Kingdom but also doubling as a kind of window.

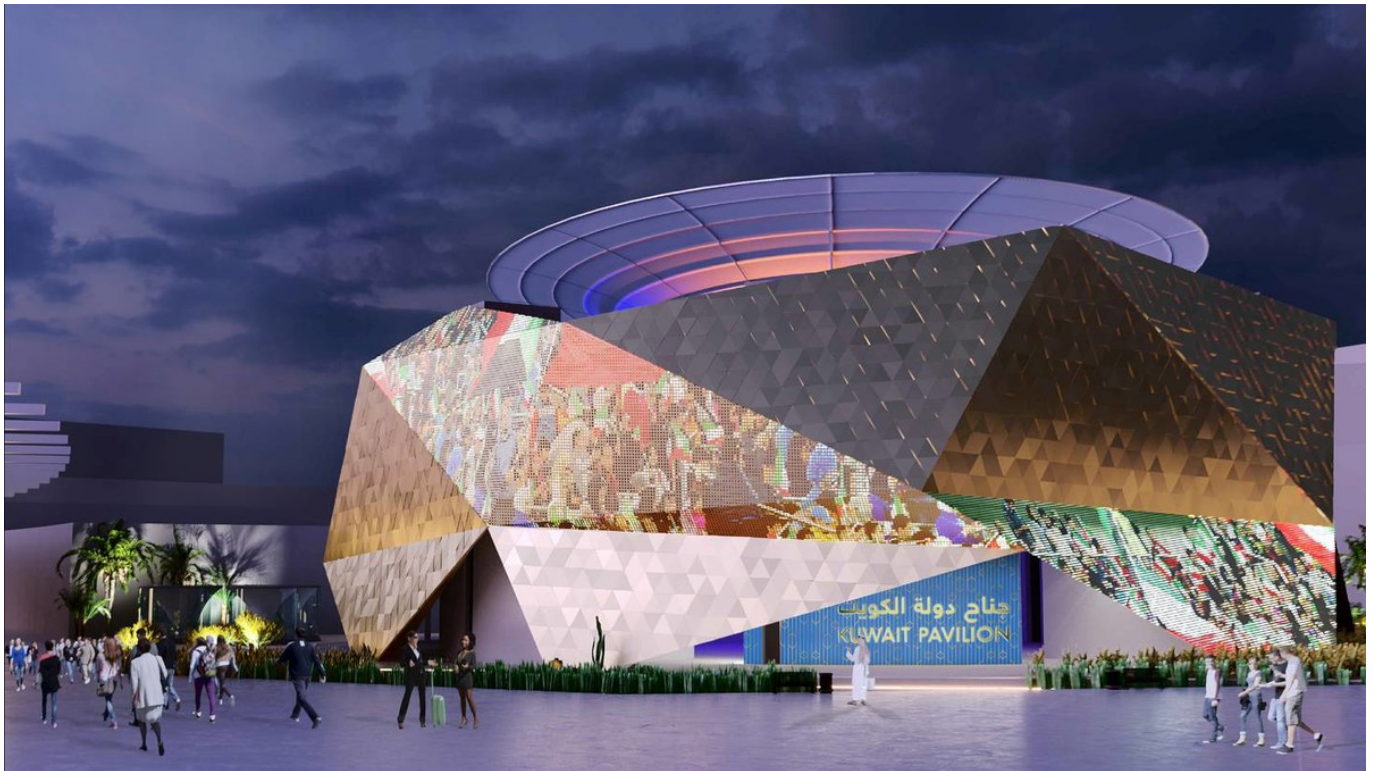
The underside of the ramp, which faces visitors as they enter the pavilion, features the world’s largest LED display, depicting Saudi Arabia’s spectacular natural scenery, offering visitors a glimpse into parts of the Kingdom most have never seen before.

The pavilion has earned a Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design platinum certificate in recognition of Saudi Arabia’s commitment to using sustainable construction materials and recycling waste during the construction process.

In a marked departure from past expos, country pavilions will remain a

permanent feature of the Dubai landscape.

Some pavilions will be repurposed to house an Expo 2020 Dubai museum, while others will remain tied to their country of origin as venues for cultural exchange.



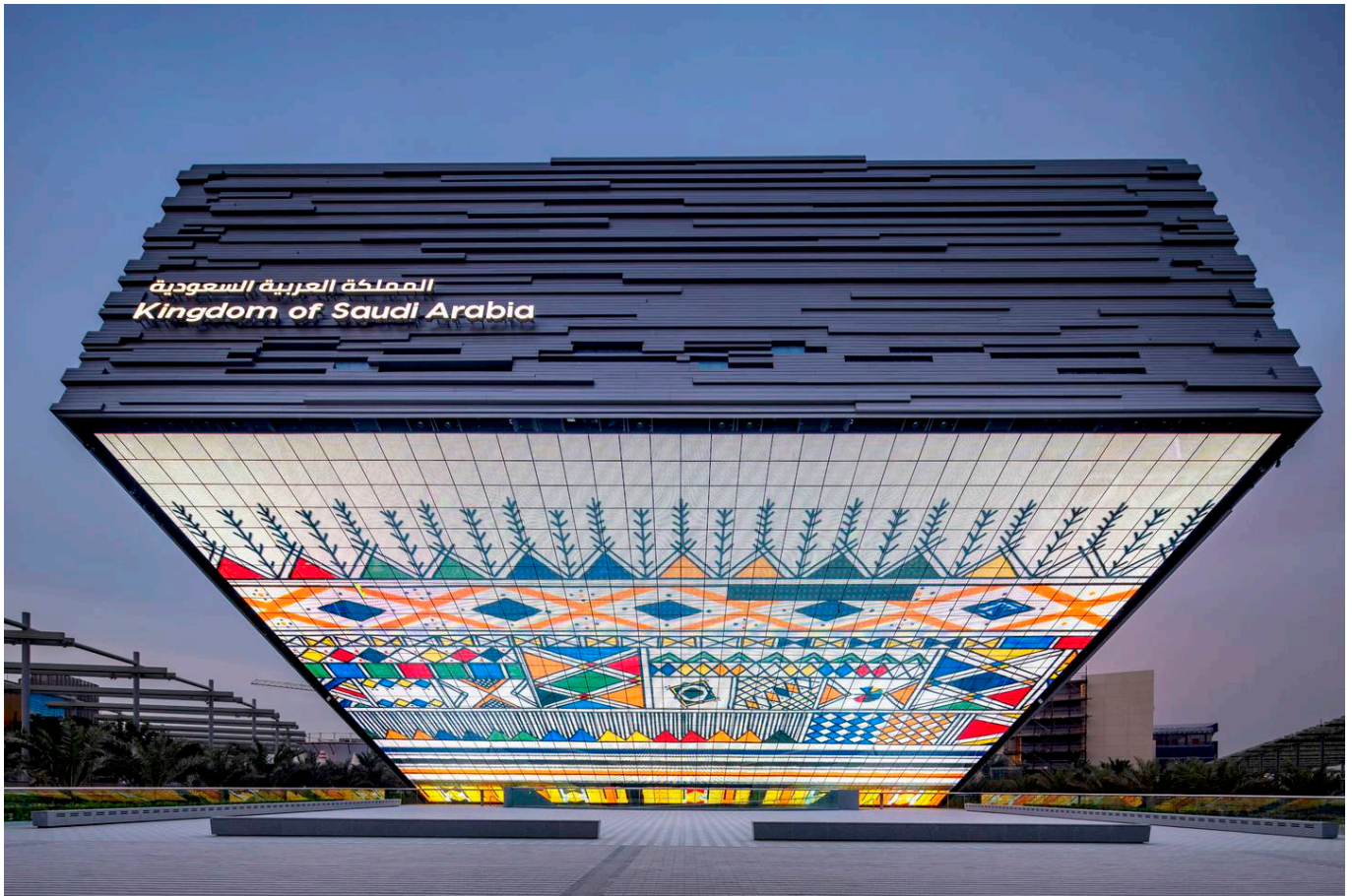
Kuwait

In 2010, the UAE became the first country ever to relocate its pavilion to home soil after the Shanghai Expo (in the form of 24,000 individual steel pieces). In 2015, the UAE also repatriated its pavilion from Milan.

Now the country is continuing this tradition of sustainable reuse on a far grander scale. In the legacy period after the event, the site will evolve into a residential and commercial community named District 2020, retaining around 80 percent of its existing buildings.

In the meantime, millions of Expo 2020 Dubai visitors are getting an exposure to a global environment awash with new ideas, cultural experiences and entertainment. The wide variety of architecture is a source of awe and inspiration.

And thanks to the foresight of its planners, the expo will not disappear once its six-month run expires, but will live on as a sustainable community for decades to come.



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Half a million visits to Saudi Arabia's pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai Kingdom's pavilion at Expo 2020 brings together industry experts for first Saudi Salon

[Netanyahu's hopes for a comeback dim as Israel passes budget](#)

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Fri, 2021-11-05 00:17

TEL AVIV: Former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu watched from the sidelines Thursday as the government that toppled him after 12 years in power passed a national budget, dealing a major blow to his hopes of a swift return to the country's top office.

The man whose shadow loomed so large for so long over Israel, whose rule

sparked both mass protests and cult-like devotion, has been relegated to the backbenches as opposition leader, far from the levers of power and exposed to serious corruption charges.

The first budget to be passed in three years, during which a prolonged period of political gridlock brought four divisive elections, was a stress test for Israel's fractious coalition government.

"It changes the timeframe for him," said Anshel Pfeffer, a columnist at the left-leaning Haaretz daily and Netanyahu biographer. "It doesn't mean he's going to give up. He's not going to give up. He's incapable of giving up." Failure to pass the budget before Nov. 14 would have resulted in the dissolution of the government and snap elections – giving Netanyahu, who is rising in the polls, a chance at redemption. Now that it has passed, the government – established with the goal of ousting Netanyahu – appears to have bought itself some time. Coalition parties are struggling in the polls and none is likely to want to topple the government and trigger new elections, for now.

Netanyahu's best hope is that the coalition, made up of eight ideologically diverse parties, implodes over its own contradictions. Otherwise, his next chance will come when the government rotates its leadership in 2023, bringing the centrist Yair Lapid to power and perhaps giving his nationalist coalition partners a reason to bolt.

Aviv Bushinsky, a former Netanyahu aide, said Netanyahu is better off biding his time as opposition leader, a public platform from which he can contest the legal charges and ratchet up support from constituents.

"Right now he's in no hurry. He has nothing to lose," he said.

Addressing parliament on Wednesday, ahead of the budget vote, Netanyahu vowed to carry on.

"We will continue to fight this awful government. We will leave no stone unturned, we will look for any way to topple it, to return Israel to the right track," he said.

Netanyahu, a major figure in Israeli politics for the last quarter century, suffered a dramatic downfall earlier this year.

He began a 12-year run as prime minister in 2009, after an earlier stint in the 1990s, becoming Israel's longest serving leader and helping to shape the country.

He was ubiquitous on the world stage, preaching against Iran's nuclear program and the accord with world powers meant to rein it in.

He ramped up settlement building in the occupied West Bank, avoided peace talks with the Palestinians and presided over three wars against the Hamas militant group ruling Gaza.

He worked hard to convince Israelis that he was a world-class statesman, the only one who could safely guide Israel through its myriad challenges.

But under Prime Minister Naftali Bennett, who has traveled to the global climate summit, steered Israel through a fourth COVID-19 wave and passed a budget, that argument has eroded.

"Suddenly you don't need to be Benjamin Netanyahu to be the prime minister of Israel. And that in itself has sort of been a revelation," Pfeffer said.

Netanyahu also used his office to divide Israelis, whipping up nationalists against dovish leftists, Jewish Israelis against Palestinian citizens of Israel and railing against the country's institutions, especially after he was indicted in three corruption cases.

Netanyahu is on trial for fraud, breach of trust and bribery, charges he denies but which clouded his last years in office. Under Israeli law, Netanyahu did not have to step down after being indicted, leaving him a bully pulpit from which he could fight the charges, push to legislate immunity and air his grievances against the media and the judicial system.



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Outgoing Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu gets his first smartphone
Benjamin Netanyahu to leave prime minister's residence by July 10

[Vietnam seeks information from Iran about seized oil tanker](#)

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Fri, 2021-11-05 00:05

HANOI: Vietnam was seeking more information on Thursday about a Vietnamese oil tanker that was seized at gunpoint last month by Iranian soldiers in the Gulf of Oman, while vowing to ensure the safety and humane treatment of the ship's crew members.

Iran's powerful paramilitary Revolutionary Guard troops on Oct. 24 took control of the MV Southys, a vessel that analysts suspect of trying to transfer sanctioned Iranian crude oil to Asia. US forces had monitored the seizure but ultimately did not take action as the vessel sailed into Iranian waters.

The episode was the latest provocation in Mideast waters as tensions escalate between Iran and the US over Tehran's nuclear program.

Vietnamese officials "continue to closely follow the developments and work closely with Iranian authorities to resolve this issue in accordance with the law and enact necessary measures to safeguard the rights and interests of Vietnamese nationals," Pham Thu Hang, deputy spokesperson in Vietnam's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said on Thursday.

The captain of the MV Southys told the Vietnamese Embassy in Iran that all 26 crew members were being treated well and were in "normal health," Hang told reporters at a scheduled briefing.

Iran celebrated its capture of the vessel in dramatic footage aired on state television Wednesday, the day before the 42nd anniversary of the 1979 seizure of the US Embassy in Tehran.

Ship-tracking data analyzed by The Associated Press from MarineTraffic.com showed the vessel still off Iran's southern port of Bandar Abbas on Tuesday. A satellite photo from Planet Labs Inc. also showed the vessel off Bandar Abbas in recent days.



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Iran seized Vietnamese oil tanker: US officials Iran says stopped US navy seizing tanker in Sea of Oman

[Mikati urges Kordahi to prioritize national interest over populist slogans](#)

Thu, 2021-11-04 23:37

BEIRUT: Lebanon's Prime Minister Najib Mikati on Thursday again called on Information Minister George Kordahi to resign to avoid further escalation with the Gulf.

He urged him to put national interests first and not to "disrupt the government's work and waste more time."

Mikati also had stern words on Thursday for his partners in government, Hezbollah and its allies, for exacerbating Lebanon's diplomatic spat with various Gulf states.

He stressed that "the country is not run by defiance, arrogance, raised tones, and threats, but rather a common discourse that unites the Lebanese people so they can work together on saving Lebanon."

Mikati also gave what seemed to be a strongly-worded speech against Hezbollah and its allies.

"Anyone who thinks they can impose their opinion by impeding work and verbal escalation is wrong," said Mikati.

"Anyone who thinks they can impose on the Lebanese choices that steer them away from their history, their Arab depth, and their close ties with the Arab countries and the Gulf states, especially with Saudi Arabia, is also wrong."

Mikati returned on Wednesday from Glasgow, after participating in the COP26 summit, on the sidelines of which he held a series of meetings with international officials regarding the diplomatic and economic crisis between Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries.

The row was triggered by statements Kordahi made before becoming a minister, in which he offended Saudi Arabia and defended the Houthis in Yemen.

Speaking to Al-Mayadeen TV, Kordahi responded to Mikati's request, saying that he will not resign and that his position has not changed.

On Thursday, Mikati met separately with President Michel Aoun and Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri, and briefed them on the talks he held on the sidelines

of COP26.

He said that he and Aoun agreed on a roadmap to exit the current crisis with Gulf states.

Mikati noted: "When we formed this government after months of disruption, delay, and missed opportunities, we announced that we are on a quick rescue mission to advance cooperation with international bodies and the International Monetary Fund, in addition to holding parliamentary elections.

"We believed that the painful reality that our country is experiencing would push everyone to let go of personal interests, and actively participate in the rescue mission, but this, unfortunately, did not happen."

Mikati also commented on the Tayouneh incident and the decision of the ministers of the Amal Movement and Hezbollah to boycott the Cabinet until Tarek Bitar, the judge leading the investigation into the Beirut port blast, is removed from his post.

He also criticized "the approach of exclusivity and obstruction that the government was subjected to from within."

He added: "One month in, we faced our first challenge as a government, as we were dragged into intervening in a judicial order that we have nothing to do with.

"We refused to interfere in the Beirut port blast probe but stressed the need for Bitar to correct his course, especially when it comes to trying presidents and ministers. But that was not enough for some people."

Mikati noted: "We were in the process of finding a way to hold a Cabinet session, but we had to face a more difficult challenge in light of Kordahi's personal views, which he had expressed before becoming a minister, and Saudi Arabia and some Gulf states decided to cut ties with Lebanon."

The prime minister said: "The Cabinet is the natural place to discuss all issues of concern to the government, away from dictations, challenges, raised tones and threats. The Cabinet will never be a means to interfere in any matter that does not concern the government, and specifically in the work of the judiciary."

Mikati called on "all ministers to show solidarity and adhere to the ministerial statement, which set the basic rules for the government's work and policy. We are determined to deal with the relationship with Saudi Arabia and Gulf states based on sound rules.

"We will not allow political arguments to take over this issue. In this context, I call on Kordahi once again to follow his conscience, assess the circumstances, do what should be done, and prioritize national interest over populist slogans. I am betting on his patriotic sense to evaluate the situation and the interest of the Lebanese citizens and expats."

The prime minister also stressed that "anyone who believes that obstruction

is the solution” was misguided. “Everyone must realize that no party unilaterally speaks on behalf of Lebanon and the Lebanese people,” he added.

According to political observers, Mikati received international support during his stay in Glasgow.

Political writer Tony Francis told Arab News: “Those whom Mikati met in Glasgow asked him to assume his role as prime minister and that the ball is in his court and he must act. The international community will not accept the resignation of his government.”

Francis added: “Mikati’s stances are kind of adventurous, to which Hezbollah and its allies may not respond. Everything depends on what the Iranians want in the region, and they are exploiting all fronts to get what they want.

“On the other hand, we see that Iran has agreed to resume the nuclear negotiations in Vienna on Nov. 29. Mikati’s raised tone may be part of the Western response to the Iranians; all of this means that things will remain ambiguous and no solution will be reached before Nov. 29.”



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Mikati fears slippery slope if Lebanese-Saudi crisis is not resolved
Houthi militia put up posters backing Lebanese minister, George Kordahi