

Arab American group demands protected status for Lebanese nationals in the US

Sat, 2021-08-28 16:31

ATLANTA: The American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC) has requested that the US government designate Lebanon for Temporary Protected Status (TPS) due to its political instability and looming economic meltdown.

The move was co-sponsored by more than 70 civic, legal and religious organizations in the US seeking to protect Lebanese nationals who are presently in the US on non-immigrant visas but would face dire circumstances should they go back to Lebanon under the current conditions.

The letter was sent to Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas and Secretary of State Antony Blinken earlier this week, who would take such a decision.

It requested the designation status fearing that further escalations and tensions in Lebanon's fractious and dysfunctional political system might escalate into a regional armed conflict.

Lebanon's political and economic problems became more acute in the aftermath of Beirut port explosion last year that killed at least 200 people and injured thousands more and devastated the country's fragile economy.

TPS is a temporary protection that allows people from a designated country to remain in the US while conditions in their home country make safe return impossible. The Secretary of Homeland Security can designate a country for TPS if the country is experiencing armed conflict, natural disaster or other extraordinary and temporary conditions.

The designation lasts 18 months and can be renewed several times. If granted, TPS would allow Lebanese nationals to stay in the United States during the designation period and to legally work.

The letter estimates the number of Lebanese nationals who could benefit from the TPS designation at around 28,500 people.

Among the groups that co-sponsored in this effort are Amnesty International USA, the Arab American Institute, Jewish Voice for Peace, Atlanta Chapter and the National Council of Churches.

Commenting on the deteriorating situation in Lebanon, ADC president Samer Khalaf said: "The conditions in Lebanon are grim. The circumstances and facts on the ground make it abundantly clear that Lebanon is not in a position to safely accept the return of its citizens at this time. We call on the Biden administration to quickly designate TPS protections for Lebanon."

Addressing concerns over immigration issues that might arise, the letter said that there is no real risk that such a designation would result in an immigration influx into the US from Lebanon.

“There has also been no indication that TPS designation has encouraged greater, irregular numbers of migration from the designated areas, including when Lebanon has been designated in the past,” the letter said.

“The US has already invested billions of dollars over the past 10 years in Lebanon’s recovery. TPS would strengthen that investment. Lebanon’s stability is also key to the stability of the region, which is within US foreign policy interests,” it added.

Abed Ayoub, ADC’s legal director, told the Arab News that he feels optimistic that the US President Joe Biden would show compassion and grant the request.

“We urge the Biden administration to do the right thing and designate Lebanon for TPS, Lebanon is on the verge of a complete economic and humanitarian collapse, granting TPS is the morally correct thing to do, and will help provide safe haven to nationals of the country currently in the US,” he said.



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Sudan receives over 200,000 doses of COVID-19 vaccines from France

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Sat, 2021-08-28 08:20

KHARTOUM: Sudan has received a shipment of 218,400 doses of the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine as a donation from France, the health ministry and UNICEF said.

The vaccines were delivered with UNICEF's support through the COVAX facility, they said in separate statements on Friday.

In March, Sudan received an initial 820,000 doses of the coronavirus vaccine made by AstraZeneca in March through COVAX and UNICEF.

It also received 606,700 doses of the Johnson & Johnson vaccines as a donation from the United States earlier in August. China also had donated quantities of Sinopharm's COVID-19 vaccine.

More than 800,000 people in Sudan including health workers have been vaccinated since March 2021 with the first COVAX shipment and other donations, UNICEF said on Friday.

Most have taken only one dose, and the new shipment will contribute to an increase in the number of people who are fully vaccinated, it added.

"The vaccinations come at a critical time as the infection numbers are climbing while the country is preparing to re-open schools after three years of numerous interruptions," the statement said.

Sudan, with a population of 42 million, will start a second vaccination campaign in some states on Sunday after receiving new vaccines batches, the health ministry said.

As of Aug. 26, Sudan's health ministry reported 37,699 infections with COVID-19 and 2,831 deaths since the start of the coronavirus pandemic in March 2020.



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[Biden, Bennett agree Iran should never acquire nuclear weapons in White House talks](#)

Fri, 2021-08-27 22:13

WASHINGTON D.C.: US President Joe Biden told Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett in White House talks on Friday that he was putting “diplomacy first” to try to rein in Iran’s nuclear program but if negotiations fail he would be prepared to turn to other unspecified options.

In brief remarks before reporters were ushered out of the Oval Office, both leaders touched on Iran, one of the thorniest issues between the Biden administration and Israel, but mostly papered over disagreements.

Biden said he and Bennett discussed “the threat from Iran and our commitment to ensure Iran never develops a nuclear weapon.”

“We’re putting diplomacy first and we’ll see where that takes us. But if diplomacy fails, we’re ready to turn to other options,” Biden added, without offering specifics.

After a one-day delay due to a deadly suicide bombing in Kabul during the chaotic US evacuation from Afghanistan, Biden and Bennett held their first meeting seeking to reset US-Israeli relations and narrow differences over how to deal with Iran’s nuclear developments.

But the meeting, the first since Biden and Bennett took office this year, was eclipsed by Thursday’s attack outside Kabul airport that killed at least 92 people, including 13 US service members, confronting Biden with the worst crisis of his young presidency.

“The mission there ... is dangerous and now it’s come with a significant loss of American personnel, but it’s a worthy mission,” Biden told reporters after his one-on-one talks with Bennett.

US forces helping to evacuate Afghans desperate to flee new Taliban rule were on alert for more attacks.

Bennett, a far-right politician who ended Benjamin Netanyahu’s 12-year run as prime minister in June, was expected to press Biden to harden his approach to Iran and back out of negotiations aimed at reviving an international nuclear deal with Tehran that Trump abandoned.

US-Iran negotiations have stalled as Washington awaits the next move by Iran’s new hardline president.

“I was happy to hear your clear words that Iran will never be able to acquire a nuclear weapon,” Bennett told Biden. “You emphasized that you’ll try the diplomatic route but there’s other options if that doesn’t work out,” he added, also stopping short of identifying the possibilities.

Bennett has been just as adamant as Netanyahu was in pledging to do whatever is necessary to prevent Iran from building a nuclear weapon. Iran consistently denies it is seeking a bomb.

Bennett told reporters at the White House that Israel has developed a “comprehensive strategy” to keep Iran away from nuclear breakout and stop its “regional aggression.”



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Israel's Bennett calls election of new Iranian president a "final wake-up call"
Biden vows to finish Kabul evacuation, avenge US deaths

[Lebanon's Hezbollah agrees to third shipment of Iranian fuel](#)

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Fri, 2021-08-27 22:18

BEIRUT: The leader of Lebanon's Iran-backed Hezbollah group, Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, said on Friday a third vessel of Iranian fuel was agreed to ease crippling shortages in the country.

"We have agreed to start loading a third vessel," Nasrallah said in a televised speech.

"The coming days will prove those doubtful about the shipments arriving with fuel wrong ... and our words will be clear when the first vessel reaches Lebanon."

On Sunday Nasrallah had said the first vessel carrying Iranian fuel for Lebanon had already departed.

Hezbollah's foes in Lebanon have warned of dire consequences from the purchase, saying it risked sanctions being imposed on a country whose economy has been in meltdown for nearly two years.

Prime Minister-designate Najib Mikati said earlier on Friday in an interview with Saudi-owned Al Hadath television he was against anything that would harm Lebanon's interests but also asked critics of the Iranian fuel deals to provide help so that the country would not have to resort to them.

Nasrallah blamed the country's economic crisis on what he called an economic siege by the United States adding that so-called Caesar sanctions imposed by Washington on Syria had harmed Lebanon.

"Go ahead and give Lebanon an exemption for Iranian gasoline and diesel ... go ahead and give Lebanon an exemption from Caesar," Nasrallah said, addressing the United States in his speech.

Lebanon's worsening fuel shortages reached a crunch point this month threatening to bring daily life to a halt.

Nasrallah also urged top politicians to stop debating names for the new Cabinet and urgently form a government.

"It is high time this debate now ends," he said.

Lebanon has been run by the caretaker government of Prime Minister Hassan Diab, who resigned with his Cabinet after a massive Beirut port blast ripped through the capital a year ago.

Mikati is the third prime minister-designate since then to attempt to form a government with President Michel Aoun, a Hezbollah ally.



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[Lebanon's Mikati says he still faces big hurdles to forming cabinet](#)

Fri, 2021-08-27 20:52

BEIRUT: Lebanon's Prime Minister-designate Najib Mikati said on Friday he still had to overcome major hurdles to forming a new government, amid a deep economic and political crisis that has left the country with a caretaker administration for a year.

Mikati, the third person picked to try to form a government since last year, told television network Al Hadath that the situation in Lebanon remained

grave.

Forming a government is a necessary first step to secure international support to help pull Lebanon out of its deepest crisis since its 1975-1990 civil war. The currency has collapsed, while medicines and fuel are running out.

Hassan Nasrallah, the leader of Hezbollah, a heavily armed Shi'ite movement back by Iran and under US sanctions, has said Iranian fuel shipments were on their way to help ease shortages.

Opinion

This section contains relevant reference points, placed in (Opinion field)

Asked about Nasrallah's comments, Mikati said he was against anything that would harm Lebanon's interests.

"We will not let anyone lead us to new sanctions," he said. "But I tell the critics and the Arab League give us a candle, we can't say no to the shipment without having an alternative."

The prime minister's post is held by a Sunni according to Lebanon's sectarian power-sharing system.

Lebanon has been run by the caretaker government of Prime Minister Hassan Diab, who resigned with his cabinet after a massive Beirut port blast ripped through the capital a year ago.



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