

Hariri marks 16th anniversary of father's assassination

Mon, 2021-02-15 01:06

BEIRUT: Lebanon's Prime Minister-designate Saad Hariri said on Sunday that although he had been subjected to "slander and lies," he was "very patient" and determined to form a new government.

In a televised speech marking 16 years since the assassination of his father, Rafik Hariri, he said that he would never accept giving "the blocking third in the government to the president of republic."

Hariri said that during his meeting with Michel Aoun on Friday "the president of the republic asked for a quota of six ministers and for granting the Armenian Tashnag party a minister out of this quota."

"Things are not going well, for the economy is in crisis, a dear part of our beloved Beirut was destroyed by the explosion of the port, the new coronavirus pandemic is devastating our families, and the series of assassinations is continuing with the last victim being martyr Lokman Slim," Hariri said.

"A specialists' government of nonparties members is the only one capable of implementing the necessary reforms, whose road map was set by the initiative of French President Emmanuel Macron, otherwise no one will help us and the deterioration will continue until the big explosion."

He continued: "Fighting corruption starts with a reform that guarantees the independence of the judiciary, which stops pressures on some judges to open or close certain cases according to political affiliations."

Hariri considered that "the one who is blocking the forming of the government is the one who is obstructing the launching of reforms, delaying preventing the collapse, and launching reconstruction."

On the anniversary of his father's death, Hariri stressed that the ruling issued by the Special Tribunal for Lebanon against Slim Ayyash, convicted in absentia of killing Rafik Hariri in a 2005 bombing, should be executed and that he should be handed over no matter how long it took.

Ayyash is still at large and Hezbollah refuses to hand him over as it does not recognize the tribunal.

HIGHLIGHT

Hariri rejected criticism of his late father, saying: 'Hariri's policy had brought back Lebanon to the scene, attracted investors and tourists, and set the first cellular network in the Middle East even before Israel did, and it was a policy of moderation.'

Hariri rejected criticism of his late father, saying: "Hariri's policy had brought back Lebanon to the scene, attracted investors and tourists, and set the first cellular network in the Middle East even before Israel did, and it was a policy of moderation."

The prime minister-designate also objected to allegations that he infringed on the president's prerogatives in forming the government or on the Christians' rights but that he "did not allow the president of the republic to choose the ministers he wanted, especially Christian ministers." He added: "Where were you from Christians' rights when the seat of the first presidency remained vacant for three years? Christians' rights lie in a strong economy and in stability, and if there is no state there would no rights for Christians or for anybody else."

"We are for a forensic investigation in the Central Bank, and in all institutions, ministries, and directorates, whether in communication, dams, funds, and everything else starting from 1989 onward so that truth of what happened will be known to everybody and so that all violators, corrupts, and thieves will be sued."

He said that his visits to Arab and foreign countries were to "gather support to Lebanon and to re-establish relations, especially with Arab states, so that the solution will be launched quickly when the government is formed, and it will definitely be formed for there is no way out of this crisis without the Arabs and the international community, without deep reconciliation with the Arab brothers, and without stopping using Lebanon as a platform to attack the Arab Gulf and damage the interests of the Lebanese."

The current lockdown forced Hariri to cancel the annual gathering of his supporters to commemorate the anniversary of the assassination.

On the anniversary of the assassination there were declarations by political parties commemorating the event, while Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) activists launched a wave of criticism on social media against the late prime minister.



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Lebanon's Hariri sees no way out of crisis without Arab support
Crisis-hit Lebanon kicks off COVID-19 vaccinations

[UAE swears in country's first ambassador to Israel](#)

Sun, 2021-02-14 21:19

DUBAI: Mohammed Mahmoud Al-Khaja has been sworn in as the new UAE ambassador to Israel.

Al-Khaja took the oath in front of UAE Vice President, Prime Minister and Ruler of Dubai, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid.

He swore to be loyal to the UAE and its president, respect the constitution and the state's laws and to place its interest above all else, as well as perform his duties in a safe, faithful and confidential manner, Emirates news agency WAM reported on Sunday.

UAE Ambassador to Israel, sworn-in before [@HShkMohd](#).
pic.twitter.com/cNsZPUA6XN

– Dubai Media Office (@DXBMediaOffice) [February 14, 2021](#)

The ceremony comes after the cabinet approved the setting up of an embassy in Tel Aviv last month.

Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid wished Al-Khaja success in his mission, and called on him to work to consolidate relations between the UAE and Israel in a way that promotes a culture of "peace, coexistence and tolerance," the report said.

The UAE and Israel signed a US-brokered deal on Sept. 15, known as the Abraham Accords, which established diplomatic relations between the two countries for the first time.

Since then, several bilateral meetings and visits have been conducted between both sides.

Israel officially opened its embassy in the UAE capital Abu Dhabi last month with Eitan Na'eh serving as an acting ambassador.



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UAE cabinet approves opening embassy in Tel Aviv, Israel opens embassy in Abu Dhabi
oman content with current Israel relationship, foreign minister says

[Lebanon's Hariri sees no way out of crisis without Arab support](#)

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Sun, 2021-02-14 15:47

BEIRUT: Lebanese Prime Minister designate Saad Al-Hariri on Sunday said that his country could not be rescued from its current crisis without the support of Arab countries and the international community.

Gulf states have long channelled funds into Lebanon's fragile economy, but they are alarmed by the rising influence of Hezbollah, a powerful group backed by their arch-rival, Iran, and so far appear loath to ease Beirut's worst financial crisis in decades.

"There is no way out of the crisis ... without a deep reconciliation with our Arab brothers and an end to using the country as a staging point for attacking Gulf countries and threatening their interests," Hariri said in a televised speech marking 16 years since the assassination of his father, ex-premier Rafik Al-Hariri.

A UN backed tribunal in December convicted a Hezbollah member of conspiring to kill Rafik Al-Hariri in a 2005 bombing. Hezbollah has denied any links to the attack.

Saad Al-Hariri, a former prime minister himself, was given the task of forming a government in October but is struggling so far to cobble together a cabinet to share power with all Lebanese parties, including Hezbollah.

After a meeting with President Michel Aoun on Friday, Hariri said there had been no progress on the formation of a government.

Under a sectarian power-sharing system, Lebanon's president must be a Maronite Christian and the prime minister a Sunni Muslim. President Aoun is an ally of Hezbollah, listed as a terrorist group by the United States.

On Sunday Hariri blamed Aoun for impeding progress, saying he had visited the president 16 times since his nomination as prime minister and proposed names to no avail.

France has been spearheading efforts to rescue Lebanon from its worst crisis since the 1975-1990 civil war.

A new government is the first step on a French roadmap that envisages a cabinet that would take steps to tackle endemic corruption and implement reforms needed to trigger billions of dollars of international aid to fix the economy, which has been crushed by a mountain of debt.

"In all my communications there is a readiness and an enthusiasm to help Lebanon, to stop the collapse and rebuild Beirut," Hariri said.

"But it is all waiting for the push of a button and that button is government formation."



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Crisis-hit Lebanon kicks off COVID-19 vaccinations
Lebanon launches urgent vaccine rollout

[Erdogan's two-state demand puts the jinx on planned UN-led Cyprus meeting](#)

Sun, 2021-02-14 00:54

RIYADH/LONDON: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's recent assertion that the only way to resolve the Cyprus dispute is a two-state solution may have just muddied the waters further, rather than helping resolve Europe's

longest-running frozen conflict.

By rejecting the reunification of Cyprus under a two-zone federal umbrella, long favored by Greece and the UN, the Turkish leader has purposely raised the stakes in the run-up to a UN-led meeting to assess the possibility of resuming talks.

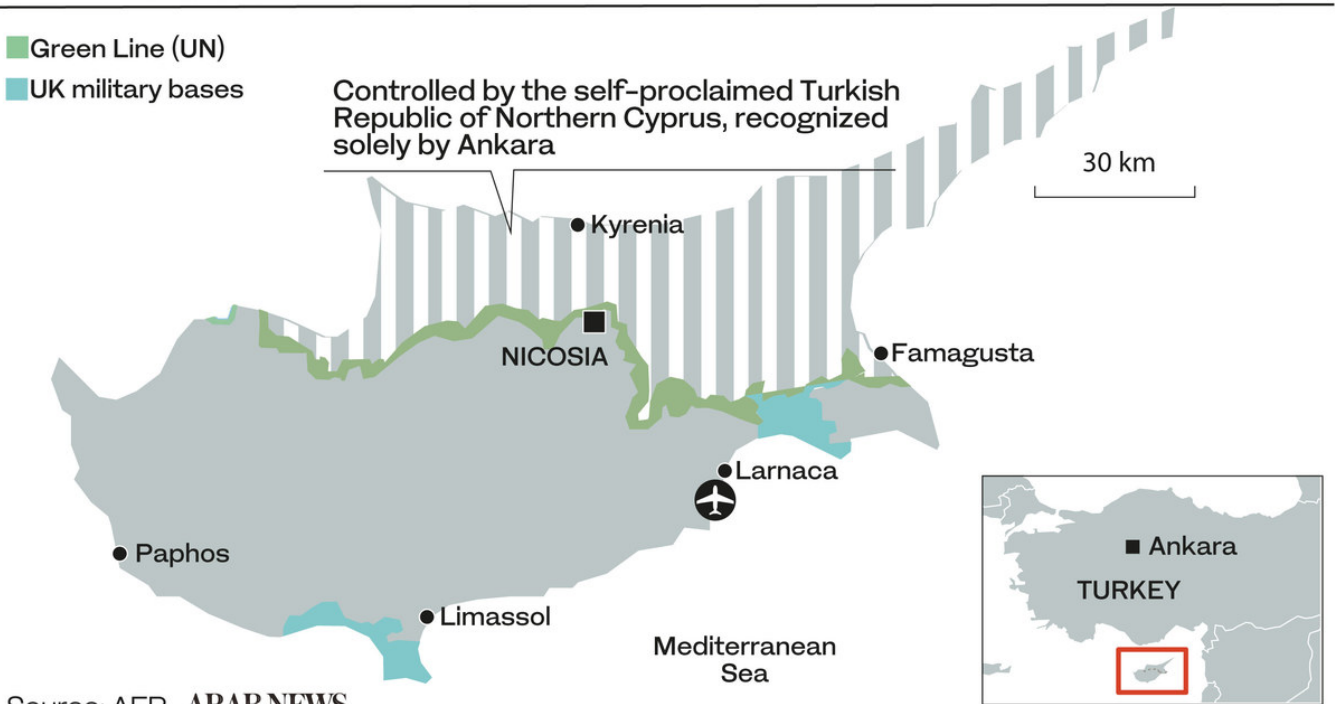
Erdogan's comments also came shortly after the leaders of Greece and Cyprus said they would only accept a peace deal based on UN resolutions, rejecting the two-state formula supported by his government and the Turkish Cypriot leadership.

Greek Cypriots, who make up the EU member's internationally recognized government, refuse to discuss proposals for a two-state union as it implies Turkish Cypriot sovereign authority.

UN initiatives have failed to break the deadlock since the eastern Mediterranean island underwent a de-facto partition into Greek- and Turkish-speaking zones in 1974, when Turkey invaded and occupied its northern third in response to a coup in Nicosia engineered by the Greek junta.

CYPRUS

Divided since 1974



The last UN-sponsored negotiations at the Swiss ski resort of Crans Montana came to naught in July 2017, going the way of the talks brokered by then UN chief Kofi Annan in 2004. For the March meeting, the UN is expected to invite Cyprus' two communities as well as foreign ministers from the three guarantor nations – Greece, Turkey and Britain – to discuss how to move forward on the issue.

“Cyprus has been a quagmire for every UN secretary-general since the 1970s and (current UN Secretary-General Antonio) Guterres will be no exception,”

Dimitris Tsarouhas, professor of international relations at Turkey's Bilkent University, told Arab News.

"The parameters of a solution are known to all parties involved: a bi-zonal, bi-communal state that will incorporate international law provisions for the protection of the rights of all, and be functional enough to make it all work. Maximalist positions on both sides meant that golden opportunities were lost at Crans Montana in 2017 and during the Annan Plan in 2004."



But then again, the rivalry runs deep. Greek Cypriots reject granting veto powers to Turkish Cypriots, and oppose both permanent troop presence and the continuation of military intervention rights by Turkey.

For its part, Turkey not only rejects suggestions of a federation between the two zones, it is also asking for hydrocarbon resources in the eastern Mediterranean to be shared. Last month, Greek and Turkish officials met in Istanbul after a five-year gap for exploratory talks on a raft of long-standing issues, including the status of Cyprus.

Conflicting claims to Cyprus' political status and natural resources go back more than a century. Cyprus was annexed by Britain in 1914 at the conclusion of the First World War, following more than 300 years of Ottoman rule, and officially became a British colony in 1925.

Then, in the mid-1950s, Greek Cypriots launched a guerrilla war against British rule, demanding unification with Greece.

Independence was won in 1960 and a constitution agreed on by the island's

Greek and Turkish communities. Under the Treaty of Guarantee, the UK, Greece and Turkey each retained the right to intervene in Cypriot affairs, while British kept hold of two military bases.

INNUMBER

1.28 million Total population of Cyprus.

\$35 billion GDP (purchasing power parity).

Harmony was short-lived, however. Inter-communal violence erupted in 1963 when the president, the clergyman cum politician Archbishop Makarios, suggested changes to the island's power-sharing arrangements. The following year, a UN peace-keeping force arrived and delineated the "Green Line."

Events moved quickly in 1974 when Greece's military junta orchestrated a coup against Makarios in an attempt to annex Cyprus. The consequent deployment of Turkish troops on the island's north effectively partitioned the island along the UN-policed Green Line.

While an estimated 165,000 Greek Cypriots fled south, about 45,000 Turkish Cypriots relocated to the north, where they established their own independent administration with Rauf Denktash as president. Despite a unanimous UN Security Council resolution, Turkey has refused to withdraw its troops from Cyprus.

Fresh attempts at UN-sponsored talks in the early 1980s were dashed when Denktash proclaimed an independent "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus" – an entity recognized only by Turkey to date.

Open conflict loomed in the 1990s when the Greek Cypriot government considered purchasing a Russian-made S-300 missile defense system – a move quickly dropped when Turkey threatened military action.

Repeated failures of diplomacy and the rhetoric of ethnic nationalism have taught political analysts to manage their expectations.

"Recent electoral results in northern Cyprus have strengthened hardliners there – and they are themselves benefiting from Erdogan's material and ideological support," Tsarouhas told Arab News. "For the first time, Turkish Cypriots now claim that a two-state solution is the only way forward, and Erdogan echoes that. This means the partition of the island.

"On the other hand, it is equally true that Greek Cypriots have missed their opportunities to push for a successful resolution of the problem in the past, so they are not in a hurry. They have never been, since 1974."

Stavros Avgoustides, ambassador of Cyprus to Saudi Arabia, rejects the claim that the Greek Cypriot side has also mishandled the issue and places the blame squarely on Turkey.



"The failure of successive efforts to achieve a solution was fundamentally due to Turkey's insistence to maintain Cyprus as a protectorate through the obsolete post-colonial system of guarantees and the presence of Turkish troops on Cyprus' soil," Avgoustides told Arab News.

"Cyprus has ended up being 'ethnically divided' as a result of the 1974 Turkish military invasion and occupation and the policy of ethnic cleansing executed by Turkey against the people of Cyprus."

Judging by the statements coming from Ankara, it is obvious that ruling party politicians have nothing to lose by adopting a harder line ahead of the UN-led meeting. "There is no longer any solution but a two-state solution," Erdogan told a meeting of his Justice and Development Party (AKP) last week. "Whether you accept it or not, there is no federation anymore."

A day later, in an interview with TRT Haber, Ibrahim Kalin, the presidential spokesman, expanded on his boss's statement. "We cannot discuss the things we discussed for 40 years for another 40 years," he said.

"Now, this issue will be discussed under the UN's roof. It will be discussed at the 5+1 talks. We will now be discussing a two-state solution."

The remarks by Erdogan and Kalin came shortly after Kyriakos Mitsotakis, the Greek prime minister of Greece, said that "significant" talks to reunify Cyprus could not be resumed if Turkey insists on a two-state accord that disregards the UN and EU framework for a peace deal.

Even if next month's meeting goes ahead as planned, a successful outcome is

far from guaranteed. After all, with the new millennium had come renewed impetus to resolve the dispute, led by Annan. The 2002 road map – known as the Annan Plan – envisaged a federation with two constituent parts, presided over by a rotating presidency.

If the Greek and Turkish Cypriot sides agreed to the plan, Cyprus was to be offered EU membership. If they failed, only the internationally recognized Greek Cypriot south would be permitted to join.

The Annan Plan was put to the Cypriot public in twin referendums in 2004. Although it won support among Turkish Cypriots, it was overwhelmingly rejected by Greek Cypriots, thus compounding the situation.

Animosity between the two sides deepened in 2011 when Cyprus began exploratory drilling for oil and gas. Turkey responded the following year with its own drilling onshore in northern Cyprus despite protests from the Cypriot government. In a parallel development, UN-sponsored reunification talks launched in 2015 again ended inconclusively in July 2017.



Then, in Oct. 2020, anti-reunification nationalist Ersin Tatar narrowly won the Turkish Cypriot presidency, making the UN-backed vision for peace seem even more impractical. With the Turkish side backing Ankara's demand for a two-state formula, expectations of a deal based on the UN resolutions being reached are low.

As far as the Greek Cypriots are concerned, the terms have not changed, according to Ambassador Avgoustides. "We are committed to the continuation of negotiations with the aim of achieving a solution of a bi-zonal, bi-communal

federation as provided in the relevant UN resolutions,” he told Arab News.

“We earnestly hope that the same level of commitment will be displayed by all involved.”

A solution must “fully respect the basic rights and fundamental freedoms of all Cypriots, that will free Cyprus from foreign guarantors and from the presence of foreign troops, and will render it fully able to exercise its role as a beacon of peace and stability in the eastern Mediterranean.”

As things stand, whether the two competing visions for the future of Cyprus can be reconciled in the near future is an open question.

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Egypt, Cyprus and Greece demand respect for maritime sovereignty
Ankara rejects federation solution for divided Cyprus

[French-speaking university in Turkey faces government regulation](#)

Sun, 2021-02-14 00:16

ANKARA: While student protests continue over the appointment of a loyalist rector to Turkey's prestigious Bogazici University, another institution known for its independent academic line is also under the spotlight.

The French-speaking University of Galatasaray, located along the Bosphorus just kilometers-away from Bogazici University, has made headlines due to a new official instruction given to its academic staff.

French teachers at the university are now required to have relatively high-level Turkish proficiency following an instruction by the Council of Higher Education. Those who do not meet this requirement will not receive work permits or have their permits extended, making their stay "illegal" – although several of them have been living in Turkey for decades.

About 30 teachers at the university are nominated by France.

Opened by presidents Francois Mitterrand and his Turkish counterpart Turgut Ozal in 1992 to boost bilateral relations between the two countries, Galatasaray University is a French-speaking institution welcoming thousands of students.

They are mostly employed in elite circles after their graduation due to the high-class bilingual education they receive.

Experts say that the move might be in retaliation for educational changes introduced by French President Emmanuel Macron last year.

These require all Turkish teachers in France to know the French language, to preserve social cohesion and fight against the segregation that feeds extremism.

However, while the changes in the French system were announced a year before, giving sufficient time for teachers to gain a decent knowledge of the language, the sudden requirement put forward unilaterally by Ankara has been harshly criticized, turning several prominent French scholars into illegal residents.

BACKGROUND

French teachers at the university are now required to have relatively high-level Turkish proficiency following an instruction by the Council of Higher Education.

Those who do not have a residence or work permit in Turkey cannot open a bank account or hold an electricity account for their apartments.

Guclu Akyurek, a law professor at MEF University in Istanbul, said that although countries can adopt measures affecting foreigners in line with the sovereignty principle, such restrictive procedures do not have a legal basis.

"Galatasaray University is a university that was founded with an international agreement with France. Therefore, Turkey has to respect international deals according to the norm hierarchy. A regulation cannot change the status of such an established university," he told Arab News. Akyurek, who is himself a graduate of Galatasaray University, said that the European Court of Human Rights has urged all countries to protect the private lives of their residents. This applies to French teachers at Galatasaray University who have married Turks, he said.



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Global body criticizes Turkey over pressure against critical media
Biden starts off tough on Turkey, with rocky path ahead