

Lebanon, Israel set to hold first maritime talks

Tue, 2020-10-13 21:34

BEIRUT: After decades of conflict, Lebanon and Israel are set for the first round of talks over their maritime border that runs through potentially oil- and gas-rich Mediterranean waters.

The US-mediated meeting between officials from both sides will be held at the headquarters of the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) on Wednesday. This will be followed by talks on demarcating the land border.

David Schenker, US undersecretary of state for Near Eastern affairs, will preside over the inaugural session of the maritime talks, according to the State Department. Beirut insists that these talks "have nothing to do with normalization" of ties with Israel.

On the eve of the meeting, Lebanese President Michel Aoun reviewed preparations for it and met with Jan Kubis, UN special coordinator for Lebanon.

"The UN welcomes hosting the negotiations session," Kubis said. "The international organization will do its duty by hosting and sponsoring the negotiations, and provide all necessary facilities to make it successful." Aoun met with the Lebanese negotiating delegation, and expressed hope "to reach a just solution that protects the sovereign rights of the Lebanese people."

According to Aoun's media office, he said: "The negotiations are technical and limited to demarcating the maritime borders ... The US party is present in the negotiations as a mediator to facilitate the process."

He instructed the delegation "to stick to and defend Lebanese rights recognized internationally."

Lebanon is putting high hopes on a positive outcome, which could foster a secure environment for international companies to explore oil and gas fields off the country's coast.

Opinion

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

The contested zone between Lebanon and Israel in the Mediterranean is estimated at 860 sq. km and is known as Block 9, which is rich in oil and gas.

"What's expected on Wednesday during the negotiations is that each party will come up with a paper that includes all subjects that will be put on the table, and the US side might come up with a paper that includes some solutions," Dr. Riad Tabbarah, former Lebanese ambassador to Washington, told Arab News.

"Usually an agenda is set with a primary point that negotiations would revolve around, then points that might lead to an agreement would be picked

up to build on them to reach a final agreement over all other points,” he said.

“Each party will try whatever it can to get the maximum that it could in the negotiations. These talks might also be stalled so that each party would refer to its government.”

But the absence of a government in Lebanon begs the question: To whom will the country’s delegation refer?

Former Minister Rachid Derbas told Arab News: “In this case and according to the constitution, it will be the president of the republic, but in case of the need to take a decision, this necessitates the availability of an active government and not a caretaker government, as is the case today.”

Former Prime Minister Fouad Siniora criticized Aoun “for breaching the constitution while forming the negotiating delegation with Israel,” because “according to the constitution and to the norms, the president should have consulted with the prime minister prior to the formation of the delegation.”



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Lebanon names team for maritime border talks with Israel
Lebanon, Israel to hold maritime border talks

Israel approves plan for immigration of 2,000 Ethiopian Jews

Author:

AFP

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Mon, 2020-10-12 14:43

JERUSALEM: Israel's government on Monday approved immigration plans for 2,000 Ethiopians whose desire to move to the Jewish state has stirred controversy and faced extended delays.

The group are members of the Falash Mura, descendants of Ethiopian Jews who converted to Christianity – many under duress – in the 19th and 20th centuries.

They are not recognized as Jews by Israel's Orthodox rabbinical authorities, but claim the right to immigrate under family reunification rules.

The government approved about 9,000 claimants in 2015 but then rescinded the decision the following year, citing budgetary constraints.

Some groups in Israel, including members of the Ethiopian community, have opposed immigration of the Falash Mura, citing doubts over their claim to be Jewish.

Netanyahu told his cabinet on Monday that it was time to bring "2,000 of our people, our brothers and sisters from Ethiopia."

"We will also act to bring all of the rest," he said.

Integration Minister Pnina Tamano-Shata, the first Ethiopian Jewish woman elected to Israel's parliament, praised the government's "unanimous vote to bring 2,000 people to Israel who are waiting in Ethiopia to be united with their families."

The bulk of Ethiopia's Jewish community was brought to the country between 1984 and 1991 under the Law of Return, which guarantees Israeli citizenship to all Jews.

The Ethiopian-Israeli community has since grown to 140,000-strong, including 50,000 born in Israel.

Many say they faced racial discrimination, notably abuse by Israel's police.



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Ethiopian-Israelis decry family separation as discriminatoryAngered by police killing, Ethiopian-Israelis demand change

[Lebanese ex-PM looks to revive French rescue plan](#)

Author:

Mon, 2020-10-12 22:49

BEIRUT: Former Lebanese prime minister Saad Hariri has put himself forward as a potential leader in a bid to break the country's growing political deadlock.

He also began political consultations with other parties in order to revive the possibility of a successful French rescue plan on Monday.

After a meeting with President Michel Aoun in the Presidential Palace, Hariri said: "We have no time to waste on political polemics. If someone wants to change the concept of the French initiative, let them bear the

responsibility.”

The French plan, launched by President Emmanuel Macron on Sept. 1 to help Lebanon cope with its crises, failed after Hezbollah and the Amal Movement demanded ownership of the finance portfolio and the presence of Shiite ministers in a new government.

Hariri said that the government should be “formed of specialists who do not belong to parties and who will undertake specific reforms within a specific timetable, which does not exceed a few months.”

Lebanon is scheduled to begin negotiations with Israel on Wednesday to demarcate maritime borders amid an absence of government in the country, which is enduring one of its worst economic and financial crises to date.

President Aoun said he “wants to form a new government as soon as possible, because the situation no longer tolerates further deterioration.”

Aoun also urged “the necessity of adhering to the French initiative.”

In a statement, Hariri said the consultations, which also included meetings with Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri and other former prime ministers, were designed to “float Macron’s initiative.”

He added that the French plan “is the only and last opportunity to stop the collapse and rebuild what was destroyed by the Beirut Port explosion.”

Hariri said he would “send a delegation to communicate with all the main political blocs to ensure that they are still fully committed to the terms of the paper that they previously agreed upon during the meeting with President Macron at the Pine Palace.”

“The government’s goal is to implement only economic, financial and administrative reforms. Governments formed on the traditional basis of party representation failed to implement reforms and brought the country to the great collapse in which we are living.

“The great collapse threatens our country with more tragedies and threatens the state with complete demise.

“Macron has pledged to all of us to mobilize the international community to invest in Lebanon and to provide external financing. Do you understand what that means? It means that he will hold a conference to save Lebanon from collapse.”

“If any political party wants to change the concept of the initiative, especially concerning its economic aspect and the clause of specialized ministers, knowing in advance that this leads to its failure, then let them assume their responsibility before the Lebanese people and inform them of this matter,” he added.

President Michel Aoun will begin consultations with parliamentary blocs on Oct. 15 to assign a Sunni figure to form the next government and succeed

Prime Minister Hassan Diab's caretaker administration.

Diab's government resigned on Aug. 10 following the Beirut explosion, while Mustapha Adib, who was assigned prime minister-designate on Aug. 31, stepped down a month later after he failed to form a Cabinet based on the French plan.

Following Adib's downfall, Macron condemned Lebanon's political dysfunction, with a particular focus on Hezbollah and the Amal Movement.

He singled out the former as a "terrorist militia that terrorizes political forces with weapons," adding, "some of the leadership preferred to be hostages with Hezbollah."

On Monday, Lebanon listed the members of its delegation being sent to discuss maritime borders with Israel. The meeting, which begins on Oct. 14 at the Naqoura UNIFIL headquarters, will be overseen by US officials.

The leader of the delegation is Brig. Gen. Pilot Bassam Yassin, while members include Marine Col. Mazen Basbous, Petroleum Administration official Wissam Chbat and maritime expert Najib Masihi.

The Presidency of the Republic said the negotiations are "purely technical," downplaying rumors that the talks are part of a normalization process with Israel.

Hezbollah's parliamentary bloc said last week that the negotiations "have nothing to do with making peace with Israel and do not come in the context of reconciliation with the enemy, nor with normalization policies."

The economic stranglehold on the Lebanese public is tightening, with citizens voicing complaints about lack of medicine available in pharmacies.

The country's chemists are preparing to stage their first-ever strike on Tuesday, in a bid to prevent "the smuggling of subsidized medicines out of Lebanon, and steps to remove subsidies on medicines."

President of the Pharmacists Syndicate Dr. Ghassan Al-Amin said medicine smuggling is affecting Lebanon's ability to provide vital medicine to the public. He added: "There are 17 pharmacies in Iraq that sell drugs smuggled from Lebanon, and there are pharmacies in Syria that sell smuggled Lebanese medicine."

Amin also warned of "importers storing subsidized drugs in Lebanon."

Minister of Health Hamad Hassan revealed during a meeting with the Pharmacists Syndicate that "a truck covered with shades was seized containing a large number of vaccines being transported abroad."

The minister also warned of "large quantities of medicines arriving at pharmacies and being smuggled at night across the border with Syria."



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[UAE reports 1,064 coronavirus infections, one death](#)

Mon, 2020-10-12 21:55

DUBAI: The UAE on Monday recorded 1,064 new COVID-19 cases and one death. The Ministry of Health and Prevention said the total number of cases since the pandemic began has reached 107,293, while the death toll rose to 446. The ministry also said 1,271 cases recovered from COVID-19 over the previous 24 hours, bringing the total to 98,555.

Dubai Economy closed a real estate office and issued fines to eight businesses and a warning to one shop for not adhering to anti-COVID-19 measures.

During daily inspection rounds, teams from Dubai Economy, in cooperation with Dubai Sports Council, fined five sports establishments over the weekend for failing to adhere to COVID-19 precautionary measures, while six others received warnings.

Dubai Health Authority announced that COVID-19 tests required for traveling could now be booked at some malls.

The UAE, with a population of around 9.9 million people, has conducted 10.8 million tests so far.

Meanwhile, Khalifa University of Science and Technology said a research team had developed an anti-viral eco-friendly face mask.

Helping to combat the pandemic while protecting the environment, a team of researchers from [@KhalifaUni](#), together with partners, have successfully developed the first working prototypes of the NavaMASK – a fully biodegradable & biocompatible anti-viral adaptive face mask

– مكتب أبوظبي الإعلامي (@admediaoffice) [October 12, 2020](#)

The scientists claim the “navamask” eliminates more than 99 percent of bacteria.

Elsewhere, Kuwait recorded 777 new COVID-19 cases, bringing the total to 111,893. The death toll reached 664 after six new fatalities were registered.

تعلن [#وزارة_الصحة](#) عن تأكيد إصابة 777 حالة جديدة، وتسجيل 534 حالة شفاء، و 6 حالات وفاة جديدة بـ [#فيروس_كورونا_المستجد](#) COVID-19 ، ليصبح إجمالي عدد الحالات 111,893 حالة pic.twitter.com/eEmeHwSbeS

– (@KUWAIT_MOH) [October 12, 2020](#) وزارة الصحة – الكويت

Oman's health ministry confirmed 685 new cases and eight deaths, bringing the total to 106,575 and the death toll stands at 1,046.

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[Oman to introduce 5% VAT within six months](#)

Mon, 2020-10-12 16:14

DUBAI: The Sultan of Oman, Haitham bin Tariq Al-Said, issued a decree on Monday to start imposing a five percent value-added tax (VAT) within six months.

Oman News Agency said that a law was also issued to amend some provisions of

the Criminal Procedures Law, and that the VAT law will be imposed on most goods and services, with some exceptions.

The government said it will have a limited impact on the cost of living.

The tax will be applied 100 percent on tobacco and its derivatives, energy drinks, alcoholic beverages and pork, while 50 percent will be applied to soft drinks based on their retail price.

The sultanate intended to impose five percent VAT in 2018, but postponed it until 2020.

The law is part of a broader 2016 agreement between all six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states and Saudi Arabia. The UAE and Bahrain have already implemented the five percent VAT law.



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