

# Lebanese president calls for consultations with lawmakers to name PM

Wed, 2019-12-04 17:56

BEIRUT: Sunni businessman Samir Khatib looks set to be nominated as Lebanon's next prime minister when consultations with lawmakers to name a premier are held on Monday, political sources said on Wednesday. More than a month since Saad al-Hariri quit as prime minister, prompted by protests against the ruling elite, President Michel Aoun scheduled the binding consultations with MPs to designate the new premier on Monday. Lebanon is deep in the throes of an economic crisis that has shaken confidence in the country's banks and worsened since the protests erupted on Oct. 17. It needs a new government to enact urgent reforms to get the economy back on track.

Lawmakers from the Future Movement, which is headed by Sunni politician Hariri, as well as powerful Shi'ite groups Hezbollah and Amal are all expected to back him at the consultations, sources familiar with their positions said.

With the support of Lebanon's main Sunni and Shi'ite Muslim political forces and no other declared candidate so far, Khatib appeared under the current circumstances likely to win the nomination.

Several hundred protesters blocked one side of a main roadway in central Beirut following Aoun's call for consultations. Some protesters have rejected Khatib's candidacy and consider him part of an elite they have sought to oust.

Hariri said last week that he did not wish to return as prime minister of a new government, which will face the worst economic crisis since the 1975-90 civil war.

Efforts to agree a new government have been mired in political differences between Hariri, who is aligned with Western and Gulf Arab states, and the Iran-backed Hezbollah and its allies, including Aoun.

Hezbollah, which had more influence in the Hariri-led cabinet than any previous administration, has accused the United States of meddling in the formation of a new Lebanese government. It had backed Hariri's return. Hariri had been willing to return as prime minister but on condition he could lead a cabinet of expert ministers he believed would be best placed to steer Lebanon out of crisis, win international support, and satisfy protesters. But Hezbollah and its allies, including Aoun, had insisted the cabinet be a mix of technocrats and politicians.

Hariri said on Tuesday that he backed Khatib to head the next cabinet but added that "some details" still had to be hashed out. He said his party would only name technocrats as ministers.

Aoun is constitutionally required to designate the candidate with the greatest support among Lebanon's 128 lawmakers. The prime minister must be a Sunni Muslim according to Lebanon's sectarian system of government.

Ali Hassan Khalil, a senior figure in Amal, told reporters the government

would most likely comprise 24 ministers and it would be up to each party to name a political representative in the cabinet or not. Khatib's candidacy appeared to suffer a setback earlier on Wednesday when three former prime ministers criticised the talks around Khatib, saying they had violated the constitution. The former ministers have supported Hariri's return. Khatib is executive vice-president and partner of Khatib & Alami, a construction and contracting business with projects in countries including Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and North Africa, according to its website. He has no track record in Lebanon's sectarian politics but is known to have good ties with many of the main parties, including Saad al-Hariri and his late father, Rafik, who was assassinated in 2005. His daughter is married to Major General Abbas Ibrahim, the Shi'ite head of Lebanon's most powerful internal security agency, General Security. He is seen to have good ti



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## [Pentagon official gives indication that potential Iranian 'aggression' could occur](#)

Wed, 2019-12-04 16:46

WASHINGTON: A senior Pentagon official said on Wednesday that there were indications that Iran could potentially carry out "aggressive" actions in the future, amid simmering tensions between Iran and the US.

John Rood, the Pentagon's No. 3 official, told reporters that the US was concerned about potential Iranian behavior but did not provide details about what information he was basing that concern on or any timeline.

Tensions in the Gulf have risen since attacks on oil tankers this summer, including off the coast of the UAE, and a major assault on energy facilities in Saudi Arabia.

Washington has blamed Iran, which has denied being behind the attacks on global energy infrastructure.



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## **Former Lebanese PMs' statement seen as blow to chances of government led by Khatib**

Author:

Reuters

ID:

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Wed, 2019-12-04 10:37

BEIRUT: Any candidate for the post of Lebanese prime minister who engages in talks over the make-up of the cabinet before being formally designated premier is violating the constitution, three former prime ministers said. The statement on Wednesday from former prime ministers Fouad Siniora, Tamman Salam and Najib Mikati was seen as a blow to efforts underway to form a new government led by Sunni businessman Samir Khatib.

The post of prime minister is reserved for a Sunni Muslim in Lebanon's sectarian system of government.

Statements from Lebanese politicians on Tuesday had appeared to signal progress toward agreeing a new government led by Khatib, though a deal had yet to be done. Lebanon is facing its worst economic crisis since its 1975-90 civil war.

Caretaker Prime Minister Saad Hariri said on Tuesday he backed Khatib for the post but added that "some details" still had to be hashed out. He said his party would only name technocrats as ministers.



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## [People with special needs protest in Lebanon](#)

Tue, 2019-12-03 23:40

BEIRUT: People with special needs have taken to the streets throughout Lebanon, carrying banners demanding their "right to education, rehabilitation, treatment, integration and interdependence."

Waving Lebanese flags, they shouted "we don't want to be at home, we want to learn," "you and I are like each other," and "no one is better than anyone."

Some associations catering for Lebanese children with special needs have closed down due to lack of government funding.

People in wheelchairs, and some with canes, went to the headquarters of Maronite Patriarch Bechara Boutros Al-Rahi.

“We’re not the weakest segment of society, as some people like to call us,” said protester Michela Gabriel. “We have the right to know why the state hasn’t yet provided the necessary support to the associations.”

In the town of Hermel, people with special needs gathered around the center that provides them with care. “We don’t accept being marginalized,” said one of them.

Students with special needs also protested in the city of Tripoli. “If the dues aren’t paid, our students will remain in their homes without educational attention, and we don’t accept that,” said social worker Anita Bator.

## **HIGHLIGHT**

Demonstrations come after some groups catering for special children closed down due to lack of government funding.

Norma Al-Zain, director of the El-Kharrub Complex for Welfare and Development, expressed concern that “social welfare institutions will have to make painful choices because their continuation depends on the donations of good people and the payment of dues by the state.”

Richard Kouyoumdjian, social affairs minister in the caretaker government, told protesters that he “won’t abandon these institutions, and won’t accept the threat of closure, nor touching a hair on the head of a child with special needs.”

He said the suffering of people with special needs and the associations that care for them “is part of what Lebanon is experiencing from an economic crisis that affects all institutions.” He promised to speed up aid disbursements.

Meanwhile, Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri met on Monday with Progressive Socialist Party (PSP) leader Walid Jumblatt.

The latter also visited Saad Hariri, who resigned as prime minister on Oct. 29.

The meetings were part of efforts to overcome hurdles to the formation of a new government.

There were conflicting reports of a meeting on Monday between President Michel Aoun and Samir Khatib, who has emerged as the favorite candidate to form a government, and a meeting between Khatib and the leader of the Free Patriotic Movement, Gebran Bassil.

Jumblatt said the PSP will not participate in the government, but will

nominate competent Druze candidates as ministers.



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## [Al-Baghdadi's 'deputy' captured in northern Iraq](#)

Author:

Tue, 2019-12-03 22:56

LONDON: A senior Daesh militant close to the former leader Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi has been captured in northern Iraq.

Police in Huwajjah, Kirkuk province, managed to track down the extremist who operated under the name "Abu Khaldoun".

He was caught hiding inside an apartment with a fake identification card,

according to government security officials. A statement from the Security Media Cell described Khaldoun as Al-Baghdadi's deputy.

He was previously the military chief of Iraq's Salahuddine province, the statement said.

Al-Baghdadi blew himself up in a tunnel after US special forces entered his heavily-fortified compound in Syria's Idlib province in October. The US said it also killed Abu Hassan al-Muhajir, who they said was Al-Baghdadi's deputy at the time.

Since Al-Baghdadi's death several of the leaders operating under him have been killed or captured, along with some of his family members. Daesh controlled large parts northern Iraq after it rapidly expanded from its Syrian stronghold in 2014.



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