

# Lebanon is a sinking ship, parliament speaker warns

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BEIRUT: The speaker of parliament on Monday described Lebanon as a sinking ship at risk going under completely, underlining the depth of crisis in a country hamstrung by political deadlock and facing the worst economic strains since the 1975-90 civil war.

Banks, which have been seeking to prevent capital flight, were set to reopen on Tuesday as staff ended a one-week strike over security concerns posed by clients demanding their cash and protests at branches.

Struggling with a massive public debt and economic stagnation, Lebanon has sunk deeper into trouble since protests erupted against its ruling elite a month ago, leading Prime Minister Saad Al-Hariri to quit on Oct. 29.

Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri told his visitors Lebanon was like a ship that was "sinking little by little," the newspaper Al-Joumhouria reported.

"If we don't take the necessary steps, it will sink entirely," he said.

An-Nahar newspaper quoted him as likening Lebanon to the Titanic.

Berri, an ally of the powerful Shiite group Hezbollah, also said that efforts to form a new government were "completely frozen" and awaiting developments at any moment, Al-Joumhouria reported.

Efforts to form a new government, needed to enact urgent reforms, hit a setback at the weekend when former finance minister Mohammad Safadi withdrew his candidacy for the post of prime minister, drawing bitter recriminations. Safadi had emerged as a candidate after Hariri, who is aligned with Western and Gulf Arab states, had been unable to agree with the Iran-backed Hezbollah and its allies on the type of government that should replace the outgoing cabinet.

Hariri had said that he would only return as prime minister of a cabinet of specialist ministers capable of securing international aid and saving Lebanon from crisis.

Hezbollah, which is heavily armed and listed as a terrorist group by the United States, and its allies have insisted that the government include politicians.

Hezbollah's deputy leader, in comments to Iranian media, said "political understandings" would take place between "the parties and even with leaders of the protest movement" to form a new government, without giving further details.

Sheikh Naim Kassem also said the new government's agenda would help to calm down the streets.

Both Hezbollah and Berri have said their preference is for Hariri to return again as prime minister – a post reserved for a Sunni Muslim in Lebanon's power-sharing system.

The nationwide protests have been fueled by the mismanagement and perceived

corruption of the ruling elite.

Lebanon's economic problems have been compounded by a slowdown of capital inflows, leading to a scarcity of US dollars and spawning a hard currency black market.

Dollars were being offered at 1,820 pounds, around Friday's level, dealers said, but still some 20% weaker than the official rate of 1,507.5 pounds. On Sunday, banks, which have mostly been closed since the protests began, announced temporary measures including a weekly cap of \$1,000 on cash withdrawals and restricting transfers abroad to cover urgent personal spending only.

A union representing bank staff said banks would be operating as normal on Tuesday after a decision to end the strike. It cited an interior ministry security plan and the newly declared measures announced by the banking association as the reason for the decision to go back to work.

"Tomorrow the banking sector will no longer be on strike. Tomorrow is a normal working day in all banks and all branches," George Al-Hajj, President of the Federation of Syndicates of Bank Employees, said.



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# [Houthi militants from Yemen seize South Korean ship in Red Sea](#)

Mon, 2019-11-18 18:37

RIYADH: Houthi militants from Yemen have seized a ship in the southern Red Sea, the Arab Coalition said Monday.

The Iran-backed militia used two small boats to hijack the vessel as it was towing a South Korean drilling rig late on Sunday, spokesperson Col. Turki Al-Maliki said.

“The Houthi militia pose a real terrorist threat to the freedom of navigation and trade,” he added.

The coalition said the militia were responsible for securing the safety of all ships and crew members from any country.

The Houthis have been involved in a number of attacks against shipping in the Red Sea and near the Bab Al-Mandeb Strait – a major conduit for global trade.



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# Yemeni government back in Aden under deal with separatists

Author:

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ADEN: Yemen's internationally recognized government returned to the war-torn country on Monday for the first time since it was forced out by southern separatists during clashes last summer.

Prime Minister Maeen Abdulmalik Saeed landed in Aden, fulfilling a key point in the power-sharing deal brokered by Saudi Arabia that ended months of infighting with separatists in Yemen's south.

"The government's priorities in the next stage are to normalize the situation in Aden first and then consolidate state institutions on the ground ... as a guarantor of stability," Saeed told The Associated Press when he disembarked onto the tarmac.

He described the government's return as "foundational for the improvement of civic services," but added that "security challenges cannot be overlooked, especially at this stage."

Saeed, accompanied by five key ministers from President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi's government, was received by local officials and Saudi forces at the air base.

"Today we are uniting our efforts to defeat the Iranian project in Yemen and restore the state," the government said in a statement.

In August, the separatists, overran Aden and drove out forces loyal to President Hadi, who has been based in Saudi Arabia since 2015.

The outbreak of violence between nominal partners in the coalition fighting against Iran-allied Houthi rebels added a new twist to the country's complex civil war.

The power-sharing deal, signed earlier this month in Riyadh, calls for both sides to pull their forces out of Aden. That leaves the city under the coalition's control, with only a presidential guard for Hadi's protection if the exiled president were to return.

The agreement also asks that the separatists break up their militias and integrate them into Hadi's forces.

"The plan for incorporating the security services needs to be clear and transparent," Saeed told The Associated Press. "We have the support of the Saudis and the coalition leaders, factors that will help to implement the

agreement through promising steps on the ground.”

The conflict in the Arab's world's poorest country started in 2014, when the Houthi rebels captured the capital, Sanaa, along with much of the country's north. The Saudi-led alliance intervened in 2015 to drive out the Houthis and restore Hadi's government.









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## [Protesters regain control of third bridge in Baghdad](#)

Author:

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Sun, 2019-11-17 16:16

BAGHDAD: Iraqi protesters regained control of a third bridge leading to Baghdad's Green Zone on Sunday, taking further ground in the biggest wave of anti-government demonstrations in decades.



Security forces used tear gas and stun bombs to prevent protesters from getting right across Ahrar Bridge in central Baghdad, part of a weeks-long attempt to disrupt traffic and reach the Green Zone housing government ministry and embassies.

Protesters made a barricade of old cabinets, trash cans and metal sheeting on the bridge while security forces took positions behind blast walls installed to prevent protesters from crossing to the other side. Protesters who choked on the tear gas were evacuated by tuk-tuk, a Reuters cameraman said.

On Saturday, Iraqi demonstrators reoccupied part of adjacent Sinak Bridge and a nearby tall building in Baghdad that security forces had pushed them away from a week before. They have held a third bridge, Jamhuriya, since October 25.

More than 300 people have been killed since the start of mass unrest in Baghdad and southern Iraq in early October, the largest demonstrations since the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003.

Protesters are demanding the overthrow of a political class seen as corrupt and beholden to foreign interests.

In Basra in the south, dozens of protesters burned tires and briefly blocked some roads on Sunday, before police managed to restore control and reopen them, police said.

The unrest has shattered the relative calm that followed the defeat of Islamic State in 2017.



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Four killed in Baghdad as Iraq protests see no letup

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# Algeria kicks off presidential campaign, 5 candidates to run

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By AOMAR OUALI | AP

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Sun, 2019-11-17 14:28

ALGIERS: Algeria's presidential campaign officially kicked off Sunday with five candidates vying to replace the country's longtime leader, who was pushed out in April amid sustained protests.

Two former prime ministers, Ali Benflis and Abdelmadjid Tebboune, are among those running in the Dec. 12 election to succeed former President Abdelaziz Bouteflika.

Big crowds took to the streets Friday for a 39th consecutive week to demand an end to Algeria's post-colonial political system. Protesters say they don't trust those currently in power to ensure democratic elections, citing their past links to Bouteflika.

Benflis and Tebboune are considered the favorites of the vote.

The other candidates are: former tourism minister and moderate Islamist Abdelkader Bengrina; former culture minister and current interim secretary of the RND party that was in the governing coalition, Azzedine Mihoubi; and Belaid Abdelaziz, who heads the small El Moustakbel (Future) party that's close to the FLN, both of which remain part of the ruling coalition.

In some neighborhoods of Algiers, protesters have hung black trash bags on billboards featuring the candidates' portraits, often sprayed with the words "election of shame" and "traitors."

Benflis said this week that "this election is not held in ideal conditions, I know that, but I consider it is the shorter and less risky path to get Algeria out of the political impasse caused by the former regime."

Tebboune acknowledged the "special climate" of the electoral process.

Speaking on television earlier this month, he justified his candidacy by saying he wanted to "put Algeria back on good tracks."

"Some Algerians are against the election, but I know a majority are for it," he said.

Army chief Ahmed Gaid Salah, who has emerged as the country's authority figure, repeatedly vowed that "all security conditions will be met so that Algerians can fulfill their electoral duty in full serenity."



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