

Lebanese PM betting on 2022 budget to restore crippled Cabinet

Sun, 2022-01-09 00:45

BEIRUT: The dispute between Lebanese President Michel Aoun and Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri has disappointed those who hoped their row would subside and that Cabinet would convene, as sources close to the prime minister said that this year's budget was ready and the government should take action.

Hezbollah and its ally the Amal Movement have been refusing to allow the Cabinet to meet since Oct. 12, demanding the removal of a judge who is investigating 2020's devastating explosion at Beirut Port.

With Parliament expected to convene in an extraordinary session starting Monday, politicians appeared to mourn the Aoun-Berri settlement, which they felt was "stillborn."

MP Ali Darwish said that Prime Minister Najib Mikati was counting "on the sense of patriotism of those boycotting Cabinet sessions to attend."

Darwish is a member of the Independent Center bloc headed by Mikati.

"The discussion of the budget is a constitutional right that cannot be avoided," Darwish told Arab News. When Mikati received the budget from the Ministry of Finance, he would call for a Cabinet session to study it and refer it to Parliament, the lawmaker said.

"I think that attending the Cabinet session is necessary. Discussing the budget is a crucial constitutional duty to meet people's needs and approve spending policy," he added.

Sources close to Mikati said that the budget was ready and the government should take action, which necessitates a Cabinet session and opening an extraordinary session of Parliament since legislation is required to keep pace with the work of the government.

The country's election law has entered into force, and the Ministry of Interior has decided that elections will be held mid-May.

The Lebanese people and the international community are counting on these elections to bring about change in the ruling authority.

That Aoun requested to include an item related to the election law on the agenda of parliament's extraordinary session has raised questions about the possibility of disrupting these elections under the pretext of making new amendments.

"The election law is now in effect and any amendment cannot be related to the date of holding the elections," said Darwish.

Darwish said the fact that the Constitutional Council failed to accept Aoun's appeal challenging the amendments to the election law meant it had approved the law as it was and Parliament would therefore not allow any amendment that would delay holding the elections.

The head of the Lebanese Forces party Samir Geagea announced on Saturday "a comprehensive partisan mobilization in order to fight the next electoral battle."

In a partisan meeting, he called "to unleash campaigning efforts and to transform all party bodies into a mobilized electoral machine, since the electoral process is the only means to achieve national salvation."

The Lebanese Forces party is the first political party to openly launch its electoral battle in the country.

"It is a battle that the Lebanese need to win to get rid of the dire reality that the alliance between Hezbollah and the Free Patriotic Movement has brought upon the country," Geagea said. "The chances of success are very great as public opinion has significantly shifted."

He said the people had "sensed the danger" posed by an authority that only cared about its interests and "deliberately" led the country to collapse.

Geagea ruled out the possibility of disrupting the elections.

"We will confront any such attempt and the Lebanese army, along with other security forces, is able to guarantee elections are held in the best possible way."

While it remains unclear how to get people to even start thinking about voting in the absence of a social protection network for the poorest and needy families in light of Lebanon's worsening economic collapse, the efforts of security services are focused on prosecuting illegal financial practices that manipulate the exchange rate and prosecuting gangs of robbers.

The Higher Banking Commission announced that it would start issuing warnings prior to writing off the licenses granted by the central bank to 188 money changers for their lack of commitment to registering dollar-buying and selling transactions on the Sayrafa platform.

The Lebanese Army Command announced: "A patrol from the Military Intelligence Directorate, supported by a force from the army, raided the homes of two Lebanese citizens in the Ghobeiry area in the southern suburbs of Beirut and arrested them for forming a gang that carried out armed robberies and sold weapons, in addition to participating in the Tayouneh incidents on Oct. 14, 2021, assaulting peaceful demonstrators, provoking riots and blocking roads."

It said ammunition, military equipment and drugs were seized from the house of one of the arrested individuals.



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More talks on Lebanese cabinet as deadline in doubt

[Lebanese national jailed in Miami for sexual assault](#)

Author:

Sat, 2022-01-08 22:56

CHICAGO: Lebanese national Marwan Habib, 32, has been jailed without bond after he was arrested on Friday for sexually assaulting a woman at a hotel in Miami, Florida.

He appeared in court on Friday before Miami-Dade 11th Circuit Court Judge Marisa Tinkler Mendez after he was taken into custody.

Habib met his victim at a club but later followed her to her hotel and then fraudulently convinced the clerk to give him a key to her room.

Police told reporters that Habib had entered the victim's room at Hotel Victor in South Beach on Friday night and then sexually assaulted her.

He faces the felony charge of "burglary with assault or battery," according to court records. He is also being held for an "immigration review" by the court.

Habib asked the judge if he could "pay a fine and go home," but Mendez responded: "You are not going home today, sir." She denied him bond, which would have allowed him to be free until his next court hearing.

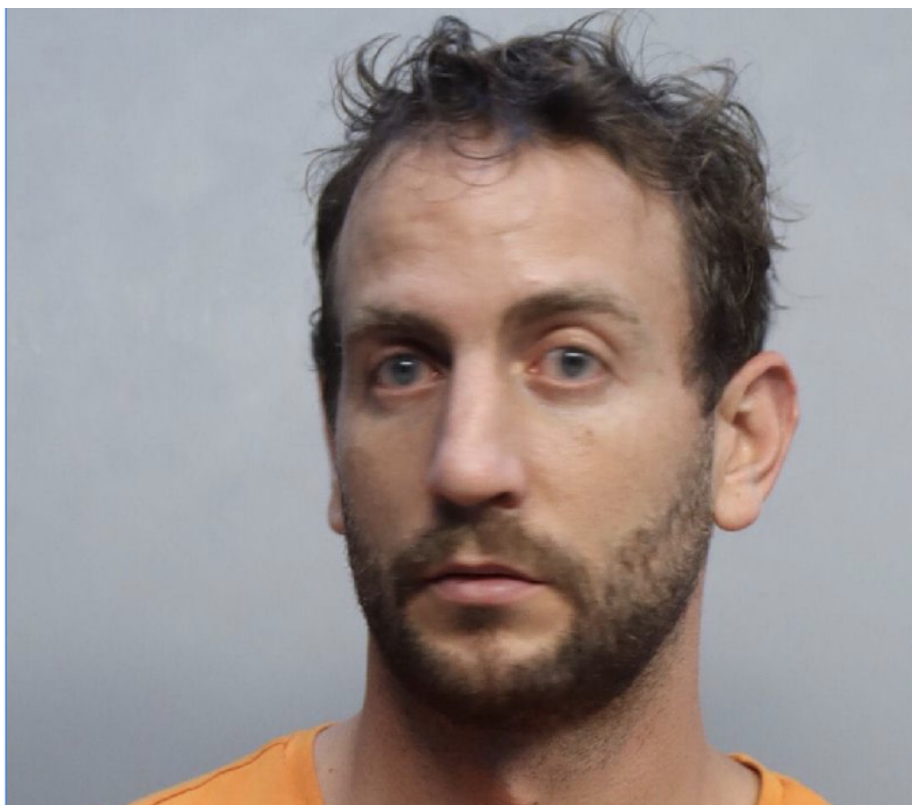
Instead, he was ordered into the custody of the Miami-Dade Turner Guilford Knight Correctional Center, where he is being held pending further court appearances.

Police are investigating whether Habib tracked and sexually assaulted other women, according to Miami media reports.

Police said they are investigating several complaints from women who said they were harassed by the suspect.

Habib has reportedly alluded police in Lebanon, where he is suspected of rape and sexual assault.

According to court records, he could be extradited back to Lebanon, where he could face further charges.



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Philippines seeks to prosecute former US diplomat over sexual abuse of minor

[Lebanon power company says protesters behind national blackout](#)

Author:

AFP

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Sat, 2022-01-08 22:33

BEIRUT: Lebanon's state electricity company said Saturday that its power plants had stopped working after protesters stormed a key substation and tampered with the electrical equipment.

The small Mediterranean country is already grappling with round-the-clock power cuts that last at least 20 hours a day due to a financial crisis that has hampered key imports, including fuel for power stations.

Demonstrators angered by the blackouts stormed an Electricite du Liban substation in the Aramoun region north of Beirut on Saturday, EDL said in a statement.

"Protesters disconnected a 150-220 kilovolt power transformer and opened circuit breakers connecting the Zahrani power plant to the Aramoun station," it said.

"This caused disturbances on the electrical grid... which led to a total blackout across Lebanese territory as of 17:27 (1527 GMT)."

The disruption will pile more pressure on private generators that are already struggling to keep up with the near-total absence of state power.

Private generator owners have hiked prices and rationed supply in recent months, with costs surging after the government gradually lifted fuel subsidies.

The average generator bill for a Lebanese family usually costs more than the monthly minimum wage of 675,000 Lebanese pounds – now worth just \$22 as the local currency hits record lows against the dollar on the black market.

The international community has long demanded a complete overhaul of Lebanon's ruinous electricity sector, which has cost the government more than \$40 billion since the end of the 1975-1990 civil war.

Lebanon has reached an agreement on bringing Jordanian electricity and Egyptian gas into the country via war-torn Syria, while Shiite movement Hezbollah has separately started hydrocarbon deliveries from Iran.



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General Labor Union president warns against 'certain catastrophe' in Lebanon amid economic crises
UN peacekeepers attacked in south Lebanon near Israel border

[Eight killed in 'shocking' West Bank road crash](#)

Author:

Sat, 2022-01-08 01:37

RAMALLAH: Eight Palestinians died on Thursday when the van they rode in collided with a cement truck in the occupied West Bank, Palestinian official media said.

The two vehicles slammed into each other at a junction on Route 90, which runs up the Jordan Valley and is under Israeli security control near the

northern West Bank village of Fasayil, according to the Wafa news agency. A medic with the Magen David Adom Israeli rescue services said in a statement that the scene at the crash site was “shocking.” “We saw a truck and a private vehicle crushed on the side of the road,” he said. The victims were not officially identified but local news outlets reported they were teenagers between 14 and 17 years old.

HIGHLIGHT

Palestinian police said that the victims were workers from the town of Aqraba, near Nablus.

Wafa said that Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas declared a day of mourning to be observed on Friday across the Palestinian territories in honor of the victims.

Medics declared seven people dead at the scene, and Wafa later reported an additional victim. Three injured people were evacuated to Israeli hospitals via helicopter.

Israeli Defense Minister Benny Gantz issued a note of sympathy published in Arabic and Hebrew.

“I would like to convey my heartfelt condolences to the Palestinian families who lost eight of their loved ones today” in the crash, he said.

Neighboring Jordan also expressed condolences.

Palestinian police said that the victims were workers from the town of Aqraba, near Nablus.



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Head of Arab League Aboul Gheit condemns Israeli settlement expansion in Golan Heights
Israeli MP faces heat for remarks on settlers

[Syrians seek word of loved ones missing in regime jails](#)

Author:

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Fri, 2022-01-07 23:42

AZAZ, Syria: More than 70 families gathered in the rebel-held Syrian town of Azaz on Friday to highlight the plight of loved ones missing in the government's feared jail system.

Since civil war broke out in Syria in 2011, nearly one million people have been detained in the network of prisons and camps run by the various security services, according to Britain-based monitoring group the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

Of those, around 105,000 have died in custody, while others have been released, but tens of thousands remain unaccounted for, according to Observatory figures.

Lama Andani said it was nine years since her husband was arrested.

For 18 months, she had received some updates indirectly, but then nothing.

"I know what it's like to be tortured in the jails of the regime," said Andani, who said she spent nine years in prison during a previous outbreak of political unrest in Syria during the 1980s.

"We came here in the hope of getting our message through to the international community... so that it isn't forgotten.

"I dream of seeing my husband... and of knowing what happened to him," she said, as she joined others in posting messages in a square in Azaz.

The northern town, hard by the border with Turkey, was occupied by Turkish troops in 2016 to prevent it falling to US-backed Kurdish forces, which had taken swathes of northern Syria from the Daesh group.

It has since been under the control of rebel groups supported by Ankara.

In 2013, a military defector known as "Caesar" smuggled more than 50,000 photographs out of Syria, many of them documenting the deaths of prisoners in detention centers or military hospitals.

The name went on to be used in the title of US legislation that provides for economic sanctions against Syria.

Despite efforts to open dialogue about the missing on both sides of the

conflict, little progress has been made on establishing their fate.



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Car bombing kills 19 in Syria's Azaz: monitor Turkey won't let Kurds take control of Syria's Azaz town