

US envoy to Yemen Lenderking to travel to Middle East on Thursday

Thu, 2021-11-04 00:20

LONDON: US envoy to Yemen Tim Lenderking will travel to the Middle East on Thursday to continue negotiations to reach an agreement to end the war in Yemen.

Lenderking will hold talks with Yemeni government officials and civil society representatives, senior regional government officials, and other international partners, the US State Department said in a statement on Wednesday.

“The special envoy and his team remain focused on the need for the Houthis to stop their offensive on Marib and repeated attacks against civilian areas, which are exacerbating the humanitarian crisis,” the statement said.

The Iran-backed Houthi militia have renewed their offensive to take control of Marib, one of the last remaining government strongholds, following a lull in September.

“Lenderking will also continue to stress the US government’s commitment to working with the international community to press the parties to implement critical economic reforms, secure regular imports and distribution of fuel, and resume commercial flights to Sanaa airport,” the State Department added.



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[Iran nuclear talks with world powers to resume Nov. 29](#)

Wed, 2021-11-03 22:13

DUBAI: Nuclear talks between world powers and Tehran on reviving the Iran nuclear deal will resume in Vienna on November 29, the EU said in a statement Wednesday.

"The Joint Commission of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) will convene in a physical format on 29 November in Vienna," said the EU's European External Action Service in a statement.

The meeting would be chaired by Enrique Mora on behalf of EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell, the statement added.

The United States – which is willing to rejoin the deal if Iran rolls back nuclear advances it has made in retaliation for US sanctions – said an agreement was possible if Iran was "serious".

In Tehran, Deputy Foreign Minister Ali Bagheri, Iran's lead negotiator, confirmed the November 29 resumption of talks in Vienna. He tweeted that the date had been set in a phone call with Mora.

The EU statement said that the remaining parties to the deal – Britain, China, France, Germany, Russia, and Iran – would be represented.

"Participants will continue the discussions on the prospect of a possible return of the United States to the JCPOA and how to ensure the full and effective implementation of the agreement by all sides," it said.

Bagheri tweeted: "We agreed to start the negotiations aiming at removal of unlawful and inhumane sanctions on 29 November in Vienna."

The United States withdrew from the Iran nuclear deal in 2018 on orders from then president Donald Trump.



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[How GCC investment in clean hydrogen can supercharge energy transition](#)

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Wed, 2021-11-03 22:12

DUBAI: As world leaders convene in Glasgow for the COP26 summit, the untapped potential of hydrogen among other alternative energy sources has occupied the attention of experts and delegates who have descended on the Scottish city to explore ways to mitigate climate change.

Hydrogen fuel has become a viable contender for energy transition as heat-trapping greenhouse-gas emissions continue to increase despite the goal set by the Paris Agreement to limit global warming to well below 2 degrees Celsius and to pursue efforts to limit it to 1.5 degrees Celsius.

According to a joint report by consultancy Roland Berger and the international industry network Dii Desert Energy titled “The Potential for Green Hydrogen in the GCC Region,” hydrogen’s intrinsic characteristics make it a clean and versatile energy carrier, with the potential to become the new oil or natural gas.



Hydrogen’s intrinsic characteristics make it a clean and versatile energy carrier, with the potential to become the new oil or natural gas. (AFP)

Hydrogen gas can be used to store energy for long periods of time, in large tanks or in salt caverns. And, according to engineering firm Geostock, some GCC countries have the ideal geological conditions to allow for large-scale underground storage facilities inside rock formations, which could serve as a buffer for varying seasonal demand.

In any case, thanks to their vast empty spaces, strong regular sunshine and, in some places, powerful winds, the GCC states are well positioned to develop low-cost, large-scale renewable energy projects.

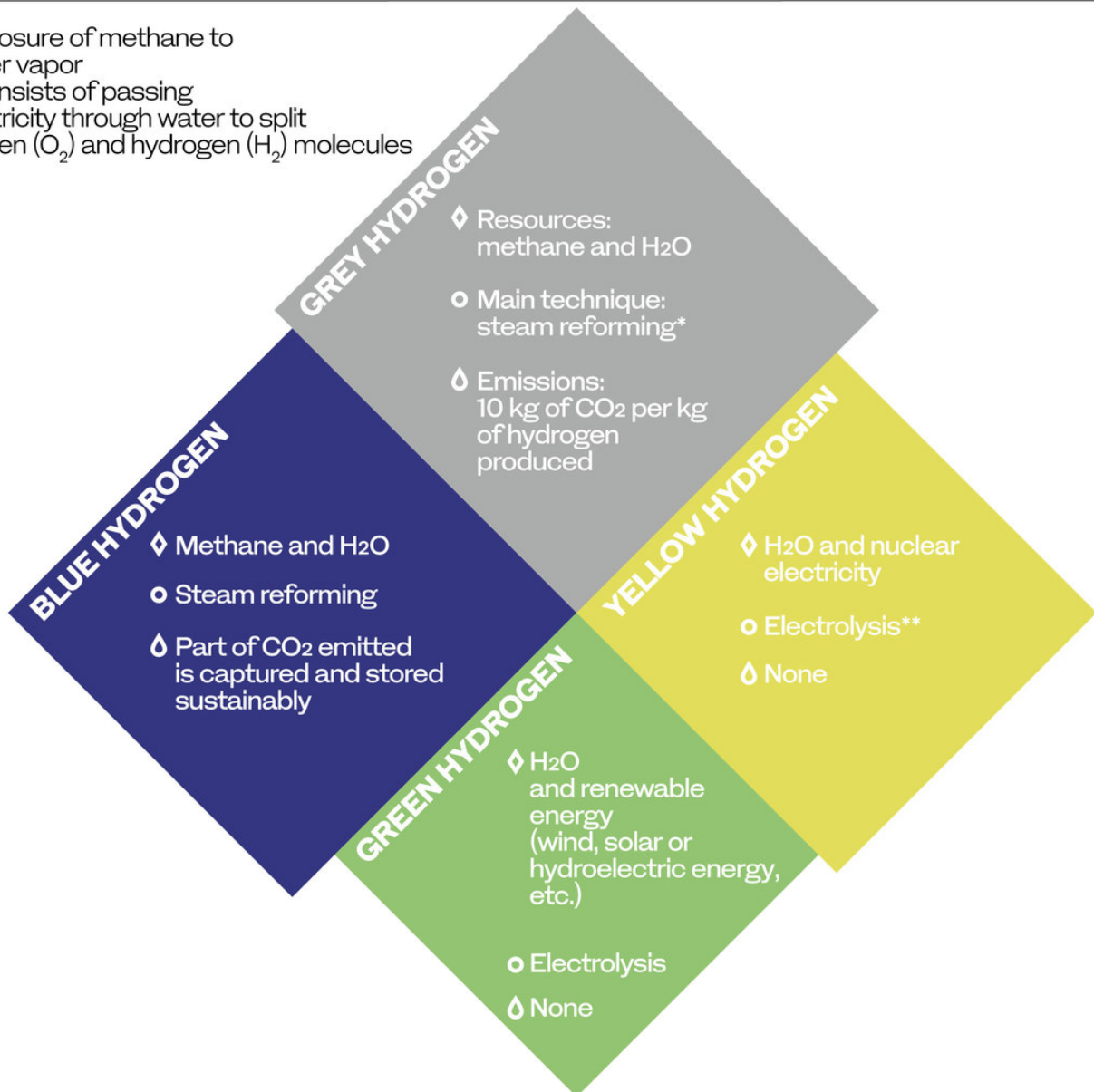
Last year, IHS Markit predicted that the price of “green hydrogen” in GCC countries would be competitive with “blue hydrogen” by 2025 and with “grey hydrogen” by 2030.

PRODUCTION OF HYDROGEN

Different types of hydrogen are labeled by colour, with grey polluting the most

*Exposure of methane to water vapor

**Consists of passing electricity through water to split oxygen (O₂) and hydrogen (H₂) molecules



Sources: International Renewable Energy Agency (Irena), Alternative Energies and Atomic Energy Commission (CEA), French Ministry for ecological transition

ARAB NEWS

“This is a CO₂-free energy source,” Heinz Sturm, a civil engineer and expert on hydrogen and fuel cells, told Arab News. “I see Saudi Arabia and the UAE as very important suppliers for worldwide green hydrogen supply, especially for countries in the EU.”

Hydrogen is derived through water electrolysis, which uses electricity to split water molecules into oxygen and hydrogen. Green hydrogen is produced using renewable energy sources such as solar and wind to drive the chemical reaction, without emitting carbon byproducts.

“The problem is it’s too expensive and it needs wind or solar, which is a huge problem for developing countries,” said Sturm, who regularly advises governments and the UN on hydrogen and the circular economy, climate change and clean energy.

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[The role of hydrogen in tackling climate in MENA](#)

However, “another way to do it is through the gasification of biomass waste. It’s 30 percent cheaper than water splitting, reduces waste, and is totally free of carbon.”

Sturm is also the founder of the Bonn Climate Project, which is being implemented by the Germany-based International Clean Energy Partnership and Climate Technology Center.

In 2017, he developed a technical report titled “Hydrogen Economy for Arab Countries,” commissioned by the Berlin-based Ghorfa Arab-German Chamber of Commerce and Industry to find ways to tackle climate change from a new angle.

“It’s important for Gulf countries because they are the existing suppliers of oil to the EU and we will still need such supply to continue in the future,” said Sturm.



Hydrogen fuel has become a viable contender for energy transition as heat-

trapping greenhouse-gas emissions continue to increase. (AFP)

“So, they need to build this business and switch it to hydrogen instead of oil. For North African countries, they have other opportunities to produce green hydrogen by thermal chemical reaction of biomass waste, which will help their economy grow. It’s a social, political and economic project.”

Experts say the potential for green hydrogen in sectors ranging from chemicals and refineries to transport and residential is immense. According to the International Energy Agency, the abundance of renewables in the GCC countries makes the bloc potentially one of the most price competitive for hydrogen production.

Progress is already being made in Egypt, the UAE and Oman, while in Saudi Arabia a 2-GW green hydrogen production facility for ammonia is in the works for NEOM, the smart-city project taking shape on the Kingdom’s Red Sea coast.

Developed through a partnership between ACWA Power, Air Products and NEOM, the project is among the biggest green hydrogen initiatives in the world.

“Given the availability of competitive and low-cost renewable energy, NEOM will produce green hydrogen at scale and convert it to green ammonia for export,” according to the Dii Desert Energy report.

“NEOM’s prime location enables world record low renewable energy prices, and among the highest combined capacity factors by solar and wind energy beyond 70 percent.”



Thanks to their vast empty spaces, strong regular sunshine and, in some places, powerful winds, the GCC states are well positioned to develop low-cost, large-scale renewable energy projects. (AFP)

NEOM has developed a comprehensive localization approach and strategy, which

the report says could turn it into the first hydrogen valley in the MENA region – an area where several applications are combined into an integrated hydrogen ecosystem.

“It could serve as an incubator for NEOM and other green hydrogen projects nationally and potentially internationally,” the Dii Desert Energy report said.

The potential economic benefits are huge, including new employment opportunities across a wide spectrum of positions and skills.

“For the GCC, hydrogen has the potential to become a \$200 billion industry and it could create 900,000 direct and indirect jobs by 2050, which is significant,” Frank Wouters, green energy developer and chairman of the MENA Hydrogen Alliance, an initiative led by Dii Desert Energy, told Arab News.

The joint Dii Desert Energy and Roland Berger report predicts between 200,000 and 450,000 jobs could be created in the region by 2050 in renewables related to hydrogen production. However, such jobs will require new skills that do not exist in the current workforce. As a result, it recommends that the GCC develop an ecosystem of capability building, including educational and training programs.

It also advises GCC countries to develop hydrogen valley projects, while setting up research and development partnerships with international technology providers to accelerate the development of hydrogen ecosystems, particularly for advanced technologies.



“This is a CO₂-free energy source,” Heinz Sturm, a civil engineer and expert on hydrogen and fuel cells. (Supplied)

To unlock the full potential of the hydrogen economy, the report added that GCC countries will need to set a clear direction for all key actors with integrated hydrogen strategies. This could ultimately result in the generation of up to \$200 billion in revenues annually.

To this end, Sturm wants to see tech-sharing deals reached between the Gulf countries and Germany.

“We need hydrogen as a universal energy for all sectors, as no other energy source can do that,” he said. “Gulf countries are already further ahead than most other nations thanks to their decisive commitment to climate protection.”

Looking to the not-too-distant future, Sturm said: “If they work in parallel with Germany and the EU for the introduction of a hydrogen economy, we can save our climate and, with it, our world.”

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[Renovation of Christianity's holiest site nears completion](#)

Tue, 2021-11-02 23:54

CHICAGO: Palestinian Christian Said Khoury was praying at the iconic Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem when drops of water trickled on his head from the roof above.

Maybe it was a signal from God, or just a coincidence as the rains had battered the Christian town in the Israeli occupied West Bank earlier in the

day. But it moved Khoury. He built one of the world's largest construction companies to initiate a church renovation after his family was evicted from its home in Safad during the Alwaziri coup, a violent dynasty overthrow attempt in Yemen in 1948.

Khoury approached the Palestinian government, which initially funded the campaign to repair the roof. The church, which houses the grotto where Jesus was born more than 2,000 years ago, was also in desperate need of other upgrades as it had not undergone a significant renovation since 1480.

Thanks to Khoury, who died four years ago, the renovation of the Church of the Nativity is only a few years away from completion, Mazen Karam, CEO of the Bethlehem Development Foundation – which Khoury founded – told Arab News.

The BDF continues to supervise Khoury's vision while working with the presidential commission for the "Restoration of the Church of the Nativity," which was formed in 2008. The commission's work did not start until Khoury intervened in 2013.

"The focus of this initiative was launched by the late Said Tawfiq Khoury and (it) was to restore the Church of the Nativity. The last time the church was restored was 500 years ago in 1480. It was left uncared of," Karam told Arab News.

"A lot has happened. Many earthquakes have caused some damage to the church, while there has been deterioration of the windows, roof, and insulations."

"But it went dormant for some years until Said Khoury came and rain dropped on top of his head and he was not happy about it," Karam told Arab News.

"This was common. It needed a visionary to see it and go take this up with the president of the country and tell him that we are not allowed to leave the church to deteriorate like this. President Mahmoud Abbas told Said Khoury we support you fully. Go and do whatever you like, whatever you want to do to restore it to its original glory."

Karam said the church had many issues. It was deteriorating from so much damage and erosion that it was near collapse. The conflict with Israel also placed restrictions and the Palestine National Authority intervened in 2009 to establish a committee that remained dormant until Khoury stepped in.

The renovation of the church, which was commissioned by Constantine the Great around the year 330, is not only to uplift the spirits of Christians but to protect the church from collapse.

"Some of the wooden tresses that were discovered were almost to zero and about to fall. It was just in time. They were saved in time," Karam said, noting how close the church was to structural collapse.

"And during that period after the restoration started, they filed for a World Heritage Site. But UNESCO placed it as a World Heritage Site that was endangered, which meant we had to do all the work to remove it from the

danger. Now, it was removed two years ago from endangered status after all of the work that has been done by the presidential committee to restore it and we are safe now. But we have to maintain it, too. We have to come up with a way to maintain that work that we have done.”

Karam said Khoury’s focus was always on the church and he visited it many times. Khoury initiated the studies and renovations himself, and also donated more than \$500,000 from his personal funds.

Renovating the church was not a simple matter, Karam said, because the church is governed under an agreement adopted in 1879, which gave the three major Christian religions separate jurisdictions over different parts of the church structure.

“The grotto is more intricate and more complicated because of the holiest parts of the church and it has to be done right so as not to cause any friction or changes to the status quo. Every piece of the Church of the Nativity was a problem. Even the light switch was the problem,” Karam said, noting that all three churches – Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox and Armenian – must come to agreement.

“What we have done so far is 90 percent of the work and what is left is 10 percent of the work. We only fundraise for work that is approved to proceed. So, we have 10 percent of the work that has yet to proceed and it is not yet funded. We are raising funds, about \$2 million for the church to be completed. Except for the grotto itself, that will come later.”

The Armenians, Catholics and Greeks have each restored their convents and areas.

“The walls of the church, from the outside, were restored to the original stone as if it was quarried now and constructed now. It is a light colored Jerusalem stone that is original, all around the church, restored to its original beauty,” Karam said.

While erosion and damage has continued, renovation came slowly until Khoury initiated the project.

“When you first walked inside, there were some wood props that were supporting the arches which were damaged during an earthquake in 1927. That was exposed and the ceiling was protected and saved for the first time in about 60 years, more than, about 80 years,” Karam said.

During the renovation, architects discovered a hidden door that had been made in Armenia and donated by the Armenian Emperor many centuries before with engravings in Armenian and Arabic.

Karam said the columns were repaired, and the church’s original flooring was covered in ceramic mosaic tiles, which are actually two feet below the current floor of the church. Parts of that original floor were exposed and cordoned off so visitors to the church could see more of the mosaic flooring that was only partially exposed previously.

The renovation has restored the famous “Seven Angels” that are pointing to the grotto where Jesus was born. There are mosaic paintings on the walls inside the church including of Jesus’ family lineage, a depiction of Saint Thomas feeling Jesus’ wound after his crucifixion and a mosaic of the Palm Sunday, Karam said. Below that is the Orthodox chapel and the grotto. But the floor there is not yet restored but is part of the remaining work to be done, he said.

Karam said that the renovations were delayed during the past two years by many factors.

“The works were supposed to be completed by 2018 but there were not enough funds to complete and then the pandemic hit us. This delayed us too much from fundraising and also for the work to continue,” Karam said.

“Now, we expect completion maybe in one year provided we get the funds available, about \$2 million for the stone tiling and the tiling of the promenade outside.”

Karam said that there will also be a sprinkler system installed to prevent fires.

Smoke from lighted candles also damaged the mosaics so vents were installed for the smoke to be expelled from the church.

“The renovations will ensure that the Church of the Nativity survives for the next 2,000 years,” Karam said.



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Bethlehem Nativity Church reopens after coronavirus closure
Silent night for Bethlehem as coronavirus keeps pilgrims away

[Bahrain urges its citizens to leave Lebanon amid row](#)

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Tue, 2021-11-02 21:04

MANAMA: Bahrain on Tuesday urged its citizens in Lebanon to immediately leave the country amid a row between Beirut and Arab Gulf states over a Lebanese minister's remarks on the Yemen war.

The foreign ministry "urged all citizens in Lebanon to leave immediately, following the tense situation there, which calls for extra caution," it said in a statement carried by the official Bahrain News Agency.

The call came a day after the United Arab Emirates also urged its citizens to leave Lebanon.

Lebanese Information Minister George Kordahi triggered the row with an interview recorded in August and aired last week in which he said that Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi rebels were "defending themselves... against an external aggression."

A Saudi-led military coalition that has included the UAE and Bahrain intervened to prop up the Yemeni government in 2015, after Houthi rebels seized the capital Sanaa in 2014.

Saudi Arabia on Friday gave Lebanon's ambassador 48 hours to leave the country, recalled its envoy from Beirut and suspended all imports from Lebanon.

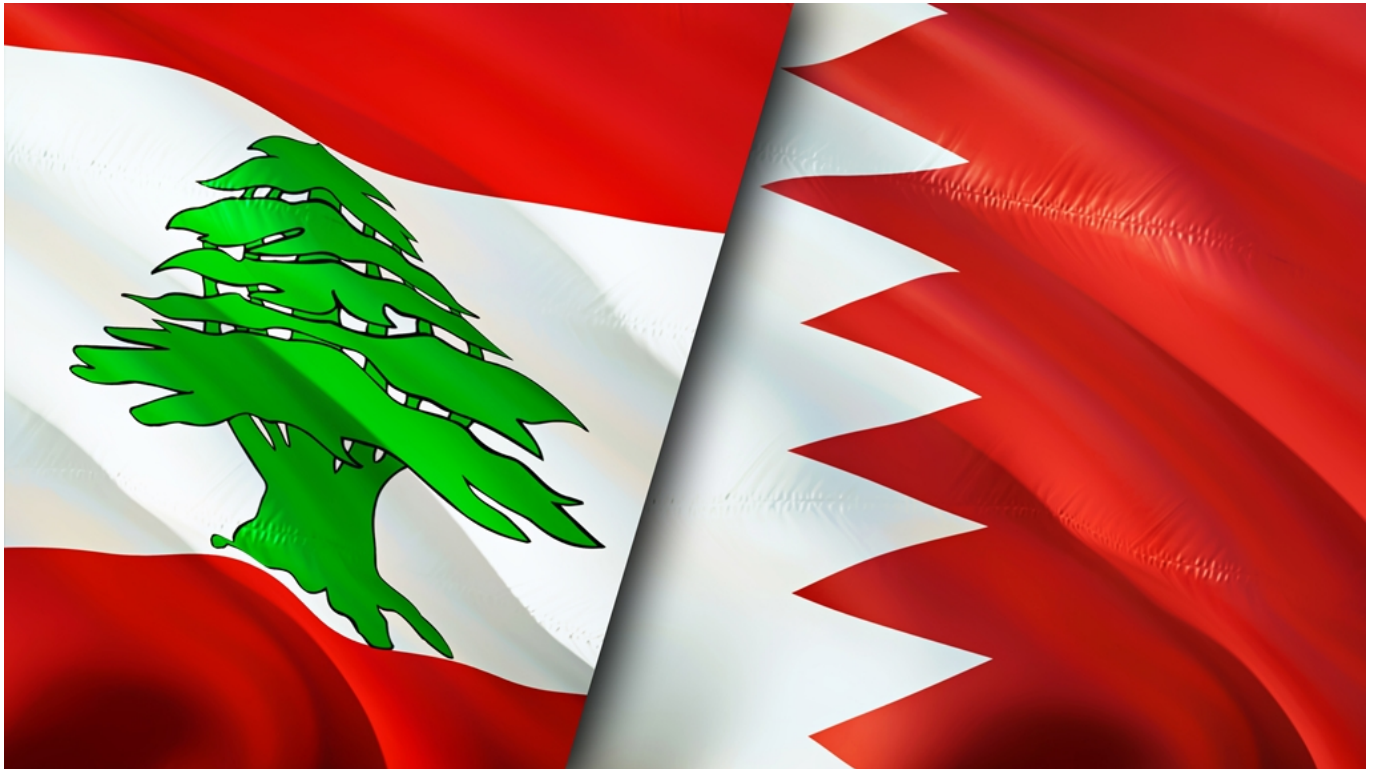
Bahrain and Kuwait quickly followed suit with similar measures, and the UAE on Saturday recalled its diplomats from Beirut in "solidarity" with Riyadh. The Saudi foreign ministry said its moves were taken after the "insulting" remarks on the Yemen war, but also due to the influence of Lebanon's Iran-backed Shiite Muslim movement Hezbollah.

Saudi Arabia, which suspended all imports from Lebanon, has said dealing with Beirut was "pointless" due to Hezbollah's dominance.

Meanwhile, Kordahi has said that resigning was "out of the question."

Lebanon on Monday called for talks with Saudi Arabia to ease the row, which is a fresh blow amid its deep economic crisis and while Beirut's fragile

government is struggling to secure aid, including from wealthy Arab countries.



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Pressure mounts for removal of Lebanese information minister over Gulf row
Arab League expresses concern over deterioration of Lebanese-Gulf relations