

# Lebanon Christian leader summoned over deadly violence

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BEIRUT: The head of the Lebanese Forces Christian group, Samir Geagea, has been summoned for questioning over deadly violence that erupted at a Shiite rally last week, a judicial official said Thursday.

Seven people were killed in Beirut on October 14 during a protest organized by the Shiite movements Amal and Hezbollah to demand Tarek Bitar, the judge investigating Beirut's powerful port blast, be removed.

Hezbollah and Amal accused the Lebanese Forces (LF), which supports the probe, of being responsible for sniper fire against the protesters that ignited street clashes.

The Christian group denies the charges.

Fadi Akiki, a representative of the military court, had "instructed the army intelligence to summon Geagea and take his statement based on information provided by arrested LF members," the judicial official said.

Twenty-six people were arrested after the violence in the heart of the Lebanese capital, most of them LF members, the official said on Thursday.

The exact circumstances of the violence remain unclear.

Geagea has denied responsibility for the deaths, saying that residents of Beirut's Christian neighborhood of Ain Al-Remmaneh had "defended" themselves against "Hezbollah militiamen who tried to enter their homes."

Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah said on Monday that his Iran-backed movement had 100,000 armed fighters at its disposal, and warned it is against sparking any "civil war."

On Thursday, Geagea told the Lebanon's MTV channel he was not aware of the summons.

"I am ready to appear before the judge, on one condition: that Hassan Nasrallah does it before me," he said.

Nasrallah has been in hiding since the war between Hezbollah and Israel in 2006.

Tensions flared after Bitar summoned two Amal former ministers for questioning as part of the investigation into last year's devastating Beirut port blast.

The explosion of a huge stockpile of poorly stored fertilizer on the dockside on August 4, 2020 killed more than 210 people, wounded thousands and ravaged half the capital.



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Lebanon has scant chance of getting IMF aid, Geagea says

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## [Woman dies in crash, run over repeatedly on pitch-black Lebanese highway](#)

Author:

Thu, 2021-10-21 20:34

BEIRUT: Lebanon on Thursday woke to news of one of the bleakest moments brought on by the country's energy crisis, after the smashed-up body of a female Ethiopian worker was found on Al-Zahrani Highway, which links Beirut

to the south.

According to a security source, she was killed in a crash during the night but was run over again and again as drivers could not see her body in the dark.

People took to the streets for the second day in a row to protest their ever-worsening conditions, especially the uncontrolled rise in fuel prices and its repercussions on everyday life.

On Thursday, Banque du Liban said a meeting was held with the executive director at the International Monetary Fund during which the government's priorities were discussed, especially with regard to a "comprehensive economic project."

The IMF's Mahmoud Mohieldin described his visit to Lebanon and his meetings with officials as "successful, with a positive outcome, compared to previous visits."

He said: "I saw a better consensus over priorities and a common discourse between the parties regarding the economic crisis and its social effects. The meetings reflect the four priorities that constitute the pillars of future dealings with the IMF, and a framework for the negotiations that the government will carry out with the BDL in the coming weeks. It is important to consider a timeframe."

Mohieldin stressed the importance of unifying the exchange rate which was, he added, usually a product of comprehensive economic reforms that were being initiated.

"A law to control remittances from inside and outside the country needs to be adopted, along with structural reforms and emphasis on the issue of governance, transparency and sector-related priorities, determined by the state.

"If we succeed in developing a good framework to present to the IMF in the coming weeks, it can then be presented to the IMF's board of directors, and the form of the program and the financing framework associated with it will thus be determined, in a way that will reinstate confidence in the Lebanese economy and restore financial flows," he said.

But the Cabinet has yet to convene as the ministers of Hezbollah and the Amal Movement are refusing to attend a session until Judge Tarek Bitar, who is leading the investigation into last year's Beirut Port blast, is dismissed and until the deadly street violence from earlier this month is investigated.

The government is also supposed to decide on the ration card for the country's poorest and most vulnerable, coinciding with the lifting of fuel subsidies.

Prime Minister Najib Mikati on Thursday contacted several officials following statements from the Culture Minister Mohammad Mortada, who is affiliated with the Shiite parties Hezbollah and the Amal Movement, about Shiite ministers

resigning from the government.

Mikati also met President Michel Aoun.

According to a ministerial source, their meeting revolved around “finding a formula” that would lead to the resumption of government work “under the pressure of stressful living conditions.”

“All parties realize that the uncontrolled rise in prices will implode in the street, and the government bears the responsibility to implement rescue measures and secure the required international assistance,” the source added.

Mikati chaired a committee meeting to address the repercussions of the financial crisis on public utilities.

The committee discussed existing obligations and an agreement to provide a financial, contractual and legal equation that allowed securing public utility services and the continuation or termination of business in a balanced and fair manner that took into account urgent factors.

The majority of contractors that signed with the Lebanese state have stopped their work, including waste removal companies, because the cost was calculated on the official exchange rate of LBP1,507 to the US dollar. But the Lebanese national currency trades at around LBP20,000 to the dollar on the black market.

During the meeting, it was decided that the first Cabinet session would announce measures that would respond to the living crisis, specifically raising the daily transport allowance, and approving a monthly advance as social assistance for workers in public institutions, government hospitals and schools, within an integrated project.



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IMF official hopes Lebanon program talks can start before new year  
Lebanon elite united against Beirut port blast probe seen as survival threat

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## [Tunisia president promises 'dialogue' over political system](#)

Thu, 2021-10-21 20:08

TUNIS: Tunisia's president said on Tuesday he would launch a "national dialogue" on changing electoral law and the political system, but gave no detail on how he would allay international concerns about his seizure of near total power.

President Kais Saied assumed executive authority in July then last month brushed aside most of the constitution. Critics called the moves a coup and the European Union this week joined other donors in calling for a restoration of democratic order.

In a speech streamed on the presidential Facebook page, Saied said the



dialogue would include the country's young people, but kept up a defiant tone.

He said the discussions would not include "those who stole the people's money and traitors". He also criticised what he called foreign interference, telling world powers to "return smuggled Tunisian money to European and international banks".

Critics say his moves have cast doubt over the democratic gains of Tunisia's 2011 revolution. But his supporters have hailed the changes, saying they have reclaimed the revolution from an entrenched, corrupt elite.

Saied announced a new government this month but gave no indication he was ready to relinquish control. Under rules announced in September, the new cabinet ultimately answers to him rather than the new prime minister, Najla Bouden.



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# Blast at US outpost in Syria, no American injuries – US officials

Wed, 2021-10-20 23:51

WASHINGTON: A US outpost in southern Syria was attacked on Wednesday, but there were no reports of any American casualties from the blast, US officials told Reuters.

The officials, speaking on the condition of anonymity, said it was too early to say who was responsible for the attack.

One of the officials said it was believed to have been a drone attack.

The garrison, known as Tanf, is located in a strategic area near Syria's Tanf border crossing with Iraq and Jordan.

The garrison was first set up when Islamic State fighters controlled eastern Syria bordering Iraq but since the militants were driven out, it is seen as part of the larger US strategy to contain Iran's military reach in the region.

Tanf is the only position with a significant US military presence in Syria outside the Kurdish-controlled north.

While it is not common for attacks on the US troops at the outpost, Iranian-backed forces have frequently attacked American troops with drones and rockets in eastern Syria and Iraq



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Syrian army shelling kills at least 11 civilians

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## [Yemen counters Houthi attacks in Shabwa province](#)

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Wed, 2021-10-20 23:34

AL-MUKALLA: Yemen's army troops and allied tribesmen on Wednesday launched counterattacks in the southern province of Shabwa with the aim of liberating three strategic areas that the Iran-backed Houthis captured during the past couple of weeks.

Local officials said hundreds of Yemeni troops attacked Houthis in the district of Bayhan and managed to recapture a military base along with a large swathe of land in the district after killing and capturing dozens of rebels.

Rashad Al-Mekhlafi, a military official at Yemen's Armed Forces Guidance Department, told Arab News on Wednesday that military units from Shabwa's capital Attaq, Abyan province, along with security forces also took part in the offensive in Shabwa.

"This is a well-prepared military offensive," Al-Mekhlafi said. "There are great advances for the government forces."

After months of relentless attacks on government forces, the Houthis have recently managed to seize control of three areas in Shabwa and the besieged Abedia district in the province of Marib. The advancement put them closer to oil and gas fields and Marib city, the main goal of their continuing offensive in the province.

In Marib, dozens of combatants were killed in fierce fighting between government forces and the Houthis outside the city of Marib as the Arab coalition intensified airstrikes in the province.

Al-Mekhlafi said that at least three Houthi field leaders were killed in fighting with government forces or in the coalition's airstrikes. Several army officers and tribesmen were also killed in the fighting.

The focus of Wednesday's fighting was on the Juba and Hareb districts, south of Marib city, where government forces pushed to expel the Houthis from areas they controlled during their latest incursions.

Yemeni Prime Minister Maeen Abdul Malik pledged full support to army troops and tribesmen who have fought off relentless Houthi attacks in Marib. He also urged international aid organizations to help displaced people and civilians



who come under Houthi missiles, drones, and ground strikes in Marib province. The official Yemen News Agency (SABA) reported that the prime minister called the governor of Marib, Sultan Al-Arada, to express the government's support with Marib's authorities in their battles against Houthis. He also praised their handling of the desperate humanitarian situation in the city of Marib, which hosts more than 2 million internally displaced people. Abdul Malik accused the Houthis of committing genocides in Abedia and other areas in the province. The Yemeni prime minister vowed to throw full weight behind government forces in order to win the "existential" battle in Marib. Thousands of combatants and civilians have been killed in Marib province since early this year when the Houthis resumed a major military offensive to control Marib city, the government's last stronghold in the northern half of the country.



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