

# Hezbollah under fire as Lebanese political, economic crises continue

Author:

Mon, 2021-08-09 23:08

BEIRUT: Hezbollah drew fresh criticism on Monday from the streets and the political class over the crisis in Lebanon.

Angry residents blocked several roads in protest against the economic crisis. As the Lebanese pound's value plummets, the country is also experiencing a major medicines shortage.

The process of forming a government headed by Prime Minister-designate Najib Mikati is slowly coming to a stalemate.

Meanwhile, Hezbollah launched a broadside against the Maronite Patriarch Bechara Boutros Al-Rai, accusing him of taking stances that are no different than Israel's.

In his Sunday sermon, Al-Rai stressed that "the decision of war or peace should be in the hands of the state exclusively," calling for "a return to the 1949 Armistice Agreements and Lebanon's neutrality."

Hezbollah's campaign against Al-Rai elicited counter-reactions from various political figures and numerous Christian religious and political entities.

Druze leader Walid Jumblatt tweeted on Monday: "What crime did Al-Rai commit when he mentioned the armistice agreement? It seems that it is forbidden to discuss anything outside of the opposition group's discourse," sarcastically adding: "A democratic atmosphere par excellence."

Resigned MP Marwan Hamade accused Hezbollah of igniting tension on the southern border with Israel and slammed the group for its attack on the judicial investigator in the Beirut port explosion crime Judge Tarek Bitar.

Hamade addressed Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah: "Your graciousness has set us back 50 years.

"The balance of deterrence advocated by Hezbollah is a pretext for controlling Lebanon."

Saydet Al-Jabal Gathering warned that "if this campaign (against Al-Rai) does not stop immediately, we will take action in several cities."

Former MP Ahmed Fatfat told Arab News: "The Lebanese state is collapsing because there is a parallel state – the state of Hezbollah. It seems that we are now experiencing the Iraqi scenario, and even more.

"Hezbollah suggests that it has the ability to replace the state, but in fact, it has so far failed to do so. Its entourage suffers like all the

Lebanese, due to Hezbollah's practices that destroyed the state."

He added: "Iran will not allow the formation of the government in Lebanon as long as the Iranian-US negotiations are ongoing.

"Nasrallah has, for the first time, admitted that there is no consensus over the resistance in Lebanon.

"This means that Hezbollah has lost supporters and stature, and its intimidation policy no longer works on people.

"The biggest evidence is that the families of the Beirut port victims carried a banner that read Iran Out on Aug. 4. People have other priorities now."

Fatfat said that Hezbollah's stances regarding medicine and fuel imports from Iran are mere propaganda.

"The Iranians did it once in Venezuela, but they took gold in exchange. Do they want to get their hands on the gold that is in the Lebanese Central Bank?"

Elsewhere, caretaker Health Minister Hamad Hassan – affiliated with Hezbollah – criticized "financial and political decision-makers."

Hassan said in an interview on Sunday: "The Central Bank and drug importing companies are responsible for exposing the health system in Lebanon to grave danger."

Hassan defended medicine imports from Iran.

"The Central Bank and the importing companies are responsible for every missing medicine," said the minister.

"A decision to urgently import and register missing medicines has been taken; any medicine that meets the conditions and standards will be imported."

Hezbollah MP Hassan Fadlallah also tried to pressure the Central Bank on Monday, saying that the latter "is insisting on controlling the decision to lift subsidies on oil derivatives and medicines."

Fadlallah said Hezbollah "is exerting efforts to expedite the import of fuel from Iran."

Sidon, the third major Lebanese coastal city after Beirut and Tripoli, sank into complete darkness on Monday, amid demands to secure diesel fuel as soon as possible.

Lebanese cities continue to fall into darkness as private generator owners announce that they are running out of fuel in light of strict rationing by the Electricite du Liban.

The Lebanese are being supplied with an average of one hour a day of fuel, as the Central Bank has used up most of the foreign currency it needs to

purchase fuel for state electricity.

There are over 3,500 private generators in Lebanon, with monthly bills for subscribers raised to more than 1.5 million Lebanese pounds (\$992).

MP Michel Daher complained on Monday that he “receives hundreds of visits daily from patients who need missing medicines. When importers are asked, they say that the Ministry of Health prices unsubsidized medicines at the rate of 12,000 Lebanese pounds to the dollar, half the actual value of the black market rate, which prompted them to stop importing.”



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Support to Hezbollah dented after rocket attack on Israel  
Hezbollah rocket attack on Israel brings Lebanon to the brink of war

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# Egypt ramps up spending on health, education in new budget

Mon, 2021-08-09 23:14

CAIRO: Egypt's Cabinet has denied reports that it reduced funding for the country's health and education sectors in the state's general budget for 2021/2022.

It came following the publication of claims on several major websites and social media pages.

The Cabinet's Media Center subsequently contacted the Egyptian Ministry of Finance, which denied the claims.

In a statement, the media center said that there was "no truth to the news" regarding a reduction of funding for the health and education sectors in the state's budget.

It added that funding of the health and education sectors were instead raised in the new general budget, exceeding constitutional entitlement rates.

Allocation to the health sector increased by 6.6 percent to reach 275.6 billion Egyptian pounds (\$17.5 billion), compared to 258.5 billion Egyptian pounds in the 2020/2021 budget.

The increase in education funding also rose by 6.8 percent to reach 388.2 billion Egyptian pounds, compared to 363.6 billion Egyptian pounds in the previous budget.

The total expenditure of the state's general budget for administrative apparatus, local administrations, and public service bodies also amounted to about 1.8 trillion Egyptian pounds.

Financial allocation for public investments saw an unprecedented increase, reaching 358.1 billion Egyptian pounds in the new budget – a 27.6 percent increase – compared to a previous 280.7 billion Egyptian pounds.

The increase in funding aims to ensure improvements in services provided to citizens, authorities said.

Spending on development projects is being maximized to speed up the progress of Egypt's Vision 2030 national agenda.



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## [Iran 'will pay price' for attack on tanker, US warns](#)

Author:

Mon, 2021-08-09 22:46

NEW YORK: International pressure mounted on Iran on Monday over a deadly attack on an Israeli-operated tanker off the coast of Oman.

A special UN Security Council session on maritime security was told that Iran was responsible for the attack, and would be held to account.

The tanker, the MT Mercer Street, was on its way from Tanzania to the UAE on July 29 when it was targeted by three Iranian-made drones laden with explosives. The attack killed the vessel's Romanian captain and a British security guard.

The vessel is Liberian flagged, Japanese owned, and operated by Zodiac

Maritime, a ship management company based in London and run by billionaire Israeli shipping magnate Eyal Ofer.

The attack caused international outrage. Iran denied responsibility, but a report by US military experts concluded that the drones were Iranian.

The US investigation found that the Mercer Street was targeted unsuccessfully on July 29 by two drones, both of which were reported by the crew via distress calls. A third drone attack, on July 30, significantly damaged the ship and caused the two deaths. The investigation found the third drone was loaded with military-grade explosives, which created a 2-meter hole in the vessel's crew accommodation.

The attack was "part of a pattern of attacks and other provocative behavior by Iran that threaten freedom of navigation, international shipping and commerce in addition to the cost in human lives," US Secretary of State Antony Blinken told the Security Council on Monday.

"It is on all of our nations to hold accountable those responsible. Failing to do so will only fuel their sense of impunity and embolden others inclined to disregard the maritime order."

Russian President Vladimir Putin called for a new "special structure" within the UN system to fight maritime piracy, armed robbery, and terrorism.

British Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said the attack was "a clear violation of international law by Iran that not only threatens maritime security and the lives of seafarers, but is also a threat to the rules-based system the world depends upon for its maritime security. amid so much anxiety the international community needs to shore up that system."



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UK, Iran summon envoys after British slam 'unlawful' Oman tanker attack

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## [Advances in artificial rainfall hold big promise for water-scarce Arab region](#)

Sun, 2021-08-08 21:22

DUBAI: Drone technology has more applications than most people imagine, including manipulating the weather. In the UAE, scientists are planning to deploy unmanned aerial vehicles to penetrate clouds and generate rainfall using electrical charges – a process that builds on the success of “cloud seeding.”

In common with other Gulf countries, heat and aridity are the bane of life in

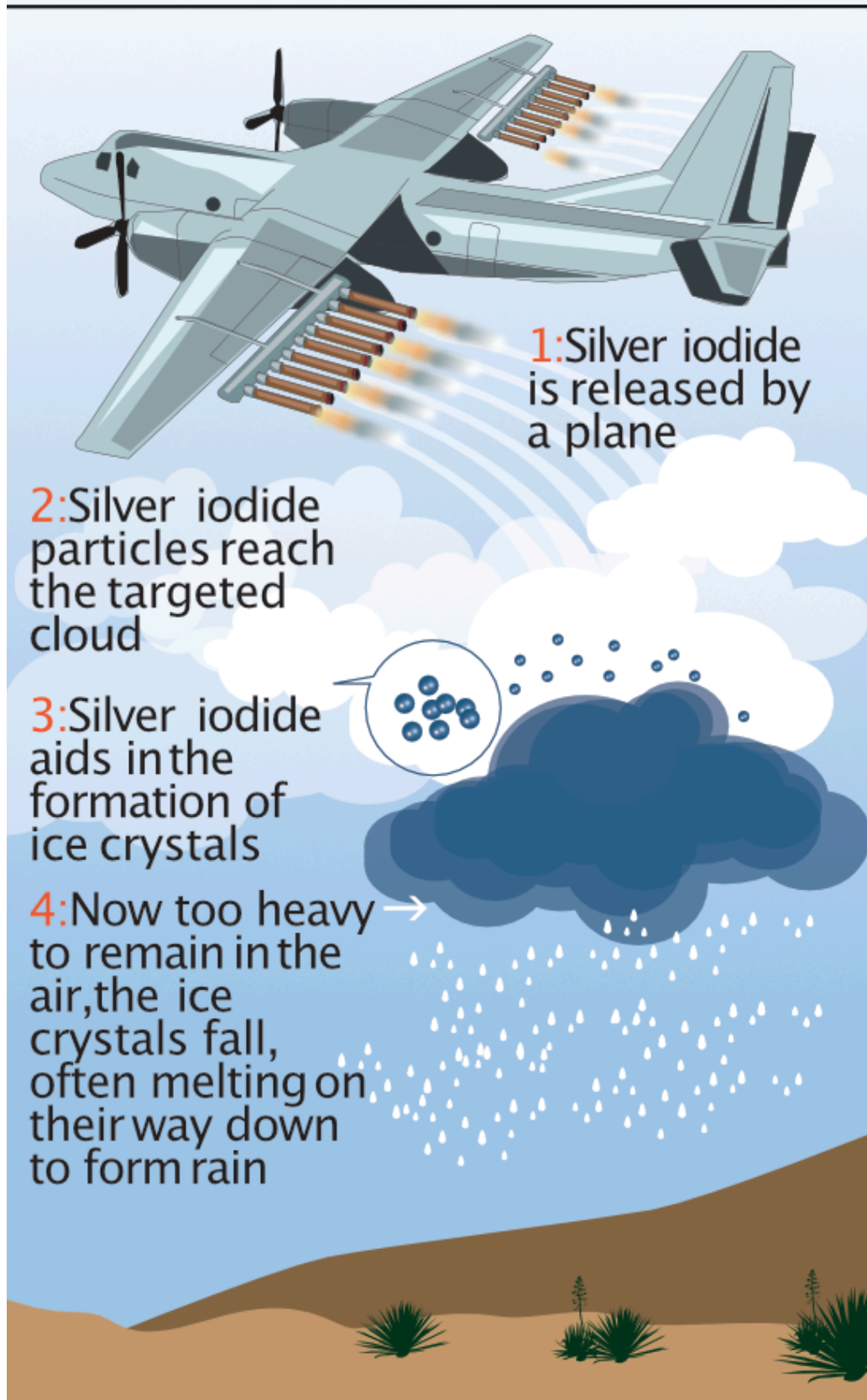
the UAE, where just 1.2 mm of rain fell in the first three months of 2021 and where summer temperatures often hit 50 C. Scientists are therefore exploring innovative solutions to the interrelated problems of extreme temperatures, heat waves, water scarcity and poor air quality.

The results of their efforts could bring benefits not only to the UAE but also to other Middle East and Central Asian countries with water-scarce environments.



# HOW CLOUDSEEDING WORKS

The technology involves use of salt flares to target specific types of clouds and stimulate rainfall



“This is a very important and interesting initiative for the UAE, not only as a scientific or research experiment, but to make the country a global hub in cloud-seeding knowledge,” Dr. Mohamed Shamrukh, a civil engineer who participated in cloud-seeding feasibility studies in the Kingdom in 2007-2008, told Arab News. “Such an initiative is urgently needed in our region.”

As one of the driest countries on earth, the UAE has precious few freshwater resources of its own. As a result, its economy is highly reliant on imports and desalination – the process of removing salt from seawater – to irrigate crops and meet the demands of its growing population.

In fact, the UAE accounts for some 14 percent of the world’s desalinated water, second only to Saudi Arabia, which has also tapped cloud-seeding technology as a potential way of addressing its freshwater shortage.

Riyadh last year approved a cloud-seeding program aimed at increasing rainfall in the Kingdom by almost 20 percent. In the UAE, that work began earlier, in 2017, when the government invested \$15 million in nine rain-enhancement projects.

Using experimental drone technology, scientists can create man-made downpours by delivering electric shocks to cumulus clouds, causing them to clump together and produce precipitation.



A pilot and a UAE official from the National Center for Meteorology and Seismology inspect a Beechcraft plane at the Al-Ain airport before another cloud-seeding sortie. (AFP/file photo)

The small, remote-controlled gliders, equipped with a payload of electric-charge emission instruments and customized sensors, fly at low altitudes to deliver an electric charge to air molecules.

Clouds naturally carry positive and negative charges, but by altering the balance of these charges, these electric shocks enable water droplets to merge into larger raindrops and fall from the sky.

Of course, once the rain has fallen, the next challenge is to prevent it from evaporating or simply flowing off into the sea. To this end the UAE has built around 130 dams and levees with a storage capacity of about 120 million cubic meters.

There are several methods of triggering rainfall that scientists are exploring, including the spraying of salt compounds, silver iodide and dry ice into the atmosphere.

If the drone technique proves successful in the long run, cloud seeding could play a major role in enhancing the wider region's sustainable water supply for years to come. Rain-enhancement projects could help to mitigate drought conditions without the environmental, cost and efficacy concerns associated with methods involving salt flares.

"The UAE has similar weather and climate to the other Gulf countries and this leading experiment in the UAE is very useful to them," Shamrukh said.

## **INNUMBERS**

- 50 Countries looking to establish rain enhancement programs.

20% Targeted increase in KSA's rainfall through cloud seeding.

18% KSA's share of global production of desalinated seawater.

80-85% KSA's water demand currently met by groundwater sources.

Earth's surface is 71 percent water, but the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region sees precious little of this life-giving resource. According to the UN, it is the world's most water-scarce region, with 17 countries considered below the water poverty line.

Matters are made worse by rapid population growth, poor infrastructure and overexploitation of limited resources. Agriculture alone accounts for around 80 percent of water usage in the MENA region, according to the World Bank.

This overuse means the region's natural groundwater reserves are not replenishing fast enough to keep pace with demand. Desalination of seawater and major dam projects have been the favored solutions, but these come with their own environmental downsides.

Shortages could have wide-reaching humanitarian consequences. Droughts

destroy livelihoods, displace populations from rural to urban areas, and can result in conflict and unrest.



The cloud-seeing technology was first tried in the 1940s and was put into widespread use in the 1970s. (Shutterstock photo)

Around 1.1 billion people worldwide already lack reliable access to water, and 2.7 billion endure scarcity for at least one month of the year. By 2025, an estimated two-thirds of the world's population may face water shortages.

Forecasts suggest water supplies will drop dramatically by 2030 and that rationing could become the new normal unless sustainable solutions are implemented.

Along with ground-based seeding generators, cloud seeding is perhaps one way to help top up dwindling reserves. Last year, the UAE conducted more than 200 cloud-seeding operations, led by its National Center of Meteorology and Seismology (NCMS).

A team of pilots and technicians at NCMS's dedicated operations room analyzed data based on their observation of 150 cumulus clouds to identify those considered "seedable."

These detached, cauliflower-shaped clouds are usually spotted in fair weather conditions, and often hug highland areas such as the UAE's eastern Al-Hajar mountains, which deflect the warm air blowing in from the Gulf of Oman. They tend to develop as a result of convection and stay at base heights of 1,000 meters, with a width of up to one kilometer.



The UAE, which suffered from rare heavy rains in 2006, is normally arid for most of the year – and climate change is putting real pressure on where it and its neighbors will source water from in future. (AFP)

“Based on the previous experience the UAE has gained, they know and understand more of how to use their system of monitoring every drop of water that falls,” Dr Khalil Ammar, principal scientist in hydrogeology and water resources management at the International Center for Biosaline Agriculture in Dubai (ICBA), said. “They know which type of cloud they can use certain technologies on to avoid any risk of floods or damage on the ground.”

Cloud seeding is a rapidly growing science that the UAE is well placed to capitalize on. Being able to predict the distribution and intensity of rainfall in the Gulf and wider MENA region could prove critical in the years to come as climate change makes droughts more common.

“It’s very important to keep investigating and using leading technologies to enhance rainfall and increase opportunities for its occurrence,” Ammar said.

However, scientists must be cautious about the possible environmental side effects and other risks while generating rainfall artificially, including the potential for pollution and flash flooding.

“The UAE avoids certain types of clouds with huge quantities of water,” Ammar said. “We need to work more on showing evidence on what’s happening in this program and what implications and gains there are. Whatever drop of water you can bring in ultimately has high value because it adds to the water system of the country and region.”

For Shamruk, there is still a long way to go, both in the development of

seeding technology and in scientific understanding of the best processes. “Nowadays, there are many cloud-seeding techniques,” he said.

He and Ammar would both like to see more investment in rain-making technologies and much more regional cooperation to address the shared dangers posed by climate change and water shortages.

“Cloud seeding is a must, not a choice,” Ammar said. “Scientists should keep developing new ideas and innovations from all over the world and bring them here, if they are affordable and technically feasible to scale up.

“Maybe a joint program for the whole GCC is possible, as it will help improve their performance instead of working separately on monitoring.

“All this rain is valuable,” he said. “Countries can’t survive without this valuable resource.”

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Saudi Arabia throws its support behind cloud-seeding technologyCloud-seeding plan aims to increase rainfall in Saudi Arabia by 20 percent

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## [Beirut blast bereaved hold symbolic funeral to demand justice](#)

Author:

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Sun, 2021-08-08 19:05

BEIRUT: Lebanese protesters carried imitation coffins in a symbolic funeral procession from Beirut port Sunday to demand justice, days after the first anniversary of a vast dockside explosion that killed more than 200 people. Families of the victims were joined by dozens of supporters, some wearing

black and carrying burning torches, at an entrance to the port where a warehouse fire on Aug. 4 last year ignited a vast stash of ammonium nitrate, causing one of the biggest peacetime blasts in history.

Wives, sisters and mothers of those killed held portraits of their loved ones and marched ahead of three symbolic coffins covered in flowers, an AFP reporter said.

"Ammonium nitrate did this," read one sign.

Accompanied by drumming from a marching band, the demonstrators marched through the nearby districts of Gemmayzeh and Mar Mikhail, which were heavily damaged by the blast.

"These coffins are symbols to remind people that we carried the coffins of our martyrs," said Ibrahim Hteit, spokesman for a bereaved families' association.

"We deserve the truth and we deserve justice for our loved ones. We're not going to give up," he said.

On Wednesday, thousands of people demonstrated in Beirut to mark the anniversary of the blast, voicing outrage that nobody has been held responsible for the disaster which left 214 people dead.

The ammonium nitrate, a highly explosive fertilizer, had been stored for years at the port with no safety precautions, according to the government itself.

The explosion wounded 6,500 people and caused billions of dollars-worth of damage.

Yet a judicial enquiry into the disaster has made little progress.

Former ministers are suspected of complicity in the negligence which culminated in the explosion.

Lebanon's deeply unpopular ruling class have been accused of making every effort to torpedo the investigation and avoid prosecutions.

"The crime goes on, lift immunity!" read one placard at Sunday's rally.

Helene Ata, a psychologist who lost her twin brother Abdo, 38, called on Lebanese citizens to hit the streets every day until justice is served.

"The pain gets worse every day, under the shadow of injustice around this affair, officials' inaction, their avoiding justice," she said.

"A year later, it's as if nothing happened," she said.







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Beirut blast survivors lose hope as Lebanon lurches from one crisis to another