

Lebanese president says talks on new PM will begin next Monday

Mon, 2021-07-19 23:28

BEIRUT: Lebanon's President Michel Aoun announced on Monday that parliamentary consultations to choose a new prime minister will begin on July 26.

Lebanon has been run by a caretaker government for nearly a year. Meanwhile the nation's currency has collapsed, many people have lost their jobs and banks have frozen customers' accounts in what has been described as one of the most severe financial crises the world has seen in modern times.

Saad Hariri, who was chosen as prime minister-designate nine months ago, resigned on Thursday after months of negotiations with Aoun failed to result in the formation of a new government. The previous administration, led by Prime Minister Hassan Diab, resigned amid public anger following the explosion at Beirut's port on Aug. 4 last year.

Since then, the escalating financial collapse has fueled hunger, unrest and fuel shortages as the country struggles with its worst crisis since the civil war that began in 1975. The Central Bank's foreign reserves are rapidly running out and the nation's currency has lost most of its value since 2019, pushing more than half of the population into poverty amid soaring prices.

A delegation from the US Department of Treasury's Terrorist Financing and Financial Crimes office arrived in Beirut on Monday. It will meet "with financial sector interlocutors and civil society groups to engage in discussing issues related to corruption, illicit finance and counterterrorism," according to the US Embassy in Lebanon.



The results of the Syndicate of Engineers elections held in Beirut showed that voters are taking a new path. (File/AFP)

Dana Stroul, the US deputy assistant secretary of defense for the Middle East, warned on Saturday that “the inability of the Lebanese to put food on their tables could lead to violence.”

She also expressed concerns that “the failure to form a government and Hezbollah’s ongoing attempts, due to the support it receives from Iran, to challenge the Lebanese state” are “keeping Lebanon weak and not providing an alternative to the legitimate government.”

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Dana Stroul, US deputy assistant secretary of defense for Middle East, warned that 'the inability of the Lebanese to put food on their tables could lead to violence.'

She added that "the Pentagon is closely monitoring the situation and encouraging Lebanon's leaders to take prompt steps to prevent the outbreak of this type of violence."

Meanwhile the results of Syndicate of Engineers elections in Beirut on Sunday suggested that voters are beginning to take matters into their own hands. The opposition Syndicate Revolts coalition, which formed during the Oct. 17, 2019 revolution, achieved a resounding victory over the ruling parties that is unprecedented in the history of syndicate elections in Lebanon.

Activist Ralph Germany, from the opposition Tahalof Watani (My Nation's coalition), told Arab News: "The people, including engineers, are angry at the parties in power. Usually the educated class in any society is the one that holds its parties accountable; this is what civilized peoples do.

"Through their votes the engineers wanted to tell the parties in power that the people are not sheep."

The opposition alliance won about two-thirds of the votes in what is being seen as a referendum on the extent to which the revolution groups are united in opposition to the ruling authority.

A total of 8,727 people voted in the poll out of more than 46,000 registered syndicate engineers, many of whom work outside of Lebanon. Aref Yassin of the Syndicate Revolts coalition won 5,798 votes to become head of the syndicate, succeeding Jad Thabet.

Yassin defeated the candidate backed by the Future Movement and Amal Movement, Bassem Al-Oueini, and the candidate backed by other ruling parties, Abdo Sukaria, by a margin of about four to one.

The ruling parties had tried to disrupt the election by spreading rumors designed to smear the opposition candidate and discourage voting.

"The parties in power fought dirty to stay in charge," said Germany. "These parties were benefiting from the syndicate by making certain deals, especially since (the syndicate) has a say in urban planning, the fate of marine property, and granting licenses.

"When the ruling parties were in charge, every decision served their own interests."



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[Egypt vows firm stance on protecting Nile water security: President tells China](#)

Mon, 2021-07-19 23:11

CAIRO: Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi has told China that his country would maintain its firm stance on preserving its water security in the face of an ongoing dispute over a giant Nile dam project.

During talks with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, on Sunday, Abdel Fattah El-Sisi reiterated Egypt's historical rights to the Nile waters and stressed the need to reach a binding legal agreement about the operation of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) that worked in the interests of Egypt, Sudan, and Ethiopia.

Yi pointed out Beijing's understanding of the importance of the Nile River to

Egypt and its interest in helping to find a solution to the impasse.

An official spokesperson for the Egyptian presidency said Cairo was keen to strengthen its strategic partnership with China which had been established for 65 years.

The Chinese minister noted the acceptance of Egypt as a dialogue partner in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, a Eurasian political, economic, and security alliance.

Since the start of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, relations between Egypt and China have been further cemented through the signing of a joint manufacturing agreement for the Sinovac vaccine in Egypt, and El-Sisi said he hoped the two countries could continue to work together in bolstering international efforts to tackle the global health crisis.

The president added that Egypt was keen to draw on Chinese expertise in supporting development programs and national infrastructure projects, including integration into the Belt and Road Initiative.

To mark this year's 65th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries, Egypt and China inked an agreement to set up a governmental cooperation committee to advance bilateral cooperation in a range of fields.

The GERD project was among a number of regional and international issues discussed in talks chaired by Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry and Yi.

Shoukry said a mutually beneficial deal was needed on the dam scheme that preserved the Nile water security of downstream countries Egypt and Sudan, and he noted the importance of China's position on the issue.

The two sides also talked in detail about ways to resolve the Palestinian crisis.



Battle for the Nile

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Iraq market bomb kills at least 35 on eve of Eid holiday

Mon, 2021-07-19 19:46

BAGHDAD: An explosion ripped through a busy market in the Iraqi capital Monday killing at least 35 people, according to medical sources, in an apparent suicide bombing ahead of Eid holiday celebrations.

In one of the worst attacks in Baghdad in recent years, body parts of victims lay scattered across the previously bustling market, that had been crowded with shoppers buying food ahead of the Islamic festival of Eid Al-Adha, according to an AFP photographer.

Some 60 people were also wounded in the blast, medics said.

Iraqi President Barham Salih called the bombing in the densely populated majority-Shiite suburb of Sadr City a "heinous crime," and offered his condolences.

"They are targeting our civilians in Sadr City on the eve of Eid," Salih said in a message on Twitter. "They do not allow people to rejoice, even for a moment."

Eight women and seven children were among the dead, according to a medical sources, who said the toll lay between 28 and 30 killed.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility, but two security sources told AFP it was caused by a suicide bomber wearing an explosive belt.



Iraqis light candles for the victims of the blast in Sadr City, Baghdad.
(AFP)

Video footage shared on social media after the blast showed bloodied victims and people screaming in terror. The blast was so strong it ripped the roofs off some market stalls.

"A terror attack using a locally-made IED (improvised explosive device) in Woheilat Market in Sadr City, in east Baghdad, left several victims dead and others injured," Iraq's interior ministry said in a statement.

Refrigerators full of water bottles were drenched with blood, and shoes were strewn on the ground alongside fruit, AFP journalists said.

"It's a sad Eid night in Iraq," the International Committee of the Red Cross said. "Our deepest sympathies and sincere condolences to those who lost their loved ones."

Baghdad Operations Command, a joint military and interior ministry security body, said it had launched an investigation into the blast, and police and forensic teams late Monday were searching through the smoking wreckage for clues.

In January, the Daesh group claimed responsibility for a rare twin suicide bombing that killed 32 people – also at a crowded market in Baghdad.

That blast was the city's deadliest attack in three years.

Such violence was commonplace in Baghdad during the sectarian bloodletting that followed the US-led invasion of 2003, and later on as Daesh swept across much of Iraq and also targeted the capital.

But after years of deadly violence, militant attacks have become relatively

rare in the capital Baghdad.

The attack sparked a furious response from Iraqis on social media.

“Terrorism and the government’s failure keep on stealing our lives,” tweeted Alaa Sattar, a youth activist. “The authorities have nothing but condolences to dole out and empty investigative committees.”

Another Twitter user wrote “every Eid, there’s a tragedy in Baghdad. It’s impossible to celebrate like the rest of humanity.”

Iraq declared Daesh defeated at the end of 2017 after a fierce three-year campaign.

Yet the group’s sleeper cells have continued to operate in desert and mountain areas, typically targeting security forces or state infrastructure with low casualty attacks.

The US-led coalition that had been supporting Iraq’s campaign against Daesh has significantly drawn down its troop levels over the past year, citing the increased capabilities of Iraqi forces.

The United States, which provides the bulk of the force, has 2,500 troops left in Iraq – down from 5,200 a year ago.

They are mainly in charge of training, providing drone surveillance and carrying out air strikes while Iraqi security forces handle security in urban areas.

Sadr City, where Monday’s bomb blast took place, is named after revered Shiite cleric Mohammed Al-Sadr.

His son, Moqtada Sadr – a firebrand cleric with millions of followers and in command of paramilitary groups – is a crucial player in Iraqi politics who has often protested against the influence of both the United States and Iran. The boycott by Sadr of upcoming elections slated for October is a blow to Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhemi, who had called the early vote in response to demands by pro-democracy activists.



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[Egypt seeks to restore passenger air traffic to pre-pandemic levels](#)

Sun, 2021-07-18 22:48

CAIRO: Egyptian Civil Aviation Minister Mohammed Manar has called for the concerted efforts required to restore passenger air traffic to what it was before the pandemic.

His call came as ways to maximize EgyptAir's returns outside the country, especially within Africa, were discussed at a recent meeting. The minister and airline officials took part in the talks.

Manar discussed ways to revitalize and promote the airline's sales in light of the pandemic's impact on global travel.

He highlighted the airline's aim to spread in Africa through the establishment of bodies in Ghana and South Sudan, in order to operate from there, and the launch of new flights from those countries to others.

He described it as a great investment that had been reviewed by authorities and one that would help the airline make gains from its fleet.

Montaser Manna, who is deputy minister of civil aviation, said that agreements had been made between the ministry and some African countries to establish a partnership.

It comes within a government framework and ministerial directives to support development and increase income.

Aircraft maintenance expertise from the airline's engineers and specialists would be loaned out to inspect and maintain European planes landing in African countries under these deals, he explained.

Egyptian engineers had high levels of professionalism and craftsmanship, according to the minister, and some African countries were unable to maintain certain aircraft which hindered air traffic in these countries.

But if European and other countries were aware of the availability of full maintenance, spare parts, and the possibility of repairing aircraft malfunctions, it would encourage them to land in and fly to those African countries, he said.

He added that Egypt would provide such a service to those countries by way of an agreement, with specialist engineers and technicians being made available.

Engineers and technicians would be assigned according to the model they specialized and were trained in, he explained.



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[Frankly Speaking: Fugitive motor mogul Carlos Ghosn ready to stand trial in 'a fair and neutral jurisdiction'](#)

Sun, 2021-07-18 22:20

DUBAI: Carlos Ghosn, the fugitive motor-industry mogul, wants to stand trial in a country he regards as more neutral than Japan, he told Arab News.

Ghosn, who fled Tokyo 18 months ago, said: "I think the end of it has to be in a trial, but a trial that takes place in a country which has no stake in what is being tried. The only thing I'm asking is for a jurisdiction to be fair and neutral and not to be politically motivated. That's all."

In the course of a wide-ranging interview, the former boss of Japan's Nissan and France's Renault talked of how he was "abandoned" by the French government after it "surrendered" to Japan; his advice on how Lebanon – where

he is currently seeking refuge from international law enforcement – can get out of its dire economic and political crisis; and his views on the Vision 2030 reform strategy in Saudi Arabia.

In conversation on the “Frankly Speaking” series of video interviews with leading policymakers and business people, he also gave his view on the intense rivalry between Nissan and Toyota in the Middle East.

Ghosn’s most savage criticism was of the Japanese legal system, after he was arrested and imprisoned on charges of financial irregularity at the Nissan Motor Co., where he was chairman.



Carlos Ghosn arrives for a pre-trial hearing at the Tokyo District Court in Tokyo on June 24, 2019. (Kazuhiro Nogi / AFP file)

“Prosecutors prevailed 99.4 per cent of the time, which is unheard of and unseen, quite frankly. Even though I’d been living in Japan for 18 years, I never suspected this kind of score,” he said.

“But having gone through the system and seeing the kind of intimidation – confession seeking, pressures, violation of human rights etc. – I am even surprised that they get only 99.4 per cent of confessions. I wonder how the other 0.6 per cent were able to resist when you look at the arsenal of arguments and things that they put against you.”

Japan’s justice system has been labeled “hostage justice” by the UN, he said, adding: “I’m ready to go to Japan the day they change their ‘hostage justice’ system.”

He said that he “felt bad” for people on trial in Japan, including his former lawyer, Greg Kelly. “I was lucky to be able to get out before the systems locked me down for God knows how many years, but I feel bad for Greg Kelly,” he said.

Japanese prosecutors charged Ghosn with a variety of financial crimes, including inflating his salary, but he said his remuneration had been agreed by the Nissan board of directors on several occasions. “I deduced from this that they were happy, particularly knowing that dividends were paid, the company was growing, the company was profitable,” he said.



French carmaker Renault CEO Carlos Ghosn arrives on Feb. 17, 2016 at the French National Assembly, before addressing the Economical and Financial commissions during a hearing. (AFP file)

Ghosn – a French citizen as well as holding Lebanese and Brazilian nationality – was also scathing about the actions of the government of President Emmanuel Macron, which appeared to want to appease Tokyo over the future of the Nissan–Renault alliance.

“Instead of somehow getting good support, I was just abandoned, after two or three weeks of obvious conflict between France and Japan,” he said.

“But then the French surrendered, and they said it very clearly – you know we want to preserve the good relationship between Japan and France, we want to preserve the good relationship between Nissan and Renault, and we trust that Japanese justice will solve this problem with Carlos Ghosn,” he said.

Ghosn has lived in Lebanon since December 2019 with his wife Carole, and is subject to a “red notice” from Interpol at the request of the Japanese government. Lebanon does not extradite citizens.

“Lebanon asked for Japan to transmit the accusation and the charges so they could look into them and eventually try me in Lebanon. But Japan has refused

to do so," he said.

Although there was "zero chance" of him becoming involved directly in Lebanese politics, including considering any offer to become the next president, Ghosn said that he was aware of "the misery brought on the country by the financial collapse, the economic recession with all its social consequences."



A portrait of ousted Nissan chairman Carlos Ghosn is seen on a publicity billboard in his support at a street in Beirut on December 6, 2018. (Joseph Eid / AFP)

He would "support, help, guide, advise whoever is interested to limit the suffering that people around us are going through," he said.

"Having turned around many companies, I know by practice that whatever solution you bring when you have to turn around a company, or a country, five percent is the strategy, and 95 percent is execution," he said. "So somehow those who will save the country are those who are in power and put in power by the Lebanese people, because frankly, the methods and the strategy to get out are pretty simple, and they have been (tried) in many countries (and) many companies."

He also offered his view on the Vision 2030 reform strategy in Saudi Arabia. "I think that makes a lot of sense – transforming a country from being overly reliant on a couple of resources, to have different sources of revenues, and different sources of income, and different sorts of activity for employment," he said.

Ghosn cautioned that the challenge for Saudi policymakers lies in the implementation of that strategy. “The success of this depends on how disciplined it’s is going to be – the execution, how focused (it is) going to be, the people in charge of delivering on this, and how serious they’re going to be about gathering the maximum level of talents into transforming the reality of Saudi Arabia.

“Saudi Arabia is a very rich country. It benefits from a lot of resources, but I think the people in charge of the country know that it’s not going to last forever. So, in my opinion they’re doing the right thing and I hope that will be successful,” he said.

From his perspective as a global expert in the motor business, he said that the difference between the Nissan business and the dominant Toyota operation in the Kingdom lay in the strength of the distribution network Toyota has built there in partnership with the Abdul Latif Jameel group.

“They have probably one of the best distributors in the world located in Saudi Arabia, so it’s going to be very difficult to fight if they (Nissan) don’t have people even approaching this level now,” he said.



This courtroom sketch illustrated by Masato Yamashita depicts former Nissan chairman Carlos Ghosn attending his hearing at the Tokyo district court on January 8, 2019. (JIJI PRESS via AFP/file)

He added that he thought the Nissan–Renault–Mitsubishi alliance, which he was developing in the global motor industry, was doomed to fall apart.

“Frankly everything I’m seeing today makes me see the alliance as a zombie –

that means it looks like it's living matter, but in fact, inside nothing is happening. So, I'm not very optimistic when it comes to the future of this alliance. I hope I'm wrong but I will bet you that within the next five years this whole thing is going to totally unravel," he said.

Ghosn cooperated in the making by Saudi media company MBC of a full-length documentary, "The Last Flight," describing his dramatic escape from Japan in a large musical-instrument box on board a private jet, and analyzing the events leading up to it, which was released last week.

"I think there was a clear motivation from MBC to do it. They were the first one to come to me and say we would like your cooperation to do something like this, and they were very straightforward and honest about it," he said.

Ghosn is planning further publicity initiatives, on top of legal action against his former employers.

"I want to leave something in order to help re-establish my reputation, on top of what I'll be doing from a legal point of view. But I have no intention to come back to the high-flying life I had before," he said.

• **Twitter:** [@frankkanedubai](https://twitter.com/frankkanedubai)



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