

# Lebanese protester shot dead, another wounded by Israelis at border demonstration

Author:

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Fri, 2021-05-14 19:10

KFARKILA, Lebanon: Hezbollah said Friday a young man killed by Israeli gunfire along the Lebanese-Israeli border was a fighter with the militant group.

The man, 21-year-old Mohammad Tahhan, died of wounds sustained on Friday when he was struck during a protest at the border.

The National News Agency (NNA) said in the afternoon two demonstrators were wounded "by two Israeli shells that fell near them after a number of youths tried to enter the town of Metula" in northern Israel.

Palestinian and Lebanese youth had gathered in the border area as part of a rally against the Israeli military campaign in Gaza. A small group later breached the fence and crossed the border into Israel, triggering the shooting.

In the aftermath, "the Lebanese army and security forces were deployed... to stop the youths from advancing" again, the NNA added.

The Israeli military said troops fired shots toward the group after they sabotaged the fence and crossed over briefly, confirming on Twitter its tanks had "fired warning shots at a number of rioters... who had crossed into Israeli territory."

The protesters, some carrying Palestinian flags and that of Hezbollah gathered in the Khiam plain, opposite Metula, a few dozen meters (yards) from the border, an AFP photographer said.

They later set fire to the area, with the flames spreading "all the way to the border," he added.

After sunset a dozen protesters still lingered by the fence, prompting tear gas from the Israeli side.

Lebanese President Michel Aoun strongly condemned "the crime committed by Israeli forces" when they opened fire at the group.

On Thursday, three rockets were fired from southern Lebanon near the Palestinian refugee camp of Rashidiyeh toward Israel, a Lebanese military source said. Israel's army said the rockets landed in the sea.



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## [Small businesses pay big price for pandemic protection measures in MENA](#)

Fri, 2021-05-14 18:42

DUBAI: Staying in business through the COVID-19 pandemic has not been cheap for retailers, hoteliers or eateries – to name just a few types of small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). All over the world, including the Arab region, SMEs have suffered the double whammy of lost custom combined with new expenditure on cleaning, testing, protective equipment and hand sanitizers.

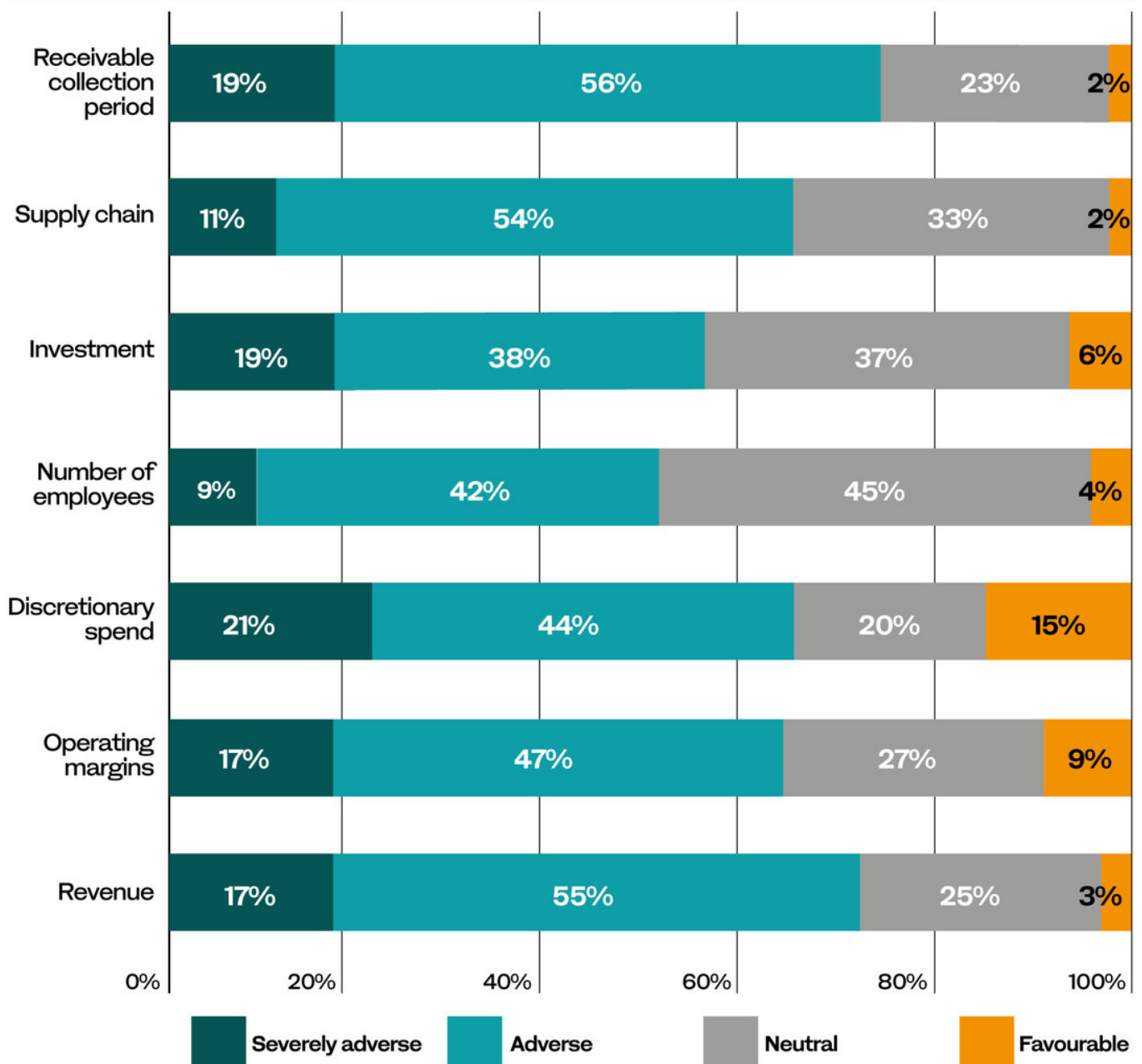
Companies have spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on hygiene protocols in a desperate bid to keep their doors open. Contact-intensive sectors such as

leisure, hospitality and tourism have suffered more than most. Airlines, spas, gyms and galleries have all been forced to limit footfall.

Although the rollout of vaccines has raised hopes of a turnaround this year, with people itching to book summer getaways and nights out on the town after months stuck indoors, a mixture of new virus mutations and the uneven distribution of vaccines means the world is still a long way from returning to normal.

## HOW COVID-19 AFFECTED THE BOTTOM LINE

Middle East businesses still in cost-cutting and mitigation mode



Source: Deloitte survey

ARAB NEWS

According to an April report by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), which assessed the impact of the pandemic on SMEs over the past year, such firms have been hit far harder than their larger

counterparts.

“SMEs are overrepresented in the sectors most affected by the crisis, in particular in wholesale and retail trade, air transport, accommodation and food services, real estate, professional services, and other personal services,” the report said.

“Smaller firms are typically more financially fragile and have smaller cash buffers than their larger counterparts. This makes them less resilient to crises.”

Small companies also tend to have weaker supply chains and can “lag behind in terms of the uptake of digital tools and technologies which can help to build resilience in the current pandemic crisis.”



People walk past a closed restaurant in the Saudi capital Riyadh, on February 5, 2021, after new rules laid out by the Ministry of Interior to curb a recent spike in COVID-19 cases. (AFP/File Photo)

Crucially, it would seem, SMEs are also “less likely to have managerial capability to comply with new regulatory frameworks to guarantee customers’ and employees’ safety.”

For Tala Badri, founder and executive director of the Center for Musical Arts in Dubai, most of the past year’s excess expenditure has been spent on COVID-19 safety and hygiene measures for her patrons and staff.

When businesses in Dubai were cleared to reopen in the second half of 2020,

under strict public health guidelines, Badri was legally obliged to hire an approved cleaning company to sanitize the entire premises, its equipment and its musical instruments.

"We have to set up systems where you have a sanitization station everywhere that is accessible," Badri told Arab News. "You have to buy the sanitizer. These are all additional expenses that we never had to face before.

"We also have to put up special screens for teaching, which cost AED 2,000 to AED 3,000 (\$545 to \$820) and are just plastic screens, not even that big, but they cost money," she said.

"One of the other things we have to do is increase our Internet usage (for remote teaching). You have (limited) choice (in selecting an Internet service provider). You have just to go with whatever is there. We are paying on average about AED 15,000 (\$4,000) per term, and this is like someone's salary. It is like having another person on staff."



Saudi authorities in February suspended the provision of indoor dining service, allowing only take-away, and banned all recreational and entertainments activities for 10 days to stem the spread of COVID-19. (AFP/File Photo)

Badri “totally accepts” the measures are necessary, but says they constitute an “unprecedented extra cost” that businesses like hers were in no position to take on. “When you are losing such a huge amount of your money, and you have to pay extra to stay in business, where there is no support, it is very difficult,” she said.

Other sectors have been forced to absorb cumbersome expenses of their own. Gyms, for instance, have replaced communal soap dispensers with individually wrapped bottles to reduce surface contamination.

Although many fitness facilities are saving on their laundry bill by asking guests to bring their own towels, round-the-clock sanitizing of equipment and surfaces is nevertheless eating into their budget.

Restaurants have also had to radically rethink their business model, relying on local delivery firms to reach a smaller catchment of customers and absorbing the additional cost of single-use takeaway packaging, not to mention the outgoings on additional health and safety measures in the kitchen.

Those eateries with sufficient space have experimented with partitioning and spreading out their customers, but the loss of larger bookings and walk-ins will no doubt have hit their balance sheets.



Employees of a restaurant at a mall in the Saudi capital Riyadh wear face masks after the authorities eased some of the restrictive measures put in place to combat the spread of COVID-19. (AFP/File Photo)

On top of this, extra signage, QR-code menus, queuing areas, plexiglass screens, sanitizing stations, plastic tablecloths and cashless payment systems have not only multiplied expenses but also taken away some of the magic of the dining-out experience. Who enjoys wearing their mask between courses?

No wonder supermarkets and other food-retail outlets have seen a bounce at the expense of restaurateurs since the pandemic began. According to Somaia Basha, a Dubai-based senior research analyst for Euromonitor International, Saudi Arabia's restaurant sector lost 37 percent of its value in 2020.

"Because of the initial lockdown, we have seen overspending on food retail. On the other hand, of course, restaurants were massively hit," she told Arab News.

SMEs have been forced to adapt quickly to new trends, which, although they existed prior to the pandemic, have been pushed into overdrive out of necessity. Take, for instance, the digital transformation of home delivery and payment methods.

"COVID-19 has elevated or increased the speed of a lot of trends that were actually already happening," said Basha. "So, before COVID-19, there was transformation of payments, there were delivery options that were getting traction. But after COVID-19, these became more important.

"Progress that we expected to take years has been happening over the course of one year in some countries and even just a matter of months in others. This high speed is transforming many industries.



People sit at a cafe in a mall in the Saudi capital Riyadh on June 4, 2020, after it reopened following the easing of some restrictions. (AFP/File Photo)

"Now, imagine you are one of these restaurants and suddenly you are faced with this issue of either going digital or shutting down. You are going to



have to invest money when you are already making a loss, because you are not generating any revenue, and you are not there on delivery platforms.

“So, you are now going to spend a couple of thousand dollars to be there, to be available in the digital world. And then, when you go into the digital world, you will find you have multiple platforms, which are competing, and you have prices dropping.”

Perhaps, then, the innovations that this pandemic has driven forward, with companies forced to invest and adapt to ensure their long-term survival, are the real silver lining of this traumatic and costly year. True, not all sectors can benefit from digital technologies, but those that do can expect to bounce back much faster.

“It is a challenging time for restaurants all over the world. They are playing in an area they have not maneuvered in before,” said Basha. “It is unknown territory.”

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## [France's Emmanuel Macron speaks with Israel's Benjamin Netanyahu, calls for return to peace](#)

Author:

Reuters

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Fri, 2021-05-14 14:41

PARIS: French President Emmanuel Macron spoke with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Friday about the escalating conflict between Israel and Palestinians and called for a return to peace in the region.

In a statement, Macron condemned rocket attacks by Hamas and said Israel had the right to defend itself. He also expressed concern about the plight of the civilian population in Gaza, which is run by Hamas.

Israel pummelled Gaza with artillery fire and air strikes on Friday, killing 13 people including three children, local health officials said, as it targeted Palestinian militant tunnels to try to stop the rocket attacks on Israeli towns.

Netanyahu said Friday that Israel had no plans on relenting in its attacks against Hamas in Gaza, after heavy bombardment targeting the group's targets in the Palestinian enclave.

"They attacked our capital, they fired rockets at our cities. They're paying and will continue to pay dearly for that," he said following security consultations at the military's headquarters in Tel Aviv.



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## [Lebanon spends Eid Al-Fitr under strict quarantine](#)

Author:

Thu, 2021-05-13 22:10

BEIRUT: Eid Al-Fitr celebrations in Lebanon were very scarce on Thursday as the country was in the middle of a two-day total closure and curfew to combat the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19).

As people avoided gatherings in homes and public places during what is supposed to be a joyous time, one prominent religious leader expressed fear during his Eid sermon.

“People will starve as a result of the errors and sins of the government, and from an explosion or social violence, which will lead to the revolt of the hungry,” said Sheikh Abdel-Latif Derian, grand mufti of Lebanon.

“When this happens, remorse will not be helpful.”

He also accused “political officials of regressing to low levels of violating the constitution, striking the judiciary, resorting to sectarian delusions, and dividing citizens.”

The joy of Eid could not be seen on the faces of the Lebanese people as living conditions continue to deteriorate in a country gripped in financial and political turmoil.

Authorities allowed only 30 percent capacity at mosques for the Eid prayers as worshippers spread out in the open-air squares surrounding the Al-Amin Mosque in central Beirut.

The prayers were led by Sheikh Derian as Lebanon’s caretaker Prime Minister Hassan Diab were among the many who participated in the prayer.

The Israeli-Gaza violence and unrest dominated the Eid sermon, but the political reality and the poor living conditions within Lebanon were also addressed in the sermon from Sheikh Derian.

“The collapse and devastation that we are living through it can only be stopped by the birth of a government that addresses the corruption and decay that Lebanon has seen for the first time in decades,” Mufti Derian said. “We need a government that carries out the required reforms. Anything else counts as deception.”

He also criticized “those working in public political affairs for failing their citizens when they indulged in corruption and prevented the formation of a government capable of stopping the collapse, beginning reconstruction, and seeking help from the international community.”

It was noticeable that the Arab and Islamic diplomatic presence was absent from the central Eid prayer in downtown Beirut.

The Saudi ambassador to Lebanon, Walid Bukhari, performed Eid prayers in the garden of his residence in the Yarze district while a number of ambassadors of Arab and Islamic countries and embassy staff joined him. The embassy took the initial precautionary measures related to the coronavirus.

Measures to remove subsidies on more subsidized food commodities, fuel and medicines added even more concern to a continuing list of hardships experienced by the Lebanese people even before Ramadan.

Many pharmacies closed their doors because owners did not receive the minimum

needs of medicine and baby milk from agents and warehouses.

Despite the complete closure, petrol stations remained busy as people fear more fuel shortages.

“The ships that produce power will stop on Saturday, and the factories will follow suit,” Abdo Saadeh, president of the Association of Private Generator Owners, said on Thursday.

“This means that the rationing of electric current in Lebanon may exceed 20 hours. In parallel, there is a shortage of diesel that feeds private generators, which means we are on the verge of a big problem.”

The fuel crisis affects vital sectors in Lebanon, as the secretary-general of the Lebanese Red Cross, Georges Kettaneh, announced that the Red Cross “has prepared a plan to fill its cars with fuel, and there is no crisis yet.”

The head of the Syndicate of Private Hospital Owners, Suleiman Haroun, said: “If Lebanon enters darkness as a result of not providing the funds allocated for the purchase of fuel, many patients in need of oxygen and dialysis machines will be affected.”

Haroun warned that private hospitals have generators, but it is impossible to ask hospitals to supply themselves with electricity 24 hours a day because “these generators are there to support the network and be a substitute for any malfunctions that occur.”



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## [Israeli military confirms three rockets fired from Lebanon](#)

Thu, 2021-05-13 21:41

JERUSALEM: Three rockets were launched from Lebanon toward northern Israel on Thursday but landed in the Mediterranean sea, causing no damage or casualties, the Israeli military said.

Lebanese security forces also confirmed that at least three rockets were fired from the south of Lebanon toward Israel.

*More to follow...*



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Israeli troops mass at Gaza border amid rocket fire, air strikes and clashes in Israel