

MIDEAST



Passengers sit next to their luggage as they wait to cross the border to the Egyptian side of Rafah Crossing, in Rafah, Gaza Strip on Aug 11. Egypt reopened Rafah Crossing for three days starting Tuesday for humanitarian cases in and out of the Gaza Strip. (AP)

Lebanon Govt ordered to stay on as caretaker

'Beirut could run out of bread'

BEIRUT, Aug 11, (Agencies): Lebanese President Michel Aoun has accepted the resignation of the country's government and asked it to stay on in a caretaker capacity until a new cabinet is formed.

A statement by the Lebanese Presidential Office said President Aoun has received the written letter of resignation from Prime Minister Hassan Diab.

Earlier, Lebanese Prime Minister Hassan Diab announced his government resignation over public anger following a recent deadly explosion in Beirut.

Meanwhile, Lebanon's prime minister stepped down from his job Monday in the wake of the catastrophic explosion in Beirut that has triggered public outrage, saying he has come to the conclusion that corruption in the country is "bigger than the state."

The move risks opening the way to dragged-out negotiations over a new Cabinet amid urgent calls for reform. It follows a weekend of anti-government protests after the Aug. 4 explosion in Beirut's port that decimated the facility and caused widespread destruction, killing at least 160 people and injuring about 6,000 others.

In a brief televised speech after three of his ministers resigned, Prime Minister Hassan Diab said he and his government were stepping down.

"May God protect Lebanon," he said, repeating the last phrase three times. As he spoke, protesters demonstrated in the streets near parliament for a third straight day. The moment typified Lebanon's political dilemma. Since October, there have been mass demonstrations demanding the departure of the entire sectarian-based leadership over entrenched corruption, incompetence and mismanagement.

But the ruling oligarchy has held onto power for so long – since the end of the civil war in 1990 – that it is difficult to find a credible political figure untainted by connections to it.

Diab blamed corrupt politicians who preceded him for the "earthquake" that has hit Lebanon.

"They (the political class) should have been ashamed of themselves because their corruption is what has led to this disaster that had been hidden for seven years," he added.

"I have discovered that corruption is bigger than the state and that the state is paralyzed by this (ruling) clique and cannot confront it or get rid of it," said Diab, who was a professor at the American University of Beirut before he took the job.

After the catastrophe, Diab had sought to stay on for two months to organize new parliamentary elections and allow a map for reforms. But the pressure from within his own Cabinet proved to be too much. With the mass resignation, the call for early elections appears dead, so the same factions will debate on forming a new Cabinet.

Diab's government was formed after his predecessor, Saad Hariri, stepped down in October in response to the demonstrations. It took months of bickering among the leadership factions before they settled on Diab. His government, which was dominated by the Hezbollah militant group and its allies and seen as one-sided, was basically doomed from the start, tasked with meeting demands for reform but made up of all the factions that reformers want out.

Now the process must start again. "I hope that the caretaking period will not be long because the country cannot take that. Lets hope a new government will be formed quickly," Public Works Minister Michel Najjar said. "An effective government is the least

we need to get out of this crisis."

The pressure from the streets – and from French President Emmanuel Macron, who visited Beirut last week after the blast – could push the political factions to put aside their differences and form a unity government. Diab's government largely excluded Hezbollah's opponents, the Eurasia Group said in an analysis, adding that the factions may now see the need to carry out greater reform.

The group said a government of independent experts could be created, although Hezbollah is a main obstacle to that since it fears that would eventually lead to the group being forced out of the political system.

The weekend protests saw clashes with security forces firing tear gas at demonstrators.

The explosion is believed to have been caused by a fire that ignited a 2,750-ton stockpile of highly volatile ammonium nitrate that had been stored at the port since 2013 with few safeguards despite numerous warnings of the danger.

The result was a disaster that the Lebanese people blame squarely on their leadership's corruption and neglect. Losses from the explosion are estimated at \$10 billion to \$15 billion, with nearly 300,000 people left homeless.

On Monday, a French chemical expert working at the shattered port told The Associated Press that his team is working to secure at least 20 potentially dangerous chemical containers there after finding one that was leaking.

He also said there are flammable liquids in other containers as well as batteries and other products that could increase the risk of an explosion, describing huge containers tossed around the port by the powerful blast. The expert identified himself only as Lt. Anthony in accordance with French government policy.

The last decision by Diab's government before its resignation was to refer the case of the explosion to the Supreme Judicial Council, which handles crimes infringing on Lebanon's national security as well as political and state security crimes.

The Supreme Judicial Council is Lebanon's top judicial body.

A judge on Monday questioned the heads of the country's security agencies. Public Prosecutor Ghassan El Khoury questioned Maj. Gen. Tony Saliba, the head of State Security, according to state-run National News Agency. It gave no further details, but other generals are scheduled to be questioned.

State Security had compiled a report about the dangers of storing the material at the port and sent a copy to the offices of the president and prime minister on July 20. The investigation is focused on how the ammonium nitrate came to be stored at the port and why nothing was done about it.

Najjar, the public works minister, said he learned about the material's presence 24 hours before the blast, receiving a report about the material and holding a meeting with port officials before calling its chief, Hassan Koraytem.

"I wrote a report in the morning the explosion happened in the evening," Najjar said. Asked why he only learned of it the day before, Najjar said, "I don't know. Truly I don't know."

About 20 people have been detained after the blast, including the head of Lebanon's customs department and his predecessor, as well as the head of the port. Dozens of people have been questioned, including two former Cabinet ministers, according to government officials.

On Sunday, world leaders and international organizations pledged nearly \$300 million in emergency humanitarian aid to Beirut, but warned that no money for rebuilding the capital would be made available until Lebanese authorities commit themselves to the political and economic reforms demanded by the people.

In Brief

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia on Monday reported 32 fatalities attributed to coronavirus, while 1,257 more people tested positive in the past 24 hours, the health ministry said.

The new figures take the kingdom's death toll to 3,199 and confirmed cases hit 289,947, according to health ministry data, which showed the number of recoveries reached 253,478.

Saudi Arabia has the highest count among the six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council. (KUNA)

MANAMA: The Bahraini Health Ministry registered Monday 382 new COVID-19 cases and 418 recoveries.

The total confirmed COVID-19 cases reached 2,882 and 40,967 recovery cases, said ministry in a press statement. (KUNA)

DOHA: The number of coronavirus infections in Qatar rose by 315 on Monday to up the total to 113,262, the health ministry said, putting the death toll at 188 after a fourfold increase in the past 24 hours.

Some 109,993 people have recovered from the virus in the Gulf state, according to health ministry figures. (KUNA)

MUSCAT: The Oman Health Ministry announced on Monday 207 new COVID-19 cases, raising the country's total number of confirmed cases to 81,787.

The ministry, in a pressed release, said the total recovered cases reached 76,124, while 521 patients died from the disease, said the ministry. (KUNA)

RAMALLAH: Palestinian Health Minister May Al-Kaila declared on Monday that seven people have succumbed to COVID-19, raising the death toll to 110, with 467 new infections and 545 recoveries in the past 24 hours.

The total confirmed cases reached 19,121, the minister said in a statement, adding that 24 patients are in intensive care, including three put on ventilators. (KUNA)

AMMAN: Jordan announced Monday that 16 new COVID-19 cases were recorded, bringing the total of confirmed cases since the start of the pandemic to 1,268.

Jordanian Premiership and Health Ministry said in a joint statement that no recovery cases were recorded, adding that authorities performed around 6,200 tests, raising the total to 652,700 tests.

However, they denied reports on a total or partial curfew, stressing that Jordan is in the moderate-risk phase. (KUNA)

TUNIS: Tunisia's Health Ministry announced on Monday that 20 additional people tested positive for the coronavirus (COVID-19) over the past 24 hours.

The figures took the overall infections to 1,717, the ministry added in a statement, noting that up to 1265 patients recovered from the virus.

It pointed out that some 51 patient dies of the pandemic so far. (KUNA)

RABAT: Morocco said on Monday coronavirus cases grew by 826 as deaths climbed by 18.

This brings the tally to 34,063 and the death toll to 516, the health ministry said.

On the other hand, recoveries rose by 1,177 to 24,524. (KUNA)

Egypt allows Gazans to leave strip in months

Egypt on Tuesday reopened Gaza's main passenger crossing point for the first time in months for thousands of Palestinians who have been stranded on both sides of the border due to the coronavirus crisis.

Gaza residents holding Egyptian passports, foreign passports and patients seeking treatment abroad were to leave through the Rafah crossing point during its three-day opening, the Hamas-run interior ministry in Gaza said. Some 500 people were scheduled to exit Tuesday, the first time the crossing has allowed departures since March.

Palestinians stranded in Egypt and abroad will be allowed to return

home, the ministry added. Traffic for arrivals had been shut since May.

Gaza appears to have managed to keep the pandemic in check – in part because of an Israeli-Egyptian blockade that severely restricts movement in and out of the territory. Israel and Egypt imposed the blockade after the Islamic militant group Hamas seized control of Gaza in 2007.

Gaza has reported 81 cases of the coronavirus, but all of the cases were people who were in mandatory quarantine centers set up by Hamas for anyone returning to the territory. There have been no reported cases of community transmission inside Gaza.

To prepare for thousands of Palestinians expected to return via Rafah, Hamas has opened more isolation facilities across the Gaza Strip.

Life in Gaza has returned to normal with the virus at bay. Last week, schools reopened normally. Mosques, wedding halls, cafes and gyms are also open.

Israel and Hamas are bitter enemies that have fought three wars and numerous skirmishes since 2007. On Tuesday, Israel closed its only commercial crossing point with Gaza in response to explosives-laden balloons being launched by Palestinians into Israel. The balloons started dozens of fires in Israeli farmland near Gaza. (AP)

Gulf Bank announces winners of the Al Danah Weekly Draws for the Weeks from 26 July - 6 August 2020

Gulf Bank held two weekly draws on 9th August 2020 announcing the names of the winners for the week of 26 - 30 July 2020, and the week of 2 - 6 August 2020. Each weekly draw consists of five winners who receive KD 1,000 each, every week.

The winners for the week of 26 - 30 July 2020:

- ABDULWAHAB ABDULRAHMAN ABDULATEEF ALMELHEM
- NIHAL AHMED ABDULATIF ALSUBEIH
- MOHAMMED FISAL ALI FARAJ
- JANA RADWAN ABDULLAH JAMAL
- TURKI MAIAH ALI SALEH

The winners for the week of 2 - 6 August 2020:

- SARA JASSEM ABDULLA SHUKRALLAH
- FUAD JASSIM MOHAMMAD DASHTI
- ALI ABDULKARIM JOOHAR ALSHATTI
- SABIHA FARES ABED ALI
- ABBAS ABDULLAH ALI ALQATTAN

Al Danah is now offering its biggest prize yet, with an annual draw prize of KD 1,500,000. The annual draw will be held on 14 January 2021, and the last chance to deposit into an Al Danah account to participate is 30 September 2020.

Gulf Bank encourages customers to increase their chances of winning with Al Danah by depositing more into their Gulf Bank accounts using the new ePay (Self-Pay) service, which is available on Gulf Bank's online and mobile banking services.

Al Danah offers a number of unique services to customers, including the Al Danah Deposit Only ATM card, which allows account holders to deposit money into their accounts

at their convenience. Account holders can also calculate their chances of winning the draws through the 'Al Danah Chances' calculator available on the Gulf Bank website and app. Furthermore, loyal Al Danah customers are rewarded with loyalty chances. Loyalty chances are the total chances accumulated from the previous year, which are added to the customer's chances the following year. Therefore, the total chances earned by Al Danah customers in 2019, have been added to their 2020 chances, and the same process will take place in 2021, and so on. Terms and conditions apply.

Gulf Bank's Al Danah account is open to Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti residents of Kuwait. Customers require a minimum of KD200 to open an account and the same amount should be maintained for customers to be eligible for the upcoming Al Danah draws. If the customer's account balance falls below KD200 at any given time, a KD2 fee will be charged to their account monthly until the minimum balance is met. Customers who open an account and/or deposit more will enter the weekly draw within two days. To take part in the Al Danah 2020 quarterly and yearly draws, customers must meet the required hold period for each draw.

Customers can visit one of Gulf Bank's branches, transfer online, place queries through the official Gulf Bank WhatsApp service on 65805805 or call the customer contact center on 1805805 for assistance and guidance. Customers can visit the website to find out more about Al Danah and its winners.