

Lebanon's Ex-PM Endorses Michel Aoun for Presidency

BEIRUT (Press TV) – Lebanon's ex-prime minister, Saad Hariri, has endorsed Michel Aoun for presidency, a post that has been vacant for almost 30 months.

In a televised news conference, Hariri, who leads Lebanon's March 14 Alliance, voiced support for his rival, raising hopes for the settlement of a long-running deadlock on Lebanon's political stage.

"I announce today before you my decision to endorse the candidacy of general Michel Aoun for the presidency of the republic," Hariri said.

Aoun, the founder of the Free Patriotic Movement, is an ally of the Lebanese resistance bloc, Hezbollah.

Lebanon's al-Akhbar news website reported that Hariri had informed his bloc, allies and Suleiman Tony Frangieh, the leader of the Marada Movement and another candidate for president, about his decision.

According to the report, Hariri was supposed to declare his decision on Wednesday but the announcement had been delayed as it coincided with the fourth anniversary of the assassination of General Wissam al-Hassan, the intelligence chief of Lebanon's Internal Security Forces.

Fouad Siniora, the head of the Future Movement's parliamentary bloc, said in an interview with the Daily Star newspaper that Hariri had told lawmakers that he had decided to back



Lebanon's former prime minister Saad Hariri (R) meeting ex-general Michel Aoun are seen in this Oct 20, 2016 photo.

Aoun, but stressed that there was "no final decision yet on this matter."

Some Lebanese political sources said if Aoun was elected president, Hariri would be appointed as prime minister for the second time.

Lebanon has been without a head of state since 2014, when the term of President Michel Suleiman expired.

The Lebanese parliament has repeatedly failed to elect a president due to the lack of quorum. The presidential election has been put off until the end of October.

Under Lebanon's power-sharing system, the president must be a Christian, the prime minister a Sunni Muslim and the parliament speaker a Shia Muslim.

Saudi Arabia Joins U.S. to Impose Sanctions on Lebanon's Hezbollah



File photo shows members of the Lebanese resistance movement, Hezbollah.

BEIRUT (Press TV) – Saudi Arabia has joined the U.S. in imposing sanctions on a number of Lebanese nationals and a company over their alleged financial support for Hezbollah resistance movement.

The Saudi regime slapped sanctions on two individuals -- Muhammad al-Mukhtar Kallas and

Hasan Jamal-al-Din -- and one firm, accusing them of funneling money to Hezbollah.

Riyadh ordered the asset freeze of the individuals, prohibiting any commercial licenses to be issued to them in the kingdom.

The measure came after the U.S. Treasury announced that it had imposed sanctions on four Leba-

nese men and a firm, accusing them of financing Hezbollah.

The U.S. Treasury claimed that the men -- Muhammad al-Mukhtar Kallas, Hasan Jamal-al-Din, Yusef Ayad and Muhammad Ghaleb Hamdar -- had raised and generated funds to help Hezbollah.

Adam Szubin, U.S. Treasury's acting undersecretary for terrorism and financial intelligence, said the U.S. designations were imposed under an executive order issued by former president, George W. Bush. The executive order, announced by the US Treasury Department, had been a joint action with Saudi regime aimed at "disrupting Hezbollah's worldwide commercial and financial infrastructure."

The Treasury has vowed in a statement to aggressively target Hezbollah and those supporting its activities. It has also blacklisted the Tabaja-controlled company, Global Cleaners, which it said had won sanitation services contracts in the Iraqi capital,

Baghdad.

Last year, the White House approved a bill which imposed sanctions against banks that do business with Hezbollah.

Washington falsely claims that the resistance movement condones terrorism despite the fact that Hezbollah has been involved in fierce fighting against Daesh terrorists in Syria.

Hezbollah was founded in the 1980s following the Zionist regime's invasion and occupation of southern Lebanon. The movement waged a long resistance campaign against Zionist troops and pushed them out of southern Lebanon in May 2000. Since then, the group has grown into a powerful military force and has successfully defeated the Zionist regime several times.

Hezbollah has also supported the Syrian army in its fight against the foreign-sponsored terrorists, who have been wreaking havoc in the Arab country since March 2011.

Zionist Troops Gun Down Palestinian Stone-Thrower

WEST BANK (Dispatches) – Zionist troops have shot dead a Palestinian teenage boy, who hurled rocks at patrolling regime forces in the occupied West Bank.

The incident took place in Beit Ummar, northeast of the city of al-Khalil.

The victim, who was identified as 15-year-old Khalid Bahr Ahmad Bahr, was reportedly shot in the back, with the bullet coming out through his chest.

Local activist, Muhammad Ayyad Awad, told the Palestinian Ma'an news agency that the Zionist troops prevented a Palestinian Red Crescent ambulance from approaching the teen.

Witnesses also said that Zionist troops refused to provide cardiopul-

monary resuscitation to the youth, with reports saying the regime troops transferred the victim's body to an unknown location.

However, Awad noted that Zionist authorities had informed Beit Ummar mayor that Bahr's body would be returned on Friday.

"Rocks were hurled at the soldiers, wounding one of them lightly," a Zionist police spokeswoman said, claiming that the troops first fired warning shots and then fired toward the Palestinian youth.

Meanwhile, Israeli media reported that another Palestinian youth was detained during Thursday's incident.

The occupying regime's police and troops have come under heavy criticism for extrajudicial executions of Palestinian citizens, who did not pose a threat or could have been detained through non-lethal means.

Turkish Police Arrest 40 Army Officers in Anti-Terror Probe

ANKARA (FNA) – Forty high-ranking military officers stationed at a Turkish air base were detained in an anti-terror investigation, a security source said.

According to the provincial security source in Turkish province of Konya, two colonels, a lieutenant colonel, three majors, three captains, one lieutenant and 30 non-commissioned officers from the Konya 3rd Main Jet Base Com-

mand were held, Anadolu reported.

The group was detained for alleged links to the U.S.-based opposition leader Fetullah Gulen movement in an investigation launched by the Konya Chief Public Prosecutor regarding financing of the illegal network.

Arrest warrants were issued for a total of 47 suspects.

Those detained went through health checks at

Konya Education and Research Hospital before being taken to the provincial security directorate.

The Gulen movement is accused of orchestrating Turkey's July 15 coup plot as well as being behind a long-running campaign to overthrow the state through the infiltration of Turkish institutions, particularly the military, police and judiciary.

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sanctions still in force. European banks also face problems, since transactions with Iran in dollars cannot be processed through the U.S. financial system.

Banks remain nervous after some heavy U.S. penalties, including a \$9 billion fine on France's BNP Paribas in 2014, largely for violating U.S. financial sanctions.

Despite this, European export credit agencies are guaranteeing trade finance for Western companies doing business with Iran.

Germany's state run export credit group Hermes has concluded trade finance deals covering goods worth several million euros.

"About a dozen transactions have been approved so far," a Hermes spokesman said.

"The demand is there from the exporters' side but they need a lot of information. There is a continuous and rising flow of applications (for export credit guarantees)."

Italian export credit agency SACE has also undertaken its first small transactions with Iran.

"The lingering risks should not be underestimated, however, as they might create problems ... legal, documentary, operational, for companies interested in building or restoring commercial or financial relationships with local counterparties," a SACE spokesman said.

France's Coface has signed an agreement with Iran to guarantee trade finance on behalf of the French government. Nevertheless, major transactions were yet to be concluded due to the banking issues.

Aviation and energy are two sectors in focus, industry executives say, along with political risk cover, even if there have been few deals so far.

Christian Bieri, EMEA reinsurance head at insurance group MS Amlin, said Iran was "very much under discussion".

"It's very high up the agenda," Bieri said. "It's going to be something for 2017."

Other large insurers and reinsurers such as Hannover Re are looking closely at Iran, but say concerns about payments still prevent them from doing business there.

Swiss Re chief executive Christian Mumenthaler told Reuters: "We have big business in the U.S. and so our chief legal officer is basically regulating every micro-step we do in that direction."

Lloyd's of London had historically been active in Iran and chairman John Nelson said it was a "market we would like to get back into".

"We have to just be clear, the U.S. sanctions are still very restrictive," Nelson told Reuters.

U.S. ...

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to coalition forces, has an irrefutable role in the atrocities against the Yemeni people, had better prevent further crime and bloodshed and put an end to the massacre of defenseless and oppressed people by its allies instead of accusing others," Qassemi said.

"The American government meanwhile has to watch out for measures by those who have been struggling in the Yemen war quagmire following a barbaric and imposed aggression," he said.

Those sides, Qassemi said, "in their illusion to avoid a humiliating defeat and save themselves, are seeking to escalate tensions and drag others to the fruitless war in Yemen."

EU Backs...

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German Chancellor Angela Merkel, however, said the European Union is willing to maintain good relations with

Russia. Merkel and French President Francois Hollande met Russian leader Vladimir Putin in Berlin on Wednesday.

"We've had a very intensive exchange of views today especially as regards to our relationship with Russia. On the one hand, we want to have a good relationship with Russia," Merkel said after the Friday summit.

"But on the other hand, we want to be very clear in our contacts about where we stand, especially with regards to recent developments in Syria," she added.

Russia and Syria unilaterally announced a "humanitarian pause" for Aleppo on Thursday after halting the airstrikes some 48 hours ahead of the ceasefire as a gesture of goodwill.

The pause is meant to allow safe passage to civilians trapped in the militant-held side of Aleppo as well as those militants not affiliated to terrorist groups.

As the pause went into effect on Thursday, extremist groups began shelling the humanitarian corridors to hamper the evacuations.

Aleppo, Syria's second largest city, has been divided between the government forces and foreign-backed militants since 2012. The Syrian army launched operations to retake the militant-held eastern section of Aleppo on September 22.

The EU is already at loggerheads with Russia over the crisis in eastern Ukraine, where Brussels says Moscow is propping up groups seeking autonomy. Russia rejects the accusation.

Zionists...

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deepening among the Palestinian civilian population."

Khoshroo also blamed illegal foreign intervention, extremism and violence for the ongoing conflicts in Libya, Iraq, Syria and Yemen.

"These problems have persisted and deepened because the international community has failed to do its part in dealing with the root causes, and naive trans-regional players have done erroneous actions," he pointed out.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Khoshroo referred to Riyadh's aerial bombardment campaign against its crisis-hit southern neighbor, stressing that the airstrikes have killed or permanently maimed thousands of civilians, including women and children, displaced millions of people, and turned Yemen from a disadvantaged country into a devastated one.

"All these horrendous and heinous attacks, which display total disregard for human life and international law are happening under the watch of Security Council, which has failed to take any action to stop them," the Iranian diplomat said.

Iran...

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In a similar statement, the head of the Bahraini Society Against Normalization with the Zionist Enemy, Jamal al-Hassan, also "totally rejected" Manama's move.

In July, a Bahraini lower court ordered Wefaq's dissolution over alleged accusations of inciting violence and encouraging anti-regime protests.

The opposition bloc's secretary general, Sheikh Ali Salman, has also been sentenced to nine years behind bars for backing reforms in the country through peaceful means.

Since early 2011, Bahrain has been the scene of one of the largest popular uprisings in its history, with the protesters demanding an end to the long-time rule of the Al Khalifa family and the establishment of democracy in the Persian Gulf state.

However, the peaceful anti-regime demonstrations have been met with a heavy-handed crackdown, which has killed scores of activists in the past five years.