

Spiritual Summit in Baabda

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Religious summit expected to back unity, president
Use of arms reportedly on agenda

Daily Star staff
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BEIRUT: A meeting between Lebanese Muslim and Christian leaders is expected to take place at the Presidential Palace in Baabda on Tuesday. Spiritual leaders, their advisers and members of the Christian-Islamic Dialogue Committee are expected to attend Tuesday's conference, which will be hosted by President Michel Sleiman.

"This summit aims at restoring dialogue between the different confessional leaders and religious figures in Lebanon," a source close to the Presidential Palace told The Daily Star.

Fiery speeches traded by various religious figures are believed to have fueled clashes between supporters of feuding political groups.

According to the source, some skepticism remains concerning the outcome of such a summit: "Others even question the purpose of holding the conference, as it seems useless amid the ongoing dangerous political divisions and the existing tensions that led to civil clashes between partisans to opposite groups."

Media reports on Monday said Sleiman first had the idea to organize the summit in the Presidential Palace as he thought it would be "a good idea to reunite all the Lebanese religious parties in a location that represents all the people."

Reports quoted Sleiman as saying that Baabda was also the right place to resolve internal disputes as well as the right place to "fight and condemn religious divisions and confessional extremism."

According to reports published on Monday, the president will be giving the summit's opening speech, where he will present his expectations from the meeting and his hopes of seeing the country get out of its extended political crisis.

The religious figures will then be able to discuss the main items on the agenda of the meeting, which will be compiled by the Christian-Islamic Dialogue Committee members.

Media reports have said the participants will reiterate the fact that the discussions and what may result from them "fully respect the Lebanese Constitution and the parliamentary democratic system."

Reports have said the religious figures will also show their support to the president by trying to discuss ways to free the Israeli-occupied areas of the South as well as the issue of Lebanese held prisoners in foreign countries, namely Syria and Israel.

The religious leaders are also expected to work on eliminating the obstacles delaying the formation of a new cabinet.

Another issue to be discussed is the internal use of weapons. Reports said that the dignitaries would voice condemnation of the use of arms and "forbid their use to solve internal political quarrels."

The summit will stress that security services and constitutional institutions should be "the sole authorities dealing with solving political skirmishes."

The attendees reportedly will also call on various media outlets to avoid bias, "which directly contributes to widening the country's division."

They also are expected to call on the media to keep away from all kinds of "fiery and violent speeches and promote the concept of national unity."

Finally, the religious leaders are expected to express thanks to all the "friendly Arab nations" who contributed to easing Lebanon's political deadlock and six months of a presidential vacuum by organizing the Doha summit which was a first step toward a solution.

According to several media reports on Monday, the issue of Hizbullah's weapons will not be discussed during the religious summit "since it is a delicate subject that would be better left for politicians to resolve." - The Daily Star

http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_id=1&categ_id=2&article_id=93447

Spiritual Summit Likely to Support Unity

A summit between Muslim and Christian religious leaders, under the auspices of President Michel Suleiman, began at Baabda Palace on Tuesday.

Lebanese spiritual leaders, their advisers and members of the Christian-Islamic Dialogue Committee attended the meeting which started at 11 am.

"This summit aims at restoring dialogue between the different confessional leaders and religious figures in Lebanon," The Daily Star quoted a source close to the Presidential Palace as saying.

Suleiman has reportedly called for the summit in an effort to reunite all Lebanese religious parties in the wake of the extended political crisis.

Use of arms as well as ways to free the Israeli-occupied areas of south Lebanon and the issue of Lebanese detainees held in foreign countries were reportedly on the summit agenda.

The participants were expected to condemn the use of arms and "forbid their use to settle internal political quarrels."

They are also expected to work on eliminating the obstacles facing the new cabinet line-up.

News reports said the summit will also stress that security services and constitutional institutions should be "the sole authorities dealing with solving political conflicts."

The summit is also likely to urge the various media outlets to avoid bias, "which directly contributes to widening the country's division."

It is expected to call on the media to avoid all kinds of "fiery and violent speeches and promote the concept of national unity."

Beirut, 24 Jun 08, 11:07

<http://www.naharnet.com/domino/tn/NewsDesk.nsf/0/92DB66F9396577D0C2257472003191BD?OpenDocument>

Muslim-Christian Summit in Baabda June 24

A summit of Christian and Muslim spiritual leaders is expected to take place at the presidential Palace in Baabda June 24 as part of the reconciliation process.

Meanwhile, President Michel Suleiman's political advisor Nazem Khoury was busy finalizing invitations to Lebanon's main Christian and Muslim religious leaders.

News reports said Khoury visited Grand Mufti Sheikh Mohammad Rashid Qabbani on Monday in order to invite him to the spiritual summit.

Beirut, 17 Jun 08, 12:02

<http://www.naharnet.com/domino/tn/newsdesk.nsf/0/D470BB83C32B6F2CC225746B003126DA?OpenDocument>
Live Coverage

Spiritual Summit in Baabda

1:33pm They urged all media outlets to refrain from agitation.

1:33pm They declared commitment to the national unity.

1:32 The statement declared commitment to the presidential oath address.

1:31pm The spiritual leaders urged all factions to facilitate the formation of the national unity government.

1:30pm the spiritual leaders urged all factions to cooperate with President Michel Suleiman in leading the nation to stability and prosperity.

1:29m They urged the various factions to settle their differences through the constitutional institutions.

1:27pm The spiritual leaders reiterated commitment to a ban on the use of weapons as outlined by the Doha Accord.

1:26pm they condemned radicalism and violence.

1:25pm The sopiritual leaders reiterated commitment to the state of Lebanon, its unity and democratic system.

1:24pm The spiritual leaders called their followers to adhere to their religions.

12:33pm Suleiman called for more political concessions, noting that the differences have reached the level of suicide.

12:30pm Lebanon's role is deteriorating in regional and international arenas, Suleiman warned.

12:25pm Suleiman said the summit is an opportunity to launch comprehensive national dialogue.

12:20pm President Suleiman delivers a speech.

12:15pm Spiritual summit begins in Baabda..

Tuesday, 24 June 2008

13:36 The final statement of the Spiritual Summit:The final statement of the Spiritual Summit

- This summit reiterates our commitment to the unity of the Lebanese people, land and institutions, as well as our commitment to keeping the democratic parliamentary system and spreading the state's authority over the whole country.
- The Spiritual Summit stresses on the respect of Lebanon's diversity, which is its distinctive mark, so that the country can remain a place for freedom and dialogue, and can hold on to the constitutional principles as agreed upon in the Taif Agreement.
- The Spiritual Summit condemns extremism and violence and reiterates the clauses of the Doha Agreement, especially its ban on the use of weapons or violence to achieve political gains.
- The Spiritual Summit calls for letting the Lebanese army and ISF preserve security and stability, which will also help Lebanon in its economic advancement.
- The Spiritual Summit calls on various factions to use constitutional institutions in order to solve their problems and to make the country's best interests their priority.
- The Spiritual Summit calls on all parties to cooperate with President Michel Sleiman to facilitate his mission in addressing the situation in the country; liberating occupied land; cementing security, stability and unity; and dealing with the economic crisis in cooperation with the parliament and the coming government, whose establishment we are calling for as soon as possible. Any delay in establishing the government will hamper the start of the new mandate.
- Sammak: The Spiritual Summit calls on all media outlets to stop their accusations, abuses and sectarian provocations, which contradict religious and moral values.
- The summit calls on all politicians to commit themselves to using high political and moral standards while speaking in order to prevent further political crises.

Mohammed Sammak, secretary general of the committee for Christian-Islamic dialogue, delivering the final statement of the Spiritual Summit:

13:17 Prime Minister Fouad Siniora and Speaker Nabih Berri have arrived at the Baabda presidential palace.

12:24 President Michel Sleiman from the spiritual summit in Baabda:President Michel Sleiman from the spiritual summit in Baabda

- President Sleiman: We are aware of the risks facing Lebanon after months of sectarian tensions on all levels.
- President Sleiman: The gathering today heals the wounds between the Lebanese and will make up a platform for a dialogue.
- President Sleiman: This gathering is a message to the Lebanese and whole world that our country is built on morals and values, and politicians must act accordingly.
- President Sleiman: This meeting is a national and human need because it is a model for dialogue between cultures and religions.
- President Sleiman: It is normal for spiritual leaders to have a prevailing presence in national concerns. The meeting today is a safety measure, and it is a confirmation of unity, not division.
- President Sleiman: As much as our society is solid and coherent, narrow policies fail to achieve their objectives.
- President Sleiman: We have to determine a starting point to begin healing wounds.
- President Sleiman: Today's gathering must be the launching pad for a national dialogue workshop aimed at cementing Lebanon's unity.
- President Sleiman: If one faction is suffering in Lebanon, the whole country suffers along with it.
- Disputes between the Lebanese have reached the level of suicide. Let us put aside disputes that serve the interests of the Israeli enemy.

- President Sleiman: Forming the government as soon as possible reflects the Lebanese aspiration for a better future, even if this requires making compromises before it's too late.

12:15 Religious summit begins in Baabda.

12:01 MP Samir Jisr to NTV:

- The problem in Tripoli dates back to the era of Syrian presence in Lebanon. We thought that this problem was over, but every time there is tension, violence breaks out. There is no excuse for this.
- It is not true that we were the ones to start the security problem. If we had a militia, nothing would have happened in Beirut. Our only choice and our only project is the Lebanese state.
- Security cannot be achieved on the basis of consensus and compromises, but must be imposed by the state.

11:34 The heads of various religious sects have started arriving at the Baabda presidential palace to participate in the spiritual summit.

10:48 An explosion was heard in the area separating Jabal Mohsen and Bab al-Tabbaneh, which could have been caused by unexploded ordinance left over from recent clashes in the region.

10:42 Kataeb leader Amin Gemayel to the Future News Channel:

- The most important thing is that none of the young men who were kidnapped in Sannine are harmed. The most dangerous thing is that there is a military station that doesn't belong to the Lebanese army at the peak of the mountain. There was a permanent base with a radio transmitter up there, which proves that certain groups are making contacts.
- Aggressing people in this way is dangerous, but what is more dangerous is the establishment of military base for surveillance. We don't think it is in a combat zone or has anything to do with the Arab-Israeli struggle.
- These bases help erode Lebanese sovereignty. Also, the committees that liaise with the Lebanese army remind us of a previous era.

10:13 MP Robert Ghanem to LBC Television:

- From a constitutional standpoint, a resigned government has a narrow margin of maneuvering and cannot commit itself to handling important laws, such as the electoral law.
- Reforming the electoral law requires the adoption of laws that will make the suggested committees the reference point, not the Interior Ministry.
- Speaker Nabih Berri can present the electoral law during a plenary session of the parliament. If he refers it to the Administration and Justice Commission, we will examine it.
- The problem is not whether the government is established or not. Even if the cabinet is formed, without a regional desire to reach a solution, we will face other problems, whether over the government's plan of action, resignations or something else.

09:14 MP Antoine Zahra to the Voice of Lebanon radio station:

- The electoral law cannot be partially adopted.
- The other party wants to achieve maximum gains to use in the upcoming legislative elections. I call on the Lebanese army to disarm all those who possess weapons in order to control things.

08:47 MP Boutros Harb to the Voice of Lebanon radio station:

Speaker Nabih Berri will not call for a session on adopting the electoral law, which cannot be passed quickly because it needs to be discussed thoroughly in order to improve the agreement and reassure the Christians over the divisions of some districts.

08:36 Youth and Sports Minister Ahmad Fattat to the Voice of Lebanon radio station:

- The developments in Lebanon require the Arabs to return in order to play a role in the implementation of the Doha Agreement. The formulas the opposition suggested over the establishment of the government are a preparation for another gradual escalation.
- MP Michel Aoun is driven by the opposition to make obstructionist demands.
- Mr. Nawwaf al-Moussawi's statement is a sign of the opposition's intention to either control key positions in the state or to obstruct progress.
- According to some articles of the constitution, no legislation can be adopted before putting it in front of the government. There is no permanent government right now; only a caretaker government with limited power. However, we will vote on the division of electoral districts as agreed upon in Doha when the issue is properly presented before the parliament.

