

Shatah Meets Rice as U.S. Reiterates its Commitment to Lebanon

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Finance Minister Mohammed Shatah has discussed with U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice Syrian-Lebanese ties, the situation in the region and Lebanon's economic reform program, An Nahar daily reported Wednesday.

The newspaper's Washington correspondent quoted well informed sources as saying American officials stressed to Shatah that U.S. support to a sovereign and independent Lebanon is an "institutional support" that will continue after the election of a new U.S. president.

They told Shatah, as they informed President Michel Suleiman during his visit to the U.S. last month, that there was unanimity in Congress and among Republicans and Democrats on continued support to Lebanon.

The sources also quoted the U.S. officials as saying economic and military aid programs reflect American commitment to Lebanon.

Earlier Tuesday, U.S. State Department Spokesman Sean McCormack said that Shatah was "in town for the World Bank/IMF meetings, and he's also a former ambassador to Washington from Lebanon and a close advisor to Prime Minister Saniora. So it's a good opportunity to talk about not only economics, but politics."

Rice "will talk to him about the Lebanese economic reform plan. She'll also talk to him about the political situation in the region, as well as in Lebanon," he said.

Lebanon's ambassador to Washington Antoine Shedid attended the talks between Rice and Shatah.

Meanwhile, An Nahar said that U.S. Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Eric Edelman will arrive in Lebanon in the next few days to hold talks with Lebanese leaders and military officials.

Edelman will also follow up on military and training issues that have been discussed between President Suleiman and Defense Secretary Robert Gates, according to the daily.

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