

Berri: Presidential election to take place on time

Contributed by The DailyStar
Friday, 03 August 2007

Despite the failure of efforts to break the country's political deadlock or find consensus in the heated Metn by-election, Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri said the presidential election would take place "on time." Berri was quoted Wednesday in the As-Safir newspaper as saying the presidential election would be held on September 25, "no matter what obstacles may show up along the way."

"The two-thirds majority is a must. Those thinking of electing a president based on a simple majority - let them try," he said.

Berri also reiterated the "importance" of forming a government of national unity as soon as possible before "time runs out."

A source close to Berri told The Daily Star that the speaker would be holding a series of meetings with major Lebanese leaders and might hold "an important press conference" later in the month.

Berri was also quoted as blaming the ruling majority for the failure of all of the recent regional and international initiatives that have tried to break the country's political impasse.

A second Arab initiative pushed by Arab League Secretary General Amr Moussa failed earlier this month to make any progress, with conflicting reports on whether Moussa will be coming back to Beirut later in August.

At the same time, the latest French initiative continues, with French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner vowing to carry on with his efforts to help Lebanon.

Kouchner said he would pursue efforts to "facilitate" an end to the political standoff even though pressure from Iran and Syria was "significant."

"We have to remain persistent, as inside Lebanon itself there is some sort of understanding between the various factions" on the need to end the crisis in spite of the pressure from external powers, Kouchner said in Paris late Tuesday.

"I'm without doubt referring to Syria and Iran," he said, adding that their influence "remains significant."

"We will continue to push forward, even though there are no guarantees that we are going to succeed," added Kouchner.

Kouchner was in Lebanon during the past weekend, when he held talks with rival leaders in a bid to revive the national dialogue among the feuding camps.

The French minister pointed out that there was little time left before the September 25 presidential election to elect a new head of state for Lebanon.

"The schedule is terribly busy. We have to hurry things up if we are to make any impact," Kouchner said, adding that Lebanon could slip back into war if a swift solution were not found to end the impasse.

Meanwhile, President Emile Lahoud thanked Iran for providing "all kinds of support" to Lebanon to help it overcome the aftermath of the summer 2006 war with Israel.

Lahoud made his statement after meeting with Iranian Ambassador to Lebanon Mohammad Rida Shibani, to whom he expressed his "satisfaction" with the bonds of friendship between Lebanon and Iran.

Shibani gave the president a letter from Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, in which Ahmadinejad paid homage to the Lebanese for their victory in last summer's war with Israel and expressed hopes for a more "stable Lebanon."

"Iran hopes to see a more stable and prosperous Lebanon. Lebanon has become an example for all the free people around the world," said the letter, according to a statement released by the presidential office on Wednesday.

Shibani told reporters after the meeting he believed the political deadlock could be broken.

"Iran is exerting all its efforts with regional and international forces to solve the crisis in Lebanon," he said. - The Daily Star, with agencies

Compiled by Daily Star staff
Thursday, August 02, 2007