

## Bush Warns Syria Again Over Lebanon Election

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U.S. President George Bush telephoned Prime Minister Fouad Saniora to offer him his support for presidential elections without Syrian interference, the White House announced.

Bush briefed Saniora about his meetings this week with German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Nicolas Sarkozy, White House spokeswoman Dana Perino told reporters aboard Air Force One.

"He reiterated his commitment to ensuring March 14 as the democratically elected government, and that they should be able to elect a government free of any external interference, especially from Syria," she said.

Saniora, MP Saad Hariri and other leaders accuse the Hizbullah-led pro-Syrian opposition of stalling a vote in parliament to elect a successor to President Emile Lahoud, who is also pro-Damascus and who stands down on November 24.

Speaker Nabih Berri on Saturday postponed until November 21, for a third time, a special session to elect a new president.

In his call to Saniora, Bush "reconfirmed our position that elections must happen on time and according to Lebanon's constitution," according to Perino.

"And he said that he looked forward to working closely with a president that is upholding Lebanon's international obligations," she said as Bush flew back from his Texas ranch to Washington.

March 14 Forces on Monday accused Hizbullah chief Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah of obstructing initiatives to resolve the crisis over the looming presidential election.

Ruling coalition members condemned a speech on Sunday by Nasrallah who called on President Lahoud to adopt a "salvation" measure before the end of his term in just under two weeks.

Lahoud has warned that if no consensus candidate is found for the top job, he may name a parallel government -- a reminder of the last years of Lebanon's 1975-1990 civil war when two competing administrations battled for control. (AFP-Naharnet)

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