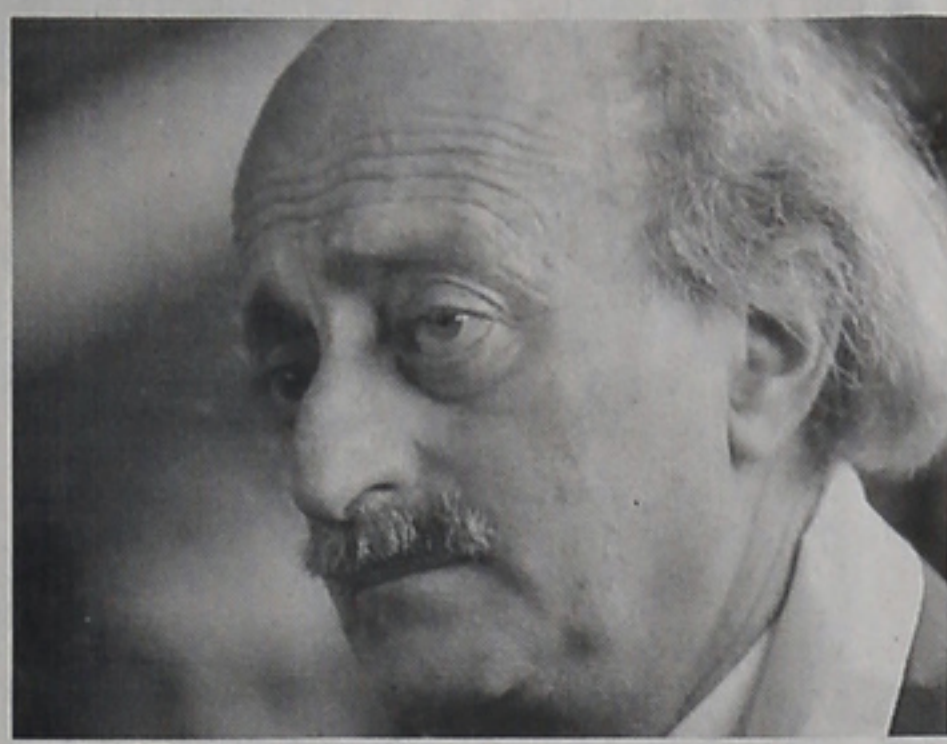


BRIEFS

Khaddam offers to defend Jumblatt in Syrian court



Former Syrian Vice-President Abdel Halim Khaddam has offered to act as Druze leader Walid Jumblatt's attorney in a case filed by the Syrian government against the Chouf MP. *Al-Mustaqbal* newspaper said Thursday. Khaddam made his proposal during a telephone conversation with Jumblatt, who answered that he had no objections. The case against the Druze leader falls under Article 298 of the Syrian penal code according to which such a crime is punishable by life imprisonment with hard labor. It is not clear how Khaddam, a defector who is now living in self-exile in Paris, would be able to act as Jumblatt's legal representative in a Syrian court case. Jumblatt has told *The Washington Post* that the United States should topple Bashar Assad's regime and bring the Syrian leader to trial before an internationally recognized tribunal. Similarly, Khaddam has called for the overthrow of the Assad regime prompting a Syrian military court to charge him with inciting a foreign attack against Syria and plotting to take power. — *Nahamet*

Fadlallah, Nassib Lahoud discuss national talks

Senior Shiite cleric Sayyed Mohammad Hussein Fadlallah met Thursday with former MP Nassib Lahoud at his residence in Haret Hreik. Speaking following the meeting, Lahoud said that his visit aimed at discussing Lebanese and Arab situations as well as the national dialogue and its expected outcome. "I hope that this dialogue will achieve accord on all pending issues," Lahoud said. He added: "I think that Lebanon is witnessing a crisis due to the presidential issue," adding that the country needs an activation of its economy through a "wise economic plan." He added: "I support the economic reform plan presented by Premier Fouad Siniora as long as it eases the Lebanese people's suffering." When asked if the March 14 Forces have agreed on a presidential candidate, Lahoud replied: "Not yet but I hope that they will in accordance with the other active forces in the country." As for the plot which targeted Hizbullah Secretary General Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, Lahoud voiced his "concern about any attempt to assassinate Nasrallah for he has an important Islamic, Arab and national position." He added: "I urge the government and authorities to consider this matter seriously for the attempt exposes the country's stability to danger."

Rizk informs Sfeir of Siniora's agenda in U.S.

Maronite Patriarch Nasrallah Butros Sfeir met Thursday with Justice Minister Charles Rizk and discussed the situation in Lebanon. Speaking following the meeting, Rizk said his visit aimed to "pass on good wishes to the prelate on the occasion of Easter and inform him of the agenda of the ministerial delegation that will head to the U.S. next week with Premier Fouad Siniora." Concerning the international tribunal to try the assassins of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, the minister said "the UN Security Council has charged the UN Secretary General with negotiating with Lebanese authorities the formation of that tribunal." He added: "When the negotiations between the two sides are done I can express my opinion about this issue." Rizk also said that the ministerial delegation will meet with Kofi Annan in New York to discuss the matter.

Nayla Tueni to restart Nahar youth foundation

Nayla Tueni, daughter of slain MP Gebran Tueni, announced Thursday the relaunching of the Nahar al-Shabab Association, which mainly aims at promoting the ideas of reconstruction and development among young Lebanese. In a news conference, Tueni, who will chair the association, said her father wished to revitalize the association because he believed that the Lebanese memory can build a united country. She explained that the association was first launched in May 1993 and played an exceptional role at the time as it voiced the concerns of the Lebanese youths. On the occasion, Education Minister Khaled Qabbani said the association will open the door for true democracy and a pioneer Arab project that will bridge many gaps in public life.

LF MP: Dialogue aims to curb Iran's regional goals

Lebanese Forces MP Antoine Zahra said Wednesday: "The national dialogue aims to keep Lebanon away from the regional strategy being conducted by Iran, which is trying to possess nuclear weapons." However, he added that Hizbullah's relation with Iran and Syria renders this mission "difficult to achieve." In an interview with ANB television, he also said: "I do not expect anything new regarding the Syrian position because until this moment Syria's behavior shows that it has not yet considered Lebanon as a free and independent country." Zahra said that MP Michel Aoun's positions before and during the dialogue "contribute to keeping President Emile Lahoud in power," adding that the Lebanese Forces will not act "outside the framework of the dialogue unless it reached an impasse." Meanwhile, Iranian Ambassador Massoud al-Idrissi paid a visit to Archbishop of Beirut Elias Aoude. Idrissi said: "Iran will definitely not produce nuclear weapons or weapons of mass destruction." He added that his country "fully supports the ongoing national dialogue and hopes it will achieve all the peaceful aspirations of the Lebanese people."

Fneich, Qabbani address electricity 'catastrophe'

Parliament's Water, Transport, Energy and Public Works Committee presided over by MP Mohammad Qabbani held a meeting on Thursday in the presence of Water and Energy Minister Mohammad Fneich. Speaking following the meeting, Qabbani said: "Since the committee considers the electricity problem as a national catastrophe, it urged the implementation of the law pertaining to the establishment of a committee that organizes the sector." He added: "The law also calls for the independence of the sector's three activities which are production, transportation and distribution as well as the move of the production and distribution activities to the private sector whereas the transportation remains possessed by the state." Qabbani further said that the sector is not yet "ready to provide the G7 with electricity for Ksara station will not be equipped before the end of 2006." The committee urged the government to implement the law "as soon as possible" adding that "the electricity file will remain open to continue the execution of the necessary steps."

ANNOUNCEMENT

The Directorate General of the Surete General calls on citizens, Arabs and foreigners, residing in Lebanon and who have submitted different applications in 2005 and earlier to visit the offices where they have presented the applications in order to recover them. The applications will be destroyed if the applicants fail to recover them.

'Don't do it again – ever'

NATIONAL FIGURES REFLECT ON DEVASTATION CAUSED BY CIVIL WAR

Karine Raad
Daily Star staff

BEIRUT: On the eve of the 31st anniversary of the Civil War, national religious and political officials issued calls for all Lebanese to learn from past experience by uniting to defend the country by embracing coexistence.

To mark the occasion, the head of the Democratic Gathering bloc in Parliament, MP Walid Jumblatt, "cordially" invited the resistance to join the Lebanese Army.

He argued that the full implementation of the Taif Accord would not be possible until the state enjoyed a monopoly on the use of armed force, spread its control to the southern border regions, and officially resolved to abide by the truce agreement with Israel of March 23, 1949.

In an interview with the *Al-Istihqaq* talkshow on the Hariri family's Future Television station, the outspoken lawmaker criticized "the unequal partnership in the country between independent liberal forces and pro-Syrian forces hampering the security, administrative and judicial designations."

Jumblatt called for the resistance to be integrated into the army and warned that the country's borders – especially in the Shebaa Farms area – had to be demarcated once and for all.

Lebanese Forces leader Samir Geagea noted that there are many ways to fight for a cause and reach the desired goal, reminding all Lebanese that war can only bring destruction.

In an interview with the same television station, Geagea stressed the importance of winning a war by political, economic and intellectual means.

He argued that changing the balance of power – by promoting political solutions and economic growth – would strengthen the positions of Arab countries on the international scene and therefore record a victory without having to resort to war.

Hamade: 'Serious dialogue could have provided solutions'

Geagea added that the current national dialogue had a chance to yield positive results, reiterating that war is not an option, except in the extreme case of self-defense – "like our status in 1975."

On April 13, 1975, unidentified gunmen killed four Phalangists during an attempt on the life of Phalange Party founder Pierre Gemayel.

Believing the assassins were Palestinians, the Phalangists retaliated later that day by attacking a bus carrying Palestinian passengers across Ain al-Roumaneh, in eastern Beirut, killing more than two dozen people.



A fighter takes aim at enemy forces during the war.



The infamous Ain al-Roumaneh bus attack was the spark that touched off the war.

Beirut, killing more than two dozen people.

The incident marked the beginning of a 15-year Civil War. Pierre Gemayel's son, former President Amin Gemayel, told Future that the year 1975 was not the beginning of the Civil War, arguing that the conflict had been simmering since 1969, when the Cairo Agreement was signed to reorganize the Palestinian presence in Lebanon.

Gemayel also related how the Syrian regime started to creep into Lebanon with the help of supporters and the intelligence apparatus.

He added that Lebanon did not want hostilities with Syria but rather cooperation to establish a relationship based on equality that would allow the consolidation of Lebanese sovereignty and independence.

Telecommunications Minister Marwan Hamade said the regional circumstances that influenced Lebanon in the early 1970s constituted "a climate marked by the left and right wings more than sectarianism."

"A serious and constructive dialogue," he argued, "could have provided Lebanon with solutions that would have helped the country overcome the regional obstacles without falling into the heart of the conflict."

"However," he added, "foreign forces, Arabs and non-Arabs – specifically Israel – did not stop pressuring Lebanon and using it as a bargaining chip, just like what is currently happening."

"This is why we are trying through dialogue to avoid falling into the heart of the conflict again," Hamade said on



The war made its own fashion statements.

the same program.

The National Liberal Party (NLP) called on the Lebanese to unite to help recover the country's sovereignty and freedom to make decisions, rebuild a state of rights and laws, and guarantee human rights.

In a statement, the NLP stressed that "cultural, religious and political diversity can be a source of power if a dialogue is held based on recognizing and

accepting the other and according to national principles and loyalty to the country."

Grand Mufti Sheikh Mohammed Rashid Qabbani cautioned against the corrosive effects of intolerance.

"We call on all Lebanese, both Christians and Muslims, to hang on to Lebanon, the model of coexistence ... and not to contribute in the loss of their country," Qabbani said.



Casualties included children, many of whom are still suffering.



Child soldiers were a particularly disturbing development.



Certain areas saw women join the fighting.



Even houses of warships became targets.



Many families mourned their loved ones as death knew no religion.

Mini-marathon marks hope that conflict stays in past

Leila Hatoum
Daily Star staff

BEIRUT: Under minimal security measures, several Lebanese citizens staged a mini-marathon "So the war will not return" to commemorate the 31st anniversary of the start of the Civil War in 1975.

The participants in the mini-marathon, mostly Lebanese Forces supporters, ran from Ain al-Roumaneh, the place where the war's earliest sparks ignited some 15 years of civil strife, and Downtown Beirut, where a statue of the war's martyrs depicts them with bullet holes and missing limbs caused by the vicious war.

The Lebanese Forces, a Christian party headed by Samir Geagea, was one of the main players during the war.

It was disbanded after 1990 and Geagea was imprisoned in 1994. The party later turned into an active political movement and Geagea was released from custody in 2005.

The commemorators, most of whom carried LF banners next to Lebanese flags, gathered at the base of the martyrs statue in Downtown Beirut, where they laid down rifles, symbolizing the end of the fight, and lit a torch.

Milad Antonious, a 43-year-old former LF fighter who has been disabled since being wounded in battle, participated in the mini-marathon in his wheelchair and later laid down his rifle as well.

'Our citizens were the ones who paid the heavy price'

On 13 April, 1975, Ain al-Roumaneh witnessed clashes between bodyguards of Phalange Party leader Pierre Gemayel and unidentified gunmen. The Phalangists, believing the assailants were Palestinians, responded by attacking a bus full

of Palestinian passengers. The war was on. The result was a vicious conflict pitting Christians against Muslims in Lebanon.

"I hope that the war never returns. All we got from it was destruction, sectarian conflicts and distrust between the citizens of the same country. We had to fight everyone's war on our land and our citizens were the ones who paid the heavy price," 54-year-old Abu Fadi told *The Daily Star*.

According to 26-year-old Mary Ammar, a resident of Ain al-Roumaneh, "the Lebanese are fed up with war. It is about time we stop the fight. We have to admit that even today people of different religious sects still feel awkward toward others from different sects."

She explained to *The Daily Star* that "until the Lebanese feel safe and trust each other, I don't think we will get out of the war mentality. But I truly believe that everyone is trying to do so because they are fed up with the killing."



Running for unity: "The Lebanese are fed up with war."