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SPECIAL REPORT

LEBANON UPRISING

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Spring in autumn

The lasting change from Lebanon's mass protests

Nour Square in Tripoli overflowing with protesters chanting in unison for the fall of the system and dancing to music spun by a live DJ. Men and women across the country have broken free of sectarian shackles, calling out the political class *en masse*. Street vendors selling *kaak* and corn on the cob in the streets of Downtown Beirut previously inaccessible to them in favor of high-end cafes and shops. Crowds of people dancing, chanting “*hela hela*,” “*kullon yani kullon*,” and the famous Arab Spring slogan of “*ash-sha’ab yurid iskat an-nizam*,” among others, or participating in public debates in “the Egg” and other reclaimed public spaces in Downtown Beirut. Countless Lebanese of all ages and backgrounds, and in regions all across the country fill up city squares and go on live television to voice their frustration and anger with an economic reality that was brought about by deep-rooted corruption and the entrenchment of the sectarian political order (see comment page 44). Protesters across the country began setting up roadblocks that were at times removed by the authorities only to be reformed, sometimes multiple times per day. The most striking example of which was the roadblock on the

Fouad Chehab bridge, known as the ring, which connects east and west Beirut, where protesters got creative, bringing sofas and fridges to block off the highway and on the 11th day of the protests posting the area on AirBnB as “*Beit el-sha’ab*,” which translates to “the people’s home.”

These are just some moments of the October uprising in Lebanon, at the time of writing in its 13th day, which is being described as the tipping point and a game changer for the country (see timeline of the first 13 days starting page 18). Those protesting—at one point media estimates put numbers at a quarter of the Lebanese population—succeeded in shutting down the country through blocking roads and organizing a general strike. Banks and schools have remained closed since the second day of the protests, despite some attempts to open the latter. A leaderless movement—an initial strength but as time goes on increasingly perceived as a weakness—those participating in mass protests have been united in their calls for the resignation of

the government, a technocratic government put in its place to address immediate economic concerns, the calling of new elections, a more proportional electoral law, and the overthrowing of the post-war sectarian system. Their first victory came just three days into the protests, with the resignation of the four Lebanese

■ Those participating in mass protests have been united in their calls for a technocratic government and new elections under a new law.

Forces ministers from the government. Ten days later, on the 13th day of protests, one marred by violence against protesters from Amal and Hezbollah supporters, Prime Minister Saad Hariri announced his resignation, and by extension, the resignation of his unity government. In the streets, the crowds chased away by the earlier violence returned and celebrated their victory, however, to these protesters the prime minister’s resignation was just one important step on a long path toward much needed reforms and fundamental change in Lebanon.



WHEN ENOUGH BECAME ENOUGH

Initial protests were sparked by local media reports on a series of proposed taxes that cabinet discussed in line with the 2020 budget. When it emerged that cabinet had agreed to impose a tax on Voice over Internet Protocol services, which would have resulted in a charge on the use of WhatsApp calls up to \$6 per month on top of by regional standards high phone bills (two to three times those of regional peers), this was seen as the straw that broke the camel's back. It was not, however, the underlying cause of this October uprising (see comment page 44), as was initially naively reported in both local and international media.

Our own coverage of the Lebanon economy over the past 20 years has shown time and again what needed to be addressed to prevent a looming economic crisis (see EXECUTIVE's 2019 Economic Roadmap). As we entered into this October, Lebanese had faced multiple gas station strikes and strikes from bakeries over difficulties that gas distributors and wheat importers had in securing dollars at the official rate to pay for imports. Fear over the potential dollar shortage was stoked by residents facing issues withdrawing dollars from ATMs and banks, trouble depositing Lebanese lira in dollar accounts, and increasingly higher unofficial exchange rates.

In the days leading up to the protest, Lebanese literally watched in horror as some of the worst wildfires in over a decade spread across the country aided by a heat-wave and high winds, with the Chouf and Metn areas particularly hard hit. Over two days, Lebanon lost at least 1,200 hectares of forest according to George Mitri, director of the land and natural resources program at the University of Balamand, who was cited in



several media reports. Added to the 1,300 hectares already lost this year, the annual average due to wildfires, Lebanon doubled its annual losses in the span of 48 hours. And while the Lebanese banded together to provide aid to those displaced, and food and water for the unpaid civil defense teams who fought the fires, it emerged that the country was in possession of three firefighting helicopters—donated by citizens who had raised millions of dollars for their purchase back in 2009—that the government had failed to maintain.

■ Across the country, the common call was for the downfall of the corrupt and inept regime. The Lebanese revolt had begun.

To add insult to injury, Free Patriotic Movement MP Mario Aoun came on a local TV station to question why these fires were targeting Christian areas—a statement as categorically untrue as it was moronic. It is against this backdrop that when it was announced that the cabinet had decided

on regressive tax measures, including the tax on WhatsApp, hundreds of people took to the streets. Across the country, the common call was for the downfall of the corrupt and inept regime. The Lebanese revolt had begun.

THE TIMES THEY ARE A CHANGIN'

The first line in the Tunisian poet Abu al-Qasm al-Shabbi's "The Will of Life" translates into, "If one day a people desires to live, then fate will answer their call." With the October uprising, it seems that the Lebanese people have loudly and clearly chosen life. Regardless of whether fate will answer their call or not, their desire to live has manifested itself in ways that cannot be taken away from them.

The most powerful outcome of the October protests is the breakdown of the barrier of fear across Lebanon that had prevented the people of Lebanon's various sects from openly questioning leaders. For the first time in recent memory, Lebanese from Tripoli to Sour—through Nabatieh, Saida, Batroun, Beirut, and others—were openly criticizing and cursing those in the government from Foreign Minister Gebran Bassil to Speaker Nabih Berri to Prime Minister Saad

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Hariri, and, following his first speech on the third day of protests where he backed the current government, even Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah. While protesters in Nabatieh and Sour were met with aggression by supporters of Amal and Hezbollah, the majority still persisted in their critiques and demands that the government resign.

The economic reality of the majority of Lebanese—the bottom 50 percent receive just 10 percent of the national income—has led to an unprecedented breakdown in the current

sectarian order. Across the country, and particularly outside the capital, Lebanese citizens decided that it was no longer acceptable for them to struggle to find work to support themselves and their families, while the politician they had blindly supported grew richer at their expense. Lebanese realized their roles in keeping these politicians in their chairs and entrusting them with the job of securing their basic rights as citizens. If the government does not deliver, then they, the people, have the power to hold them accountable—and so they did.

The resignation of Hariri's govern-

ment affirmed Lebanese people's newfound faith in their power to effect change in their country, and there is no turning back now. Even if the protesters do end up leaving the streets and opening roads, they now know they can go back down again and demand change when needed. The anger and the power that has been released

■ The resignation of Hariri's government affirmed Lebanese people's newfound faith in their power to effect change.

cannot be easily bottled up again.

Another rarely seen before outcome of the protests is the spontaneous unity among Lebanese across sects and social classes. The fact that an estimated 1 million people gathered across Lebanon on October 20, without any call from a political party or sect leader to do so, is truly heartwarming. Reciting both the *Fatihah* and the Rosary in Jal el-Dib is unprecedented. Public space has been reclaimed as a long soulless Downtown Beirut becomes the *balad* again, alive with street vendors, town hall-style debates—a place for all people to gather. In Martyr's Square

and Riad el-Solh, university students and intellectuals can be found alongside moped riders, coordinating on roadblocks. And while accusations that the protests have, over time, become more middle class are valid, there have still been important steps toward breaking down class barriers and shifting to more horizontal alliances. That sense of caution and fear that many Lebanese have of “the other”—whether that other is from a different sect or a different social background—has also been broken as the realization that we are all suffering from the same economic strains under the corrupt system becomes clearer. In Tripoli, long seen as a bastion of Sunni extremism, they chanted in solidarity with the protesters of Sour.

BREAKDOWN OF A PROTEST

While Lebanese of all ages are participating in the protests, they are largely sustained by the youth who did not live through the civil war and are thus less cautious and more optimistic than their parents' generation that change can be achieved without a descent into violence.

The role of women in October's uprising also needs to be highlighted. One of the most iconic images, taken on the first day of the protests, was of protester Malak Alaywe kicking one of Education Minister Akram Chehayeb's armed bodyguards in the groin. After the first two days, when protesters were met with tear gas and rubber bullets by the riot police in response to mild provocations from the crowd, day three saw women standing on the frontlines, creating a barrier between security forces and the male protesters to prevent the escalation of violence. Tripoli's Jana Jammal became another icon of the revolution when she spoke about being a university graduate unable to find a job without *wasta* and about her mother's healthcare issues. Across social media, other examples emerged. In Riad el-Solh and the public gardens in its

vicinity, women are leading debates on public spaces, anti-sectarianism, and the way forward after the protests.

The protests have affirmed that women and youth, both of whom are traditionally marginalized in Lebanon's patriarchal political system, are capable leaders.

WHEN THEY TRY TO FIGHT BACK

Mahatma Gandhi said, "First they ignore you, then they laugh at you, then they fight you, then you win." Lebanon's revolt has passed through these three stages and has secured its first major victory with the resignation of Hariri. What was striking throughout the past 13 days was the protesters' persistence and their insistence to persevere with their peaceful approach despite security forces forcing open roads and counter-revolutionary forces attacking them.

The political elite's response to these protests—until Hariri's resignation—was lacking. Hariri addressed the protesters on the second day, announcing a 72-hour deadline for the cabinet to agree on reforms. When these reforms were announced (see story page 41), they were met with general distrust from protesters. It took over a week for the president of the republic to address the crisis, doing so in a prerecorded and short statement that also failed to address demands. After an initial speech on day two, backing the government, Bassil—the subject of a lot of the protesters' ire—had stayed silent until after the 13 days. Most notably, after this first speech failed to have any impact on the streets, Nasrallah spoke again on the ninth day of the protests, alleging that what began as a spontaneous revolt was now being influenced by foreign embassies and local political parties, calling on the protesters to disclose their funders and for his own supporters to leave the streets. Social media posts declaring themselves the funders of the protests began to appear, along with



jokes of sandwiches supplied by different embassies.

In Sour and Nabatieh, protesters have been facing violence from the second day of the uprising. The protesters in Beirut were met with violence three times—the most recent of which was at the ring when thugs attacked protesters and journalists while chanting pro-Hezbollah and pro-Amal chants before the army was deployed to separate them. The same group headed to Downtown Beirut where in a matter of minutes they tore down the tents and infrastructure the protesters had built over days. Protesters did not take the bait. They persisted with their peaceful protesting, and once the security services had cleared the thugs out of Downtown began to rebuild their tents.

On roadblocks, protesters proved persistent and determined. When security forces would open one road, protesters would simply close it again. When rumors spread that security forces would reopen the streets at dawn, protesters slept on the streets to prevent that from happening, or abandoned their cars to block off highways. Road closures became a power struggle between the government and the peo-

ple, one that the people seemed determined to win.

Corruption is so deeply entrenched in Lebanon—starting from the public sector employee who asks for a bribe to complete a simple procedure to elected MPs stealing the people's money—that it is difficult to erode in a few months or even years. So while there may be short-term political gains from these protests, manifested in the formation of a technocrat

■ Corruption is so deeply entrenched in Lebanon that it is difficult to erode.

government and early parliamentary elections, a complete system overhaul is required—and when or whether that happens is uncertain.

Some economic changes may be immediately apparent following the protests, but real economic reform will take years. What can be said with certainty is that October's uprising has irreversibly changed Lebanese people's relation to themselves. It has led them to fall in love with their country again, and to know that they have the power to fight for it. This has regional implications that could be the start of a real spring. And that is something beautiful. ■



Lebanon erupts

The first 13 days



DAY 1 | THURSDAY, OCTOBER 17

PROTESTS ERUPT ACROSS THE COUNTRY

Protests begin in Downtown Beirut around 6 p.m., triggered by media reports earlier Thursday that cabinet had agreed on new taxes for the 2020 budget, including a tax on Voice over Internet Protocols (VoIP) that would have cost up to \$6 per month for those using WhatsApp calls or other VoIP apps.

Initially, a few hundred protesters march from Downtown to Hamra and back to Riad el-Solh. As the news spreads, their numbers swell into the thousands. Clashes between protesters and bodyguards of Minister of Education and Higher Education Akram Chehayeb break out in front of Bank Audi in Downtown, with the bodyguards firing shots into the air. The photo that becomes the first icon of the protests is taken as protester Malak Alaywe kicks one of Chehayeb's armed bodyguards in the groin.

Reports begin to come in of spontaneous protests breaking out across the country, from Tripoli in the

north to Sour in the south. Protesters burn tires, create bonfires, and block roads. Two Syrian migrant workers are killed after the Downtown Beirut building they are in is set alight. The government reverses their decision on the VoIP tax, but this response does not quell the protests. Progressive Socialist Party head Walid Jumblatt tells local media he would prefer to quit the government with Prime Minister Saad Hariri.

Protests continue until the early hours of Friday morning when security forces start firing tear gas and protesters move out of Riad el-Solh and Martyr's Square.

Protests and roadblocks in: Beirut (BCD), Tripoli (Tripoli), Saida (Saida), Zahle (Zahle, Chtaura, Taalabaya), Jbeil (Jbeil), Keserwan (Zouk Mosbeh), Baalbek (Baalbek), Sour (Sour), Nabatieh (Nabatieh el-Fauqa) *See note on page 25 for info*

DAY 2

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 18

PROTESTS SHUT DOWN LEBANON, HARIRI ANNOUNCES 72-HOUR DEADLINE FOR REFORMS

Just after midnight, the education minister orders all schools and universities to close Friday. Lebanese wake up to find roadblocks paralyzing movement across the country and all banks closed. The airport highway is blocked by protesters, and travelers hitch rides into the city on the back of scooters or in army trucks. Activists call for a general strike.

Both Jumblatt and Lebanese Forces leader Samir Geagea call on Hariri to resign. A cabinet meeting planned for the afternoon is canceled. Gebran Bassil, leader of the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) and foreign minister, speaks in advance of Hariri, says that the choice is chaos or reforms. Hariri speaks around 6:40 p.m. amid rumors circulating social media that he might resign. Instead he sets a 72-hour deadline for his political partners to convince him, the Lebanese, and the international community of reforms. Hariri warns that if there are no agreed upon reforms by the deadline he will take a different approach.

Protests continue to intensify across the country. In Tripoli, local media reports two dead and others are

wounded after bodyguards of former MP Misbah al-Ahdab shot into the crowd. Ahdab had tried to join the protests but had been pelted by water bottles from the crowd. In the south, there are chants, unprecedented in the region, calling Speaker Nabih Berri a thief.

Security forces clear Riad el-Solh much earlier than on the previous day, around 11 p.m. Copious amounts of tear gas are used in the square, with women, children, and peaceful protesters still there. Reports say that the Lebanese Army and Internal Security Forces (ISF) use force against protesters and arrest dozens. A concertina wire fence is put up blocking the Grand Serail from Riad el-Solh. It is announced that banks are to remain closed Saturday.

Protests and roadblocks in: Beirut (BCD), Tripoli (Tripoli), Metn (*Daoura, Sin el-Fil*), Zahle (Chtaura, Zahle), Jbeil (Jbeil), Keserwan (*Aaqaybe Keserwan, Zouk Mosbeh*), Saida (Saida), Baalbek (Baalbek, *Britel, Rayak*), Nabatieh (Nabatieh el-Fauouqa), Aley (*Bhamdoun el-Mhatta, Masnaa*), Shouf (*Jiyeh*)

DAY 3

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 19

PROTESTS CONTINUE TO GROW, WITH VIOLENCE IN SOUR; NASRALLAH BACKS CABINET

Early Saturday morning, protesters head to Downtown Beirut to clean up damage caused by rioting the evening before. Reports come in that armed Amal supporters are violently attacking protesters in Sour, in response to anti-Berri chants and protests at the office of two Amal MPs. Al-Jadeed TV receives direct threats. In Tripoli, protesters begin chanting in solidarity with protesters down south.

Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nashrallah addresses his followers and those out protesting. He warns against the resignation of the government and says that reforms must be made by the current government as Lebanon cannot afford the time to form a new one. He also says if Hezbollah were to join the protests they would be forced to stay until all their demands are met. Responding to his speech, protesters in Riad el-Solh begin chanting, "All of them means all of them, and Nasrallah is one of them."

Lebanese Forces announces the resignation of its

four ministers, marking the first tangible success of protesters' demands.

In Beirut, the atmosphere of protests shifts as families increasingly join in the crowd, tents and food stands are set up in Martyr's Square, and DJs play techno sets.

Protests and roadblocks in: Beirut (BCD), Tripoli (Tripoli, *Mina*), Metn (Daoura, Sin el-Fil, *Jal el-Dib*), Saida (Saida, *Zahrani*), Jbeil (Jbeil), Keserwan (*Adonis Keserwan*), Sour (Sour), Nabatieh (Nabatieh el-Fauouqa, *Nabatieh el-Tahta, Habbouche, Kfar Roummane*), Aley (*Khaldeh, Aramoun, Bchamoun, Qubbat Choueifat, Kahaleh*), Shouf (*Deir el-Qamar, Jiyeh, Katermaya*), Zahle (Chtaura), Batroun (*Batroun, Chekka, Hamat*), Akkar (*Halba*), Marjaayoun (*Marjaayoun*), Zgharta (*Zgharta*), Baabda (*Ouzai, Chiyeh*), Koura (*Kousba, Anfeh, Dahr al-Ain, Kfar Hazir, Amioun*), Hasbaya (*Hasbaya*), Hermel (*Hermel*)



DAY 4

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 20

HUGE TURNOUT FOR PROTESTS AS MORE FAMILIES HEAD TO THE STREETS

Hundreds of thousands of protesters across the country express their will and frustration on the streets and major squares in various cities; some media estimates put the overall number at close to 1 million. This is the largest day so far for these protests, which maintain a national, non-sectarian character—only Lebanese flags are waved.

Some of the largest crowds, found in Martyr's Square and Riad el-Solh, are compared to the March 2005 protests in which protesters called for the end of Syrian presence in Lebanon. In Tripoli, thousands flock to Nour Square, where Lebanese singer Marcel Khalife joins protesters in singing some of his songs. Buses transport protesters from the Bekaa to Beirut. In Jal el-Dib, hundreds

of protesters begin to gather on the main highway and the overpass, with the crowd swelling throughout the day.

Roadblocks are maintained across the country.

Protests and roadblocks in: Beirut (BCD, Ashrafieh), Tripoli (Tripoli), Metn (Jal el-Dib), Saida (*Maghdousheh*, Saida, Zahrani), Zahle (Zahle, Rayak), Keserwan (Adonis Keserwan, *Ghazir*), Baalbek (Nabi Osamane), Sour (Sour, *Abbassieh*), Nabatieh (Kfar Roummame, Nabatieh el-Tahta), Shouf (Jiyeh, Deir el-Qamar, *Baakline*, *Kfar Him*), Batroun (Chekka), Akkar (Halba, *Zouk el-Hosniye*), Marjaayoun (*Deir Mimas*), Koura (Kousba, Kfar Hazir, *Bsarma*, *Kfar Aaqqa*), Minieh-Danieh (*Beddawi*)

DAY 5

MONDAY, OCTOBER 21

HARIRI ANNOUNCES REFORMS, PROTESTS AND ROADBLOCKS CONTINUE

The first day of reckoning for the political establishment arrives, as Hariri's 72-hour deadline draws to a close. Early in the morning, protesters once again return to Downtown Beirut to clean up from the night before. Protests throughout the weekend had drawn large crowds, but numbers in Beirut on Monday do not pick up until after 5 p.m., in spite of renewed calls for a general strike. Access to Beirut via main highways is severely restricted as roadblocks continue.

Around 3 p.m., Hariri announces a list of 17 reforms approved by cabinet that propose to cut the deficit and expedite long overdue administrative reforms without increasing taxes on the people (for details see story page 41). Protesters, who had called for Hariri's resignation, are unconvinced, and demonstrations swell in size across Lebanon following Hariri's speech.

In the evening, a convoy of men on mopeds carrying Amal and Hezbollah flags make their way toward Downtown but are prevented from reaching the protests by the Lebanese Army. Both Amal and Hezbollah later deny having any involvement.

Protests and roadblocks in: Beirut (BCD, *Saifi*), Tripoli (Tripoli), Metn (Sin el-Fil, Jal el-Dib), Saida (*Ghaziyeh*, Saida, Zahrani), Zahle (Rayak, *Zahle el-Midan*), Jbeil (Jbeil), Keserwan (Jeita, *Achkout*, Zouk Mosbeh, Bouar), Baalbek (*Douris*), Nabatieh (Kfar Roummame, Habbouche), Aley (*Choueifat Qubbat*, *Bchamoun*, Aramoun), Shouf (Jiyeh), Batroun (Chekka, Batroun), Akkar (Halba), Marjaayoun (Deir Mimas, Marjaayoun), Zgharta (Zghorta), Baabda (Bir Hassan), Koura (Kfar Hazir, *Enfe*), Hasbaniya (Hasbaniya), Rachaya (*Rachaya el-Wadi*, *Deir el-Ahmar*), Minieh-Dinieh (*Minieh*)

DAY 6

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 22

SLOW START BUT PROTESTS PICK UP, TELE LIBAN STORMED, NNA HEAD FIRED

Protests are slow to start, but pick up in the evening as people got off work and hit the streets. As the day goes on, hundreds block the street facing Banque du Liban (BDL), Lebanon's central bank, chanting that Central Bank Governor Riad Salameh is a thief; similar protests are staged in front of Tripoli's central bank branch. A group of actors and artists storm the Tele Liban building, saying the station had failed to cover the demonstrations.

The National News Agency (NNA) Director Laure Sleiman, who headed the NNA for 11 years, is dismissed. Minister of Information Jamal Jarrah appoints Ziad Harfoush as the new director of the NNA.

The Ministry of Information, which the NNA falls under, is set to be abolished per Hariri's basket of reforms.

Protests and roadblocks in: Beirut (BCD, *Mazraa*, Hamra), Tripoli (Tripoli), Metn (Jal el-Dib, Dbayeh), Saida (Saida), Zahle (Zahle el-Midan, Masnaa), Keserwan (*Nahr el-Kalb*, *Jounieh*, Ghazir, *Safra*, Zouq Mkayel, *Aachqout*, Jeita), Nabatieh (Kfar Roummame), Aley (Aley, Bhamdoun el-Mhatta, Sofar, Bhamdoun), Shouf (Jiyeh, *Barja*, *Naame*, *Aalma el-Shouf*), Batroun (Batroun, Chekka), Akkar (Halba), Koura (Majdel Koura, Enfe, Kousba), Sour (Sour), Hermel (Hermel), Minieh-Dinieh (Beddawi, Minieh)

DAY 7

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 23

PROTESTS IN NABATIEH TURN VIOLENT

As their first week draws to its close, protests do not abate, and in Nabatieh turn violent, leaving 15 injured; one is taken to the intensive care unit. Amal denies any involvement in the clashes. In Beirut, protests in front of the central bank continue.

Separately, Mount Lebanon State Prosecutor Ghada Aoun files an "illegitimate enrichment through subsidized housing loans" lawsuit against Bank Audi and former Prime Minister Najib Mikati, his son Maher, and his nephew Azmi, saying that she had the file prepared beforehand and that this move was not politically motivated. Mikati and Bank Audi deny "illegitimate enrichment" allegations against them.

Meanwhile, Hariri meets with Salameh over the financial and economic situation. Hariri also chairs a meeting of the ministerial committee in charge

of financial and economic reforms. The committee studies a draft law on the recovery of looted public money and decides to request suggestions on this matter from the Supreme Judicial Council within a period of 10 days, NNA reported.

Protests and roadblocks in: Beirut (BCD, Hamra, Ashrafieh), Metn (Sin el-Fil, Dbayeh, Jal el-Dib), Saida (Saida), Zahle (Zahle), Jbeil (Jbeil), Keserwan (Jounieh Kaslik, Jeita, *Nahr el-Kalb*, Bouar, *Safra*, *Aachqout*, Zouk Mikayel), Baalbek (Baalbek), Sour (Sour), Nabatieh (Habbouch), Aley (Aley, Bhamdoun al-Dayaa, Bhamoun, Choueifat, Khalde), Shouf (Naame, Jiyeh, Bhamdoun), Batroun (Heri, Chekka), Akkar (Halba), Zgharta (Zgharta), Baabda (Furn el-Shebbak), Koura (Kousba, Enfe, Kfar Hazir), Hermel (Hermel), Minieh-Dinieh (Minieh, Kharroub)



DAY 8 | THURSDAY, OCTOBER 24 AOUN ADDRESSES THE NATION

Having been silent for the first week of protests, President Michel Aoun addresses the nation, announcing that he will hold everyone who embezzled public funds accountable and that economic reform will save Lebanon. He also says that he is ready for “constructive dialogue” with representatives from the protest movement, which remains leaderless. His speech, which was pre-recorded, falls on deaf ears as protesters continue to occupy the streets. Key thoroughfares in and outside of Beirut remain closed, despite some scuffles between the army and protesters as the former attempts to reopen them. Videos of soldiers crying in Jal el-Dib circulate on social media.

In Riad el-Solh, six protesters are taken to the hospital following clashes between members of a pro-Hezbollah group and anti-government protesters, according to the Lebanese Red Cross.

The Association of Lebanese Banks (ABL) announces that banks will reopen as soon as the situ-

ation stabilizes. Schools and universities remain closed; some professors teach classes in public spaces.

Following the Wednesday clashes between protesters and Nabatieh municipal police, five members of the Nabatieh Municipal Council announce their resignation. One member, Abbas Wehbi, says in a statement that he is against the “inhumane treatment of protesters.”

Protests and roadblocks in: Beirut (BCD, Ashrafieh, Mazraa, Ras el-Nabaa, Hamra, Ain el-Tineh), Tripoli (Tripoli), Saida (Saida), Metn (Jal el-Dib, Mkalles, Dbayeh), Zahle (*Bar Elias, Saadneyel, Jdita*), Keserwan (Zouk Mosbeh, Ghazir, Safra, Aqaybeh, Bouar), Sour (Sour), Nabatieh (Nabatieh el-Fauouqa, Habboush), Aley (Sofar, *Mansourieh, Khalde*), Shouf (Barja, Jiye, Kfar Him, *Beittdine*, Naame), Batroun (Batroun), Baabda (Furn el-Chebbak, *Abadiyeh*, Dahr el-Biadar), Minieh-Dinieh (Beddawi, Minieh)

DAY 9 | FRIDAY, OCTOBER 25 NASRALLAH SPEAKS FOR A SECOND TIME, QUESTIONS PROTESTERS' MOTIVES

As protests continue across the country, Nasrallah speaks again, saying he refuses to accept the resignation of the government. In his speech, Nasrallah warns the country of a civil war and claims his intelligence services found evidence that the protests were being orchestrated and funded by certain embassies with hidden agendas.

Hariri meets with Aoun and tweets: “I called the president of the republic and welcomed his call for the need to reconsider the current government situation through the constitutional mechanisms.”

Nasrallah calls for roads to be unblocked, but protesters are not swayed and remain in the streets despite aggression from Hezbollah supporters in areas including Sour, Nabatieh, and Riad el-Solh prior to Nasrallah's speech. Chants in Hermel in the north demonstrate solidarity with their fellow Lebanese in the south. Meanwhile, supporters of FPM chief Bassil and President Aoun gather in Batroun amid army and security forces' deployment and call for restoration of looted public funds. In Al-Fakiha in Lebanon's

east, protesters square off with Hezbollah supporters before riot police intervene.

Boxes are set up by civil society groups and some media outlets at protest sights for people to write down their demands. The Standard & Poor's ratings agency puts Lebanon on “Credit-Watch negative” warning that decline in foreign currency inflows “could exacerbate fiscal and monetary pressures.”

Protests and roadblocks in: Beirut (Ashrafieh, BCD, Hamra, Saifi), Metn (Jal el-Dib), Mazraat Yachouh, Saida (Saida, Ez Zahrani), Zahle (Zahle, Bar Elias, Saadnayel, Jdita), Keserwan (Zouq Mkayel, Safra, Bouar), Baalbek (Douris), Sour (Sour), Akkar (Halba), Nabatieh (Habbouch, Kfar Roummene, Nabatieh el-Fauouqa), Aley (Choueifat, Aley, Khalde, Aramoun), Shouf (Jiyeh, Naame, Barja, *Sibline*), Batroun (Batroun, Chekka), Zgharta (Zgharta), Baabda (Furn el-Chebbak, Dahr el-Baidar, Abadiyeh), Minieh-Dinieh (Minieh, Beddawi).

DAY 10

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 26

CLASHES AS SECURITY FORCES RESOLVE TO REOPEN ROADS

Following a meeting of security heads at the Army Headquarters in Yarze, security forces attempt to clear blocked roads on the 10th day of the uprising, leading to a clash between protesters and the ISF at the Fouad Chehab bridge, known as the ring, as well as another clash with the army in Minieh-Dinie's Beddawi street, which ends with around 10 injured protesters. Both roads are reblocked following the clashes. The army withdraws from the highway connecting Saida and Sour, after negotiating with the protesters. The army also attempts to open roads at the Chevrolet area in the southeastern suburbs of Beirut. The road is opened for three hours before protesters block it again. Key roads connecting Beirut to the north, south, and east of Lebanon are also successfully reblocked by protesters, with the exception of the main highway leading to the south of Lebanon that is reopened by the army.

Following up on the president's address, the FPM issues a statement that all ministers and parliamentarians of the party will lift banking secrecy on their accounts.

The Association of Banks in Lebanon announces that banks will remain closed on Monday, the ninth day of closure.

Protests and roadblocks in: Beirut (Ashrafieh, BCD), Tripoli (Tripoli), Metn (Jal el-dib, Jdaide), Saida (Saida), Zahle (Qabb Elias, Jdita), Jbeil (Jbeil), Kasrouane (Bouar, Aaqaybe, Ghazir, Zouq Mkayel, Safra), Baalbek (Baalbek, *Qaa*), Sour (Sour), Akkar (*Abde*, Halba), Aley (Choueifat, Khalde, Sofar, Bhamdoun, Aley), Shouf (Jiye, Barja, Naame), Batroun (Batroun), Zgharta (Miryata), Koura (Dahr el-Ain, Kfar Hazir, *Bziza*), Minieh-Dinie (Beddawi).

DAY 11

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 27

LEBANESE FORM A HUMAN CHAIN ACROSS THE COUNTRY

A 171-kilometer "Lebanese Human Chain" is formed across the country, from north to south, by tens of thousands of Lebanese in an expressed manifestation of national unity. By around 3 p.m., the chain is complete, and despite some gaps, pictures of a *manoushe* that made it from north to south circulate on social media. Protesters move toward the public squares in Beirut, Tripoli, Saida, Sour, Nabatieh, Jal el-Dib, and Zouk Mosbeh, as well as in the Bekaa Valley and other areas across the country. Hundreds of Lebanese diaspora gather in cities like Sydney, London, and Montreal to show solidarity with the uprisings in their home areas.

Sunday evening sees the closure of the ring again, this time with protesters bringing in couches, rugs, a refrigerator, and a desk to set up camp.

Lebanon's Public Prosecutor Judge Ghassan Ouiedat issues an order banning traders and money exchangers from transporting significant amounts of dollars across borders out of Lebanon.

Protests and roadblocks in: Beirut (Ashrafieh, BCD, Hamra, *Corniche el-Nahr*), Tripoli (Tripoli), Metn (Jal el-Dib, Dbayeh, Sin el-Fil), Saida (Saida), Zahle (Jdita), Jbeil (Jbeil, *Nahr Ibrahim*), Keserwan (Safra, Ghazir, Aaqaybe, Zouq Mkayel, Nahr el-Kalb, Jounieh Kaslik), Nabatieh (Kfar Roummene), Aley (Aley), Shouf (Barja, Naame), Batroun (Batroun, Chekka, Kfar Aabida), Akkar (Halba, Abde), Baabda (*Tahouita*, Aabadiye), Koura (Kfar Hazir, Kfar Aaqqa), Hasbaiya (Hasbaiya), Minieh-Dinie (Beddawi), Jezzine (*Aarqoub*), Bint Jbeil (*Bint Jbeil*).



DAY 12

MONDAY, OCTOBER 28

RAIN DOESN'T QUELL PROTESTS, JAL EL-DIB HIGHWAY BLOCKED BY CARS

With storms across Lebanon, protest turnouts are smaller than they had been previously when weather conditions had been mostly sunny, however, significant numbers are still out braving the storm. In Riad el-Solh, a group of protesters in ponchos dance the *dabke* in the downpour. A small group of protesters crosses the barrier of barbed wire that separates Riad el-Solh from the Grand Serail; they quickly return to the main square.

Riot police are more heavily deployed to the area, and more protesters show up in the square later in the day.

Roads throughout the country remain blocked with cars, tires, and protesters holding intersections. An image circulated on social media and in WhatsApp groups encouraging people to use their cars

to block roads after increased efforts from security forces to keep them open. The furniture blockade on the ring continues, with protesters diverting traffic toward Ashrafieh off the bridge. Police presence remains heavy in Downtown.

The lift on banking secrecy of FPM ministers and MPs is implemented.

Protests and roadblocks in: Beirut (Hamra, BCD, Saifi, Ashrafieh), Tripoli (Tripoli), Metn (Jal el-Dib, Dbayeh), Saida (Saida), Zahle (Saadnayel, Zahle), Keserwan (Zouk Mosbeh, Ghazir), Baalbek (Baalbek), Nabatieh (Nabatieh), Aley (Khalde), Shouf (Jiyeh, Naameh, Deir el-Qamar), Batroun (Chekka, Batroun), Akkar (Halba), Baabda (Furn el-Chebbak), Koura (Kfar Hazir), Minieh-Dennieh (Minieh).

DAY 13

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 29

HARIRI RESIGNS "IN RESPONSE TO THE WILL AND DEMAND OF THE THOUSANDS OF LEBANESE DEMANDING CHANGE;" VIOLENCE ON THE RING AND IN DOWNTOWN

The prime minister's office of announces that Hariri will deliver a statement at 4 pm. An hour ahead of the address, Hezbollah and Amal affiliates incite unprovoked violent clashes against protesters. Their aggressions target foreign and local journalists and camera crews. Journalists and photographers covering the events say that riot police and army intervened only with delay to separate the attackers and protesters. The group of attackers, shouting slogans that identify them as Hezbollah and Amal supporters, moves on to Riad el-Solh and Martyr's Square, attacking people with sticks and pipes and destroying the tents and infrastructure that protesters had set up, while security forces watch but do not intervene. When police and military later establish commanding presence and disperse the anti-protest group under use of tear gas, protesters return to clean up tents, and one group sets up a table to hand out food to those working to rebuild the protest camp.

Just after 4 p.m., nearly two weeks into protests that have gripped the entire nation, Hariri announces his resignation in a live address; under the Lebanese constitution this means the resignation of the entire cabi-

net. He quotes his father, the late Prime Minister Rafik Hariri by saying, "No one is above his nation." Afterwards he heads to Baabda Place and hands his written resignation to President Aoun, who accepts and the next day issues a decree to keep the government on in a caretaker capacity until a new government is formed. Under the constitution, parliamentary consultations are to be held to nominate a new prime minister, who will then be responsible for forming a new cabinet. Protesters have called in the past two weeks for a cabinet of technocrats and are seeking early elections under a new, nonsectarian electoral law that they say should be held within six months.

Protests and roadblocks in: Beirut (BCD, Ashrafieh, Hamra), Tripoli (Tripoli, *Bahsas*), Saida (Saida), Zahle (Zahle, Qab Elias, Jdita, Saadnayel), Jbeil (Jbeil), Keserwan (Ghazir, Bouar, Aaqaybe Keserwan, Safra, Zouk Mkayel), Sour (Sour), Aley (Sofar, Aley, Khalde, Mansourieh), Shouf (Barja, *Sirjba*, Naame), Batroun (Batroun), Baabda (Tahwita, Aabadiye, *Chouit*, *Cite Sportive*), Koura (Kfar Hazir), Minieh-Dinieh (Minieh, Beddawi).



*Protests and roadblocks list is structured by caza, and the locations in caza are shown in brackets. Locations in italics indicate first protest in a city from day two. Source of data: Lebanon Support.



Mapping the best of Lebanon

WHAT IS ZAWARIB?

Fifteen years after compiling & publishing the first - and still the only - detailed street atlas for the Greater Beirut area, Zawarib has become synonymous with discovering, mapping & guidance and dissemination of information; from data sourcing to visualization & infographics.

Over the years, we have worked extensively with the Prime Minister's office and the Ministry of Tourism on improving and promoting, both domestically and internationally our fantastic heritage and the wonderful endeavours of our burgeoning private sector. From Tripoli & Amioun to Saida & Qana, we have partnered with local authorities in all regions of the country to promote the local economy by improving information on what, why & where there is on the ground via better signage, panels, maps, pamphlets and guides both, in print and online, to create a wholesome, pleasant and memorable experience for the visitor.

WE ARE BEIRUT

At our core though, we remain huge fans of mapping Beirut and all the places that contribute to its brilliance. We work in close collaboration with incredible unique independent businesses to offer visitors and residents of the city insightful information allowing them to explore the best of Beirut's local hangouts, hidden treasures, cultural scene & contemporary life.

Our carefully chosen list of places, and the people behind them, is reflecting the contemporary identity of the city. These places are members of Zawarib, a network of progressive, professional places, varying in their product or service, but with a common style and identity at the core of their mission. We continue to gather the most unique special Beirut gems to celebrate, elevate, and highlight the magic of Beirut to our growing audience, and offer regular b2b opportunities to our network of members. Together, we are putting Beirut on the map! And tourism figures have never been better!

OUR PRODUCT

Beirut - the city of contrast and contradiction, beaming with colour and buzzing with life, oozing with eclectic sounds and spilling with seductive scents - is now more accessible than ever. Our pocket-sized publication filled with marvellous facts is the predominant platform. It is distributed throughout the year with free copies of the booklet available at more than 400 points of distribution in Beirut & beyond as we have not stopped to print 100,000 booklets per year for the 9th year consecutively, freely available at our members' and partners' locations and events. Our street-side map panels are used by pedestrians to navigate around Beirut's neighborhoods, with our chosen places clearly displayed.

We have recently created mood maps on our web-based app- pick a vibe on our website here to get to one of our members. Our bi-monthly newsletter is receiving new subscribers every day - have you subscribed yet? Our social media channels have regular posts about our network and their news and events; Facebook, Instagram. We have maintained strong media partnerships with local and international agencies whereby we contribute editorial content to their publications and channels about the city and our members.

International NGOs and foreign governments are amongst our sponsors and members. Many of the projects are funded through them, and they are avid users of our products and services - in particular the Goethe Institute, Search for Common Ground, the UK Government and Brasilban Cultural Centre. Equally, some of the top names in the private and semi-private sectors are our partners and sponsors; From AUB to LazyB and Sursock to Solidere. We have partnered with all of the foreign embassies, cultural centres, museums and hotels and most of the regular events in the country covering sports, music, art, design, food, film and drink. We hand pick our members from all industry groups; from fashion designers to wine producers, art galleries to nightclubs... so if you believe your business is of interest to our growing audience, and you'd like to jump on board this upcoming year, please get in touch NOW and we will proceed from there.

Here's to smashing moments together in the year 2020.



UPRI



SING



Sunday's protest was the largest gathering in downtown since February 2005.

*Protesters setting fire in
downtown on Thursday
October 17 on the first day
of the revolts.*



*Demonstrations continued on
October 18 with protestors
closing roads in downtown.*





Protestors in Jal el-Dib blocked the highway on both sides and the Lebanese Army was deployed to open the road but was unsuccessful.



Protests in Riad el-Solh had some aspects on an open air carnival with street vendors and dancing in public squares.

*Remains from a vitrine which
protests broke on the first day
of the manifestations.*





Lebanese formed a human chain from Tripoli to Sour on Sunday 27 October (Source AFP).



Protesters singing the national anthem in Martyr's Square.



An elderly protestor being rescued by his fellow activists after being attacked on Fouad Chehab bridge on October 20.



Security forces attempt to contain the violence in Martyr's Square.



Protester in Riad el-Solh surveys the damage done by Hezbollah and Amal supporters who destroyed tents in the area.



Protesters refuse to be intimidated and instead make a sculpture out of the ruined tents and continue their demonstrations.

Mapping mobilization across Lebanon



Collective actions in Lebanon from November 2017 to October 25, 2019

The infographic on page 38 is based on data from the Map of Collective Actions that tracks mobilizations by groups of people across Lebanon whose goal is to achieve a common objective. The map is a project by Lebanon Support, a local non-profit research center for and about civil society.

This visual looks into the build-up of mobilizations from November 2017 (when data collection started) until October 25, highlighting the focus of protests on access to socio-economic rights (mobilizations related to a lack of protection and rights, inefficiency of the justice system, and persisting social and economic vulnerabilities) over the years and leading up to the October demands for change.

The infographic shows that these ongoing nationwide protests are not new—various groups have been mobilizing for years, notably around social and economic demands. This year, up until October 16, 200 collective actions were mapped; there were 188 in 2018 and 96 in 2017. The main demands, across all three years, were focused on wages and the salary scale, the new rent law, and increasing prices and inflation—illustrating the socioeconomic difficulties faced by the people. Of the collective actions mapped this year, 89 percent (508 collective actions) were linked to access to socioeconomic rights. Collective actions linked to socioeconomic grievances have increased steadily and exponentially from 2017

until October 25 this year (the cut-off point for the infographic). The October 17 to 25 period highlighted below saw a sudden peak in collective actions seeking radical change on the level of society or the political system.

The 308 collective actions mapped between October 17 and 25 are all linked to socioeconomic grievances and policy grievances (mobilizations around political decisions on matters of public concern), and constitute 60 percent of the total number of collective actions mapped since the beginning of the year. Bearing in mind that protesters often employed more than one mode of action during the same mobilization, the main modes of action in this period consisted of: roadblocks (76 percent), tire burning

(68 percent), demonstrations (60 percent), and sit-ins (38 percent).

Observing and mapping collective actions over a longer period allows Lebanon Support to deconstruct generalizations in the media, academia, and elsewhere on Lebanon's social mobilizations and show that people in Lebanon are continuously mobilizing, using various modes of action, and in response to a diversity of grievances not merely limited to partisan and/or confessional affiliations.

Based on Lebanon Support's ongoing monitoring of collective actions, this infographic contributes to show the accumulation of successive movements over time, thus steering away from normative and linear perspectives on these mobilizations and predictions or expectations on

■ This latest mobilization has contributed to breaking the boundaries of fear and patronage relations with sectarian and political leaders, notably outside of Beirut.

the outcomes of protests. So far, one of the main outcomes and breakthroughs of this latest mobilization is that it has contributed to breaking the boundaries of fear and clientelistic and patronage relations with traditional sectarian and political leaders, notably outside of the capital (in Tripoli and Sour, for example).

Ultimately, it is the view of Lebanon Support that all these street mobilizations underline the urgency of a new social contract whereby citizens reclaim the Lebanese state. One that is based on social justice, redistributive policies, and progressive taxes.

This infographic and accompanying analysis were provided to Executive Magazine by Lebanon Support, a non-profit, local, multidisciplinary research center for and about civil society in Lebanon.



EIB and Creditbank join forces to support SMEs with EUR 50 million credit line

The European Investment Bank (EIB) and Creditbank s.a.l signed on October 1st, 2013, a EUR 50 million credit line agreement in order to support investments of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Lebanon. The operation comes under the EIB's Economic Resilience Initiative (ERI), aimed to mobilize finance in support of sustainable economic growth and social cohesion, and promoting private sector development in the region.

SMEs constitute the backbone of the Lebanese economy and representing over 90% of the private sector and are one of the strongest drivers of economic development, innovation and employment. The operation is expected to sustain around 5,000 jobs in the country and provide access to finance to a large number of SMEs across various sectors and regions in order to boost their performance as well as help foster innovation and competitiveness.

Creditbank is a dynamic commercial bank providing a comprehensive range of financial services to individuals and private sector companies with an increasing focus on SMEs. Creditbank operates through a network of 20 branches strategically spread across the country.

"We are pleased to establish a partnership with Creditbank in order to provide support to the Lebanese private sector under EIB's Economic Resilience Initiative. This operation will contribute to the economic growth of the Lebanese economy, by supporting the development of more entrepreneurial projects and creating new job opportunities and enhancing financial inclusion", said Havia Palanza, Director of EU Neighbouring Countries on the occasion of the signature.

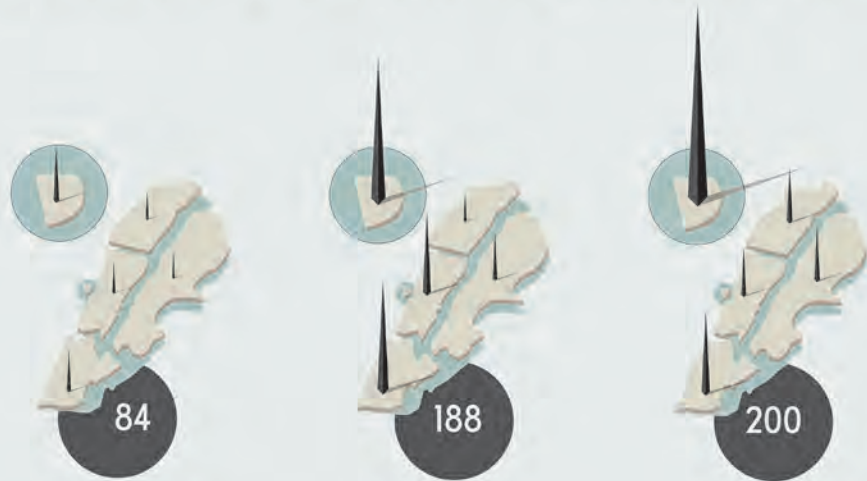
"Because we believe that Economic Resilience is at the heart of every political and sociopolitical stability, we subscribe to a philosophy that considers private sector commercial lending of national importance and interest. At Creditbank, we define our mission as enabling people by enabling economic endeavors. We consider this venture with EIB as an integral part of a continuing and lasting policy to improve and bolster small and medium enterprises", said Tarek Khalifeh, Chairman and General Manager of Creditbank.

MAPPING COLLECTIVE ACTIONS IN LEBANON

WHAT MOBILISES LEBANON?

A LOOK INTO COLLECTIVE ACTIONS FROM 2017 LEADING UP TO OCTOBER 2019

PROPORTION OF
COLLECTIVE ACTIONS /
DISTRICT



TOTAL NUMBER OF
COLLECTIVE ACTIONS /
PERIOD

CAUSE/ GRIEVANCES/
FRAMING COLLECTIVE
ACTIONS

- Access to socio-economic rights
- Corporate grievances
- Corruption
- Injustice / Perceived injustice
- Policy grievances
- Political recognition & inclusion
- Regional / geopolitical grievances



OBJECTIVES

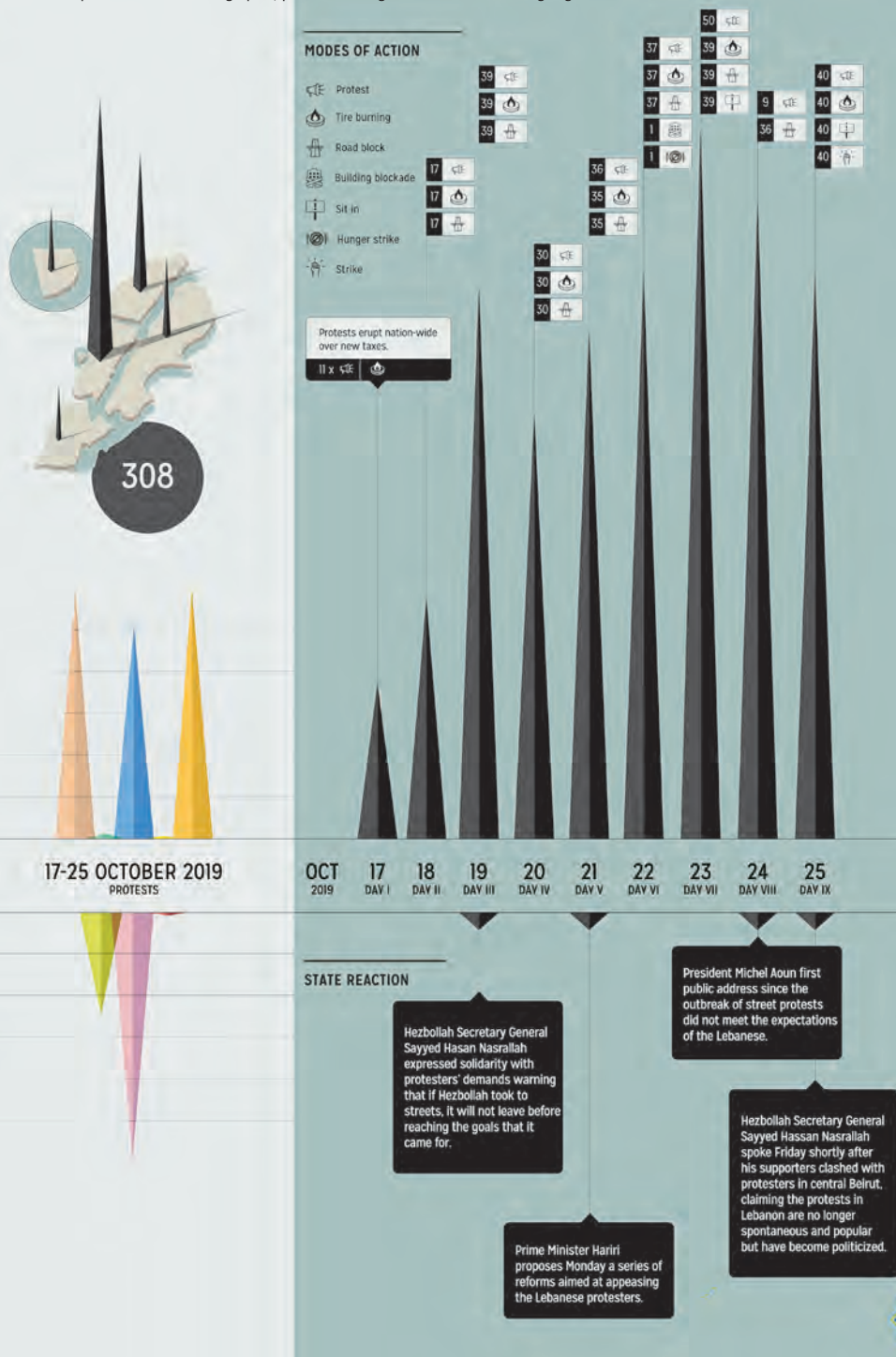
- Demands for rights / services
- Protest of a policy / governmental measure
- Protest of public statement / public representation
- Reform (advocating for a limited change in political, socio-economic etc.)
- Revolutionary (seeking radical change across society / political system)
- Solidarity with minorities (sexual, ethnic, migrants, etc.)
- Support of a cause
- Support to a political leader / public figure



The Map Of Collective Actions In Lebanon, developed by Lebanon Support, tracks mobilisations across Lebanon: https://civilsociety-centre.org/cap/collective_action
Information architecture - design by Diala Lteif & Fatil Tchilinguirian

Source: Lebanon Support

On 17 October 2019, numerous protests have taken place across the country, all directly linked to access to socio-economic rights, corruption, and policy grievances. While all these demands may notably be driven by years of neglect of the peripheries, clientelism and patronage, and austerity, they ultimately underline a crisis of political legitimacy and trust, and ought to be read in the context of an increasingly constrained democratic and civic space. This visual looks into the build up of the mobilisation in Lebanon, from 2017 (data collection started in November 2017) until 25 October 2019. At the time of publication of this infographic, protests and a general strike are still ongoing in the streets.



By Thomas Schellen

Lost signals



IN BRIEF

- The government's economic rescue plan has been rendered theoretical.
- The political context of its presentation reveals real dimension of governance failings in the past two years.
- Analysis of the plan's composition shows it to be disparate and desperate.
- Economic reality will require huge efforts beyond the scope of the last plan.

A perspective on the solutions offered in last-ditch efforts of old government

What to do with the political products of October 2019, most prominently the 2020 budget draft approved on October 21, and the economic rescue plan that then-Prime Minister Saad Hariri presented on the same day? Having arrived alongside the total novelty of a budget draft that was completed and properly signed within the constitutional time frame, the plan for national economic rescue efforts by the cabinet miraculously appeared after a mere 72 hours of negotiation.

However, just over a week later the plan was pulled with the cabi-

net's resignation. Is it now a curio for academic study on whether it could have worked? Or, on the basis—by no means certain—that there will be a near-term formation of a new, more ethical, and more technocratic government, could the plan assist in and speed up the desperate search for necessary economic solutions?

The first thing that becomes obvious from examining this plan is that it was not an instantaneous creation. Many of its components are awfully familiar as either proposals that have their roots in the early Hariri era—over two decades ago—or as cabinet

projects that have been negotiated back and forth at the Grand Serail in the past two years, falling victim to obstructionism. But as comforting as it is that these ideas were not just pulled out of thin air, the downside is that this is irrefutable evidence that political factors allowed the economy to worsen over the past two years.

BEYOND ENDURANCE

While everyone was paying lip service at the bedside of the ailing Lebanese economy it was edging nearer to total monetary paralysis and asphyxiation that could have been prevented through concerted resuscitation measures by politicians. The demand for a rescue agreement and its last-hour presentation points to the reasons for the underlying and maddening inertia of the now resigned government.

To quote Hariri's speech on October 18: "I have been trying for three years to treat its reasons and find real solutions. For more than three years, I told all our partners in Lebanon that our country has been exposed to circumstances beyond its will and is spending, year after year, more than its income. The debt has become so great that we can no longer endure."

The existence of political obstructionism in this government was no secret, and Hariri previously publicly expressed that he would be able to achieve wonders if crucial initiatives only could proceed unimpeded. It was also obvious that his purported unity government was an arena of badly conflicting interests. But it was still shocking to confirm the utter lack of rational self-interest in the ruling class. Learning that zero trust was the only thing that this gov-

ernment deserved—from beginning to end—adds more pain to having seen Lebanon stumble so deliriously through the last 17 months.

Secondly, while Hariri has throughout his political career raised the eyebrows of both opponents and non-partisan observers through his actions and indecisions, his last ditch efforts to produce an economic plan and his speech announcing his intention to resign showed a strength of character often criticized as lacking. But still it seems he was not able to acquire all of the requisite strength and decisiveness needed to lead in the Lebanese arena of never-ending political conflicts.

He noted in his October 18 speech: “As I tried to implement [CEDRE], I encountered all types of obstacles, starting from the formation of government that took weeks, months, and seasons!” Referencing obstructionism three separate times, Hariri said that at the end of efforts to reach an agreement on approaches to the electricity file, deficit reduction, and reform of administrative bodies, each time “someone came and said: ‘This cannot work.’”

Thus, context-wise, the October 18 speech demonstrates both the lack of any sense of national responsibility among an unknown number—likely an absolute majority—of the ruling class, and weaknesses in leadership that did not allow for success despite intense and sincere efforts. Content-wise, however, the question remains if the plan could be used as a blueprint for the next government as a last, post-post deadline effort to pull the economy out of its desperate situation.

The topline impression of the list of measures presented by Hariri on October 21 is not one of a strategically focused plan, but a garage sale of reform, revenue, and cost-cutting propositions. In Hariri’s own description, what he presented was not an economic plan, but an agreement with his partners in government on the “minimum necessary actions” that have been needed these past two years.

COUNTER-INTUITIVE

The list that Hariri read out entails 17 points, the first of which directly gives the appearance of insincere grandstanding by trumpeting two counter-intuitive messages—that there will be no new taxes but a fantastic numerical reduction in the deficit to 0.6 percent. This means a target of wanting to almost eliminate the deficit in a single leap by an even larger margin—some 700 basis points from 7.6 to 0.6 percent than in the 2019 budget, where the target of deficit reduction by around 400 basis points was met with disbelief by the international financial community. Notably here, the CE-

DRE agreement stipulated a commitment to a—regarded then as difficult but doable—reduction of 100 basis points per year.

In the further array of budgetary and non-budgetary measures that Hariri presented, one cost reduction target referred to lowering the EDL-related deficit by a LL1 trillion (over \$660 million). Three additional points in the list relate to cost cutting, most eye-catchingly via a 50 percent reduction in salaries and retirement benefits of top-tier public servants, but also through 70 percent reduction of allocations to institutions such as the Council for Development and Reconstruction, the Central Fund for the Displaced, and the Council for the South, plus the abolition of superfluous public sector institutions, beginning with the Ministry of Information.

On the revenue and investment side, the most prominent point high up in the list refers to financial sector contributions and support for the state finances to the tune of \$3.3 billion, besides allusions to activation of the first phase of CEDRE disbursements, foreign investment, and social loans, as well as laws that will facilitate recouping looted public funds. The feasibility of the core revenue

proposition involving the central bank and the commercial banking sector is an invitation for comments (most of which would have yet to be made) ranging from technical and legal questions to discussions of ethics, fairness, and economic effectiveness.

Two other points in the list point to projects that imply cost reductions and revenue increases with somewhat delayed impact, but also appear to require immediate funding—namely speeding up tenders for the construction of power plants and installing border scanners to combat smuggling and improve customs revenues.

■ The list that Hariri read out entails 17 points, the first of which directly gives the appearance of insincere grandstanding by trumpeting two counter-intuitive messages.

There are also mentions of popular legislative projects such as the amnesty law, the afore cited draft law for recovery of looted money, a law to establish the national anti-corruption commission in the near future (it was passed by Parliament in July but was returned by President Aoun with 11 objections), and an agreement on enabling independent regulatory authorities by appointing their boards. Social measures in the list entail an allocation of \$160 million in support of housing loans, the institution of a pension fund, and the allocation of LL20 billion and a World Bank concessional loan of \$100 million to the National Poverty Targeting Program.

The final numbered point in the 17-point list mysteriously resurrects project names Linord and Elyssar. These were two large urban development and housing projects that were once introduced by Rafik Hariri (and were alluded to by Saad Hariri in an investment forum at the end of 2018) but have long vanished from research focuses and have not recently ap-

Reforms

peared in concepts like the McKinsey Lebanon Economic Vision, an October 2019 whitepaper by the Lebanese International Financial Executives, nor mentioned by civil society and economic stakeholders in their comments on EXECUTIVE's Economic Roadmap project.

Hariri concluded his presentation with a reference to the intention to privatize the mobile communications operators Mic 1 and Mic 2, and an assertion that there is "a complete change of mentality in this budget. Investment spending from the budget is almost zero, thus closing the door on squander and corruption because the government does not spend a penny. The entire expenditure is from foreign investment."

Notably, measures discussed in the final weeks of this cabinet went beyond the points that Hariri touched upon on October 21. If the analysis is widened to cabinet statements circulated by the prime minister's press office on October 16, 17, and 18, measures communicated then to the media by Minister of Information Jamal Jarrah, the list of measures and propositions extends first of all to the infamous Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) fee proposal, dubbed the WhatsApp tax and referred to on October 17 as having a projected revenue potential of \$250 million annually. This VoIP fee was renounced the same day protests began, but sparked protests that ended up damaging and depriving the Lebanese economy of revenues to the magnitude of more than a billion dollars (some unconfirmed estimates said \$100 million a day).

A bit less spectacular, but not entirely free of problems were the measures Jarrah announced on October 16, namely a decision by the Ministry of Finance to increase fees on tobacco products, the above mentioned installation of scanners at border points, a decision for all investment decisions by public institutions and utilities to need cabinet approval, and an agreement on

"the principle of corporatization" for the Port of Beirut and other, not specified institutions. He also reported on cabinet discussions that were related to taking an inventory of state-owned real estate, a three-year investment program related to CEDRE and the Capital Investments Plan, the pension law (as referenced by Hariri on October 21), and a proposed 5 percent subsidy to industrial exporters that would be paid on the amount by which they increased their exports from year to year.

TOO MANY UNKNOWNNS

In the October 18 speech, in which Hariri gave his government colleagues 72 hours to come up with solutions, the prime minister explicitly referred again to the need to alleviate the burden of electricity subsidies, and implement the electricity plan and CEDRE process. On that day, and again on October 21, Hariri's list was high-level and broad, factors that do not favor a quick analysis of its diverse content—the same is true for some of the measures announced previously by Jarrah. Yet, it is difficult to shake the impression that the government's search for solutions since days before and throughout the protests was frantic, but not ordered strategically.

It remains at the end of a brief review of the government's October reform deliberations unknown whether

■ It is difficult to shake the impression that the government's search for solutions since days before and throughout the protests was frantic, but not ordered strategically.

the debt, the entrenched high trade deficit, underdeveloped industrial productivity, shortfalls in international competitiveness, insufficient capital markets, poor financial inclusion, growing economic informality, weak-

ness of redistributive justice and direct taxation and plutocratic patterns that are as bad as those in the most capitalist countries could be cut if only the iron bonds around the knot, the systemic bonds of clientelism, sectarianism, and corruption, are broken.

In recent months, there have been other narratives put on the table than the narratives of austerity, increased taxation of functioning and fiscally more transparent sectors, notably banking, and total abstinence from own investment risk by the government. There has been some progress but no results yet in areas of privatization, public-private partnerships, and activation of capital markets. The concept of an Electronic Trading Platform and invigoration of capital markets has excessively been referenced as crucial means to improve the transfer of private and non-productive savings into hitherto state-owned and affiliate enterprises, such as the flag carrier Middle East Airlines and the telecommunications sector (where privatization and license auction concepts have been tossed around for two decades). Banking leaders have presented their views on the importance of banks' ability to finance private and public sectors by not being unfairly taxed. There has been enough said to provide a platform for serious, non-ideological discussion that is neither sectarian nor ignorant nor based on obviously partisan and self-interest narratives of self-righteous and narrow interest groups—communal, sectarian, economic, political, or civil society.

Despite all new or previous economic planning, up to the Hariri economic rescue plan from October 21, it remains uncertain what way will work best out of this incredibly deep mess, and it is an equally open critical question if the economy of Lebanon can be rescued by an immediate switch to governance by persons with peak theoretical knowledge and expertise but no wide political experience, or people of great technical training who did not have to previously face the opportunity and temptation to become corrupt. ■

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What lies beyond the sectarian system

Reimagining an alternative Lebanon

The unthinkable has finally happened. A stubborn sectarian system, undergirded by a peculiar postwar political economy, and sustained by institutional and disciplinary practices geared toward reproducing sectarian modes of identification and mobilization, has finally given way.

This is a story that can be traced back to the mid-19th century, when the dislocations created by overlapping socioeconomic transformations, Ottoman reforms, and colonial penetration exploded in the kind of violence that helped institutionalize a new sectarian order in Mount Lebanon. Previously a fluid social terrain, where religious identities coexisted and cross-cut with an array of alternative socioeconomic, kin, and local identities began to solidify around mainly sectarian identities. The post-1861 Mount Lebanon order structured political incentives along mostly sectarian lines. It was later reproduced in independent Lebanon, and then consolidated in postwar Lebanon. The latter's recycled corporate consociational power-sharing arrangement redistributed political offices within an expanded but predetermined sectarian quota, further entrenching sectarian identities and modes of political mobilization.

This political system was coupled with a rentier political economy serving the sectarian political elite's clientelist and private interests. A ballooning public sector played an instrumental role in this postwar political economy, but so did corruption and lawlessness. All this was meant to preclude any kind of meaningful political mobilization and affiliation outside sectarian straightjackets. Sectarianism was in fact the fig leaf camouflaging otherwise political and


class battles. Genuine postwar peace and reconciliation among the different Lebanese communities was a prime casualty of this postwar order.

For this postwar political economy of sectarianism to function smoothly and reproduce docile sectarian subjects entailed continuous capital inflows to finance the country's trade and fiscal deficits, and hence pay the price of a galloping public debt created in large measure by the archipelago of clientelist networks embedded inside and outside state institutions. This was achieved, but only with the help of successive donor conferences. Between 2006 and 2010, the balance of payments recorded a cumulative surplus of \$19.5 billion. By 2011, however, this balance turned negative, reaching a cumulative deficit of \$18.5 billion by end July this year. It is this structural fracture that created the economic grievances that exploded on October 17, and later developed into a cross-sectarian, cross-class, and cross-regional anti-sectarian revolution.

It is a revolution that has already achieved so much in so little time. It has allowed for a reimagining of the Lebanese nation beyond top-down imposed narrow sectarian affiliations. With this comes a shift in how people define themselves as agents: not as sectarian subjects in a political order cut along sectarian and religious lines, but rather as anti- and trans-sectarian citizens operating in a polyphonic and democratic civic space, one where alternative class, gender, and environmental interests drive political action. Moreover, the October 17 revolution marks the definitive end of the civil war, and a genuine bottom-up reconciliation between one-time warring communities. This rec-

onciliation is the beginning of elusive postwar peace and collective healing, the real bulwark against future attempts to instrumentalize sectarianism by the political economic elite for local or geopolitical purposes. What we are witnessing, then, is the birth of a new "imagined community," to borrow Irish political scientist Benedict Anderson's term, one that travels across regions, classes, genders, and sects. That is the greatest and undeniable achievement of this moment, one that no matter the short-term outcome, can never be reversed.

This does not mean that those sectarian communities laboriously assembled by the ideological, material, and institutional practices of the sectarian system will wither away anytime soon—despite the drying up of the clientelist swamps. They are numbed by the ideological hegemony of the sectarian system and nourished on the demonizing discourse of sectarian entrepreneurs. They are also scared lest they lose whatever material interests remain vested in the sectarian system. But they are undeniably running against the long play of history.

Ultimately, and despite the inescapable violence exercised against them, it is this nascent anti-sectarian community composed principally of Generation Zs who will, by peaceful and democratic practice, demonstrate to those lingering sectarian communities that, to borrow from French poet and politician Aimé Césaire, there is "a place for all at the rendezvous of victory" in the long battle for an alternative Lebanon. 

Bassel F. Salloukh is associate professor of Political Science at the Lebanese American University and a research fellow at the Lebanese Centre for Policy Studies (LCPS).

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What are the next steps for Lebanon? Between now and year's end, what do you propose stakeholders in your field should be doing?

EXECUTIVE posed the questions above to stakeholders across various sectors at the end of October to get their insight into what is next for Lebanon.

"Lebanon should, at long last, find its bearings politically, financially, and economically. A credible and technocratic government should be installed to restore confidence and kickstart the institutional process. The country's finances should be pulled back from the brink by shrinking the public sector and fighting corruption, smuggling, and tax evasion. The private sector should be empowered and incentivized to ignite economic growth through investment and consumption. And time is very much of the essence."

NICOLAS CHAMMAS, president of the
Beirut Traders Association

"An immediate step should be capital and exchange controls, for a few months, until tensions subside. A vision, principles, and strategy for Lebanon should be defined, shared, and adhered to by the majority of Lebanese. Stakeholders in our field should join forces to alleviate the difficulties and prepare for the end of the crisis."

RIAD OBEGI, chairman and general
manager of Banque BEMO

"In the short term, the urgency is for the formation of a government of independent specialists and activists with a political vision aiming to unify all dwellers in Lebanon as citizens of a democratic state led by principles of social justice and environmental protection. In the medium term, we ought to work toward producing a de-sectarianized political system, with an independent judiciary, in application of the Lebanese Constitution, through anticipated parliamentary elections according to a new, non-sectarian electoral law.

In my field, stakeholders should aim for the urgent implementation of the Council of Development and Reconstruction's Lebanese national land use plan, approved in 2009, through the establishment of a Ministry of Planning and the elaboration of metropolitan and regional strategic plans that can enable decentralized planning and local economic development."

MONA HARB, associate professor of urban studies
and politics at the American University of Beirut

“The main priorities in the coming months should include the institution of transparent mechanisms of public tendering and processes of accountability to secure their proper implementation. The selection of projects should prioritize large-scale interventions that respond simultaneously to economic, social, and environmental emergencies, such as public transport networks at the scale of greater urban areas. Within cities and towns, the ongoing public debates in open squares should be fostered and enhanced to allow for the consolidation of bottom-up practices of citizen engagement, likely the most important achievement of the two weeks that could lead to enduring systemic change.”

MONA FAWAZ, professor of urban studies and planning at the American University of Beirut

“We are currently in a very delicate situation. Time is of the essence. We can no longer afford the usual procrastination. We need to apply immediate emergency measures, such as (centralized) capital controls and not these half-assed measures [of] allowing each bank to set its own policies. This will deflect the anger of the masses from the banks. It would also protect banks and bankers, who will undoubtedly allow exceptions on withdrawals from wealthier clients, leaving the brunt of the unavoidable future measures to be borne by the middle class. This would be catastrophic and would eventually come out, because every transaction is tracked, with the names of the client, bank, banker, and senior banker (who approved the exemption), which will subject them to the wrath of the masses.”

DAN AZZI, former CEO and chairman of Standard Chartered Bank in Lebanon, and current Harvard fellow

“I think the role of specifically of policy institutes like ours, the Issam Fares Institute (IFI) is to pose some solutions and roadmaps around the different issues we work on, whether it's youth and education, refugee policy, energy policy, or climate change and the environment. These are all critical issues that have been raised by the protesters. These are demands of the people for the government to do a better job, and we've been working on these issues for years. We have a particular role now to propose workable solutions around all the sectoral policy issues we work on. We have a convening power here at the institute to bring stakeholders together to have discussions about the next steps for Lebanon. At IFI, we're able to bring in experts, professors, activists, and civil society players for discussions, and they're all critical players in next phase to formulate workable solutions that will be the responsibility of the next government to resolve.”

RAYAN AL-AMINE, assistant director at the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs at the American University of Beirut

“One word summarizes what Lebanon needs next: trust. Citizens and the international community need to trust the next government as a prerequisite to shift the economic and financial crisis. No one trusts the current political elite so independent competent ministers are a first step toward that. And early elections to have a Parliament that is worth the trust and eventually electing a new president to have a trustworthy elite.”

GILBERT DOUMIT, founder and managing partner at Beyond Reform and Development



Quotes

“Establish consensus on an apolitical government with a mandate to immediately implement fiscal and monetary reform, where the main objective is to cut the fiscal deficit through cuts in wages and subsidies. Restoring services in power, water, and transportation within 12 months should be the first priority. A plan should be prepared for full reform in the political, economic, and social system within six months in collaboration with NGOs and local representatives.”

MOUNIR RACHED, former IMF economist and current president of the Lebanese Economic Association

“Overworked judges with mountains of cases, red tape that can wrap around the earth twice, and delays in the legal process make the job of lawyers more difficult, in some cases impossible. The full backing of a reinvigorated executive branch of the government, with the unwavering support of legal enforcement, is the only legitimate, economical, and just way forward.”

JAMIL CHAYA, assistant professor of finance and economics at Rafik Hariri University


“The ultimate goal would be reaching a civil state that ensures the rights of citizens, but until then we are looking toward forming a new cabinet able to respond to the demands of people asking for economic and political reforms. During this revolution, the media has been giving people a voice, we are looking forward to the next phase, for a media that focuses on monitoring of policies and performance of decision-makers with more in depth investigative reports that unveil all hidden truths and inform the public. We also aspire to keep the ability of freedom of expression and criticizing public figures without the fear of arbitrary arrests.”

ROULA MIKHAEL, executive director of Maharat Foundation

“Our ultimate chance to overcome this dramatic turmoil is through the support of the international community, which should be divided into three stages. Therefore, I urge the international donors in the immediate term: to inject liquidity and currencies in the market as soon as possible, to create an international support fund to bear partially the currency risk, to ease the transactions between the local traders and international suppliers, and to benefit from subsidized interest rates from the European Investment Bank to reduce interest rates on the local businesses. In the medium term: to form an international strategic committee with various international and local stakeholders to implement and follow up on the international rescue economic emergency plan and strategy, and to monitor the disbursement of injected funds. In the long term: to support a privatization strategy that will be needed to reduce operating costs in the public sector, improve efficiency and productivity, and to serve citizens.”

FOUAD ZMOKHOL, president of the Association of Lebanese Business People in the World





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