



US, France, Saudi Arabia push jointly for Lebanon action on the sidelines of G20

The top diplomats of the US, France and Saudi Arabia on Tuesday jointly pushed for Lebanon's squabbling leaders to come together to address the country's mounting crisis.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken held an emergency three-way meeting on the Lebanon trouble with his Saudi and French counterparts on the sidelines of talks of the Group of 20 major economies in Mater, Italy.

The three discussed "the need for Lebanon's political leaders to show real leadership by implementing overdue reforms to stabilize the economy and provide the Lebanese people with much-needed relief," Blinken wrote on Twitter.

Lebanon has been without a functioning government since a narrow vote in Beirut in August 2020 killed more than 200 people and emerged evidence of the Shabrahim city.

The political indecision comes amid an economic crisis that includes massive cuts for fuel and a tumbling value of the Lebanese pound.

The US, Saudi Arabia and France - the former colonial power

er - are key players in Lebanon, having worked together on the 1989 Taif accord that ended a bloody civil war and established a complicated agreement to split power among the country's various minorities.

Another major actor is Iran, which supports the Shiite militant movement and political party Hezbollah.

Blinken repeatedly discussed Lebanon on a week-long European tour including with Pope Francis and French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian, who he also saw on Friday in Paris.

Blinken also met separately in

Italy with Saudi foreign minister Prince Faisal bin Turki.

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China is threatening academic freedom in Australia, says HRW

Human Rights Watch has accused Australian universities of failing to protect the academic freedom of Chinese students who support democracy, saying many of them have altered their behavior and practiced self-censorship



in order to avoid harassment and being "upgraded or" by authorities back home.

In a new report released on Wednesday, HRW said Australian universities, which depend on the fees that international students bring - were "turning a blind eye to concerns about harassment and surveillance by the Chinese government and its proxies."

The group said it interviewed 24 pro-democracy students from mainland China and Hong Kong, and verified three cases in which police in China visited or asked to meet their families regarding the students' activities in Australia.

In one case, Chinese authorities threatened a student with jail after they reported a Twitter account while studying in Australia and posted pro-democracy messages.

The student told HRW that the police's rationale: "China contacted my parents ... and issued an official warning and they told me to 'shut the PRC up.'"

They said it is clear that down Twitter, any spreading anti-government message will find its corporate, they may charge me with a crime," the student said. "I

deleted the Twitter account. Because I'm worried for my parents, HRW also said, pro-Bijing students in Australia harass and intimidate those who express support for democracy movements.

One female student reported no

The group said pro-Bijing students and social media users have also subjected some academics at Australian universities to harassment, intimidation, and doxing - posting their personal information - if the academics are perceived to be critical of the Chinese Communist Party or discuss "sensitive" issues such as Taiwan, Tibet, Hong Kong or Xinjiang.

In one case last year, pro-Bijing supporters bullied, harassed and doxxed an student who described Taiwan as a country and spoke out in defense of a Taiwan-born student. As a result, HRW said, the Australian university had to temporarily remove the student's teaching profile from the university website.

Israel inaugurates new embassy in Abu Dhabi during FM's first UAE visit

Israel's new foreign minister inaugurated its embassy in the United Arab Emirates in Abu Dhabi and offered an olive branch to other former adversaries, saying "We've been to say."

During his two-day visit, the first to the Gulf power by an Israeli cabinet minister since the country established ties last year, Netanyahu said he was eager to negotiate a ceasefire in Dubai and sign a bilateral agreement on economic cooperation. The trip is an opportunity for the two-week-old Israeli government of Naftali Bennett, a centrist who leads an improbable cross-partisan coalition, to make diplomatic moves.

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North Korea's Kim fumes about 'grave lapses' in pandemic defences

North Korea's leader Kim Jong Un chastised top governing party officials for failure in the response to the COVID-19 pandemic that led to an unexpected "grave incident" and put the safety of the country and people at risk, state media reported on Wednesday.

The report by the state-run agency KCNA did not elaborate on what happened or how it put people at risk, South Korea's Yonhap news agency said.

"By neglecting important defences for the party in its national emergency activities fight in preparation for a global health crisis, officials in charge have caused a grave incident that poses a huge crisis to the safety of the nation and its people," Kim was quoted by Yonhap as saying.

"A major factor that hampers the execution of important tasks is inability and irresponsibility of senior officials," he added.

"Party-wide fight should be carried out against ideological decadence and all kinds of regression fac-

to address some party executives' neglect of duty, including failing to implement important long-term measures to fight the pandemic," KCNA said.

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Myanmar to release 2,000 prisoners, drops charges against actors

Myanmar's military authorities plan to release about 2,000 people from jails across the country, according to reports on Wednesday, in state television said the generals were dropping charges against actors and other celebrities who took part in the anti-coup protests.

At least 700 of the prisoners will be released from Yangon's largest prison, said Zaw Zaw, head of the Reuters news agency.

The prison chief, however, declined to specify who would be released from the country's vast prison complex, where some of those who have taken part in the mass demonstrations have been jailed.

Prisoners that protesters would be released began on Saturday, as some family members of detainees gathered outside the prison. Hundreds of people were already waiting outside the prison on Wednesday morning in anticipation that some inmates would be freed.

In April, the military rulers gave the go-ahead for the first mass demonstration towards any issues that the country under a New Year amnesty, although few of those arrested after the February 1 coup were included.

The news came a day after the country's military government dropped charges against 20 celebrities who had been declared wanted for involvement in their part in the mass rallies and civil disobedience against the generals' power grab.

Actors, sportspeople, social media influencers, doctors and teachers have been among hundreds of people listed as wanted for opposing the military that seized power from the elected government last year under Aung Mye Thaw.

Some of the 120 wanted celebrities include singer Lin Lin and actor Tin Win, among others. They were charged with treason and other crimes, but the military said they were not part of a policy that was being pursued. It was not part of a policy that was being pursued. It was not part of a policy that was being pursued.

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