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Lebanon lawmakers fail to elect president at 12th attempt

Депутати Лівану не змогли обрати президента з 12-ї спроби

Ліванські законодавці в 12-й раз не змогли обрати нового президента, оскільки запеклі розбіжності між підтримуваною Іраном "Хізбаллою" і її противниками ризикують затягнути країну в вакуум влади, що затягнувся. Охоплений кризою Ліван вже понад сім місяців перебуває без глави держави. Аналітики кажуть, що голосування ризикує ще більше посилити політичну безвихідь, затьмаривши надії на порятунок економіки після більш ніж трирічної кризи. Міжнародна спільнота закликала політиків обрати консенсусного кандидата у президенти, який може допомогти країні провести реформи, необхідні для розблокування мільярдів доларів у вигляді позик з-за кордону. Окрім відсутності президента, Ліваном уже більше року керує тимчасовий кабінет з обмеженими повноваженнями. 31 жовтня 2016 року за підсумками двох турів виборів у парламенті Мішель Наїма Ауна обрали президентом Лівану.

<https://www.news24.com/news24/world/news/lebanon-lawmakers-fail-to-elect-president-at-12th-attempt-20230614>

A 12th attempt to elect Lebanon's new president failed on Wednesday.

The country has been without a head of state for more than seven months.

Bitter divisions between the Iran-backed Hezbollah and its opponents risk sinking the country into a protracted power vacuum.

Lebanese lawmakers on Wednesday failed for a 12th time to elect a new president, as bitter divisions between the Iran-backed Hezbollah and its opponents risk miring the country in a protracted power vacuum.

Crisis-hit Lebanon has already been without a head of state for more than seven months, and the previous attempt to elect a president was held on 19 January.

The vote for the presidency, reserved for a Maronite Christian under Lebanon's delicate sectarian power-sharing system, pitted the Hezbollah-backed Sleiman Frangieh against financial official Jihad Azour, who has mainly been endorsed by Christian and independent legislators.

But neither had enough support to get the required two-thirds majority, with Azour garnering 59 votes and Frangieh 51.

All 128 lawmakers showed up for the election, but many left the chamber after placing their ballots in the box and quorum was lost before a second round of voting - where the winner only requires 65 ballots - was able to go ahead.

"Enough passing the buck... for prolonging the vacuum," parliament speaker Nabih Berri said in a statement after the session.

"Only consensus and dialogue" will speed up the election of a president, he added, without immediately scheduling a new ballot.

Analysts said the vote risked further entrenching a political stalemate, dimming hopes of saving the economy after more than three years of meltdown.

"At this stage, the most likely scenario is a prolonged vacuum," analyst Karim Bitar said.

Threats

The international community has urged politicians to elect a consensus presidential candidate who can help the country enact reforms required to unlock billions of dollars in loans from abroad.

On top of lacking a president, Lebanon has been governed by a caretaker cabinet with limited powers for more than a year.

By convention, the premiership is reserved for a Sunni Muslim and the post of parliament speaker goes to a Shiite Muslim.

In past sessions, Hezbollah and its allies repeatedly posted spoilt ballots to disrupt the vote, then left so quorum was lost and a second round could not take place.

They adopted a similar tactic in the last presidential vote, a move that left Lebanon without a president for more than two years, until Michel Aoun's 2016 win.

Samy Gemayel, head of the Christian Kataeb party, called Wednesday's support for Azour an "uprising" against "diktats and threats", in reference to accusations Hezbollah is seeking to impose its preferred candidate.

The Shiite movement has described Azour as the "defiance and confrontation candidate", and pro-Hezbollah daily Al-Akhbar's front page on Wednesday featured just one word: vacuum.

Hezbollah lawmaker Hassan Fadlallah said that "the country cannot be led by... confrontation".

He said:

Dialogue is essential for electing a president

Third-man solution?

Frangieh, a former lawmaker and minister who is a friend of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, hails from a storied dynasty, like many of Lebanon's prominent political figures.

On Sunday, he promised to be "the president of all Lebanese" despite his polarising alliances.

Azour was finance minister from 2005 to 2008 and has stepped aside from his role as the director of the Middle East and Central Asia department at the International Monetary Fund in view of the presidential contest.

On Monday, as he announced his bid for the post, he said he wanted to "contribute to a solution" not a crisis, adding that he was "not defying anyone".

The analyst Bitar said Wednesday's vote, like the previous 11 attempts, was likely "a way for political forces to gauge their respective electoral weight" and see how many votes they could get.

A stalemate could pave the way for protracted negotiations "that would ultimately reach a third-man solution", he told AFP before the ballot.

The United States and France on Tuesday renewed calls for Lebanese lawmakers to cooperate and elect a new president.

French foreign ministry spokeswoman Anne-Claire Legendre had urged MPs to "take this date seriously" and "not to waste another opportunity".