

Hariri promises to return for Independence Day



President Emmanuel Macron with Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri

Paris

Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri arrived in France yesterday from Saudi Arabia, where his shock resignation announcement two weeks ago sparked accusations that he was being held there against his will.

Hariri is in Paris at the invitation of France's President Emmanuel Macron, who is attempting to help broker a solution to a political crisis that has raised fears over Lebanon's fragile democracy. Lebanese President Michel

Aoun said he had spoken by telephone to Hariri, who said he would be back in Lebanon for Independence Day celebrations on Wednesday.

Macron greeted Hariri warmly as he arrived for talks at the Elysee Palace hours after flying in from Riyadh with his wife.

Their eldest son Houssam joined the couple for lunch with Macron at the palace.

But the Hariris arrived in Paris without their younger children – Loulwa and Abdelaziz, born in 2001

and 2005 – who are staying in Riyadh “for their school exams”, a source close to the premier said.

“Hariri does not want to mix his children up in this affair,” the source said.

Hariri, who along with Saudi officials has repeatedly denied that he was being held under de facto house arrest in Riyadh, hammered home the message just before his departure.

“To say that I am held up in Saudi Arabia and not allowed to leave the country is a lie,”

he said in a Twitter post.

A source close to Hariri said the premier had held an “excellent, fruitful and constructive” meeting with the powerful Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman before he left.

Hariri, a dual Saudi citizen who has previously enjoyed Riyadh's backing, announced his resignation on November 4.

He said he feared for his life, accusing Iran and its powerful Lebanese ally Hezbollah of destabilising his country. (AFP)

Police to resume war on drugs if problem worsens, says Duterte

Manila

Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte said on Saturday that the police would reassume their lead role in implementing his war on drugs if the narcotics problem worsens and that nobody could stop his campaign, not even U.S. President Donald Trump.

The firebrand leader ordered the Philippine National Police (PNP) to withdraw from the campaign a few weeks ago amid unprecedented scrutiny of police conduct in the campaign, which has killed thousands of suspected drug users and peddlers.

“If human rights (advocates)

are thinking that Trump or whoever the human rights (advocates believe) can stop me, I'm sorry,” Duterte said in a speech at a business event in his hometown Davao City.

“The drug problem, if it becomes worse again, the police has to enter the picture. I want it eradicated if possible,”

he said.

The Philippines has drawn international criticism for the killing of 3,900 people in police anti-drugs operations over the past 15 months, but the police deny allegations by human rights advocates that many of the killings were executions. (Reuters)

People take to the streets as part of the protests against Mugabe



Party set to sack Mugabe, as Zimbabweans march on residence

Harare

Zimbabwe's ruling ZANU-PF party will meet on Sunday to dismiss President Robert Mugabe and reinstate the vice-president he dismissed, Emmerson Mnangagwa, two party sources told *Reuters* on Saturday.

The sources said a party central committee meeting scheduled for 10:30 am (3.30 am ET) would also dismiss 93-year-old Mugabe's preferred successor, his wife Grace, from her role as head of the ZANU-PF Women's League.

Mugabe's 37-year rule has been effectively at an end since the army seized control on Wednesday, confining him to his residence, saying it wanted to target the “criminals” around him.

Shortly after the sources revealed the meeting, a motorcade left Mugabe's official residence in the capital Harare to boos and jeers from onlookers, although a security said Mugabe was not inside.

Hundreds of thousands of people had flooded the streets of Harare singing, dancing and hugging soldiers in an outpouring of elation at Mugabe's demise, while others marched towards his residence.

In scenes reminiscent of the downfall of Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceausescu in 1989, men, women and children ran alongside the armoured cars and the troops who stepped in this week to oust the only ruler Zimbabwe has known since independence in 1980.

Under house arrest in his lavish ‘Blue Roof’ compound, he has watched support from his ZANU-PF party, security services and people evaporate in less than three days.

Mugabe's nephew, Patrick Zhuwao, told *Reuters* the elderly leader and his wife were “ready to die for what is correct” rather than step down in order to legitimize what he described as a coup.

Tears of joy

Speaking from a secret location in South Africa, Zhuwao said Mugabe had hardly slept since the military took over but his health was otherwise “good”.

On Harare's streets, Zimbabweans spoke of a second liberation for the former British colony, alongside their dreams of political and economic change after two decades of deepening repression and hardship.

“These are tears of joy,” said Frank Mutsindikwa, 34, holding aloft the Zimbabwean flag. “I've been waiting all my life for this day. Free at last. We are free at last.”

Mugabe's downfall is likely to send shockwaves across Africa, where a number of entrenched strongmen, from Uganda's Yoweri Museveni to Democratic Republic of Congo's Joseph Kabila, are facing mounting pressure to step aside.

The secretary-general of Zimbabwe's War Veterans Association, Victor Matemadanda, called on those at an anti-Mugabe rally to march on Mugabe's residence, and live television footage showed hundreds of protesters marching in that direction.

“Let us now go and deliver the message that grandfather Mugabe and his typist-cum-wife should go home,” Matemadanda told the crowd in the Harare township of Highfield. (Reuters)