



Oil Exploration Delayed over FPM, AMAL Disputes

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Sharp debates emerged between the Free Patriotic Movement and AMAL over oil exploration off Lebanon's shore, local newspapers reported on Thursday.

The different points of view over addressing the issue created a heated debate in the cabinet session held at the Grand Serail on Wednesday, which prompted the postponement of discussions to the session scheduled to convene on September 5, according to Speaker Nabih Berri's advisor Health Minister Ali Hassan Khalil.

Khalil said the postponement came due to the absence of Foreign Minister Adnan Mansour, who is currently in Tehran to attend the Non-Aligned Movement summit.

“Just like we preserved every inch of our land, we will preserve Lebanon's rights in its Exclusive Economic Zone... We are only concerned about kicking off tenders for the South similarly to any other area across the country,” Khalil said.

However, Energy Minister Jebran Bassil demanded some clarifications on the report that was submitted by the Foreign Ministry over the matter earlier this month.

Bassil told *As Safir* newspaper that the government's delay in exploring oil and appointing the oil authority members consequently postponed the launching of any tenders.

“We have continuously reiterated that the gas and oil natural resources spread over 22,000 kilometers square off Lebanon's shore... The government is obstructing the kicking off the exploration process,” the minister pointed out.

The FPM argues that there is no need to re-discuss Lebanon's EEZ when the cabinet had previously resolved the matter but AMAL insists on the government to defend every inch of Lebanon's rights in its EEZ.

Lebanon and Israel are bickering over a zone that consists of about 854 square kilometers and suspected energy reserves there could generate billions of dollars.

The cabinet approved in September the proposed borders of Lebanon's EEZ in the Mediterranean.

In June, Lebanon was able to restore 530 square kilometers of a maritime zone that it considers it to be within its EEZ, which was acknowledged by the U.S. and the United Nations after prolonged diplomatic and political efforts.

Concerning the appointment of the oil regulatory authority members, AMAL denied that there is a dispute over the name of the Shiites member, hinting that the movement agreed with Hizbullah over the name of the

candidate, but when Bassil demanded Khalil to mention the name, the latter failed to answer.

“If they have agreed over the name, I wasn’t informed about it and no one contacted me,” Bassil told al-Joumhouria newspaper.

Hizbullah’s Minister of Administrative Development Mohammed Fneish stressed in comments published in the daily that the name of the Shiite candidate is not an obstacle, lashing out at the media that is dealing with the matter in a negative attitude.

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