

# 12 Australians Sought In Murder Of Lebanon's Hariri

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Lebanon's Justice Minister Adnan Addoum said on Friday that authorities were hunting for twelve Australian men wanted over the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri.

Addoum said that all the suspects hold the Australian passport and that six of them left Beirut for Australia hours after Monday's deadly blast, adding that police found traces of explosives on aircraft seats.

Hariri was killed in a huge explosion in Beirut which also claimed the lives of additional 16 people.

The minister added that there are two more Australians who tried to leave Lebanon after the assassination but missed the flight for unknown reasons. Their location is not known.

Interpol agreed to interrogate the twelve suspects, Addoum said.

The minister didn't provide further details and it was

unclear what role the men played in the attack.

Reports earlier this week said that the Australian government was helping Lebanon investigate Hariri's murder.

In other developments, Lebanon's Tourism Minister Farid al-Khazan resigned, saying that his decision was in line with his convictions and his "obligation to the country.

There have been mounting calls for the whole Lebanese cabinet to resign over Hariri's assassination.

Also Friday, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad appointed his brother-in-law, Major-General Asef Shawkat, as head of military intelligence to replace retiring Major-General Hassan Khalil.

Hariri's family demands probe into his murder

Hariri's family issued a statement on Thursday calling for launching an international investigation into his assassination.

"We call upon the international community to promptly take control of this issue and form an international investigation commission, since the assassination of Rafik Hariri is a terrorist act targeting Lebanon's stability and national unity, "Al Hariri's family said in a statement released on Thursday.

"We will not spare any effort or means to find the perpetrators of this crime no matter what their affiliation is," the statement said.

Earlier, the Lebanese leadership rejected calls to let international experts launch the investigation, but the military judiciary now says that Swiss experts on explosives and DNA will participate in the investigation.

On Wednesday, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State William Burns called on Lebanon to ask for foreign help to facilitate the inquiry.

"We believe the investigation has to be serious and credible and those responsible have to be brought to justice swiftly and that international expertise can be brought to help ensure this kind of investigation," he said during his visit to Beirut to attend the funeral of Al Hariri.

Amid tight security Lebanon buried on Wednesday its former Prime Minister Rafiq Al Hariri, credited with restoring the country after the civil war.

The former Lebanese premier was buried at the towering Mohammed al-Amin mosque in central Beirut, the construction of which has been funded by him.

Al Hariri's family and political supporters asked the Lebanese government officials not to attend the funeral.

And while the U.S. and Israel pointed finger of suspicion at Syria, Imad Moustapha, the Syrian ambassador to the United States, said the Syrian government wasn't involved in Al Hariri's assassination, and called the former Lebanese Premier a constructive moderate.

"Why would Syria even look with hostility to a person like Rafiq Al Hariri, who is actually helping to mediate between us and the Lebanese opposition?" said Moustapha.

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