

# Hariri oversees signing of research funding

BEIRUT: A cooperation agreement between the National Council for Scientific Research (CNRS) and four Lebanese universities was signed Monday to provide millions in funding for hundreds of research projects.

Prime Minister Saad Hariri held a ceremony at the Grand Serail to mark the signing of the agreement in the presence of presidents of the Lebanese University Fouad Ayoub, American University of Beirut Fadlo Khuri, **Université Saint Joseph** Salim Daccache, the Holy Spirit University of Kaslik Elias Tohme and CNRS Mouin Hamze.

“What we mostly need in Lebanon today is science and research,” Hariri said during the event, which was also attended by Education Minister Marwan Hamadeh and Cabinet secretary-general Fouad Fleifel.

“This investment that is taking place between the government ... and the universities is very important for Lebanon because we should

advance together and look toward the future,” the Hariri said, according to a statement released by his office after the event.

The agreement represents a first for the four universities to contribute to research projects that is half funded by the CNRS. The total budget for the project at the four universities will be LL6.6 billion (\$4.4 million) with LL3.3 billion being provided by the CNRS, the statement added.

Around 200 research projects carried out by the universities will benefit from this partnership. The projects cover scientific, technical, environment, public health and social sciences fields.

A mechanism will be placed that will manage the acceptance of tenders, arbitration and implementation of these studies.

The statement, however, stressed that the CNRS will continue with its support for projects submitted by

professors from other universities as part of the Grant Research Program.

“What is happening today is the beginning of an effort with the universities and we should double these efforts because Lebanon is a small country in a volatile region,” Hariri said. “Our differences affect us sometimes, but today from my post as prime minister I assure you that I will not allow division to return to the country.”

Hamadeh noted that the ceremony, which comes one day before the 12th anniversary of the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, was very symbolic.

“This celebration has a special meaning on the eve of the commemoration of the martyrdom ... [of] Hariri, who was a pioneer in this kind of scientific excellence in Lebanon,” he said.

Requests will be received from Feb. 27 to April 21 through the CNRS website. – *The Daily Star*.