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## **Tripoli to link world with Middle East: Hariri**

BEIRUT: Prime Minister Saad Hariri called Tuesday for north Lebanon's Tripoli to become a "strategic" city, forming a link between the world and the Middle East.

Development projects aiming toward this vision have already begun, he said.

"All this work is based on a strategic vision for Tripoli's coming role in the reconstruction of Syria and Iraq. I am convinced that at some point Tripoli and the north will be leveraged for the whole Lebanese economy and for development in Lebanon, especially in the north and all the disadvantaged areas," Hariri said, during a conference hosted by the Safadi Foundation and entitled, "From Tripoli to All Lebanon – Advancement and Development."

It was, Hariri said, "no longer enough to carry out studies and count the problems. It's imperative for us to put in place solutions and projects and implement them."

Tripoli, Lebanon's second-largest city, suffers from pervasive unemployment and underdevelopment, leading to its depiction as a safe haven for extremist groups.

But Hariri called for numerous projects to be undertaken in the city, which he said would always be known as “the symbol of moderation, openness, knowledge and life in the north and in Lebanon.”

The premier also said multiple development projects were already underway in the city. “The projects include the reopening of north Lebanon’s Qoleiaat airport – Rene Mouawad; boosting the role of the Lebanese University, the state’s only public university; and strengthening the city’s port,” Hariri said.

The zone, an area near Tripoli’s port with a more open regulatory and investment environment designed to attract foreign firms, is potentially set to be completed by 2020.

A flurry of recent visits by high-level Chinese businessmen to Lebanon demonstrated China’s interest in Lebanon’s liberal tax policy and attractive business environment. Tripoli’s proximity to Syria is an added bonus. A recently hosted Chinese delegation included 20 top Chinese companies, including Vanke, the largest residential real estate developer in the world; Hytera Communications, China’s No. 1 mobile radio manufacturer; and TCL, China’s biggest TV manufacturer.

The Lebanese government has been trying to promote the country as a logical point from which to launch Syrian reconstruction efforts.

China has long played a secondary role in Lebanon’s economy. Up until recently, the eastern superpower lagged behind Europe and the United States in terms of trade with the country. But over the

past few years, China has shot to the top of the list, exporting several billion dollars worth of goods to Lebanon.