

Israeli lawmakers submit bill to dissolve parliament

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JERUSALEM: Israeli legislators submitted a bill Tuesday that would dissolve parliament and trigger unprecedented third national elections in less than a year.

Israel has been mired in political deadlock for months.

With the two largest parties, Likud and Blue and White, unable to form a power-sharing agreement ahead of a Wednesday deadline, lawmakers from the rival sides together tabled the bill.

It is expected to go to a vote in parliament on Wednesday, setting the date for the next election on March 2.

"Under the exceptional circumstances that have emerged, and after two adjacent election campaigns in which no government was formed, the dissolution of the 22nd Knesset is being proposed," the bill reads.

Neither Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu nor his main rival Benny Gantz have been able to form a coalition government after two inconclusive elections. Polls have predicted the third vote is unlikely to produce dramatically different results.

The legislation is something of a formality. The allotted period for forming a government following September's election expires at midnight on Wednesday. Without a coalition deal, elections would have been automatically triggered later in March.

Each of this year's elections, and their subsequent coalition jockeying, have largely been a referendum on Netanyahu, who was recently indicted for bribery, breach of trust and fraud in three corruption affairs.

Blue and White's Gantz has refused to sit in a Netanyahu-led coalition, citing the long-serving leader's legal troubles. Netanyahu has refused to step down, still overwhelmingly backed by his Likud party and his adoring base.



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[lawmakers](#)

[Parliament](#)

Israel says defense officials caught in major bribery case

[Protests, explosions hit Iraq's south as demos maintain strength](#)

Author:

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Tue, 2019-12-10 17:19

BAGHDAD: Iraq's south saw further protests and explosions, as demonstrations against the government and its Iranian sponsor that erupted on October 1 persist unabated, according to security sources.

The southern city of Amara was rocked overnight by four near-simultaneous explosions targeting premises of two pro-Iran armed factions, according to police.

"Three sound grenades targeted two premises and the house of an Assaib Ahl Al-Haq leader and an improvised explosive device targeted the house of an Ansar Allah commander," police said.

Asaib Ahl Al-Haq is one of the most powerful groups in Iraq's Hashed Al-Shaabi security force, a network of armed groups integrated into the state, of which Ansar Allah is also a component.

Medical sources reported three wounded by the blasts.

Founded in 2014 to fight IS jihadists who had seized swathes of northern Iraq and neighboring Syria, the Hashed is made up of mostly Shiite factions, many of which have been backed by Iran.

According to security sources, the attacks were committed against the groups due to their loyalty to neighboring Iran, whose influence continues to grow in Iraq, in particular via armed groups that it has long trained and financed.

These attacks come shortly after the recent bloodshed in several Iraqi cities, the latest seeing 24 people killed, including four police officers, on Friday evening in central Baghdad.

Both the state and the demonstrators accuse armed men of perpetrating the violence, the former claiming that it is not possible to identify those responsible, while the latter point to pro-Iran entities.

Since October 1, Iraq's capital and its Shiite-majority south have been gripped by rallies against corruption, poor public services, a lack of jobs and Iran's perceived political interference.

More than 450 people have been killed and more than 20,000 wounded during the unprecedented protest movement demanding an overhaul of the political system. In the holy Shiite city of Karbala, protesters rallied at the police station to demand information within 24 hours on the death of Fahem Al-Tai, a 53-year-old prominent civil society activist gunned down in a drive-by shooting on Sunday evening while returning home from protests.

Others blocked access to the courthouse to demand proceedings be launched against local leaders for corruption – a key priority of the protest movement in a country ranked the 12th most corrupt country in the world by Transparency International.

In Diwaniya, also in the south, protesters blocked the road to the Shanafiya oil refinery, according to police, demanding employment.

Despite Iraq being OPEC's second-largest crude producer, one in five of its people live in poverty and youth unemployment stands at one quarter of the population, the World Bank says.

Protesters from several cities in the south on Tuesday joined thousands of demonstrators gathered for more than two months in Baghdad's Tahrir Square, which is the epicenter of the demonstrations in the capital.

"We came to support our brothers in Baghdad," said an activist in the movement from Nassiriya, Haydar Kazem.



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[Israel says defense officials caught in major bribery case](#)

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Tue, 2019-12-10 16:22

JERUSALEM: Israel's Justice Ministry said Tuesday it plans to prosecute suspects involved in a "serious corruption affair" in one of the country's defense bodies.

Most details of the case, including the names of the suspects, were unavailable because of a gag order.

But a statement by the ministry said public servants working in the unnamed defense body allegedly received millions in bribes from companies with the

aim of promoting sales deals with Israel's defense establishment. The suspects are to be charged with bribery, fraud, breach of trust and money laundering, among others offenses, pending a hearing. The announcement comes after the ministry said last week it would serve indictments for corruption charges in a \$2 billion German submarine deal that roped in close associates of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, as well as the country's former navy chief. The justice ministry claims those accused in the submarine case personally benefited from the purchase. Netanyahu was questioned, but not named as a suspect, in the submarine probe, known as "case 3000." But it sparked questions about his earnings on a related German submarine sale to Egypt. Netanyahu has been indicted in three other graft cases for bribery, fraud and breach of trust. He has denied wrongdoing on all charges.



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Israel strikes in Gaza after rocket attack

Sudan's deposed Bashir questioned over 1989 coup: lawyer

Author:

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Tue, 2019-12-10 16:01

KHARTOUM: Sudan's former president Omar Al-Bashir appeared on Tuesday before a prosecutors' committee over the 1989 coup that brought him to power, his lawyer said.

Bashir was "brought to be investigated in the case of the alleged 1989 coup," said his lawyer, Mohamed Al-Hassan, who did not attend the hearing.

The lawyer also told reporters that in his view the hearing was "not a judicial matter, it's a political matter."

In 1989, Bashir, a brigadier at the time, seized power in an Islamist-backed coup that toppled the elected government of prime minister Sadiq Al-Mahdi. The former president was himself ousted by the army in April of this year after months of nationwide protests against his iron-fisted rule of three decades.

On November 12, Sudanese authorities filed charges against Bashir and some of his aides for "plotting" the 1989 coup. The prosecution established a special committee for the case.

If found guilty, he could face the death penalty or life imprisonment under Sudanese law.

Sudan is now ruled by a joint civilian and military sovereign council, which is tasked with overseeing a transition to civilian rule as demanded by the protest movement.

Bashir is being held in Kober prison in a separate case, for which he has been on trial since August, on charges of illegally acquiring and using foreign funds.

A verdict is due in that case on Saturday.

On Tuesday, Bashir was taken from Kober prison to the prosecutor's office in a convoy under strong armed protection.

After the hearing, which lasted about an hour, a crowd gathered in front of the prosecutor's office, chanting "Kober prison – the best place for you!" and "you killed people!"

Wearing the traditional white Sudanese jalabiya and turban, Bashir raised his hands to the crowd, before he set off back toward Kober in the convoy.

The veteran leader is also wanted by The Hague-based International Criminal Court on charges of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity over his role in the war in Sudan's western Darfur region.

To date, Sudanese transitional authorities do not want to extradite the former leader to The Hague.



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Sudan's first female football stars push for women's rights

[Lebanon not expecting new aid pledges at Paris meeting](#)

Author:

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Tue, 2019-12-10 13:28

BEIRUT/PARIS: Lebanon does not expect new aid pledges at conference which France is hosting on Wednesday to press for the quick formation of a new government that can tackle an acute financial crisis.

French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian urged Lebanon to create a new

government swiftly or risk the crisis worsening and threatening the country's stability.

The economic crisis is the worst since the 1975-90 civil war: a liquidity crunch has led banks to enforce capital controls and the Lebanese pound to slump by one third.

Lebanon has also been in a political impasse since Saad Al-Hariri quit as prime minister on Oct. 29, prompted by protests against the ruling elite, with no agreement on a new government.

Nadim Munla, senior adviser to Hariri, who is running the government as caretaker, told Reuters the Paris meeting would probably signal a readiness to offer support once a government is formed that commits to reforms.

"They will recognize that there is a short-term problem and that if and when a government (is formed) that basically responds to the aspirations of people, most probably the international community will be ready to step in and provide support to Lebanon, or additional support," he said.

"It is not a pledging conference."

Lebanon won pledges of over \$11 billion at a conference last year conditional on reforms that it has failed to implement. The economic crisis is rooted in years of corruption and waste that have generated one of the world's heaviest public debt burdens.

The political impasse returned to square one on Sunday when a tentative agreement on a new prime minister unraveled.

Hariri is now seen as the only candidate for the post.

He has said he would only lead a cabinet of specialist ministers, believing this is the way to address the economic crisis, attract aid, and satisfy protesters who have been in the streets since Oct. 17 seeking the removal of a political class blamed for corruption and misrule.

But Hezbollah and its allies including President Michel Aoun say the government must include politicians.

"Let's see the coming few days and if there will be an agreement among the political parties on a formation ... otherwise we might take longer," Munla said. Hariri would be willing to have politicians in cabinet but they should not be "the regular known faces of previous governments."



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Lebanon PM appeals for foreign help to combat import crisis
Lebanon's outgoing PM backs businessman to replace him