

Lebanese army separates rival protests near president palace

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BEIRUT: Lebanon's armed forces have deployed near the presidential palace east of Beirut to prevent friction between rival Lebanese protesters as the stalemate over forming a crisis government continues.

Anti-government protesters had called for a rally Sunday outside the Presidential Palace in Baabda to press President Michel Aoun to formally begin the process of forming a new government. Prime Minister Saad Hariri resigned over a month ago amid nationwide protests accusing the political elite of corruption and mismanagement of the economy.

The call prompted a counter-rally by supporters of Aoun who called him a "red line." Army soldiers formed a human chain to separate the groups on a highway leading to the palace, preventing clashes.

Meanwhile, hundreds of anti-government protesters marched toward central Beirut amid a deepening economic crisis.





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Israel planning new settlement in heart of Hebron

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Sun, 2019-12-01 14:02

JERUSALEM: Israel's new hard-right defense minister on Sunday ordered officials to start planning a new Jewish settlement in the heart of the divided West Bank city of Hebron.

Naftali Bennett's announcement came as the prospects of a third snap election since April loomed larger, with the minister's New Right party leaning heavily on settlers for support at the polls.

The Defense Ministry said Bennett had instructed departments responsible for the Israeli occupied West Bank "to notify the Hebron municipality of planning a new Jewish neighborhood in the wholesale market complex."

The market area is on Hebron's once-bustling Shuhada Street, which leads to a holy site where the biblical Abraham is believed to have been buried.

The street is now largely closed off to Palestinians, who have long demanded that it be reopened.

The city is holy to both Muslims and Jews and is a flashpoint for clashes between Palestinians and Israeli settlers.

On Saturday, Israeli forces shot dead a Palestinian southwest of Hebron, with the army saying he was one of three men throwing petrol bombs at a military vehicle.

About 800 Israeli settlers live in the ancient city under heavy military protection, amid around 200,000 Palestinians.

Sunday's statement said the planned new building project would "double the number of Jewish residents in the city."

Senior Palestinian official Saeb Erekat said the new project was a result of the United States' decision last month to no longer consider Israeli settlements illegal.

The Bennett plan, he wrote in English on Twitter, "is the first tangible result of the US decision to legitimize colonization."

The move comes amid political turmoil in Israel after general elections in April and September ended in deadlock.

Neither Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and allies like Bennett, nor their opponents, won enough parliamentary seats to form a viable coalition.

Lawmakers now have until December 11 to find a solution or see parliament dissolved once again.

At Sunday's weekly cabinet meeting, Netanyahu also offered good news for the settlers, pledging 40 million shekels (\$11.5 million) for improved security.

"We are strengthening the security components in the communities in Judea and Samaria, of the Israeli citizens there," he said, using the biblical terms for the West Bank.

Israel's West Bank settlements are considered illegal under international law and are bitterly opposed by Palestinians.



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Israeli troops kill Palestinian teen at Gaza protest Israel demolishes homes of alleged Palestinian killers

[Bus accident kills 24 in northern Tunisia: ministry](#)

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Sun, 2019-12-01 12:40

TUNIS: At least 24 Tunisians were killed and 18 more injured when a bus plunged into a ravine on Sunday, in one of the country's worst road accidents.

The bus had set off from Tunis to the picturesque northern mountain town of Ain Draham, a popular autumn destination for Tunisians near the Algerian border, the tourism ministry said.

Twenty-four people were killed and 18 injured, the victims aged between 20 and 30, said the health ministry.

An AFP team that went to the scene saw the mangled remains of the bus leaning on its side in the ravine near a river bed, with its seats scattered around the crash site.

The top of the bus appears to have been torn off and bodies, some in sports clothes and trainers, were strewn across the ground.

A sign reading in English "Sweet Time Travel" – apparently the name of the travel agency that ferried the tourists from Tunis – lay among the debris.

The bus with 43 people on board was travelling through the northern Ain Snoussi region when it veered off the road, the interior ministry said.

The vehicle had "fallen into a ravine after crashing through an iron barrier", it said on its Facebook page.

The injured were transferred to nearby hospitals, it added.

Forensic experts were deployed to investigate the crash, AFP correspondents said.

It was not immediately clear what caused the accident, but Tunisian roads are known to be dangerous and run-down.

Tourism Minister Rene Trabelsi told a private radio station Mosaique FM that the "unfortunate accident took place in a difficult area" and just after the bus had taken a "sharp bend".

A civil defence official, speaking on state television, said there had previously been deadly accidents at the same spot.

Khaled Ayadi, who had arrived at the scene after the accident, told AFP he saw the bodies of "people scattered (all around) and blood".

He said that he and other motorists who had stopped by the side of the road started to help and try to retrieve the bodies until the rescuers arrived and took over the gruesome task.

"On this road there are always accidents, especially trucks... We must find a solution for this road so there are no more accidents," Ayadi said, adding that Sunday's accident was overwhelming.

Social network users bemoaned the tragedy. "What a heavy toll," one of them said.

Another denounced the "roads of death" in Tunisia and wrote: "24 dead and no one from the government has declared a national catastrophe".

The World Health Organization in 2015 said Tunisia had the second worst traffic death rate per capita in North Africa, behind only war-torn Libya. Experts blamed run-down roads, reckless driving and poor vehicle maintenance for a rise in accidents the following year.

Tunisian President Kais Saied and Prime Minister Youssef Chahed visited the scene of Sunday's accident, one of Tunisia's worst.

In April, seven women day labourers were among 12 people killed when the pickup truck taking them to work collided with a minivan in the impoverished central region of Sidi Bouzid.

In August 2016, at least 16 people were killed and 85 others wounded in another road accident in the mountainous region of Kasserine.

The authorities recognise the scale of the problem but have said the country's security challenges, including jihadist attacks, have kept them

from giving it more attention.



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Tunisia's Ennahda names Habib Jemli as choice for PM
Tunisia's parliament picks Ennahda leader as speaker

[Nearly 70 dead in Syria regime clashes with Idlib militants](#)

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Sun, 2019-12-01 11:49

SURMAN, Syria: Two days of clashes between regime forces and armed groups in Syria's last major opposition bastion have killed nearly 70 on both sides, a war monitoring group said Sunday.

The battles in the northwestern province of Idlib are the most violent there since a Russian-brokered cease-fire agreement went into effect in late August, said the head of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

On Sunday morning, clouds of smoke rose over the Maaret Al-Numan region as warplanes pounded militants and allied rebels in positions they had recently recaptured from regime forces, said an AFP correspondent.

Residents of affected villages fled north to escape the fighting, adding to the tens of thousands who have already flooded out of the province's violence-plagued south since an escalation started earlier this year.

The Observatory on Sunday put the death toll from fighting at 69 combatants since battles started the previous day.

At least 36 regime forces were among those killed.

It said an attack led by Syria's former Al-Qaeda affiliate on several regime positions had initially sparked the fighting.

Overnight, the Syrian army backed by Russian warplanes launched a counter-push to reclaim territory it had lost in the battles, according to the Britain-based war monitor.

Regime forces have since regained lost ground but violent clashes are ongoing, the war monitor and an AFP correspondent said.

The Idlib region, home to around three million people including many displaced by Syria's eight-year civil war, is controlled by the country's former Al-Qaeda affiliate.

The Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham jihadist alliance also controls parts of neighboring Aleppo and Latakia provinces where battles with regime forces have also recently taken place.

The region is one of the last holdouts of opposition to forces of Syrian President Bashar Assad.

A cease-fire announced by Russia in late August has reduced violence in the area.

Between the end of April and the end of August, Idlib was pounded ceaselessly by Syrian soldiers backed by Russian air power.

The Observatory estimates that nearly 1,000 civilians were killed in that period, and the UN says that more than 400,000 people were displaced.

The war in Syria has killed more than 370,000 people and displaced millions since it erupted in 2011.



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Turkey 'may stall NATO defense plan over Syria dispute' France warns Turkey over Syria military action ahead of talks with European leaders

[Iran may 'reconsider' atomic watchdog commitments](#)

Author:

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Sun, 2019-12-01 11:33

TEHRAN: Iran warned Sunday it may "seriously reconsider" its commitments to the UN atomic watchdog if European parties to a nuclear deal trigger a dispute mechanism that could lead to sanctions.

The 2015 nuclear accord has been unraveling since last year when the United States unilaterally withdrew from it and began reimposing sanctions on Iran. The three European countries still party to the deal – Britain, France and Germany – have been trying to salvage it but their efforts have so far borne little fruit.

“If they use the trigger (mechanism), Iran would be forced to seriously reconsider some of its commitments to” the International Atomic Energy Agency, said parliament speaker Ali Larijani.

“If they think doing so is more beneficial to them, they can go ahead,” he told a news conference in Tehran.

In May, one year after the US pullout, Iran began retaliating by scaling back its commitments to the deal – known formally as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

Following its latest step back this month, the European parties warned the JCPOA’s dispute resolution mechanism could be triggered if Iran continued down that path.

It covers various stages that could take several months to unfold, but the issue could eventually end up before the UN Security Council, which could decide to reimpose sanctions.

Larijani also suggested the current deadlock with the United States could be “fixed” if Iran’s arch-foe learns from the past.

Ahead of the 2015 deal, then US president Barack “Obama wrote a letter and said that I accept Iran’s enrichment, now let’s negotiate,” he said.

“If the American officials have just as much wisdom, to use past experiences, then they can fix this issue.”

The JCPOA set out restrictions on Iran’s nuclear program in exchange for the lifting of Western sanctions.



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Iran starts enriching uranium at Fordow amid reports UN nuclear inspector detained