

Protesters injured during rioting at Beirut's Ring Bridge

Author:

Tue, 2019-11-26 00:47

BEIRUT: The Ring Bridge, which links east and west Beirut, was a battleground for more than five hours between peaceful protesters and Hezbollah and Amal supporters. According to the General Directorate of the Lebanese Civil Defense, 10 people were taken to hospital.

Young supporters of Amal and Hezbollah arrived on motorcycles at the Ring Bridge after 10 p.m. on Sunday chanting the name of Hezbollah's secretary general. Their demonstration turned into a riot in residential streets parallel to the Ring Bridge, which are predominantly Christian areas, as journalists and peaceful protesters were surrounded and assaulted. Tear gas was used to disperse the rioters.

Former Deputy Speaker of Parliament Farid Makari tweeted: "The people want the Ring to be a bridge that brings the Lebanese together, while others want to turn it into a boxing, intimidation and repression arena."

While no rioters were arrested in Beirut, many peaceful protesters in other areas were arrested for blocking roads on Sunday night to pressure the government to comply with their demands. The detainees were released on Monday morning.

However, there were two casualties at the blockades when stones were thrown at a car on the Jiyeh highway, on the Beirut-South road. The car crashed into a concrete barrier and two occupants were killed.

A military arrest warrant was issued for the Lebanese army aide Charbel Al-Ojeil for the deliberate murder of civilian activist Alaa Abu Fakher. Abu Fakher was killed on Nov. 12 during the blockade of the southern road into Beirut. Colonel Nidal Daou was also arrested for the murder.

Amid the continuing failure to form a government, the director general for political affairs at the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Richard Moore, paid a visit to President Michel Aoun, Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri and Saad Hariri, who recently resigned as prime minister.

In a statement issued by the British Embassy Moore confirmed "his country's commitment to helping Lebanon and to supporting its constitutional legitimacy in the formation of a government. This can then implement economic reforms to assist the restoration of long-term stability and comprehensive growth in Lebanon, in addition to the implementation of policies that reflect the aspirations of the Lebanese people, without interference in Lebanese internal affairs.

Moore stressed that "the choice of leaders and government is an internal

matter for the Lebanese. The people were clear in their demand for better governance, and they should be heard. It is important to continue to respect their right to protest peacefully, and any repression of the protest movement by violence or intimidation by any party is completely unacceptable.”

A general strike has been announced in the private sector on Thursday, Friday and Saturday in light of the “failure to form a new government and the worsening economic conditions reaching unprecedented levels.”



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Lebanon protesters defiant despite Hezbollah attack Demonstrators target US Embassy near Beirut

[Istanbul's secular mayor knocking on European doors for funding](#)

Author:

Tue, 2019-11-26 00:37

ANKARA: The secret behind the latest wave of European visits made by

Istanbul's Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu has finally been revealed: To ask for international funding for the urban projects of the metropolitan municipality.

Imamoglu announced on Sunday that Turkey's state-run banks are reluctant to lend routine loans to the municipality – even for paying salaries – and that this has led him to ask European countries for funding.

He added that the municipality is now working on a plan to sell Eurobonds to finance its projects in Istanbul, home to one-fifth of Turkey's 82 million citizens.

"The state banks seem to have shut the doors on us," he said. "I condemn the officials' attitude."

However, even if it is endorsed by the city council, he would likely need the approval from the Treasury and Finance Ministry – controlled by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's son-in-law Berat Albayrak – to issue Eurobonds worth \$500 million.

During local elections in June, Imamoglu, of the secular main opposition Republican People's Party, took the reins from Erdogan's AKP which, along with its Islamist predecessors, has run the city for the last 25 years.

He also inherited a significant amount of debt and wasteful spending from the previous administration of the city, with a budget of 20 billion lira (\$3.4 billion) and a debt of 26 billion lira, which obliged him to search for resources to pay it.

The municipality rounded up and parked hundreds of cars hired for official use by the previous administration to display the squandering of public money.

Karol Wasilewski, an analyst at the Warsaw-based Polish Institute of International Affairs, said that this is a politically risky strategy since Imamoglu may easily get hit by Erdogan who would criticize him using nationalist discourse.

Erdogan has always taken pride in ending Turkey's dependence on the International Monetary Fund in 2013 after paying its last loan installment.

According to Wasilewski, the Turkish president could capitalize on the nationalistic feelings of the people by saying that Imamoglu would do exactly the opposite after the latter met with various global creditors and bankers in London.

"However, Imamoglu not only proved that he is a politician willing to accept the risk, but also made his bones as a person fighting the oppression of the government. If he succeeds in bringing further investments to Istanbul and in improving standards of living, his stance in Turkish politics will be even stronger," he told Arab News.

Although Imamoglu, 49, has dismissed claims that he is interested in a

presidential bid, his victories on the local front, his popular appeal and inclusive profile as a practicing Muslim elected from a secularist party have led many to think that he could challenge the president, who also once served as Istanbul mayor.

Imamoglu has paid working visits to Paris, Berlin and London in recent months.

Following these visits, Istanbul has secured €110 million (\$121 million) of financing from Deutsche Bank for an underground transport project on the Asian side of the city. The construction will begin on Nov. 26.

Nezih Onur Kuru, a political analyst and a doctoral researcher on political psychology from Istanbul's Koc University, thinks the debates on Imamoglu's meetings with European investors is an indicator of the recent tension between the central and local governments.

"The government has targeted Imamoglu as a potential presidential candidate after his 9-point lead victory in the June 23 elections," he told Arab News.

Kuru added that seeking investments strengthens Imamoglu's image as a governor who defies the central government for public interest and consolidates his support base.

During Imamoglu's European tour, the French Development Agency also signed an €86 million loan agreement with Istanbul for an underground metro line.

So far, the city has secured financing from Societe Generale, Black Sea Trade and Development Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.



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Istanbul metro project gets \$121m financing from Deutsche Bank
Istanbul mayor Ekrem Imamoglu hails victory as step to repair democracy

[Hundreds of Sudanese women march against violence](#)

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Mon, 2019-11-25 20:43

KHARTOUM: Hundreds of Sudanese women Monday marched in Khartoum to mark International Day for Eliminating Violence against Women, in the first such rally held in the northeast African country in decades.

Chanting "Freedom, peace, justice," the catchcry of the protest movement that led to autocrat Omar Al-Bashir's ouster in April, the demonstrators took to the streets in the Burri district, a site of regular anti-Bashir protests earlier this year.

Many women, dressed in orange, carried banners that read: "Women's revolution continues" and "We are the revolution, we are the change."

Many also carried banners such as "Stop rape of Darfuri Women," as they called for justice for female victims of the war in the western Sudan region.

"There is an atmosphere of freedom now," said 21-year-old university student Fatima, as others behind her whistled, clapped and ululated, an AFP correspondent reported.

"There is less violence now, but we still need to change the laws that are against us."

Bashir seized power in an Islamist-backed coup in 1989 and since then the role of women had been severely restricted in Sudan.

During his 30-year-old rule, authorities implemented a strict moral code that activists said primarily targeted women, using harsh interpretations of Islamic sharia law.

Thousands of women were flogged and handed hefty fines under a controversial public order law for "indecent dressing" or consuming alcohol, which is banned in the country.

During the protests that rocked Bashir's regime, women were at the forefront, demanding his ouster and an end to violence against them.

The army deposed him on April 11, and his overthrow has triggered hope that laws encouraging violence against women be scrapped.

“I came to demand an end to violence against women,” said, Adila Farouk as she marched in the capital’s streets.

“I have been subjected to sexual harassment, but it is nothing compared to what other women have faced.”



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Sudan’s top Islamist politician sent to prison holding Bashir

[Libyan officials say US drone shot down by mistake](#)

Author:

Mon, 2019-11-25 21:45

CAIRO: Libyan forces trying to seize Tripoli shot down a US military drone over the capital by mistake last week, officials said Monday.

The US military said it lost the drone Thursday while it was assessing the security situation and monitoring extremist activity. US Africa Command declined to elaborate Monday, saying only that the incident was under

investigation.

The self-styled Libyan National Army, led by Gen. Khalifa Haftar, launched an offensive to capture Tripoli in April after seizing much of eastern Libya from Islamic militants and other rivals in recent years. The country was plunged into chaos when a NATO-backed uprising toppled longtime dictator Muammar Qaddafi in 2011.

The country is now split between a government in the east allied with Haftar and one in Tripoli, in the West, that is supported by the United Nations. The LNA is backed by Egypt and UAE, while the Tripoli-allied militias receive aid from Turkey and Qatar. The fighting has stalled in recent weeks, with both sides dug in and shelling one another along Tripoli's southern reaches. They have also carried out airstrikes and drone attacks.

A senior official in the LNA's general command said they mistook the US drone for a Turkish-made drone used by the Tripoli-allied militias. The LNA also downed an Italian drone southeast of Tripoli in recent days.

The official said the LNA apologized for shooting down the American drone and has "agreed with the Americans to coordinate their operations over Tripoli and its surrounding areas to avoid similar incidents in the future."

The LNA fighters did not share photographs of the US drone online as they usually do when they shoot down drones, including the Italian one last week, another official said.

The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to brief the media.

On Saturday, the LNA imposed a "no-fly zone" over Tripoli, saying that all flights over the capital city and nearby towns are "prohibited without prior coordination."

The Tripoli fighting forced the US military to pull out a small contingent of American troops who were in Libya in recent years, helping local forces combat the Daesh group and Al-Qaeda militants, as well as protecting diplomatic facilities.

In September, the US military said it carried out several airstrikes against IS, killing more than 40 militants in the first American strikes in the North African country in over a year.



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Libyan force imposes 'no-fly zone' amid fight for Tripoli
Libyan officials: Airstrike kills 7 workers in Tripoli

[Syria constitutional talks stuck on first day of new round](#)

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Mon, 2019-11-25 16:30

GENEVA: Damascus government delegates to a Syrian Constitutional Committee left the second UN-sponsored round before it began on Monday, in what opposition members said was a stalling tactic, and it was unclear whether talks would take place on Tuesday.

The talks are meant to be a step forward in what the United Nations says will be a long road to political rapprochement, followed by elections.

But experts question whether President Bashar Assad will be willing to cede much in any negotiations after his Russian- and Iranian-back forces recaptured large areas of the country in offensives against rebels and militants since 2015.

Syrian television reported that the government delegation left the United Nations in Geneva on Monday because they did not get answers to their proposal to specify a work schedule.

UN Special Envoy Geir Pedersen met the two co-chairs from the government and opposition sides and was continuing his consultations with a view to the panel's resumption, a UN spokeswoman said.

"The situation is clearly blocked," a Western diplomat said.

The opening round of the first Syrian peace talks in more than a year went "better than most people would have expected," Pedersen told reporters on Nov. 8 after an opening 10-day round.

Forty-five delegates who form the committee's drafting group arrived at the UN European headquarters on Monday. The group is made up of 15 members each from the government, opposition and civil society but they did not meet together. "The Constitutional Committee of today was not held. And the reason is there is no agreement on the program or the schedule to be discussed for the meeting," Yahya Al-Aridi, a Syrian opposition spokesman, told reporters upon leaving.

"The joint head of the Constitutional Committee from the regime side presented an item which is considered by him to be a schedule, namely it included fighting terrorism, it included lifting of sanctions and the condemnation of what he called the Turkish invasion," Aridi said, describing the government demands as "political."

Opposition delegate Bassma Kodmani said her side had proposed an agenda last week for a structured discussion but had had no reply.

"Now the government delegate comes with an agenda saying they want to discuss 'basic patriotic principles' as a set of pre-conditions to the constitutional discussion," Kodmani told Reuters.

The opposition was willing to discuss such principles as part of the constitutional work but not outside it, she said.

"The approach they (the government) suggest is designed to buy time," Kodmani said.



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Chemical warfare watchdog hits back at Syria report doubts