

Protesters aim to 'raise global awareness of corruption in Iraq'

Author:

Fri, 2019-10-04 00:45

BAGHDAD: The current demonstrations in Iraq seek to show the international community what is happening in the country, and force out corrupt officials and politicians, Mustafa Hameed, a senior organizer of the protests, told Arab News on Thursday.

They are an attempt to topple the government of Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi. The protesters do not want to damage the political system, he said.

There have been mass demonstrations in Baghdad and Shiite-dominated southern provinces since Tuesday, in protest against widespread corruption, high unemployment and the failure to consistently deliver basic services such as drinking water and electricity.

The protests are the worst since Abdul Mahdi took office in October last year. At least 28 people have been killed and hundreds wounded, including troops, after Iraqi forces used water cannons, tear gas and live ammunition in their attempts to disperse the crowds.

"We do not target the political process in our demonstrations and do not seek to topple the political system," said Hameed, who used a different name over fears for his safety.

"We also are not targeting the Abdul Mahdi government exclusively. We want to bring the corrupt to court. We will not include the corrupt from 2003 but will include at least the corrupt from (former Prime Minister Nouri) Al-Maliki's government. If Abdul Mahdi could make this decision (to bring the corrupt to justice) and provide the necessary guarantees for its implementation, we would withdraw from the streets within 24 hours."

Iraq ranks high in the list of the most corrupt countries. Most Iraqis consider Al-Maliki's second spell in government, which lasted from 2010 to 2014, to be the most corrupt administration. During its reign, three Sunni-dominated provinces in the western and northern parts of the country fell into the hands of Daesh militants, and thousands of innocent people were killed.

Iraqi officials said they cannot negotiate with the organizers of the demonstrations because their identities are unknown and their requests are not specific.

"Our demands are clear and our leaders are clear," said Hameed. "But we deliberately did not disclose them from the beginning, to draw the attention of the international community to what is happening in Iraq and not give the Iraqi government the opportunity to terminate us."

FASTFACTS

- Demonstrations intend to target Abdul Mahdi government but do not want to damage the political system, says a leading organizer.
- Key demand is to cancel results of May 2018 parliamentary elections, dissolve Parliament and hold new vote.

“At first, we were just trying to send a message to the Iraqi political forces, the Americans and the Iranians that we were able to conduct demonstrations without the intervention of a political party or a cleric. But after the death of many of our young people, it became bigger than this and we demand the internationalization of the Iraqi issue.”

Iraq has been the biggest battleground for the US and Iran since 2003. Both countries control dozens of armed factions, and political and security leaders who serve their agendas in the country and the wider region.

Most Iraqis believe that corrupt politicians and officials benefit from the protection of the US or Iran, escape punishment by obstructing the rule of law, and deliberately form weak governments so that they cannot be held accountable.

One of the most important demands by protesters, said Hameed, is that the results of the May 2018 national parliamentary elections be canceled, the Parliament dissolved and a new election held.

He added that preparations for the demonstrations began three months ago, in coordination with prominent tribal sheikhs in Baghdad, Najaf, Karbala and Dhi Qar provinces. The protesters and their leaders are Iraqis without Islamist backgrounds, he said, and have no links to the Baath Party, which was banned by the US-led coalition following the invasion of Iraq in 2003.

Clashes between demonstrators and security forces continued into the early hours of Thursday, especially in the provinces of Najaf, Maysan and Dhi Qar. The Iraqi High Commission for Human Rights and Iraqi officials said that more than 22 government and party properties had been set on fire by demonstrators in the past two days.

Hameed said new directives were issued to demonstrators in the past few hours telling them not to attack public buildings, security forces or clergymen in Najaf, to raise only the Iraqi flag, to form committees to protect demonstrators and expel saboteurs, and to demonstrate in all parts of Iraq instead of insisting on access to Liberation Square (known locally as Tahrir Square) in central Baghdad.

Prime Minister Abdul Mahdi said he is in “continuous contact with representatives of peaceful demonstrators to consider the legitimate demands.” Mohammed Al-Halbousi, the parliament’s speaker, invited the leaders of the demonstrations to meet him on Saturday in his office to hear their demands.

However, Hameed said they had received no contact from the government and would not accept an invitation from Al-Halbousi.

“No one has contacted us and we will not sit with them now,” he said. “They (the government) used to lie and trade the blood of Iraqis. We are waiting to see the reactions of the international community to decide our next step, so it is likely we will not meet with them (the government) until next week.”



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Iran says two border crossings to Iraq closed because of unrest in IraqSix people shot dead in southern Iraqi city as violent protests rage for third day

[Teachers association suspends four-week strike in Jordan](#)

Author:

Fri, 2019-10-04 00:33

AMMAN: The elected council of the Jordan Teacher Association announced late on Thursday the suspension of the four-week strike and the return to regular teaching on Sunday. Association spokesman Nouriddin Nadim simply told the press that the "strike is suspended in compliance with the decision of the administrative court."

Nadim said that he hoped that the government will respond with a similar gesture to help resolve the conflict.

"The teachers association has responded positively to the court decision and we have closed this file. Now the government has until Saturday night to respond to the teachers' demands and if they don't we will call for a new strike starting Sunday morning."

The strike began on Sept. 8 with the teachers demanding that the government of Jordan respect its promise to give teachers a 50 percent pay raise. Teachers also asked for an apology from the government and an investigation into the events of Sept. 5, when teachers were prevented from holding a protest demonstration outside the prime minister's office.

The Jordanian government approved a modest pay raise last week. Simultaneously the administrative court declared on Sept. 29 that teachers should immediately suspend the strike but that the court will hear the case at a later stage.

The teachers waited until they were duly served with the decision and then submitted an appeal, but the law is clear that adherence to the decision is needed first. The association met for two hours on Thursday afternoon and reluctantly approved the suspension of the strike and the withdrawal of the legal objection.

"We are suspending the strike even though our demands have not been met and we are very unhappy at what happened," an association representative said.

Sources told Arab News that the decision of the association's top council was made after reliable intermediaries assured the teacher's association that the government was willing to make an important offer to the association before Sunday. A legal adviser to the council to Arab News that the decision was made to abide by the law and to safeguard the possibility of one day calling for another form of protest, including a strike.

Ahmad Awad, the founder and director of the Phenix Center for Economic and Informatics Studies, told Arab News that the teachers have won in their battle regardless of the results, and it represents a shout to all workers in the public and private sectors to fight for their rights. "The day after the strike is going to be better than the days before this strike. This should also be a lesson to future governments in how to deal with workers and their associations in an appropriate way," he said.

Thouqan Obeidat, a veteran educator and a respected education strategist, said that the end of the strike without any resolution will not solve the problem because teachers will return in bad spirits.

“If during this weekend things loosen up and the teachers get a reasonable rise, the situation will go back to normal. This doesn’t mean that the teachers will be geniuses or that the educational system will be vastly improved because fixing education needs many solutions and they are not all monetary, but certainly if the teachers return without any change they will be devastated and the educational system will be in ruins,” he said.



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Jordan’s striking teachers reject government call to return to work
Jordanian teachers’ dispute with govt continues

[Vatican visit to Al-Aqsa celebrates religious coexistence](#)

Author:

Thu, 2019-10-03 23:48

AMMAN: Palestinian and Jordanian officials praised the important visit on Thursday by the Vatican’s cardinal for eastern churches Leonardo Sandri and Francesco Patton to Al-Aqsa Mosque.

The officials also praised the important position taken during the visit in support of coexistence and the Hashemite custodianship of Christian and Muslim holy places.

The Vatican's delegation was welcomed by the director-general of Jerusalem's Waqf department, Sheikh Azzam Khatib, members of the Waqf council and an assortment of Palestinian leaders.

A seven-point message reaffirmed the participants' attachment to the Omari pact, support for the Hashemite custodianship of King Abdullah over Muslim and Christian Holy Sites, rejection of attempts to change the status quo, regret for war periods which saw aggressions against holy places and innocent worshippers.

It stated that there is no alternative to the two-state solution with East Jerusalem as the capital of the Palestinian state in accordance with international law.

This high-level visit to Al-Aqsa is a true reflection on the 1,400 years of Muslim-Christian coexistence in the holy city of Jerusalem.

Wasfi Kailani director, Royal Hashemite Fund for the Restoration of Al-Aqsa

Wasfi Kailani, director of the Royal Hashemite Fund for the Restoration of Al-Aqsa, told Arab News that the Vatican visit was a historic meeting: "This high-level visit to Al-Aqsa and the words of solidarity and support is a true reflection of the 1,400 years of Muslim and Christian coexistence in the holy city of Jerusalem."

Kailani added that Muslims recognize the important role that the Franciscans have played in the Holy Land: "We are recognizing 800 years of the important role of the Franciscans, whose role in education and guarding holy places is appreciated."

Ramzi Khoury, head of the Palestinian Presidential Commission on Church Affairs, said that the visit is important and meaningful.

"We celebrate together with our fellow Palestinian Muslims the anniversary of the Custodians of the Holy who have played a crucial role in protecting holy places and in supporting the Christian presence in Palestine. The visit to Al-Aqsa has valuable meaning to the importance of Christian and Muslim coexistence in our homeland Palestine."



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International community must help stop Israeli aggression against Al-Aqsa:
Arab League14 injured in Israeli attack on Al-Aqsa worshippers

[Israeli Arabs go on strike to protest deadly crime wave](#)

Author:

Thu, 2019-10-03 23:39

JERUSALEM: Arab citizens of Israel observed a general strike and held protests on Thursday over a wave of deadly violence within the minority community.

Schools and businesses in Arab towns and villages were closed following a call by local and national Arab leaders, and newly elected Arab members of Parliament skipped the official swearing-in out of solidarity.

Police say there have been more than 70 killings in Arab communities this year, nearly as many as in each of the past two years, when Arabs made up

more than half of all murder victims nationwide. Earlier this week, two brothers and a third individual were killed in a brawl involving guns and knives in the northern town of Majd Al-Krum.

Arab leaders say Israeli police largely ignore the violence in their communities, everything from family feuds and mafia turf wars to domestic violence and so-called honor killings. Israel's Arab citizens make up 20 percent of the population and are descended from Palestinians who remained in the state after its creation in 1948. They have the right to vote but suffer discrimination and say authorities treat them like second-class citizens.

An Arab coalition made major gains in last month's parliamentary elections, and has made improving public safety one of its top priorities. The 13 newly elected lawmakers did not attend the swearing-in at the Knesset because they were taking part in the strike.

"A racist government has neglected us and the police have abandoned our neighborhoods to gangs and criminals," Ayman Odeh, the head of the Arab parliamentary bloc, tweeted. He said the strike was to demand weapons searches, tougher action against organized crime and higher budgets for education.

"If there is no other choice, we will block streets to return safety to the streets," he said.

The police adamantly reject the allegations of indifference and say they are doing everything they can to stem the violence.

"Police are continuing to speak to the leaders of the communities in order to try and prevent the incidents from taking place, but at the same time also working inside the communities, patrolling more," police spokesman Micky Rosenfeld said.

He said seven new police stations have been opened in Arab communities this year and there are plans to open eight more in the coming months. This year alone, police have confiscated 4,000 weapons and arrested some 2,800 people on weapons-related charges, according to Rosenfeld.

But he said local leaders need to do more to cooperate with police and to prevent violence.

"It has to come also from inside the community," he said. "They can't just, you know, decide at a wedding to open fire and shoot in the air. These are basic issues that have to be dealt with by the leaders of the communities."

Thabet Abu Rass, the co-director of the Abraham Fund Initiatives, a group that promotes coexistence between Arabs and Jews, says he has personally worked to improve relations between the police and Arab communities as part of the group's public safety program. But he said there is still a security vacuum in many Arab towns and villages that allows criminals to thrive.

"In terms of public and private safety our Arab towns are kind of ex-territorial, it's kind of outside of Israel," he said. "While we are citizens

of the state of Israel, the state is not here, not in our towns.”

He said there’s a high level of mistrust between police and Arab citizens that makes cooperation difficult, and that the lack of a police presence inside the communities makes people reluctant to come forward with information for fear of violent reprisal.

“We are willing to cooperate with the police in issues related to combatting violence and crime in our community,” he said. But “before cooperation, we would like to see a police presence in our towns.”



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Two Israeli Arabs charged over alleged Daesh support
Palestinian jailed for life for murder of Israeli

[US reopens embassy in Mogadishu after three decades](#)

Author:

Thu, 2019-10-03 23:35

MOGADISHU: The US said on Wednesday it had re-opened an embassy in Somalia's capital, 28 years after it was shut as the country plunged into civil war, highlighting warming ties between the two nations.

Washington closed its embassy during the 1991 overthrow of President Siad Barre's military regime which ushered in decades of chaos, however diplomatic relations have strengthened in recent years.

"Today we reaffirm the relations between the American people and the Somali people, and our two nations," said Ambassador Donald Yamamoto in a statement.

"It is a significant and historic day that reflects Somalia's progress in recent years, and another step forward in regularising US diplomatic engagement in Mogadishu since recognizing the federal government of Somalia in 2013."

A permanent diplomatic presence was established in Mogadishu in December 2018, however was operated out of Nairobi.

The country continues to be wracked by an Islamist insurgency, and Al-Shabab militants on Monday staged an attack on a military base that is a major launching site for US drone operations, as well as a EU convoy.

US strikes in Somalia surged in April 2017, after President Donald Trump declared the south of the country an "area of active hostilities."

"The United States remains a strong partner to Somalia in its effort to build a stable, credible, and democratic country," said the statement.



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