

Lebanese budget protesters clash with security in Beirut

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BEIRUT: Security forces opened water cannons on Lebanese anti-austerity protesters in the country's capital on Monday, as the government continued to hold marathon meetings to discuss severe budget cuts.

Lebanon faces a looming fiscal crisis as the economy struggles with soaring debt, rising unemployment and slow growth. The government's tightened budget and key reforms aim to unlock billions of dollars in pledged foreign assistance. But planned cuts have unleashed a wave of public discontent, amid leaks that austerity could target public wages, services and social benefits.



A retired Lebanese soldier chants slogans while holding an army flag, during a protest in Beirut, Lebanon, Monday. (AP)

Over one hundred protesters gathered Monday outside the Government House in downtown Beirut shouting "Thieves, thieves!" as the Cabinet met for its 16th session and struggles to reach agreement.

Protesters pushed back against police lines and set fire to tires outside the building. At least two policemen and one civilian were wounded in the

scuffles.

Among those demonstrating Monday were public and private school teachers and retired officers.

The government, headed by Prime Minister Saad Hariri, has sought to calm nerves while also describing the upcoming budget as the most austere in Lebanon's history.

Hariri said he hopes the government will be able to send the budget to parliament later this week.

Finance Minister Ali Hassan Khalil said the cabinet made "important progress" in discussions Sunday.







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Indebted Lebanon may struggle to refinance as austerity budget stalls
Lebanon's cabinet postpones final budget meeting

[World Food Programme considers ending aid to Houthi-controlled areas in Yemen after 'interference'](#)

Mon, 2019-05-20 18:26

LONDON: The World Food Programme (WFP) is considering suspending aid delivery in the areas under the control of Yemen's Houthi group because of fighting, insecurity and interference in its work, the agency said on Monday.

"Humanitarian workers in Yemen are being denied access to the hungry, aid convoys have been blocked, and local authorities have interfered with food

distribution,” the WFP said in a statement. “This has to stop.”

The highly unusual threat from the UN agency, which is feeding more than 10 million people across Yemen, reflected what it said were “obstacles that are being put in our way”.

“We face daily challenges due to the unrelenting fighting and insecurity in Yemen. And yet, our greatest challenge does not come from the guns, that are yet to fall silent in this conflict – instead, it is the obstructive and uncooperative role of some of the Houthi leaders in areas under their control.”

Negotiations with Houthi leaders to open up access to hungry people had not yet brought tangible results, WFP said, although some had made positive commitments.

“Unfortunately, they (Houthi leaders) are being let down by other Houthi leaders who have broken assurances they gave us on stopping food diversions and finally agreeing to a beneficiary identification and biometric registration exercise.”

WFP’s threat of a partial pullout comes after fighting around Hodeidah marred an apparent diplomatic breakthrough by U.N. envoy Martin Griffiths, who got the Iranian-aligned Houthis to agree a unilateral withdrawal of their forces from Hodeidah and two other ports earlier this month.



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Yemen Minister: Houthi militia raid WFP warehouse, kidnap 2 UN staff members
KSR relief, WFP sign deals to combat hunger across the world

Iran increases low enriched uranium production fourfold

Mon, 2019-05-20 18:25

LONDON: Iran has increased by fourfold the production of low enriched uranium, an official in Natanz nuclear facility told Tasnim news agency on Monday, a week after Iran officially stopped some commitments under an international nuclear accord.

Under the agreement, Tehran was allowed to produce low-enriched uranium with a 300kg limit. Tehran could ship the excess amounts out of the country for storage or sale.

Iran said this month the cap no longer applies as it scaled down commitments in reaction to US unilateral withdrawal from the deal.

It was not clear how far Iran's stock of low-enriched uranium was from the 300-kg limit. Under the deal Iran can enrich uranium at 3.67 percent, far below the 90 percent of weapons grade. It is also well below the 20 percent level to which Iran enriched uranium before the deal.



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Iran urges China, Russia 'concrete action' to save nuclear deal

[What we know about bomb blast near Egypt's pyramids](#)

Author:

Mon, 2019-05-20 18:21

CAIRO: Just a month before the African Cup of Nations, Egypt was hit by a bomb blast that undermined efforts to burnish its image as a bulwark of stability after years of turmoil.

The attack on Sunday near the famed pyramids of Giza is another setback to the North African country's efforts to revive its key tourism industry after years of turmoil.

A roadside bomb explosion hit a tourist bus driving on a road close to a lavish new museum under construction overlooking the Giza plateau.

The blast shattered many of the bus' windows, injuring several of its

passengers as well as those of a nearby car.

At least 17 people were wounded in the explosion including foreigners. South Africa's foreign ministry said three of its nationals were hospitalized.

No group has claimed responsibility for the attack yet.

A day later, Egypt announced that its security forces had killed 12 suspected militants in police raids near Cairo.

The interior ministry said the militants belonged to the Hasm movement which is believed to be a splinter faction of the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood group.

Hasm has previously claimed responsibility for attacks targeting security personnel and high-profile figures in Egypt including judges.

"The pyramids area is known to be a bastion for the Muslim Brotherhood. Groups like Hasm and Lewaa Al-Thawra (believed to be affiliates of the Brotherhood) have previously claimed responsibility for attacks in this area," said political science professor Mostafa Kamel Al-Sayed.

Hassan Nafaa, another political science professor at Cairo University, said the authorities' announcement about the killing of militants was meant to give a semblance of order.



The roadside bomb went off as the bus was being driven in Giza, also causing injuries to Egyptians in a nearby car, medical and security sources said. (AFP)

"The security establishment wants to prove it's effective and successful... by announcing it killed 12 members of the Hasm movement to give the impression it is behind the attack," he said.

The ministry's statement did not directly link the raids to the bus attack. Egypt's tourism sector has been hit by a string of previous attacks, most recently in December when three Vietnamese nationals and an Egyptian tour guide were killed in an explosion.

Back then, a home-made explosive device struck their bus which was also driving near the site of the pyramids.

It followed a lull in attacks since the 2017 stabbing of two women on a beach in the seaside resort of Hurghada.

The heaviest blow to Egypt's tourism sector was in October 2015 when a bomb attack claimed by Daesh downed a Russian airliner shortly after take off from the resort city of Sharm El-Sheikh, killing 224 people on board.

Sunday's attack follows signs of a recovery in the long-suffering tourism industry.

Egypt is set to host the African Cup of Nations from June 21 to July 19 which it sees as an opportunity to show that the country is safe and able to handle an influx of tourists.

Tourism has been reeling from turmoil since the 2011 overthrow of longtime ruler Hosni Mubarak in a popular uprising.

In 2010, Egypt welcomed a record 14.7 million tourists.

But by 2016 that figure had plunged by nearly two-thirds, to 5.3 million. The following year witnessed a rebound with arrivals reaching 8.3 million, according to the official statistics agency.

Earlier this month, Tourism Minister Rania Al-Mashat said the key industry

accounts for about a fifth of the country's gross domestic product (GDP). Despite the high stakes, some believe Sunday's attack is unlikely to have a significant impact on tourism.

"It is a minor incident and it has become common that similar occurrences take place in other areas around the world," said Sayed.



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12 suspected extremists killed in Egypt raids: ministry Blast hits tourist bus near Egypt's Giza pyramids; 17 injured

[Arab League sends out invites to Arab states to attend summit called by King Salman](#)

Mon, 2019-05-20 14:58

RIYADH: The Arab League has sent out invitations to Arab leaders to hold an emergency Arab summit, called by Saudi Arabia's King Salman, to be held in Makkah on May 30 to discuss the attacks on commercial ships.

Lebanese President Michel Aoun confirmed that he received an invitation from the king to attend the Islamic Summit Conference's fourteenth session to be held in Makkah to discuss the situation in the region.

"I am very confident that the participation of your Excellency will have a great impact on the success of this summit and its results, and look forward to welcoming your Excellency to your second country, Saudi Arabia. And contribute to raising them and will," the invitation read.

President Aoun consulted on King Salman's invitation with Prime Minister Saad Hariri, who will lead the Lebanese delegation to the summit in Makkah.

Two oil pump stations were attacked earlier this week in Saudi Arabia by the Iran-backed Houthi militia, just days after four commercial ships were sabotaged off the coast of the UAE.

The league's council will discuss the ramifications of the attacks on regional and international peace, as well as the stability of the oil markets.



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King Salman to convene summit of Gulf and Arab states Arab League sends out invites to Arab states to attend summit called by King Salman