

Iraq pays final Kuwait war reparations

Author:

Fri, 2021-12-24 00:29

BAGHDAD: Iraq has paid its last war reparations to Kuwait more than 30 years since the invasion of the Gulf country by former autocrat Saddam Hussein, officials said on Thursday.

On Aug. 2, 1990, Hussein ordered his army to invade Kuwait and seize what he described as "Iraq's 19th province," before being pushed back seven months later by a US-led coalition.

"Iraq has closed the file of the Kuwait war reparations, having paid the last of its dues," Mozher Saleh, the prime minister's economic adviser, was quoted as saying by the official Iraqi News Agency.

In total, Iraq has paid \$52.4 billion in reparations, he said. "This is not a small amount," he added. "The sum would have been enough to construct an electricity network that would have served Iraq for many years."

Despite being rich in hydrocarbons, Iraq's electricity infrastructure has suffered from years of negligence and successive wars, facing regular power cuts.

Saleh said he hoped that the slice of budget previously allocated for reparations would now be directed to development projects.

The central bank announced on Tuesday the payment of the final portion of the reparations, valued at \$44 million.

The payments were suspended in 2014 when Daesh took over large swathes of Iraq but were resumed in 2018, following the group's defeat.

Funds for the reparations come from a 5 percent tax levied on sales of Iraq's petroleum and petroleum products.



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[Beirut residents sue Hezbollah leader over deadly clashes](#)

Author:

Thu, 2021-12-23 22:58

BEIRUT: Beirut residents who suffered damages after deadly Hezbollah clashes have filed a criminal case on Thursday against the Iran-backed group's leader.

Lawyers filed the complaint before the Appeal Public Prosecution office in Mount Lebanon against Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah and "everyone who appears in the investigation."

This legal intervention follows Hezbollah also taking a hardline stance against the judge investigating the August 2020 Beirut blast, causing a row that has left Prime Minister Najib Mikati's Cabinet unable to meet since Oct. 12, even as crises mount and poverty and hunger worsen.

The lawyers filed the complaint on behalf of the residents of the Ain El-Remmaneh area.

The residents were affected by the Tayyouneh incidents on Oct. 14 as a result of Hezbollah and the Amal Movement's supporters entering the area and attacking properties.

Violent clashes broke out as Hezbollah and its Amal movement staged protests, calling for the removal of Judge Tarek Bitar, who is leading the blast probe.

The Oct. 14 protest turned Beirut into a war zone, with live-fire exchanges between rival parties leaving seven dead.

Thursday's criminal complaint coincides with a rift between the Free Patriotic Movement and virtually its sole ally in power, Hezbollah.

The rift follows the Constitutional Council's decision to turn down the appeal presented by the FPM over the changes to the electoral law added by the parliament.

Lebanese President Michel Aoun and his political team, represented by the FPM, believe that these changes are not in their interest.

FPM leader Gebran Bassil – in coordination with Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri – showed his displeasure with Hezbollah during a press conference on Tuesday where he held the group responsible for what happened.

FPM supporters also took to social media platforms to share their anger and displeasure with the group.

This rift between the two allies is the first of its kind since the Mar Mikhael agreement of February 2006.

Despite the differences between the FPM and Hezbollah for more than 15 years, their relationship was never deeply shaken.

The FPM "is facing an electoral crisis," said political observers.

They voiced doubts about the possibility of the FPM winning 12 deputies at the next elections, noting that it has the largest bloc in the parliament.

They added: "Even analyses indicate that Bassil's parliamentary seat is under threat, as there are 27,000 votes in the third electoral district where he will run and most will vote against him."

It is uncertain whether Hezbollah and the FPM will meet soon in light of Bassil's fierce criticism.

Bassil, among 10 FPM deputies, requested to schedule a parliamentary accountability session for the government.

The Cabinet has been paralyzed since mid-October as a result of Hezbollah and the Amal Movement deciding that their ministers would boycott sessions until

two demands are met.

They are demanding Judge Bitar's removal from the port explosion probe and for the arrest of everyone involved in the shooting of their supporters Ain El-Remmaneh during the Tayouneh incident.

Judge Naji Eid, head of the First Chamber of the Civil Court of Cassation, accepted on Thursday the response request submitted by the representatives of former ministers Ali Hassan Khalil and Ghazi Zeaiter against Bitar, in regard to the port explosion probe.

Bitar was informed about this response, which is the seventh proposal for his dismissal from the investigation.

In relation to Hezbollah not responding to Bassil's criticism, the party responded to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres's positions less than 12 hours after he left Lebanon, emphasizing the need to implement the Security Council resolution 1701, which was written with the intent of ending the 2006 war.

Meanwhile, a number of young men in Shaqra, in the Beqaa Valley south of the Litani river, intercepted a UN Interim Force patrol, breaking car windows and attacking the troops, under the pretext of them entering the town without the Lebanese army and filming neighborhoods.

Hezbollah often conducts similar violent protests under the pretense that its members are acting as concerned citizens.

The Lebanese army arrived on the scene and protected the international soldiers and their vehicles.

UNIFIL put the Lebanese authorities in charge of this "dangerous incident," asking them to investigate and bring the offenders to justice.

A statement from Candice Ardel, the deputy director of UNIFIL Media Office, referred to the emphasis of Guterres – when he visited the blue line in the south of Lebanon – on the need for UNIFIL's operations to have full access – without any obstacles – to all the areas in accordance with UN Security Council resolution 1701.

At the conclusion of his visit to Lebanon, Guterres emphasized during a press conference on Wednesday that "the Lebanese leaders do not have the right to punish the people by continuing to disagree."

He also stressed "the need for Hezbollah to become a political party like the rest of the political powers in the country."



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Political rift between Hezbollah and political rivals widens in Lebanon
Beirut blast investigator demands immediate arrest of ex-minister

[Tunisian court issues verdict to prison former President Marzouki for four years](#)

Author:

Reuters

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Wed, 2021-12-22 22:15

TUNIS: A Tunisian court issued on Wednesday a verdict to prison former President Moncef Marzouki for four years on charges of "assaulting the external security of the state," TAP state news agency said after he called on France this year to end support for the current administration. Marzouki, who resides in Paris, had criticized President Kais Saied, saying

he staged a coup.

Saied suspended parliament and dismissed the government in July, before later appointing a government and announcing a plan for a referendum and elections next year.



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Wed, 2021-12-22 20:53

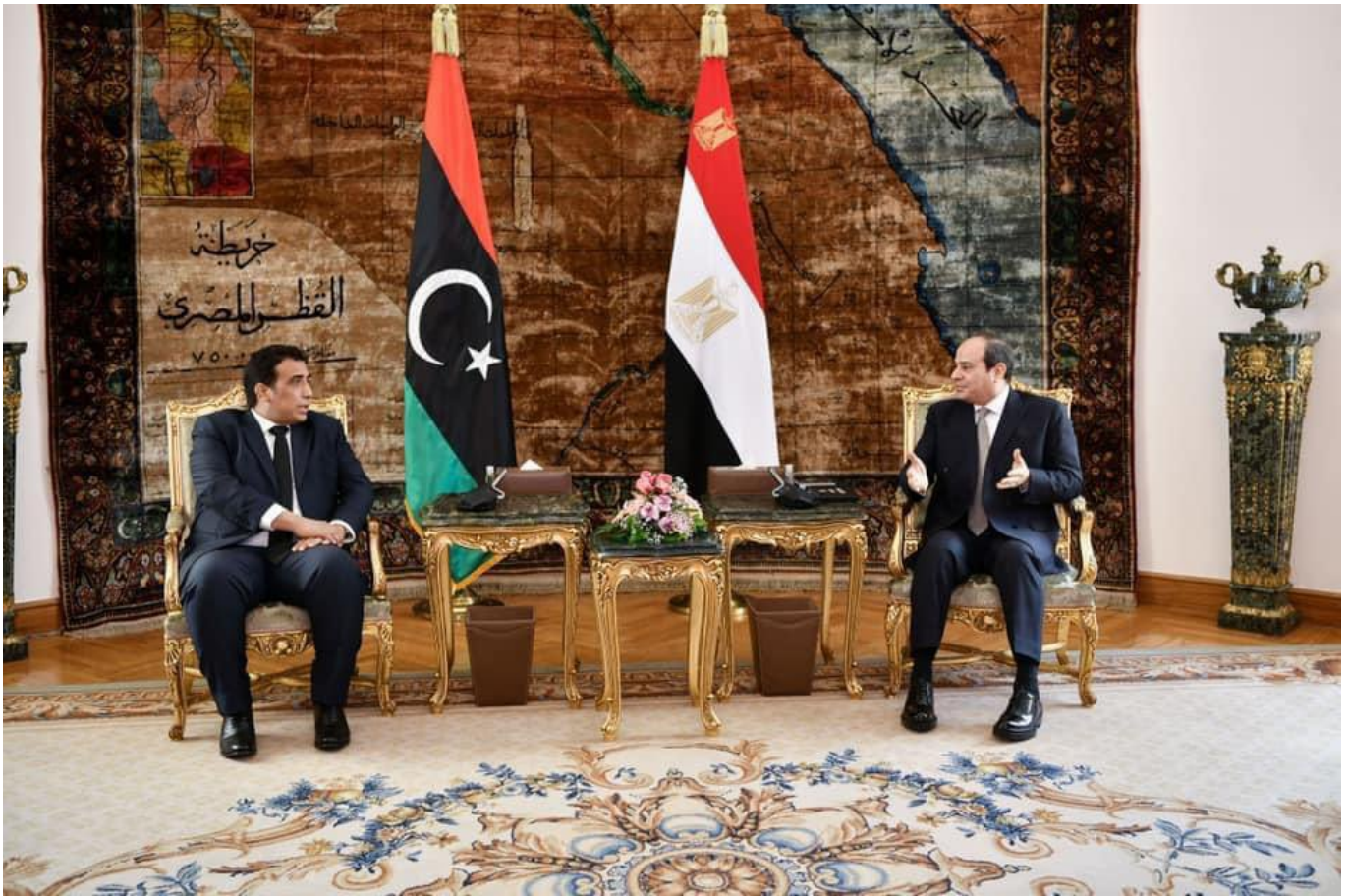
CAIRO: Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi has pledged his country's continued backing to Libya during a meeting with Presidential Council of Libya Chairman Mohammed Al-Menfi.

Also in attendance during the Federal Palace talks were Egyptian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sameh Shoukry, head of the General Intelligence Directorate

Abbas Kamel, and Ambassador Abdel Muttalib Idris, Libya's permanent representative to the Arab League.

Presidential spokesman, Bassam Radi, said El-Sisi had affirmed Egypt's support for bringing about the free will of the Libyan people and preserving the unity and sovereignty of its lands.

Al-Menfi thanked Egypt for its leading role in helping to restore security and stability to Libya and unify state institutions, especially military bodies represented by the Libyan National Army. He also briefed the Egyptians on the current internal political situation in Libya, and both sides agreed to further coordination of transitional plans for Libya's future.



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Italy working with Libya to get presidential elections back on track
Armed groups deploy in Tripoli amid Libyan election postponement decision

Higher Defense Council extends general mobilization period in Lebanon

Wed, 2021-12-22 20:36

BEIRUT: Following a meeting chaired by President Michel Aoun on Wednesday, Lebanon's Supreme Defense Council has decided to extend the current general mobilization period until the end of March 2022. It also announced measures to open the borders with Syria for vaccinated residents or those testing negative for COVID-19.

The council asked all military and security services to "ensure security over the holidays, so the Lebanese can enjoy some stability despite the difficult circumstances."

It added: "We have taken security decisions related to smuggling operations at the legitimate and illegal crossings, as well as drug production and trafficking, exchange-rate platforms, and we will be monitoring consumer prices."

During the meeting, council members discussed "the Syrian authorities opening the borders for vaccinated Lebanese, or those with a negative PCR test," and the council asked the Lebanese General Security to take similar measures in coordination with the Ministry of Health.

The Secretary-General of the Supreme Defense Council Maj. Gen. Mahmoud Al-Asmar said the council had discussed the situation of the wheat silos at the Beirut port, which were severely damaged during the explosion on Aug. 4, 2020. He explained that the council had insisted on the need to expedite measures to prevent the silos from completely falling apart.

"The council requested the ministries of economy and public works and the council for development and reconstruction to address the issue," he said.

Statements by the Lebanese army commander Gen. Joseph Aoun published on Wednesday by the army's National Defense Magazine revealed the difficult conditions the country's military is facing.

Gen. Aoun warned that "sedition is just around the corner, but we will nip it in the bud."

"Soldiers need to realize that they are facing a sacred mission; the civil war in 1975 was a bitter experience and we will not allow history to repeat itself. Never again shall we allow militias to take over nor will we live under the mercy of armed gangs and terrorism," he stated.

Addressing his soldiers directly in the article, Aoun said: "In whose hands are we leaving our homeland? Chaos? Civil war? The sacrifices and efforts you are making have prevented Lebanon from collapsing, despite the many developments since October 2019. We faced protests, the pandemic, the Beirut port blast, and devastating economic conditions. But we managed to preserve

civil peace thanks to the confidence of our people and the international community, and this encouraged many to help us.”

The general also addressed reports about the number of soldiers deserting and others applying for resignation. “The rumors exaggerate the numbers,” he said. “Many soldiers who left have rejoined the army’s ranks after they discovered that the benefits provided by the army could not be found in any other job.”

He called on officers “to educate the soldiers so that they do not rush into making decisions they will regret.”

Gen. Aoun touched on the repercussions of Lebanon’s financial collapse on the armed forces, saying: “The major concern has become transportation. I am well aware of all the pressures and challenges you are experiencing, including the protest movements, the fuel and medicine crises, raids, clashes and many others, and you have wisely and patiently taken on every one of these challenges.

“I do not expect the economic crisis to end soon and we could be facing worse scenarios,” he added. “We are not the reason behind the crisis, nor are we the solution. We are simply doing our duty toward our homeland, and we will be present wherever we are needed. Our duty is to help the state find solutions by providing security and stability. We have overcome many difficulties in the past and we will overcome this crisis as well. We will weather this storm until it ends.”

Gen. Aoun noted: “The army has bought buses and vans, and they will be in service soon, which will solve the problem of transportation for many soldiers.”

He revealed that 68 percent of soldiers have received two vaccine doses so far, and stressed “the need to vaccinate the rest. Soldiers who refused to take the vaccine would have to cover their own medical costs should they contract COVID-19, he added.

Gen. Aoun also commented on the rumors about “discrimination in the distribution of aid within the military institution,” calling on soldiers “not to pay any attention to such claims, for the army is for everyone and against all those who violate security.”

The army has requested food aid from Arab and foreign armies.

“Donors are facing legal and constitutional obstacles, but efforts are being exerted to find solutions to secure this aid for the army,” the general stressed.



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As economic crisis bites, Lebanese army withdraws soldiers from Beirut suburbs Lebanon to set up more checkpoints to clamp down on thefts