

Yemeni government takes new measures to curb devaluation of riyal

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AL-MUKALLA: The Central Bank of Yemen on Monday closed six exchange firms and shops for not complying with its anti-speculation regulations, bringing the total number of outlets blacklisted since Saturday to 60.

The Aden-based bank vowed to crack down on more money traders if they did not abide by the bank's monetary rules, warning others against dealing with the banned entities.

"The bank calls upon all exchange companies and establishments to exercise caution and abide by all instructions issued by the central bank," it said in a statement.

Despite the bank's fresh punitive measures against violators, the Yemeni riyal reached a new record low against the US dollar, falling to nearly 1,400 riyals on the black market.

In the past, the Aden-based bank closed dozens of exchange companies and firms, ordered the other companies and private companies to send their annual financial statements to the bank and asked Sanaa-based banks to move operations to Aden.

On Sunday, the Yemeni Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Maeen Abdul Malik Saeed, supported the central bank's latest measures to rein in the depreciation of the riyal and ordered judiciary and security authorities to implement the bank's punishing measures.

The Yemeni government also suspended the internal transfer network between exchange companies – known as hawala – and ordered security forces to enhance border checks to prevent the smuggling of foreign currencies outside the country.

Aden Gov. Ahmed Hamed Lamli on Sunday banned rent being paid with the US dollar or the Saudi riyal in another bid to curb the demand for foreign currencies.

Despite the latest measures, blacklisted entities opened their doors on Monday as the riyal continued to hit new lows amid unprecedented speculative activities by money dealers.

Critics questioned the government's ability to reinforce the rules or to bring the chaotic market under its control, citing unfulfilled measures during the past five years when the Yemeni riyal began to tumble.

"The bank's measures did not target currency barons who control the market and are heavily involved in speculation," a local money trader told Arab News on condition of anonymity.

People in the city of Al-Mukalla, the capital of the southeastern province of Hadramout, told Arab News that local exchange firms sell the dollar at 1,400 Yemeni riyal and buy it at 1,200 riyals.

The devaluation of the currency since last week has led to a historic rise in

the prices of basic goods such as rice, cooking oil, wheat and flour, prompting shop owners to barricade their stores as violent protests sparked in some government-controlled areas.

“We are bearing the brunt of the devaluation as we buy our goods in Saudi riyals and sell them in Yemeni riyals. Big traders would not be impacted as they buy and sell goods in Saudi riyals,” a local trader, who preferred to remain anonymous, told Arab News.

Roads were closed and tires were burnt in the southern province of Lahj amid protests against the fall of the riyal and skyrocketing prices. Last month, at least three people were killed and many others wounded during violent protests against the crumbling economy and currency in several cities in southern Yemen.

Yemeni economists and sociologists have warned that the continuing fall of the riyal would fuel a new round of violence in the liberated provinces, widening the already big gap between the poor and rich and pushing thousands of Yemenis into hunger.

Mohamed Salem bin Jumaan, an associate professor of sociology at Hadramout University, said that the government and local authorities in the provinces must listen to people’s grievances and work on addressing economic woes – including the fall of the riyal – or risk more violent protests.

“Many families are below the poverty line. The middle class no longer exists. Solutions must be found to reduce the level of violence. People block roads and cause violence when they think no one listens to them,” the academic told Arab News.



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More than 150 Houthis killed, injured in Yemen's Abedia: Arab coalition
Saudi UN envoy calls for international consensus on Yemen at Human Rights Council

Hezbollah's Nasrallah says Beirut violence was a dangerous event

Mon, 2021-10-18 21:00

BEIRUT: The leader of Lebanon's Iran-backed Shiite group Hezbollah said on Monday that last week's Beirut violence in which seven Shiite Muslims were shot dead was a dangerous development and marked a new phase in the country's internal politics.

In his first remarks since the worst street violence in over a decade, Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah lashed out at the Christian Lebanese Forces party and its head Samir Geagea, repeating accusations that they were responsible for the killings on Thursday.

"The real agenda of the Lebanese forces is civil war," Nasrallah said in a live televised speech.

Heavy gunfire erupted in Beirut's southern suburb of Dahiya, a Hezbollah stronghold, to celebrate the start of Nasrallah's speech, which came amid tensions over the investigation of last year's devastating explosion at the capital's port.

Nasrallah said Hezbollah was not the enemy of Lebanese Christians.

"The biggest threat to the Christian presence in Lebanon is the Lebanese Forces party and its head," Nasrallah said.

The bloodshed, which stirred memories of the 1975-1990 civil war, added to fears for the stability of a country that is awash with weapons and suffering an economic meltdown.

The Lebanese Forces party (LF) has denied it started the fighting last week. It blamed the violence on Hezbollah "incitement" against Tarek Bitar, the lead investigator in an investigation into the port explosion.

Opinion

This section contains relevant reference points, placed in (Opinion field)

It also accused Hezbollah of sending supporters into the Christian neighborhood of Ain Al-Remmaneh where it says four residents were wounded before a shot was fired.

"I advise the Lebanese Forces party to give up this idea of internal strife and civil war," said Nasrallah.

"You are wrong one hundred percent, your calculations are wrong. The region

has never seen Hezbollah as strong as it is now.”

Despite his tough stand, Nasrallah dedicated a significant part of his speech to trying to reassure Lebanon’s Christians, saying Hezbollah was protecting their rights and is allied with the largest Christian party, the Free Patriotic Movement.

Lebanon’s Shiite Amal movement, a Hezbollah ally, said earlier that the Beirut violence was intended to reignite internal strife and threaten peace. The seven victims were killed as crowds headed for a demonstration called by Amal and Hezbollah to protest against Bitar.

“What happened showed the Lebanese people the truth behind what these groups are doing in terms of trying to ignite internal strife and national division and threaten civic peace, and push the Lebanese back to the era of civil wars,” Amal said in a statement.

Amal, which is led by Lebanese parliament speaker Nabih Berri, one of the most powerful political figures in the country, urged the authorities to arrest all those responsible for the violence.

The inquiry into the Aug. 4, 2020 explosion, which killed more than 200 people and devastated swathes of Beirut, has made little headway amid pushback from political factions.

Prime Minister Najib Mikati told the Al-Modon newspaper on Monday that the government would not meet unless an agreement is reached concerning the investigation.

Mikati also said he was not planning to resign at the moment. “The country can’t be left in circumstances like this.”

Tensions over the probe have spilt over into cabinet, with ministers aligned with the politicians the judge was seeking to question demanding his removal.



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Lebanon Maronite patriarch says no party should resort to violence
Saudi Arabia warns citizens against travel to Lebanon

[Palestinians defend their olive trees as settler assaults escalate](#)

Author:

Mon, 2021-10-18 02:28

AMMAN: Palestinians are bracing themselves for settler assaults on their land as the olive harvesting season kicks into high gear.

Palestinian farmers, civil society, local and international volunteers, as well as video have documented Israeli settlers uprooting olive trees, stealing olive crops, and starting fires on nearby land.

Anees Sweidan, deputy mayor of Nablus, told Arab News that every year at this time settlers invaded the governorate of Nablus and stole ripe olives, cut down trees and burned them.

Sweidan said that Nablus municipality had paved parts of the road connecting areas to the east of the city with the village of Assera Al-Shamieh to help Palestinians protect their land from settler assaults.

He called on the international community to provide protection to Palestinians from settlers who attacked them and also to the international volunteers who came to help during the short but intense harvest season.

The biggest danger was always on Palestinian land closest to illegal Israeli settlements, he added.

Atallah Hanna, bishop of Sebastia, said God did not justify the injustice that was affecting people's holy places and even olive trees.

"Olive trees are a symbol of peace in Palestine. They are also a symbol of our heritage in this holy land," he told Arab News. "Jewish settlers might steal and burn, our Palestinian people will stand and we as Christians stand with justice and the case of justice of our Palestinian people."

Israeli media reported that Defense Minister Benny Gantz had ordered the army to act "systemically, aggressively and uncompromisingly – together with the Shin Bet security service and the police – against all forms of violence, against Palestinians, Jews and of course against security forces."

But Knesset member Sami Abu Shehadeh questioned the Israeli will as, he said, settler attacks against Palestinians were supported by the government and the army.

“If there was no political and military support for those racist individuals these attacks would not have continued all this period. This protection is a green light enabling the continuation and the escalation of these barbaric attacks by Jewish settlers,” he told Arab News.

The National Bureau for Defending the Land and Resisting Settlements has launched a “Protectors of the Land” campaign, while the Agricultural Relief Committee has launched its annual volunteer campaign with a slogan aimed at helping farmers harvest olives in areas threatened by settlement.

Palestinians plant around 10,000 olive trees in the West Bank each year, most of which are oil-producing varieties.

According to UN monitors, more than 4,000 olive trees and other tree crops were burned or removed by Israeli settlers in 2020.



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More Palestinians apply for Israeli work permits
In brazen attack by settlers, Palestinians see larger threat

More Palestinians apply for Israeli work permits

Author:

Mon, 2021-10-18 02:23

GAZA CITY: Mahmoud al-Dakhni was one of the thousands of Palestinians gathered in front of the Chambers of Commerce headquarters in Gaza to apply for work permits inside Israel.

They were of different age groups and backgrounds, including degree holders, and crowded outside the building in the hope of obtaining Israeli approval to apply for a permit that would allow them to pass through the Erez crossing and escape Gaza's deteriorating economic reality.

Since Hamas seized control of Gaza by force in 2007, Israel has imposed a siege that has caused Palestinians' economic conditions to suffer.

The situation worsened due to Israeli restrictions since the last war in May 2020.

Al-Dakhni said he had worked for a few days not exceeding the number of "fingers of the hand" since that war.

"Working in Israel is more profitable than in Gaza where the worker gets ILS300 (\$93.12) or more, while the wages of a worker in Gaza do not exceed ILS50 per day, and with longer and more miserable working hours," said the 33-year-old construction worker, who has six children.

To obtain a work permit Al-Dakhni, like others, resorted to opening a commercial registration with the Chamber of Commerce to prove he was a merchant, which is a condition for obtaining Israeli approval.

Al-Dakhni borrowed the amount he had paid for the commercial register. "Everyone does this," he explained. "Israel does not announce that these are work permits, but rather permits for merchants, but the truth is that those who obtain them use them to work in Israel."

Mahmoud Haniyeh and four of his friends resorted to the same approach, obtaining a commercial registration after sharing its costs. "We each paid ILS1,700 and we hope to compensate for it by working in Israel."

Haniyeh, 45, used to work as a tailor in the Erez industrial zone, before losing his job completely with the Hamas takeover of Gaza.

Haniyeh, who supports a family of eight, said he had to buy a car in instalments to work as a taxi driver to provide for his family's needs. But it became a burden on him due to the poor economic conditions of the majority

of the population.

“I work on the car every day from six in the morning until the evening hours, and on many days what I get does not meet the basic needs of the family ... We only want our children to live a decent life.”

Video clips of work permit seekers circulated on social media. They directed their anger at Fatah and Hamas and held them responsible for the crises afflicting Gaza.

One clip showed a man, who appeared to be in his late thirties, saying he graduated from university in 2009 while his wife had graduated this year and that they had no hope of getting a job.

“University degrees have become useless in light of the division, especially if you are not affiliated with a political faction,” he said in the clip.

Egypt is currently working to consolidate the truce that it sponsored between Hamas and Israel that halted the 11-day war last May. But the Egyptian mediation has not yet resulted in bringing the two sides closer together.

Israeli public radio said the total number of permits granted to Palestinian workers from Gaza to work inside Israel was 7,000, after their number was about 5,000 workers and traders last August.

In 2019, Israel allowed Gaza residents to submit job applications for the first time, with the number of workers in Israel from Gaza standing about 120,000 before the second Intifada in 2000.

At the time, the labor of these workers contributed to about 20 percent of the Palestinian economy in Gaza, according to local data.

The Chamber of Commerce said it received about 10,447 applications – in one day – to obtain work permits in Israel and the West Bank.

The Ministry of Labor in Gaza held the “responsibility for the accumulation of unemployment in Gaza, which has reached unprecedented numbers, due to the continuation of the siege imposed for the 15th year in a row, and the policy of closing the crossings.”

Permit applicants must meet several criteria. They must be aged between 26-60, married, unemployed, and vaccinated against COVID-19.

More than 2 million people in Gaza suffer from poor economic conditions resulting from an Israeli blockade since 2006, which has caused a rise in poverty and unemployment rates.

According to a report from the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics last August, the number of unemployed people in the Gaza Strip had reached 212,000, with an unemployment rate of 45 percent.

The head of the Gaza Labor Union, Sami Al-Amsi, said Israel had not yet allowed Gaza workers to work inside Israel and that all the permits issued

were for merchants.

Al-Amsi believed that Israel's issue of permits to merchants, and not as part of worker permits, did not obligate employers in Israel to show rights toward these workers.



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Thousands of Gazans apply for Israeli work permits
Israeli court ruling on major holy site angers Palestinians

[Shooting in Syria could mark new phase in Israeli campaign](#)

Author:

Mon, 2021-10-18 02:17

JERUSALEM: The death of a former Syrian Druse lawmaker, allegedly by Israeli sniper fire, could mark a new phase in what Israel calls its war against

Iranian entrenchment in neighboring Syria.

Syria's state-run news agency said that Midhat Saleh was fatally shot Saturday in Ein el-Tinneh, a village along the Israeli frontier in the Golan Heights where he ran a Syrian government office. Israeli media said Saleh had been assisting the Iranian military against Israel.

The Israeli military declined to comment, but if Saleh was indeed killed by Israel, it would mark the first time that Israeli snipers are known to have killed someone identified as an Iranian-linked target across the border. Israel has said it will not tolerate a permanent Iranian military presence in Syria and has acknowledged carrying out scores of airstrikes on alleged Iranian arms shipments and military targets in Syria in recent years.

Israel captured the Golan Heights from Syria in the 1967 Mideast war and later annexed the strategic territory, which overlooks northern Israel. Most of the world does not recognize the annexation, though the Trump administration declared the territory to be part of Israel.

Saleh was born in Majdal Shams, in the Israeli-controlled side of the Golan, and was jailed several times by Israel, most recently for 12 years until 1997. He later moved to Syria, was elected to parliament in 1998 and served as an adviser to the government on the Golan issue.

The small Druse community living in the Israeli-controlled side of the Golan generally has good relations with Israel. But many members still profess loyalty to Syria, in part because they have relatives on the other side of the border.

Samih Ayoub, a resident on the Israeli side of the Golan, told Israel's Army Radio station Saleh had "no connection" to Iran or to any militia. "He's just a quiet man who works in an office. They killed him next to his house," he said.

Saleh's brother, Yasser Saleh, a doctor in Damascus, said his brother also lived in the Syrian capital but visited the border area periodically, slept there and sometimes spoke with relatives across the frontier. He said his younger brother had survived an earlier assassination attempt in early 2011 and remained committed to ending Israel's control over the Golan Heights until the end. He said his brother was survived by a wife and two children, including a son named Golan.

While there was no official comment, Israeli military commentators – who are given high-level background briefings with top army brass – said Saleh was intimately involved in assisting the Iranians build up their capabilities along the Israeli front. Iran has sent thousands of forces to Syria to back the army of President Bashar Assad during the country's decade-long civil war.

"He answered directly to the Iranians," wrote Yossi Yehoshua, a military correspondent for Yediot Ahronot, Israel's largest paid daily newspaper.

Giora Eiland, a former Israeli national security adviser, told Army Radio

that if Israel killed Saleh, it was meant to send a message to the Iranians and not connected to the past. "I assume this was not an act of revenge," he said. "We're not talking about a mass murderer."

Yoel Guzansky, a senior fellow and expert on Iran at the Institute for National Security Studies, a Tel Aviv think tank, said it was not a sure thing that Israel had even been involved. He said that Saleh was not an especially valuable target and also had tense relations with Iranian proxy Hezbollah and objected to the group's activities in the Golan.

But he said that if Israel did indeed kill Saleh through an unprecedented sniper attack, it sent a powerful message to Iran and Syria about their activities near the Israeli border.

"It says that we have many ways and many techniques," he said. "We're watching you."



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Syrian refugees resettled in US face challenges, uncertainty