

Tunisian union rejects steps pushed by government to unlock IMF funds

Author:

Reuters

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TUNIS: Tunisia's most powerful labor union rejects reported reforms proposed by the government as part of efforts to secure foreign financing, one of its most senior officials told Reuters on Wednesday.

A government delegation is in Washington for talks with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) on a possible \$4 billion loan and reforms to eliminate subsidies and reduce the massive public sector wage bill.

On Tuesday, Reuters reported a government document laying out proposals such as encouraging voluntary redundancy on 25 percent pay, early retirement packages and offering staff part time work at 50 percent of full pay.

While the government has not yet formally commented on the details, union acceptance of any reforms is seen as important to its chances of securing the money it says it needs to finance both its debt repayments and this year's fiscal deficit.

The UGTT has more than a million members and has proven able to mobilize significant opposition to previous governments through strikes, sit ins and pressure on political parties.

"These are unilateral measures that we did not discuss with the government and we were surprised when we read about the details," UGTT deputy secretary general Sami Tahri said.

Last month, the government and UGTT said they had struck a deal on economic reforms that would allow Tunisia to start negotiations with the IMF for a loan program, but they did not reveal its contents and said details remained to be agreed.

Tahri said the government should focus on raising more revenue by targeting tax evasion rather than measures that he said would target state employees and renewed a UGTT demand to start negotiations on another public sector pay rise.

He said early retirement and other schemes to reduce the size of the state workforce would cause a decline in civil service performance and lead to an exodus of experienced staff, "exhausting the administration."



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Tunisian AI expertise to benefit Africans in need of artificial limbs 'Europe or death': West Africans risk all to leave Tunisia

[G7 urges Iran to release foreigners, dual nationals under 'arbitrary arrest'](#)

Wed, 2021-05-05 20:44

LONDON: G7 foreign ministers concluded their first in-person talks in more than two years Wednesday, hitting out at China for human rights abuses and a crackdown on pro-democracy figures, and voicing concern about Russian aggression.

The club of the world's leading economies also called on Iran to release foreign and dual nationals who they said had been imprisoned arbitrarily, in

a wide-ranging final communique after three days of meetings in London.



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Iran diplomat's 20-year sentence for France bomb plot confirmed
Iran threatens to kill brother of executed Olympic wrestler

[COVID-19: Next 10 days dangerous for Egypt](#)

Author:

Tue, 2021-05-04 21:45

CAIRO: Mohamed Abdel Fattah, undersecretary of the Ministry of Health for Preventive Affairs, said that citizens must adhere to coronavirus precautionary measures and warned of the extra care needed during the next 10 days to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

"We have seen an increase in the number of coronavirus cases in some

governorates . . . the next 10 days are the most dangerous for the spread of the virus because of the crowds due to the last 10 days of Ramadan and Eid," he said.

During televised statements, Abdel Fattah said that any citizen who felt shortness of breath should visit the health care centers of the ministry immediately, pointing out that there were highly skilled teams in all governorates to follow up on the hospital's preparations and to meet all needs. He said that respiratory symptoms were currently the most common in Egypt.

"Citizens must receive the vaccine to prevent the spread of the virus, and social distancing must be followed to prevent the spread of COVID-19 . . . Cairo, Menoufia, Aswan, Qena, Sohag and the Red Sea are the governorates with the highest number of cases," he said.

"Coronavirus cases are up 10 percent, an increase that is not worrisome, and our hospitals are equipped to receive all coronavirus patients, and 40 percent of hospital beds are vacant," he added.

Abdel Fattah said that the Indian variant of the virus has spread in 17 countries, including Iraq and Jordan, but it had not yet been detected in Egypt.

He said that Egypt had succeeded in managing the crisis and there were 2,200 liters of oxygen distributed to all governorates of the republic.

Mohamed Awad Taj Al-Din, adviser to the Egyptian president for health, said that the country had been preparing to face the situation if the Indian variant spread to Egypt, including stricter procedures for travel and at airports for those coming from India directly or indirectly.

"All published research indicates that the body's natural resistance to the Indian coronavirus variant is less than the older viruses," Taj Al-Din said, adding that Egypt was currently experiencing its third coronavirus wave. He said there has been a clear increase in the number of cases and deaths compared to the same period last year.



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[Beirut blast survivor dog gives birth to puppies in the rubble](#)

Tue, 2021-05-04 21:56

BEIRUT: While removing chemical containers at the Beirut port explosion site, German firm Combi Lift discovered a female dog who not only survived the deadly blast from last August but also gave birth to three puppies while inside an acid container.

“The puppies were found around three months ago,” said Roger Accaoui, vice president of Perpetual Animal Watch (PAW), a non-profit organization that cares for pets and finds homes for stray dogs in Lebanon.

Combi Lift and the head of its delegation, Heiko Wilderhof, contacted PAW when they found the puppies and their mom, who were in desperate need of

care.

According to Accaoui, the female dog was among several stray dogs that survived and continued to live in the rubble following the catastrophic blast on Aug. 4 that killed 211 people and injured more than 6,000.

"She gave birth to mixed-breed puppies inside an acid container and they remained in the contaminated area," Accaoui said. "One of the puppies passed away due to the contamination. The two remaining puppies underwent medical tests and got vaccinated while their mother remained at the port."

Accaoui said the surviving puppies were taken to a farm to receive treatment after suffering from infections.

"A family called wanting to adopt a puppy and when they found out the story of these puppies, they empathized even more and decided to adopt one," Accaoui said.

Wilderhof was so touched by the unlikely experience that he decided to adopt the other puppy and later named it "Samir" after a friend he met in Beirut. After some time to recover, Samir left for Germany with Wilderhof's daughter last Saturday.

Nine months have passed since the massive explosion, which also destroyed the city's waterfront and residential neighborhoods facing the port. Nearly 3,000 tons of ammonium nitrates – a highly explosive material used in fertilizers – had been improperly stored in the port for years and fueled the deadly blast. Work to remove and sort through the rubble is still ongoing.

Lebanon hired Combi Lift in the wake of the explosion and the German firm said it found 58 containers at the port that posed a threat to the city. Some of the containers had been there for more than a decade.

The German firm is still waiting for a SR7.5 million (\$2 million) payment before it can proceed with the operation of removing the chemical containers.

Accaoui said the port explosion site is still teeming with abandoned dogs. Many have taken shelter in the debris because the houses where they used to live were destroyed in the blast.

"These dogs go to the port specifically since it is an extension of the main cow and sheep slaughterhouse in Beirut, which provides them with food," said Accaoui, who also announced a July start date for a trap-neuter-release campaign for stray dogs in the port area.



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Lebanon request satellite images for site of Beirut blast
A Lebanese businessman recalls the bittersweet experience of rebuilding after the Beirut blast

[Palestinian lawyer confident of stopping Jerusalem evictions](#)

Tue, 2021-05-04 19:49

AMMAN: Lawyers and activists trying to prevent the eviction of some 87 Palestinian residents from their homes in the Sheikh Jarrah district of Jerusalem appeared to be upbeat this week.

Palestinian lawyer Hosni Abu Hussein told Arab News that Israeli courts have given the residents living in 12 housing units in the East Jerusalem neighborhood until Thursday to come up with an agreement with Nahlat Shamon, a US-registered settler organization.

“We sat for hours with the judge and each of us gave suggestions to settle the case,” Hussein said.

“Our suggestion is that we deposit the rental money for the units to a secure fund at the court until the real owner of the land – the housing units were built in the 1950s – is determined.”

□Hussein said this suggestion was made because non-payment of rent is the fastest way to evict residents, according to rental laws.

□Jordan was in control of Jerusalem when the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) built the housing units on the vacant land and started to charge Palestinians rent. Settler organizations, which also claim to be the owners of the land, are now demanding rent payment.

According to the rent protection law in Jerusalem, the offer by the settler organization allows for Palestinian families to stay as long as a designated member of the family is alive. Thereafter, the settler organization would take over the homes.

Palestinian residents have rejected this offer.

“We have been fighting for years, stressing that the settler organization has no right to the land,” said Abu Hussein, a Palestinian resident. “Why would we agree to this offer now?”

□If no agreement is reached by Thursday, an Israeli high court judge will decide how to proceed in determining the real owners of the disputed land.

New evidence, which has emerged from the Ottoman records in Turkey and the Jordanian government, proves Jordan and UNRWA agreed to build housing units on the land for Palestinians, Abu Hussein said. This agreement came after the Palestinians became refugees in the city following World War II as the land actually belonged to the Hijazi Saadi family, dated 1149 Hijri (1736 AD).

□Using old Ottoman documents, Nahlat Shamon said the land belonged to an Oriental Jewish group that registered itself in 1972.

Palestinian lawyers dispute this claim and say the documents in the Ottoman archives in Istanbul that Nahlat Shamon is referring to have no existence and are forged.

□Jawdat Manna, head of the Jerusalem campaign organizing regional and international advocacy, told Arab News that he is excited about the positive feedback the campaign has had.

“We now have strong legal support from lawyers in Kuwait, Bahrain, Jordan, the UK, and the US as well as strong public advocacy support on behalf of the threatened Palestinian families,” Manna said.

□Ahmad Deek, a top official at the Palestinian Foreign Ministry, told Arab News that the ministry has filed a complaint with the International Criminal Court.

“Our complaint provides a comprehensive summary of the case and a call for an investigation of the injustice that the Palestinian families are suffering

from," Deek said.

□Palestinians also complain that homes belonging to Arab families in west Jerusalem and other parts of Israel are not being allowed to return to their original documented and undisputed owners.

Aref Hammad, a spokesperson for the Sheikh Jarrah families, explained that the families are facing a lot of pressure. Israeli police were filmed on Monday violently breaking into one of the houses to arrest a Palestinian man.

An Israel police spokesman said they arrested those who participated in a demonstration, which resulted in closed roads and the police being attacked.

"After the demonstration was termed illegal and demonstrators were given time to disperse, the police broke up the protests using regular crowd control means," the spokesman said. "Several suspects were arrested and are being charged with attacks on the police by throwing stones at them."



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Anger in East Jerusalem as settlers occupy homes Israel resumes plans of east Jerusalem settlement, cuts access for Palestinians