

Panic on the streets as Lebanese pound hits new low

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Associated Press

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BEIRUT: Lebanese supermarkets halted sales and businesses closed their doors on Saturday as the country's embattled currency slumped to a record low on the black market.

With the dollar exchange rate exceeding 12,000 Lebanese pounds, panic erupted on the streets as shopkeepers and major outlets stopped selling goods to avoid incurring losses.

Amid growing alarm at the country's increasingly precarious state, activists in working-class areas in Mount Lebanon climbed the minarets of mosques and called on people to take to the streets.

A spokesperson for the Oct. 17 revolution said: "We will stay in the squares until the corrupt system falls."

Hundreds of protesters in Martyrs' Square in downtown Beirut pounded on metal barriers blocking access to parliament and hurled rocks at security forces manning roadblocks.

Anti-riot personnel launched tear-gas grenades after violent clashes erupted between protesters and security forces.

In the past three days, Lebanon's currency has endured a roller-coaster ride, rising to 9,000 Lebanese pounds against the dollar before falling to 10,000 Lebanese pounds.

But in a dramatic collapse on Saturday, the Lebanese pound fell from 11,750 to 12,200 against the dollar, with the slump worsening by the hour despite efforts to close online trading platforms.

Economist Louis Hobeika told Arab News: "The strong demand for the dollar is caused by the decline in confidence in the country. People are panicking about the future."

Hobeika rejected the idea that banks are buying up dollars.

"The dollar trading volume in the Lebanese market does not exceed \$2.5 million. The banks want to increase their capital on the request of the Banque du Liban collectively and need \$3.5 billion – and this cannot be secured from the Lebanese market."

Protesters traveled to Martyrs' Square from different regions, with retired

soldiers leading many groups.

The demonstrators raised Lebanese flags, played revolutionary and patriotic songs over loudspeakers, and chanted angry slogans.

A group of protesters near the Banque du Liban joined with families of the victims of the Beirut port explosion demanding that the investigation into the blast be stepped up and not politicized.

Baalbek business owners blocked roads after they closed their stores.

In Sidon, drivers formed roadblocks with their cars, while there were also protests on the streets of Tyre.

In the Bekaa region, some gas stations were demanding 70,000 Lebanese pounds for a can of petrol as fears grew over the state of the fuel market.

George Al-Baraks, a member of the Syndicate of Gas Station Owners, said that "there is no gasoline or diesel crisis."

He said that distribution "will be rationalized in order to maintain fuel deliveries, in line with the approval of the Banque du Liban to open credits for ships of import companies and oil facilities."

Panic in Lebanon is growing as the stalemate between President Michel Aoun and Prime Minister-designate Saad Hariri shows no signs of ending.

MP Rola Tabsh Jaroudi told Arab News: "Those who are obstructing the formation of the government must bear the consequences of the chaos in the street.

"Hariri's position was clear from the beginning, and he has the approval of foreign countries for what he proposed. He will remain committed to forming the government."

On the Free Patriotic Movement's calls for Hariri to step down, Tabsh Jaroudi said: "He is the prime minister appointed by the members of parliament, and he will not concede what he proposed, nor will he accept the bargaining that is taking place."

He added: "People are hungry. It is their right to take to the streets to get their voices heard."





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Lebanon's energy minister sounds alarm over power supply

[Migrants demand international probe into deadly Yemen fire at Houthi-run detention center](#)

Author:

By SAMY MAGDY | AP

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Sat, 2021-03-13 16:49

CAIRO: A leader of the migrant community in the Yemeni capital on Saturday called for an international probe into a fire that tore through a detention center last week, killing at least 44 people, mostly Ethiopian migrants. In a news conference in Sanaa, Othman Gilto, who heads the Ethiopian community, blamed "negligence" by the Houthis who control the capital, as well as the United Nations, which has aid agencies present in Yemen. The fire also injured more than 200 people, he said.

Some 900 migrants, mostly from Ethiopia, were detained at the facility – including 350 inside a warehouse – when the fire took place on Sunday, according to the International Organization for Migration. That was three times the facility's capacity, it added.

At least 43 of the dead were buried in a Sanaa cemetery on Friday amid tight security. Women from the migrant community were seen screaming and crying while ambulances, carrying the bodies, arrived from a funeral service at a major mosque.

Abdallah Al-Leithi, head of the Sudanese community in Sanaa, said many of the dead lacked IDs and could not be identified, adding that most "had not given their real names" on documentation before the fire.

There were no immediate comments from the Houthis.

The UN migration agency has called for those responsible for the tragedy to be held accountable, said Olivia Headon, the agency's spokeswoman in Yemen. "We stand with the victims of the fire. Migrants urgently need more protection and support in Yemen, or we will continue to see them suffer and lives lost. A step in this direction is to ensure that the victims of the fire and their families have the accountability they deserve following the horrific incident," she said.

Survivors and local rights campaigners say the deadly blaze erupted when guards fired tear gas into the crowded warehouse, trying to end a protest against alleged abuses and ill-treatment at the facility.

The Iran-backed Houthi militia did not state the cause of the fire, mention a

protest or give a final casualty toll. They had said an investigation was opened but no conclusions have been announced. The Houthis also prevented the UN migration agency from accessing injured migrants at hospitals, the agency said.

Some 138,000 migrants embarked on the arduous journey from the Horn of Africa to Yemen in 2019, but the figure plummeted to 37,000 last year because of the coronavirus pandemic. Over 2,500 migrants reached Yemen from Djibouti in January, according to the IOM.





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Houthis reject US cease-fire plan in new setback to peace efforts
Houthis accused of starting fire in Sanaa detention center

[Palestinians and Arab League condemn opening of Czech Jerusalem office](#)

Sat, 2021-03-13 19:06

RAMALLAH: The Palestinian Authority and the Arab League on Saturday condemned the Czech Republic's opening of a diplomatic office in Jerusalem, calling it a violation of international law.

Prague opened a Jerusalem branch of its Israel embassy, which is located in Tel Aviv, on Thursday. Its inauguration, attended by Czech Prime Minister

Andrej Babis, was two weeks after Israel sent several thousand COVID-19 vaccine doses to the Czech Republic.

The Palestinian Foreign Ministry said it considered Prague's move "a blatant attack on the Palestinian people and their rights, a flagrant violation of international law," and said it would harm peace prospects.

In Cairo, Arab League Secretary-General Ahmed Aboul Gheit said in a statement: "The legal status of Jerusalem will be affected by the decision of one country or another to open representative offices. East Jerusalem is an occupied land under the International law."

Jerusalem's status is one of the thorniest issues in the decades-old Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Israel annexed the eastern part of the city in a move not recognised internationally and regards all of Jerusalem as its capital.

The Palestinians seek East Jerusalem, which Israel captured along with the West Bank and Gaza in the 1967 Middle East War, as the capital of a future independent state.

Peace talks broke down in 2014.

Although the Czech Republic supports a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it was named in an International Criminal Court pre-trial decision last month as one of the countries supporting Israel's argument that the court had no jurisdiction over war crimes in the Palestinian territories.

The Czech Republic is also one of Israel's strongest supporters in the European Union. Last month Israel froze its short-lived "vaccine diplomacy" programme to send COVID-19 vaccines abroad to buy international goodwill after it came under legal scrutiny.



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Arab Parliament condemns Kosovo's recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital
Poll: Arabs support Trump on Iran, but not on Jerusalem embassy move

[Libyan women want progress after appointment of first female foreign minister](#)

Author:

Sat, 2021-03-13 02:42

TRIPOLI: Libya's first woman foreign minister, Najla El-Mangoush, will be sworn in next week as part of a new unity government, a rare female voice at the top table whose appointment many Libyan women welcomed this week.

Mangoush, a lawyer who had a role in the transitional council that briefly governed Libya after its 2011 uprising, will be joined by four other women in the Cabinet, including Halima Abdulrahman as justice minister.

"I think this is a win for all of us women in Libya. I hope it's a first step to going further: A woman reaching head of government," said Afia Mohammed, 34, a pastry maker in Tripoli, adding it would encourage more women to enter politics.

Prime Minister Abdul Hamid Dbeibeh's interim government emerged through a UN talks process and is mandated to unify Libya's divided state institutions and oversee national elections in December.

The 75 Libyan delegates selected by the UN to take part in those talks laid out a commitment for the new government to include women in 30 percent of senior government roles, including in top Cabinet posts.

Women represent only 15 percent of the posts in Dbeibeh's Cabinet but the proportion will rise when deputy ministers are appointed, he has said.

Elham Saudi, a lawyer and talks delegate, said: "It's a stepping stone toward fuller representation."

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Abdul Hamid Dbeibah, a 61-year-old billionaire from the western city of Misrata, is set to be sworn in on Monday in Benghazi, Libya's second city and cradle of the 2011 revolution.**
- **Fayez Al-Sarraj, head of the outgoing Government of National Accord based in Tripoli, has said he is 'fully ready to hand over' power.**

She said the quota was a result of women in the forum being "absolutely relentless on this point" despite having big differences on other political issues.

As the first meeting took place in Tunis, where Saudi said women delegates faced a barrage of sexist online abuse, Hanan Al-Barassi, a female lawyer and critic of rights violations, was shot dead on a busy Benghazi street.

When the Libyan state crumbled after 2011 and myriad warring factions seized territory, women suffered a wave of violence and those in official positions were nearly all men – until now.

"This will give an opportunity for other women to join the work in sovereign positions. The five ministers will be role models," said Lamees BenSaad, a women's rights activist and another member of the UN talks forum.

"We have been fighting a long time for this gain."

Opposition to women having a big public role is not only held by men. Tahani Qarouq, who makes wedding delicacies in Tripoli, said she did not agree with women running Cabinet ministries or state institutions.

But Hanan Malouda, selling beauty products in the market, said women in government would be good for Libya.

"Hopefully they will have more compassion for us," she said.



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EU welcomes Libya unity government, warns 'spoilers' Guterres hails endorsement of interim unity government in Libya

[US: No unilateral gestures to Iran](#)

Author:

Sat, 2021-03-13 02:37

CHICAGO: US State Department spokesman Ned Price said that Washington will not offer incentives to Tehran for returning to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), otherwise known as the Iran Nuclear Deal.

Price said that Iran must return to JCPOA compliance first and then the US will follow. But there will be no easing on existing sanctions against Iran, which continues to back Houthi strikes against Saudi Arabia from Yemen.

"We will not offer any unilateral gestures or incentives to induce the Iranians to come to the table," Price said.

"If the Iranians are under the impression that absent any movement on their part to resume full compliance with the JCPOA that we will offer favors or unilateral gestures, well, that is a misimpression."

Price said the US is dug in as Tehran's possible return to the Iran Nuclear Deal would just be the beginning.

"If Iran returns to its full compliance with the JCPOA, the United States would do the same," he said.

"As I have said before, that would be a necessary but insufficient development. Insufficient because we would then seek to lengthen and strengthen the terms of that deal, using it as a platform to negotiate follow-on arrangements to address these other areas of profound concern with Iran's behavior in the region."

The JCPOA is a 159-page agreement signed in 2015 by the US, Iran, France, the UK, China, Germany and Russia in which Iran would allow the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to monitor its nuclear programs.

Former US President Donald Trump withdrew from the agreement accusing Iran of failing to live up to the agreement's obligations.

BACKGROUND

- **The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action is a 159-page agreement signed in 2015 by the US, Iran, France, the UK, China, Germany and Russia in which Iran would allow the International Atomic Energy Agency to monitor its nuclear programs.**

- **Former US President Donald Trump withdrew from the agreement accusing Iran of failing to live up to the agreement's obligations.**

US President Joe Biden took office in January and announced a willingness to re-negotiate with Tehran and bring Iran back into JCPOA and IAEA compliance. Price said US envoy to Yemen Tim Lenderking returned from meetings with Arab leaders in the Gulf and in Jordan on Wednesday hoping to push all of the parties to a cease-fire in Yemen, but said more discussions are required. "Special Envoy Lenderking's efforts were fully coordinated with the UN throughout his travel, and he finished his trip in Jordan on March 9 where he met with the UN Special Envoy Martin Griffiths and senior Jordanian officials," Price said.

"While there is some hopeful progress, more commitment is needed from the parties. Special Envoy Lenderking and Special Envoy Griffiths are committed to working side-by-side to push the parties to negotiate under the UN-proposed plan, which includes opening Hodeidah Port and a cease-fire. To that end, the Houthis should end their offensive on Marib and their continued cross-border attacks against Saudi Arabia."

Price also spoke about bringing more Arab countries to recognize Israel under the terms of the "Abraham Accords" which grant recognition to Israel beyond the current signatories, of the UAE, Bahrain, Morocco and Sudan.

"We welcome, we support the normalization agreements between Israel and countries in the Arab world and the broader Muslim world," Price said.

"It is something that we will seek to build on. It is something that we have welcomed from the previous administration and something, again, we will seek to build on going forward."

But Price declined to speculate on which countries might sign.

"We have discussed it in the bilateral context with some of our partners in the Arab and Muslim world," he said.

“It is something that we have discussed with the Israelis. I would not want to get ahead of private conversations at this point. But I expect before too long, we will be in a position to say more and you will be in a position to see more about how we are going to build on that.”

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had planned to visit the UAE this week after announcing the Emiratis would invest \$10 billion in Israel. The cancellation of his trip was sparked by a dispute with Jordan over security arrangements at the Al-Aqsa Mosque in East Jerusalem.



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