

Iraq PM in talks with UK's Boris Johnson on security, political reforms

Thu, 2020-10-22 17:14

LONDON: Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhimi and his British counterpart Boris Johnson discussed security challenges in the Middle East on Thursday. A-Khadimi met the UK leader at Downing Street as part of an a European tour. Johnson expressed his strong support for the Iraq government as they discussed economic reforms, the coronavirus pandemic and the continued effort to defeat Daesh.

The Twitter account of Al-Kadhimi's office said both leaders discussed issues of bilateral interest, and discussed recent political and security issues in Iraq and the region.

They also agreed on more cooperation in the fight against terrorism.

"It was agreed to increase more cooperation in the field of combating terrorism, as well as in the political and economic sectors, in light of the economic challenges that Iraq faces," his office said.

Prior to his UK trip, Al-Kadhimi met with French President Emmanuel Macron in Paris and German Chancellor Angela Merkel in Berlin.

During these visits, Al-Kadhimi discussed Iraq's main challenges such as the fight against terrorism and foreign interference in its affairs.

The Iraqi leader, who became prime minister in May, has a particularly affinity with the UK, having lived there for many years after fleeing Iraq in the 1980s.





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Iraq PM arrives in UK on official visit For Iraq's persecuted Yazidis, return plan is fraught with risk

[Protesters back on Sudan streets](#)

Author:

Thu, 2020-10-22 01:28

CAIRO: Sudanese protesters took to the streets in the capital and across the country on Wednesday over dire living conditions and a deadly crackdown on demonstrators in the east earlier this month.

The protests came on the anniversary of a 1964 uprising that ended six years of military rule. Sudan is currently ruled by a joint civilian-military government, following the popular uprising that toppled longtime president, Omar Bashir, last year.

The demonstrations came a week after at least 15 people were killed and dozens were wounded in tribal clashes and a government crackdown against protesters in eastern Sudan. The violence broke out after Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok earlier this month sacked Saleh Ammar, governor of the eastern Kassala province.

Footage circulating online showed protesters marching on Wednesday in Khartoum and its twin city, Omdurman, as well as in other cities across the country. Protesters set tires ablaze in some areas in the capital. There were no immediate reports of violence.

Security forces blocked off major roads, bridges and streets leading to the presidential palace and the military's headquarters in Khartoum ahead of the demonstrations. The state-run SUNA news agency said the city center was in complete lockdown.

The "million-man march" was called by the so-called Resistance Committees, which were instrumental in the protests against Bashir and the generals who removed him from office and briefly held power. Other political parties and professional unions took part in the demonstrations.

The protesters are calling for the formation of a legislative body, which is supposed to happen as part of a power-sharing agreement they reached with the military last year.

They also demand results from an independent investigation into the crackdown against protests last year, including the deadly breakup of the main Khartoum protest camp in June 2019. The probe was supposed to have been completed by February, but investigators asked for an extension in part due to the

coronavirus pandemic.

The transitional government has been struggling to revive Sudan's battered economy amid a huge budget deficit and widespread shortages of essential goods, including fuel, bread and medicine.

Annual inflation soared past 200 percent last month as prices of bread and other staples surged, according to official figures.

Sudan's economy has suffered from decades of US sanctions and mismanagement under Bashir, who had ruled the country since a 1989 Islamist-backed military coup.

The country has more than \$60 billion in foreign debt, and debt relief and access to foreign loans are widely seen as its gateway to economic recovery. But access to foreign loans is linked to the removal of sanctions related to the country's listing by the US as a state sponsor of terror.

President Donald Trump recently said Sudan will be removed from the blacklist if it follows through on its pledge to pay \$335 million to American terror victims and their families. Sudanese officials welcomed Trump's announcement which is widely seen as a key incentive for the east African country to normalize relations with Israel.

The terror designation dates back to the 1990s, when Sudan briefly hosted Osama bin Laden and other wanted militants.



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Sudan imposes a curfew in the cities of Port Sudan and Suakin due to ethnic clashes. Four more Sudanese protesters killed in Omdurman, as army and opposition meet.

[Iran rights lawyer Sotoudeh moved to jail out of Tehran](#)

Author:

Thu, 2020-10-22 02:01

TEHRAN: Jailed Iranian human rights lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh has been moved to a women's detention center outside the capital Tehran instead of receiving the hospital treatment she needs, her husband said on Wednesday.

The UN has called on Iran to free Sotoudeh, a winner of the European Parliament's Sakharov prize, and other political prisoners excluded from a push to empty jails amid the coronavirus pandemic.

"Nasrin called me yesterday (Tuesday) to tell me she's been transferred straight (from Tehran's Evin jail) to the one in Qarchak," more than 30 km away, her husband Reza Khandan told AFP.

"We had been expecting her to be sent to hospital for an angiogram" as decided by "the medical commission at Evin prison," he said.

Khandan has said that health issues prompted Sotoudeh, 57, to end a hunger strike lasting more than 45 days to push for the release of political prisoners during the pandemic.

The lawyer was sentenced in 2019 to serve 12 years in jail for defending women arrested for protesting compulsory headscarf laws in the Islamic republic.

UN human rights chief Michelle Bachelet on Oct. 6 expressed deep concern over the deteriorating situation of rights activists, lawyers and political prisoners held in Iran as a result of the coronavirus crisis.

"People detained solely for their political views or other forms of activism in support of human rights should not be imprisoned at all, and such prisoners, should certainly not be treated more harshly or placed at greater risk," she said.

"I am very concerned that Nasrin Sotoudeh's life is at risk," Bachelet said.

A system of temporary releases to reduce the populations in severely overcrowded prisons, introduced by Iran in February to rein in transmission

of Covid-19, has benefited some 120,000 inmates, although a number have since been required to return, her office said.

But it said that prisoners sentenced to more than five years for “national security” offenses were excluded.

The pandemic has cost more 31,000 lives in Iran out of 545,000 declared cases, according to official figures released on Wednesday.



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Jailed Iranian rights lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh hospitalized amid hunger strike
Iran rights lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh sentenced to 7 years in jail

[Palestinian official Erekat undergoes bronchostomy](#)

Author:

Associated Press

ID:

1603308367436627100

Wed, 2020-10-21 18:46

JERUSALEM: A doctor treating Palestinian official Saeb Erekat for COVID-19 performed a bronchostomy on Wednesday to examine the condition of his respiratory system, his daughter said.

Salam Erekat said on Twitter that her father remained intubated and connected to an ECMO machine, which does the work of the lungs by transferring oxygen into blood.

She said it would take several days to get the results. "Hopefully things will take a better way. Pray for my father," said Salam Erekat, who herself is a physician.

Erekat, 65, was transferred Sunday from the West Bank to Israel's Hadassah Medical Center.

The hospital has said he is in critical but stable condition, and that its medical team is consulting with experts around the world to deal with the case. It says Erekat's case is especially complicated given his history of health issues, including a lung transplant in 2017.

Erekat, 65, has been one of the Palestinians' most recognizable faces over the past several decades, serving as a senior negotiator in talks with Israel and making frequent media appearances. He was also a senior adviser to late Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and current President Mahmoud Abbas.



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Officer may face charges in killing of autistic Palestinian
official Erekat 'critical' from virus

Working mothers hit back at nursery closures in Jordan

Author:

Reuters

ID:

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Wed, 2020-10-21 17:28

AMMAN: Working mothers staged protests on Wednesday against Jordan's decision to close all nurseries until year-end, saying the move unfairly targets women in the pandemic.

Jordan has already endured one of the strictest lockdowns in the region and now working mothers fear a second knockback as the country tries to stem the spread of the novel coronavirus.

"This decision has taken us back to events of (the first lockdown), when mothers were in disarray and nurseries were collapsing," said Rana Ali of Sadaqa, an organization that advocates for women in the workplace.

"It's an added burden on mothers who will lose the ability to balance their childcare duties and their work."

Mothers and daycare workers demonstrated against the shutdown – due to begin on Saturday – outside the social development ministry, echoing growing anger on social media.

"Nurseries offer a crucial solution for thousands of working women and it is not a luxury," tweeted Hadeel Seddiq.

"The closure decision is unfair and remote work is not a viable option for many professions."

The protests came a day after the ministry of social development announced the planned shutdown, with almost 41,000 coronavirus infections and 414 deaths recorded countrywide.

The ministry did not respond to requests for comment.

SHUTDOWN

It marks the second time that nurseries will close because of COVID-19 after a near three-month hiatus in spring.

Only about 400 of the nation's 1,400 nurseries re-opened after lockdown was lifted in June, citing financial losses and new hygiene and testing costs, Ali said.

Nebal Al-Haliq, who owns two nurseries in the city of Salt, 22 miles (35 km) from the capital, said the closure would hurt mothers and the 10 staff who tend to 55 children in her care.

"My priority is securing their salaries because their only source of income is the nursery," she told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

“And I’m still paying off the debts from the first closure.”

Dentist Majd Hawamdeh said she would take her two children from Salt to her parents in Amman, a two-hour round-trip that she must make twice daily to carry out her job.

With only three hours work in between, the 29-year-old said had no choice but to cut patient numbers, halving her income.

“Meanwhile I have bills to pay every month,” she said. “These don’t stop whether you go to work or not.”

Women make up less than 15% of the workforce in Jordan, one of the lowest rates in the world, according to the World Bank.

“We already have challenges that face working women and these decisions... will only worsen women’s economic participation,” Ali said.



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Jordan limits comprehensive curfew to Fridays until end of 2020 Jordan imposes 48-hour lockdown, but with exceptions