

Iraq's Sadr warns MPs against rejecting new govt

Author:

Sat, 2020-02-22 23:39

NAJAF: Populist cleric Moqtada Al-Sadr returned to Iraq on Saturday with a threat to organize protests outside Parliament unless lawmakers back the government of Prime Minister-designate Mohammad Allawi in a confidence vote. The cleric with a cult-like following in Iraq has thrown his weight behind the appointment of Allawi, despite the premier's rejection by a protest movement Sadr once backed.

The onetime anti-US militia leader whose supporters form the largest bloc in the Parliament had spent most of the past few months in neighboring Iran but came back to whip up support for Allawi's government lineup.

Sadr demanded that parliament approve the line-up in the coming days.

"If the session does not take place this week, or if lawmakers don't (back) a transparent Iraqi Cabinet in a vote ... then this will require a demonstration of a million people," he tweeted.

"Sit-ins around the Green Zone (where Parliament is located) will have to be used to exert pressure," he said.

Allawi has called for a vote of confidence to be held on Monday and has been backed by his predecessor Adel Abdul Mahdi, who bowed out as prime minister in December in the face of pressure from the street.

But the constitutional position is unclear.

Deputy Parliament Speaker Hassan Karim Al-Kaabi, who is close to Sadr, told Iraqi media that Abdul Mahdi's request for an extraordinary session to hold the confidence vote was binding.

But Parliament Speaker Mohammed Halbusi said he has not yet agreed to convene the session and several lawmakers from Iraq's Sunni Arab minority said they would boycott any vote.



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Meet the Iraqi hair blogger making 'waves' on social mediaAs Iraqis rally against corruption, ministries up 'for sale'

[Sudan to probe violence against Khartoum protesters](#)

Author:

Sat, 2020-02-22 23:36

CAIRO: Sudanese Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok on Saturday ordered an investigation into a violent crackdown by security forces on protesters in Khartoum.

Hamdok said in a televised speech: "I decided to form an investigative committee in the events that occurred on Feb. 20-21."

He said Attorney General Taj-Elsir Ali would head the committee and a final report would be issued within seven days.

On Thursday, Sudanese security forces used teargas and batons to disperse thousands of protesters.

They were demanding the reinstatement of army officers dismissed for refusing to crack down on demonstrations against former President Omar Bashir, witnesses said.

A doctors' committee linked to the opposition said in a statement that at least 17 people were wounded, and many of the wounded were hit by teargas canisters.

HIGHLIGHT

Mohamed Seddik, an iconic figure of the uprising, is among those dismissed last week and one of several young army officers who had refused to participate in the crackdown on demonstrations in front of the Defense Ministry calling for the removal of Bashir.

The military removed Bashir from office and arrested him last April after months of demonstrations, bringing an end to his 30 years of autocratic rule. But dozens of protesters were killed during crackdowns on the demonstrations, and dozens more died last June when security forces cleared a sit-in at which protesters pushed for further reforms.

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Huge locust outbreak in East Africa reaches South Sudan
ICC trial in The Hague
one option for Sudan's Bashir -minister

Thousands hit streets of Algiers on protest movement anniversary

Author:

Sat, 2020-02-22 23:34

ALGIERS: Several thousand people gathered in the Algerian capital on Saturday on the first anniversary of a protest movement that seeks an overhaul of the political system and forced the former president to resign.

Protesters shouted “the people want the fall of the regime” and “we have come to get rid of you,” referring to the country’s rulers.

“No to military power, civil not military state” was written on one banner, referring to the authority exercised by the high military command since the country’s independence from France in 1962.

Mass protests first erupted on Feb. 22 last year, in response to then-President Abdelaziz Bouteflika announcing he intended a run for a fifth term – despite being debilitated by a 2013 stroke.

Less than six weeks later, he stepped down after losing the support of the then-army chief in the face of enormous weekly demonstrations.

Despite hordes – diplomats said “millions” – turning out after Bouteflika’s fall to demand an overhaul of the entire system, the military maintained a political stranglehold in the months that followed.

Police were deployed around the Grande Poste in central Algiers in numbers unusual for a Saturday, as people responded to calls on social media to celebrate the first anniversary of the “Hirak” protest movement.

Friday had seen the 53rd straight weekly demonstration, with Algerians flooding the streets of Algiers and numerous other cities across the country. Even as the unprecedented movement has thinned in numbers since December, protesters still turn out in droves on a weekly basis.

President Abdelmadjid Tebboune, a former prime minister under Bouteflika who was elected in December, had recently claimed that “things are starting to calm” in the streets and that “the Hirak got almost everything it wanted.”



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Neighbours to meet in Algiers on Libya crisis More than 80 detained in Algiers protest, says rights group

[Financial Action Task Force tightens screws on Tehran over terror financing](#)

Sat, 2020-02-22 02:20

PARIS: An international agency monitoring terrorism funding announced tough new financial scrutiny of Iran on Friday and added seven countries to a watch list.

Pakistan, meanwhile, won a reprieve from the Financial Action Task Force at its meetings in Paris this week. The monitoring body gave Pakistan's government another four months to crack down on terrorism financing and did not put the country on a damaging "black list."

Iran and North Korea are the only two countries currently on the agency's black list. That means international financial transactions with those countries are closely scrutinized, making it costly and cumbersome to do business with them. International creditors can also place restrictions on

lending to black-listed countries.

The FATF decided on Friday to further tighten the screws on Iran, imposing extra measures that could require audits or more transactions and make it even harder for foreign investors to do business there.

The group made the decision because Iran failed to fulfill its promises to the FATF despite repeated warnings. In a statement, the organization said that Iran hasn't done enough to criminalize terrorist financing, require transparency in wire transfers or freeze terrorist assets targeted by UN sanctions.

Opinion

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

The head of Iran's central bank, Abdolnasser Hemmati, said the decision will not affect the country.

"Such incidents will create no problem for Iran's foreign trade and currency," he said in a statement. Hemmati said the FATF decision was based on the "enmity" of the US and Israel toward Iran.

Pakistan, meanwhile, has been trying to get off the FATF gray list, the color code for countries that are only partially fulfilling international rules for fighting terrorism financing and money laundering.

Pakistan's government has been working to shore up the country's faltering economy and attract foreign investment and loans, making the FATF's assessment especially important.

The FATF said that Pakistan had fulfilled 14 of 27 steps to get off the watch list, but still must do more to track money transfers and investigate and prosecute terrorism financiers.

The Pakistani government said in a statement that it "stands committed for taking all necessary action required" to fulfill the remaining steps. "A strategy in this regard has been formulated and is being implemented."

The Financial Action Task Force also put seven new countries on its gray list because of gaps or failures in stemming the financing of terrorist groups or money laundering. The countries – Albania, Barbados, Jamaica, Mauritius, Myanmar, Nicaragua and Uganda – were ordered to take a series of legal and other steps to be removed from the list and avoid further financial punishment.



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US blacklists five Iranian officials for impeding 'fair' elections

[**A Jordanian NGO takes on social ills in Amman neighborhoods**](#)

Sat, 2020-02-22 00:55

CAIRO: A local initiative in Jordan is rejuvenating neighborhoods in the kingdom's capital, bringing together communities and encouraging residents to work collectively to improve their environment.

The Harra, an NGO which translates into "neighborhood," has so far renovated five areas in Amman under the guidance of its founder, the social entrepreneur Mohammed Abu Amerah.

When Abu Amerah returned to Jordan after many years away in 2005, he was saddened to find his local community in disarray – epitomized by ugly

concrete boxes and overflowing litter – and quickly decided to take action to reinvigorate the local area.

Abu Amerah believes that traditional “harra” life in Jordan has been compromised by Amman’s explosive growth, as it struggles to contain growing numbers of refugees from across the country’s borders.

“A class system has developed, encouraging discrimination and degradation of the community,” he said.

Abu Amerah said he was spurred into action when he heard the news that his neighbor had been shot at in a dispute over a parking space.

“The idea for Harra came to me slowly. I saw that the lack of elegant structures in the community reflected not just the public space, but also created a negative psychological space among inhabitants.”

The Harra founder said that worn-out built environments not only lack “function” but also breed discontent, insecurity and even violence.

Abu Amerah has since created a Harra “identity plan” which he uses as a guide to breathe life and renewed confidence into communities.

The Harra rejuvenation strategy, which is funded by Jordanian aid, is based around physical, environmental, educational and social aspects – which are then mobilized into the community.

It has taken Abu Amerah 12 years to successfully rejuvenate five harras in Amman: Al-Ashrafiyah, Yarmouk, Jabal Jouffah, Al-Nasr and Wihdat refugee camp, which are some of the most deprived areas in the Jordanian capital.

The Harra Initiative brings neighborhood residents together to develop and implement rehabilitation projects that address common problems.

“The rehabilitation projects ultimately lead to improving the living conditions in the neighborhood,” said Abu Amerah.

The main drive in Harra is the community itself and the need to show members of the locality how to use their power to change their own lives and those of their children and their neighborhood.

This starts with the physical rebuilding of the neighborhood, including the renovation of walls and streets, adding address numbers to houses and collecting garbage, which lasts between 12 and 14 months. But the purpose of this phase is also to build social nets in the Jordanian community.

The process of rehabilitation brings with it the creation of neighborhood associations, the establishment of recycling and energy saving projects or creating ways of generating income.

“The methodology rests on a community participatory approach, which unlocks residents’ own innovative thinking and creative energies,” said Abu Amerah. “Harra interventions are designed to foster a sense of accountability and

collective ownership.”

The social entrepreneur said the benefits of the Harra programs have been very tangible. “The programs have provided the initial motivation and leadership needed to inspire change within each targeted community.

“They have also promoted recognition and sensitivity towards social, behavioral processes, cultural and economic diversity.”

Abu Amerah said that reclaiming the public space has helped to reduce violence, created a community voice and promoted social cohesion and resilience among communities.

“Creating the sense of collective ownership among residents was the biggest challenge of all,” Abu Amerah said.

“We have successfully created the voice of harra to address and influence the issues that shape our reality and future in all aspects.”

• *The Middle East Exchange is one of the Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum Global Initiatives that was launched to reflect the vision of the UAE prime minister and ruler of Dubai in the field of humanitarian and global development, to explore the possibility of changing the status of the Arab region. The initiative offers the press a series of articles on issues affecting Arab societies.*



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