

Lebanon security forces face off against protesters near parliament building in Beirut

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Sat, 2020-01-18 16:00

BEIRUT: Security personnel fired tear gas and water cannons at protesters armed with little more than tree branches and sign posts in Beirut on Saturday in clashes near Lebanon's parliament.

According to a Red Cross statement issued on Saturday, 75 protesters have been injured during the standoff with security forces.

The latest clashes come after a cooling of tensions in the Lebanese capital, after largely peaceful protests which broke out across the country in October over the state of the economy turned increasingly violent, but people have filled the streets again this week.

They are furious at a ruling elite that has steered the country toward its worst economic crisis in decades.

Police wielding batons and firing tear gas have wounded dozens of people at protests in recent days. Anger at the banks – which have curbed people's access to their savings – started to boil over, with protesters smashing bank facades and ATMs on Tuesday night.

Lebanon's Internal Security Forces said on Saturday that police in Beirut were being "violently and directly" confronted at one of the entrances to the parliament. In a tweet, it called on people to leave the area for their own safety.

Witnesses said they saw young men hurling stones and flower pots toward riot police, while protesters tried to push through an entrance to a heavily barricaded district of central Beirut, which includes the parliament.

Hundreds of protesters marched and chanted against in the political class in other parts of the capital. A large banner at one of the rallies read: "If the people go hungry, they will eat their rulers."

The unrest, which stemmed from anger at corruption and the rising cost of living, forced Prime Minister Saad Al-Hariri to resign in October. Feuding politicians have since failed to agree a new cabinet or rescue plan.

The Lebanese pound has lost nearly half its value, while dollar shortages have driven up prices and confidence in the banking system has collapsed.

(With Reuters)







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Lebanon's Bank Audi open to sale of Egyptian unit in new strategy

Iran to send flight recorders from downed jet to Ukraine

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Sat, 2020-01-18 15:18

TEHRAN: Iran will send the black box flight recorders from the Ukrainian jetliner that it accidentally shot down last week to Ukraine for further analysis, an Iranian official said Saturday.

Hassan Rezaeifer, the head of accident investigations for the civil aviation department, said it was not possible to read the black boxes in Iran, without elaborating. He said French, American and Canadian experts would help analyze them in Kyiv, the Ukrainian capital.

He said if that doesn't work the black boxes will be sent to France. His remarks were carried by the semi-official Tasnim news agency.

Iran's Revolutionary Guard accidentally shot the plane down shortly after it took off from Tehran on Jan. 8, killing all 176 people on board. Hours earlier, the Guard had launched ballistic missiles at US troops in Iraq in response to the US airstrike that killed Iran's top commander, Gen. Qassem Soleimani. Officials say lower-level officers mistook the plane for a US cruise missile.

Iranian officials initially said the crash was caused by a technical problem and invited countries that lost citizens to help investigate. Three days later, Iran admitted responsibility after Western leaders said there was strong evidence the plane was hit by a surface-to-air missile.

The victims included 57 Canadian citizens as well as 11 Ukrainians, 17 people from Sweden, four Afghans and four British citizens. Most of those killed were Iranians. The other five nations have demanded Iran accept full responsibility and pay compensation to the victims' families.

The plane was a Boeing 737-800 that was designed and built in the US. The plane's engine was designed by CFM International, a joint company between French group Safran and US group GE Aviation. Investigators from both countries have been invited to take part in the probe.



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Trump warns Iran's supreme leader to be 'careful with his words' Ukraine says Iran to hand over downed jet's black boxes

[Syrian rebels seen on plane to Tripoli are 'mercenaries for GNA': Libyan newspaper](#)

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1579359053488870700

Sat, 2020-01-18 17:49

LONDON: A video has emerged showing dozens of what appear to be Syrian rebels on an Afriqiyah Airways plane headed to Libya where they will allegedly fight

alongside the country's Government of National Accord (GNA), Libyan newspaper Al-Shahid has claimed.

In the video, the men – three of whom were seen wearing military uniforms – are on their way to Libya where they will reportedly fight as mercenaries for the GNA's militias.

On Wednesday, British newspaper The Guardian published an article suggesting that 2,000 Syrian fighters have traveled to Libya from Turkey or will soon arrive in the war torn country to fight for the GNA. The Guardian cited Syrian sources in all three countries.

The oil-rich north African state has been in turmoil since a 2011 NATO-backed uprising that overthrew and killed dictator Muammar Qaddafi.

Haftar, who backs a rival administration in Libya's east, launched a major military offensive to capture Tripoli in April 2019.

The military commander held talks in Athens on Friday, two days ahead of a peace conference in Berlin which he and the head of the GNA Fayez Al-Sarraj are expected to attend.



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UN Libya mission 'deeply concerned' over disruption in oil production, urges restraint
Saudi envoy receives Libyan ambassador to the UN

US State Department sanctions top IRGC general for crackdown on protesters

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Fri, 2020-01-17 19:19

WASHINGTON: The US Department of State imposed sanctions on Friday on a leading Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps general following Iran's crackdown on protesters, US Special Representative on Iran Brian Hook said.

"The United States is listing IRGC Brig. Gen. Hassan Shavapor under Section 7031c, visa sanctions," Hook told reporters.

"General Shavapor committed gross violations of human rights against protesters at the press briefing. He oversaw the massacre of 148 helpless Iranians in the Mashar region last November," he said.

Hook added that the designation was the result of photographic and video tips submitted to the department by Iranians.

The department has received more than 88,000 such tips since it appealed for Iranians to report evidence of repression and gross human rights abuses, Hook said.

Iran has denied US allegations of widespread repression but has acknowledged confronting separatists in Mahshahr that it said were armed.

Hook's press statement came after Iran's top leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei made comments about the day Tehran hit US bases in Iraq with missiles in response to the killing of the country's top military commander Qassem Soleimani, calling it "a day of God."

He also said that the killing of Soleimani was a "disgrace" to the American administration and that the attack showed the "terrorist nature" of Washington.

In response, Hook said: "The more Iran threatens the world, the more isolated it will become."

Hook also said that US sanctions were working, citing Iran's president Hassan Rouhani admitting financial losses due to the sanctions and pointing toward Iran's "major banking crisis."

He added: "We have succeeded in making the Iranian regime and whoever helps it pay a heavy price."

Also on Friday, Hook praised the UK and its decision to classify Lebanon's Hezbollah movement as a terrorist group.



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Countdown to UN sanctions on Iran over nuclear deal
US stands firm against Iran, it will strike if attacked: Brian Hook

[Ukraine says Iran to hand over downed jet's black boxes](#)

Author:

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1579273788953333300

Fri, 2020-01-17 13:50

KIEV: Ukraine said Friday Iran was ready to hand over the black box flight recorders of the Ukrainian passenger plane downed by an Iranian missile.

The Kiev-bound Ukraine International Airlines Boeing 737, crashed shortly after taking off from Tehran last Wednesday, killing all 176 people on board, mostly Iranian and Canadian citizens.

Ukraine's foreign minister said Iran would grant a team of investigators from Iran and Canada as the countries that have lost the most nationals access to the recorders.

"After that, the Iranian side is ready to separately transfer the black boxes to Ukraine," Vadym Prystaiko told lawmakers during a parliamentary session.

"This is consistent with international standards, although we still demand that they be given to us immediately to ensure the independence and objectivity of the investigation," Prystaiko said.

Meanwhile, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on Friday urged Iran to send the flight and cockpit data recorders from the crashed jet to France for analysis and said the first remains of victims should soon arrive back in Canada.

"Iran does not have the level of technical expertise and mostly the equipment necessary to be able to analyze these damaged black boxes quickly," Trudeau said.

He told a news conference in Ottawa that France was one of the few countries with the ability to read the plane's so-called black boxes, which he said were badly damaged.

"The right place to send those black boxes to get proper information from them and in a rapid way" is France, he said, adding "that is what we're encouraging the Iranian authorities to agree to."

Trudeau also said his government will give Canadian \$25,000 (\$19,122) to families of each of the 57 citizens and 29 permanent residents of Canada who perished in the downing of a Ukrainian jetliner in Iran last week.

He added he still expects Iran to compensate the families but said they need help now for funerals, travel to Iran and bills. He said any money Iran provides at a later date will go straight to the families and will not be reimbursed to the Canadian government.

"I want to be clear, we expect Iran to compensate these families," Trudeau said. "But I have met them. They can't wait weeks. They need support now."

After initial denials, Iran admitted it has shot down the plane

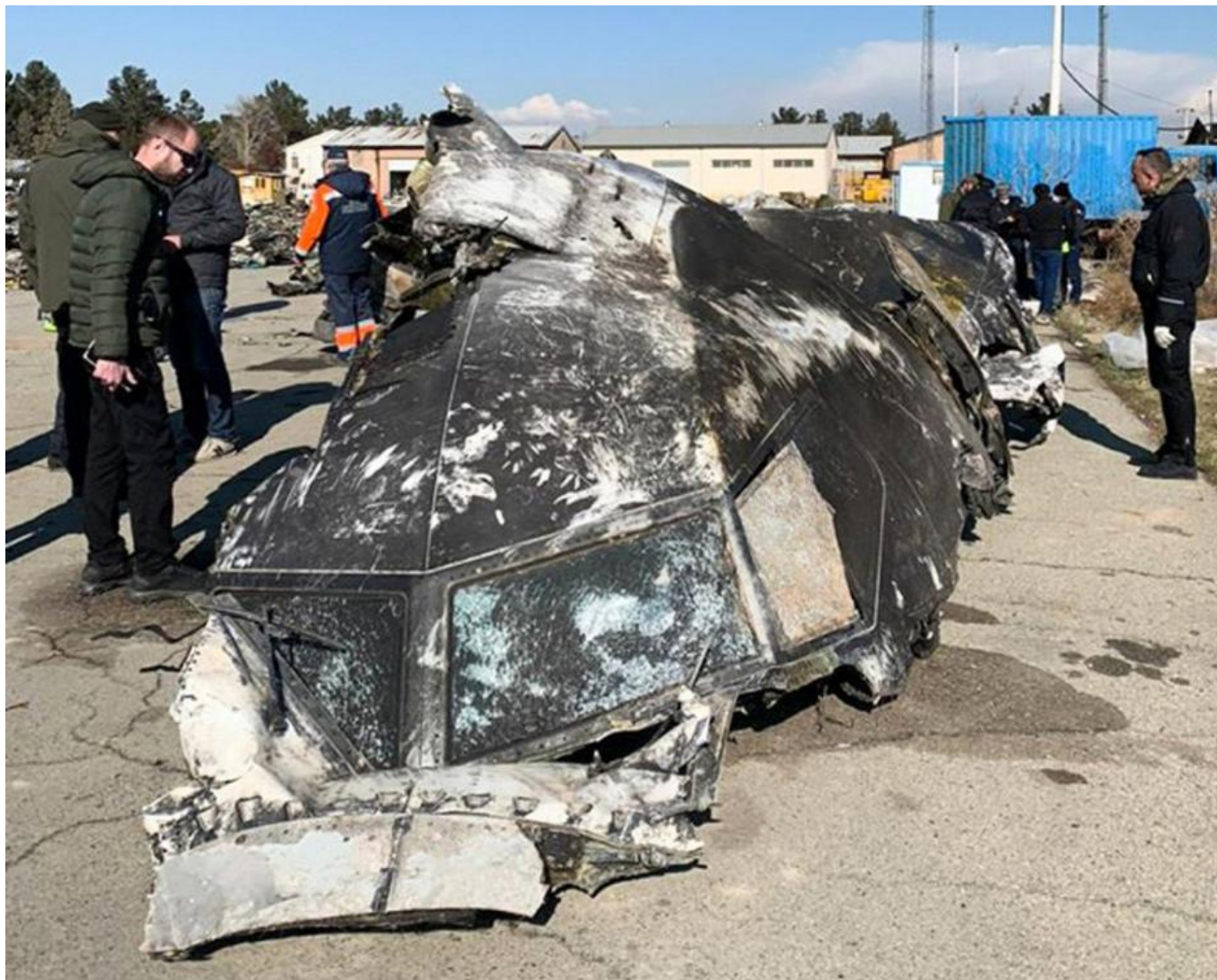
"unintentionally" while on high alert after firing missiles at US troops stationed in Iraq in retaliation for the killing of top Iranian commander Qasem Soleimani by a US strike.

Prystaiko told CNN on Wednesday that Kiev has "good cooperation" with Tehran on the crash probe, but lacked "access to the information stored in the black boxes."

"We just want to know that nobody will be tampering with the recordings themselves," he said.

Prystaiko said an Iranian official will visit Kiev next week "to apologize officially and provide explanations."

On Thursday, Canada, Ukraine, Sweden, Afghanistan and Britain issued a five-point plan for cooperation with Iran during the investigation, calling for "full and unhindered access" for foreign officials.



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London meeting for Ukraine plane victims urges Iran to hold responsible to account