

# Palestinian Fatah marks 55 years with West Bank marches

Tue, 2019-12-31 19:58

RAMALLAH: Hundreds of Palestinians marched through the West Bank city of Ramallah on Tuesday to mark the 55th anniversary of the Fatah movement led by President Mahmoud Abbas.

Established by Yasser Arafat in 1965, Fatah led the armed struggle against Israel for decades as the main component of the Palestine Liberation Organization. The PLO recognized Israel in the early 1990s at the start of the peace process, and since then it has been committed to a two-state solution.

Around a dozen masked men led the march through Ramallah, firing several rounds of gunfire into the air. Similar marches are planned elsewhere in the West Bank in the coming days.

Fatah has long vied with Hamas for leadership of the Palestinian national struggle. In 2007, the two factions battled one another in Gaza, leading to the Hamas takeover of the coastal strip. Several attempts at reconciliation have failed.

The peace process with Israel ground to a halt over a decade ago, leaving the Fatah-led Palestinian Authority with limited control over parts of the occupied West Bank but little hope of achieving an independent state anytime soon.

Israel seized the West Bank, Gaza and east Jerusalem in the 1967 Middle East war. The Palestinian Authority wants all three territories to form a future state living alongside Israel.

Israel annexed east Jerusalem in 1967, and Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has recently vowed to annex large parts of the West Bank, which would make it virtually impossible to establish a viable Palestinian state. The popularity of Abbas, and by extension Fatah, has plunged in recent years as he has failed to achieve an independent state or heal the rift with Hamas. Many Palestinians also accuse the Fatah-led Palestinian Authority of rampant corruption.



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Mahmoud Abbas hails Fatah university election win  
Fatah withdraws officers from Gaza-Egypt crossing

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## [Yemen officials: Houthi militia ban on banknotes stops gov't salaries](#)

Author:

Tue, 2019-12-31 19:25

SANAA: Yemeni officials said on Tuesday that a militia group's ban on recently-printed government banknotes in areas under their control, including the capital, Sanaa, has held up the salaries of tens of thousands of civil servants and pensioners.

The officials and the internationally recognized government said the militia, known as Houthis, refused to work with the Yemeni rials that its central bank had printed in the past three years.

The Iran-backed Houthis control most of the country's north, after more than five years of a stalemated civil war. An Arab coalition backs the internationally recognized government which still rules southern Yemen, including its interim capital, Aden, where its Central Bank is located. The fighting in the Arab world's poorest country has killed over 100,000 people and left millions suffering from food and medical shortages. The conflict has also pushed the country to the brink of famine.

The finance ministry said the militia's move paralyzed most banking activities in areas under Houthi control, depriving tens of thousands of people, including around 40,000 pensioners, of desperately needed payments this month.

Officials in Sanaa said the Houthis had given residents a month to hand over the newly printed but banned banknotes or face penalties that include jail. The Houthi militia said they would compensate them with old currency or an electronic rial they have created, they added.

The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to brief the media.

They said banks and shops in Houthi-controlled areas have refused to use the banned banknotes. Residents have resorted to trading in the Yemeni rial with the Saudi Arabian rial and the UN dollar before entering the Houthi-controlled areas to avoid being arrested, the officials said.





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Traders threaten strike in Houthi-controlled Yemen as rebels ban currency  
Houthi militants in Yemen shell World Food Program's Hodeidah grain store

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## [Oman says Sultan Qaboos in 'stable condition'](#)

Tue, 2019-12-31 17:57

JEDDAH: Sultan Qaboos who has ruled Oman for almost half a century is in stable condition after recently traveling to Belgium for a medical checkup, his royal court announced Tuesday.

"The Royal Diwan Court wishes to inform the people that the Sultan Qaboos bin Said ... is following the prescribed medical treatment and that he is in a stable condition, thanks to God," the official ONA news agency cited the

royal court as saying, without giving details.

The court announced on Dec. 7 that Sultan Qaboos, 79, was traveling to Belgium for “a limited period of time,” but did not give details on his condition.

The statement from the royal court said Sultan Qaboos thanked his people for the good wishes they had sent him.

“The Sultan extends his thanks and appreciation to the righteous people all over the world for sharing their good wishes and prayers for him,” it added.

Sultan Qaboos, 79, has ruled the Gulf Arab state since leading a bloodless coup in 1970 with the help of Britain, Oman’s former colonial power.

*(With agencies)*



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# Lebanese won't miss 2019, have low hopes for 2020

Author:

Tue, 2019-12-31 01:56

BEIRUT: The Lebanese people know what awaits them in 2020; the political, economic, and social crises that erupted in the second half of 2019 will not be resolved on this year's last day.

The formation of the new government still faces obstacles.

The banking procedures, which saw the imposition of restrictions on US dollar transfers abroad, and on the withdrawal of deposits from banks, resulted in economic contraction, bankruptcy and the dismissal of employees.

These restrictions persist and may get tougher in the new year as long as there is no government to generate confidence.

As for the unprecedented demonstrations that erupted last October against the ruling class, the people participating in them are still worried and angry.

According to political and economic experts, the new government, if it ever sees light, will face the challenge of preventing total collapse, or alleviating its effects, under stressful circumstances, while protests might even overthrow it.

The new year's budget indicates that the state's revenues have decreased in large part due to the decline in tax collecting.

The draft 2020 budget, which was transferred to the Parliamentary Money Committee, expected that revenues would total 20 trillion lira (\$13.3 billion), but the Ministry of Finance adjusted this number in light of what was collected in 2019, and reduced the expected revenues to about 14 trillion lira.

The figures for the 2019 budget were disastrous, as public financial figures showed that revenues collected until last October were estimated at a little under 11.5 trillion lira, compared to an expected figure of 18.78 trillion.

People on the street are not optimistic about the near future. Hanadi Abdel-Al, a US resident back for the holidays, said: "The problem that people talk about is the difficulty in obtaining US dollars to run their businesses. But the Lebanese people who lived through wars are able to overcome this crisis as well. I envy them because they live day by day, and do not care about planning for the future."

Sahar Baghdadi, who lived abroad for 21 years and came back to Lebanon two years ago, expressed regret at returning, and said: "2019 is one of the worst years – there is no peace of mind, no security, no social justice, and our economic situation is declining. I live with my family in a state of anxiety



about what next year will bring to us. Will I be able to pay the tuition fees for my children's schools? If I have the opportunity to emigrate again, I will not hesitate."

Mohammed Afra, a lawyer, believes 2019 was "an extension of the year 1984 – the ruling class today is a continuation of the militias that controlled the country during the war and imposed their control over the people. Former militias acquired power and imposed a corrupt political class whose only concern is financial greed, control of state assets, and protection of banks' interests."

Afra noted that based on lawsuits in his office, he was witnessing "frightening failure situations."

**Sales have decreased, and it is no longer people's priority to buy luxury items as purchasing power has decreased by 5%.**

*Hassan Chalhoub, Employee*

He said: "Companies are filing for bankruptcy and we cannot collect the rights of employees who have been laid off as a result, which affects negatively the middle and poor classes. I am afraid that next year will not produce a government that fights corruption and gives autonomy to the judiciary. If this situation persists, we will see thefts of banks, pharmacies, and homes, then looting and chaos will prevail."

Hassan Chalhoub, an employee in a telephone sales company, expressed his concern over what next year would bring with it. "Sales have decreased, and it is no longer people's priority to buy luxury items as purchasing power has decreased by 5 percent. I will not immigrate as my family needs me here in Lebanon, and my demand is to provide job opportunities for talented people with disregards to their sectarian affiliations."

Marilyn Melhem said: "2019, was full of grief for me. My husband died. I work to support two sons, one of them is married, and I do not know whether I will be summarily expelled from my job due to a decline in the market. In this country, nothing guarantees my rights as a citizen. There is a great injustice."

Bernard Saqr, a florist, said that conditions in 2019 were "very difficult" and added: "I sell flowers and seedlings in Byblos region and distribute my products in Lebanon and Syria, but conditions retreated and roses became a secondary thing that can be dispensed off. At weddings, they resort to accessories that are less expensive than roses, and they keep looking for alternatives. If the situation continues, no one could survive."

He thinks sometimes of emigrating, yet he does not want to leave the country. He still hopes "that things improve," assuring that: "I will struggle with what is available despite everything, and I support the revolutionaries and the revolution to the fullest extent."

Economic expert Dr. Louis Hobeika said things could not continue in such a fashion, for the country would not be able to stand further delay in forming a government, and that he worried that the prime minister-designate, Dr. Hassan Diab, might back down on forming the government.

“The banks’ restrictions are a necessary measure because political prospects are not clear. What is required is a government of confidence, so that the crisis eases,” he said.



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# Libyan war

Tue, 2019-12-31 01:49

ANKARA: The Turkish Navy is set to dispatch two frigates to Algeria to start joint maritime exercises.

With regional tensions simmering in the eastern Mediterranean, experts have drawn attention to the timing and objectives of the move considering Algeria neighbors war-torn Libya from the east.

The exercise not only coincides with the 500th year of commemoration of Oruc Reis, an Ottoman governor in North Africa who discovered the island of Djerba in Tunisia, but also Ankara's surprise introduction of visa-free travel for Algerians.

The two frigates are expected to be forwarded between Jan. 7 and 10. During the dispatch, Algerian naval forces will also receive training from their Turkish counterparts.

The Tunisian presidency recently denied claims that the country would join an alliance with Turkey and Algeria in resolving the Libyan crisis.

Last month, Turkey and Libya signed a military cooperation deal and another on the delimitation of maritime borders, under which Turkey got the green light to deploy its own troops at the request of Libya's government.

Syrian fighters were also dispatched to support Libyan Government of National Accord (GNA), based in Tripoli, to fight against General Khalifa Haftar's forces, which control the country's east.

Algeria's newly elected President Abdelmadjid Tebboune has recently chaired a top security meeting to discuss contingency plans for a possible Turkish military intervention in neighboring Libya.

A parliamentary vote in Turkey is expected for early January on deploying troops to Libya, including formation of an elite Libyan force to respond directly to threats, as well as allocation of weapons, conducting of joint exercises and exchange of counter-terror intelligence.

Yahia Zoubir, director of research in geopolitics at the Kedge Business School in Marseille and a visiting fellow at the Brookings Doha Center in Qatar, said the situation in Libya is worrisome for Algeria.

"The naval exercise must have been planned earlier. While Oruc Reis is part of Algeria's history and pride, the Turkish military presence in Libya isn't welcome for Algerians because Ankara is a member of NATO," he told Arab News.

Zoubir said that Algerians see foreign presence in the region with suspicion and believe that it is part of a plan to destabilize the region for access to oil and gas.

“There is no doubt that the Algerian military is going to strengthen its borders with Libya and Tunisia, and will continue calling for a political, negotiated solution among Libyans,” he added.

Algerian citizens aged under 18 and over 65 were recently granted entry permits to Turkey with a presidential decree.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan paid a visit to Tunis on Dec. 25 for talks with his counterpart President Kais Saied.

Gallia Lindenstrauss, senior research fellow from the Institute for National Security Studies in Tel Aviv, said the Turkey-GNA maritime border delimitation agreement has made the survival of the GNA’s Prime Minister Fayez Al-Sarraj critical for Turkey and Ankara is hoping for Tunisian and Algerian assistance to support him.

“Moreover, it seems that Erdogan’s surprise visit to Tunisia last week did not bring with it the desired result for Ankara in the context of Libya, so this potentially makes Algeria even more important for Turkey,” she told Arab News.



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Young Libyans train as pastry chefs as state jobs dry up Turkey mulls sending allied Syrian fighters to Libya