

# Iraq PM announces resignation after call from top Shiite cleric, Friday's death toll rises

Fri, 2019-11-29 15:53

BAGHDAD: Iraq's embattled premier announced Friday he would resign in keeping with the wishes of the country's top cleric, as renewed violence added to a soaring death toll in two months of anti-government protests.

Adel Abdel Mahdi's written statement was greeted with cheers and blaring music across Baghdad's iconic Tahrir Square, where demonstrators have massed since early October against a ruling class deemed corrupt and in hock to foreign powers.

"I will submit to the esteemed parliament a formal letter requesting my resignation from the premiership," Abdel Mahdi wrote, just hours after Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani used his weekly sermon to urge parliament to replace the cabinet.

Abdel Mahdi would be the first prime minister to step down since Iraq became a parliamentary system following the US-led ouster of Saddam Hussein in 2003.

"It's our first victory, and we're hoping for many more," shouted one demonstrator in Tahrir, as patriotic tunes blasted from the motorised rickshaws used to ferry casualties from the square.

Nearby, protesters occupying a gutted 18-storey building that has become a symbol of the uprising could be seen dancing and pumping their fists in the air. But despite their joy, many said the premier's resignation did not go far enough.

"We won't leave the square until every last one of those corrupt people resigns," said another demonstrator in a black shirt.

"Weed them all out. Every single one."

The grassroots movement is the largest Iraq has seen in decades, but also the deadliest, with more than 400 people dead and 15,000 wounded in Baghdad and the Shiite-majority south, according to an AFP tally.

The toll continued to rise on Friday, with 15 protesters shot dead in the flashpoint city of Nasiriyah and another killed in the Shiite shrine city of Najaf.

The UN's top official in Iraq, Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, said the deaths "cannot be tolerated".

The previous day had been one of the bloodiest yet, with 44 demonstrators killed and nearly 1,000 wounded in Baghdad and across the south.

That came after protesters stormed the Iranian consulate in Najaf late Wednesday, accusing the neighbouring country of propping up Iraq's government. Tehran demanded Iraq take decisive action against the protesters, saying it was "disgusted" by developments.

In response, Abdel Mahdi ordered military chiefs to deploy in several provinces to "impose security and restore order" – but the result was the opposite. Men in civilian clothes opened fire at demonstrators, tribal fighters deployed in the streets and military commanders.

As the death toll surged, governors and police chiefs resigned and Abdel Mahdi sacked a senior military commander. On Friday, demonstrators encircled a Nasiriyah police station and torched five police cars.

And in Najaf, where 16 people died the previous day, new clashes erupted between protesters and armed men dressed in civilian clothes. As in Baghdad, demonstrators in the south did not appear satisfied with Abdel Mahdi's resignation.

"Our problem isn't the prime minister – we want all the parties to go!" one man told AFP in Diwaniyah.

Since October 1, Baghdad and the south have been rocked by the most widespread street unrest in decades, demanding an overhaul of the ruling elite and reforms to root out corruption, end unemployment and improve infrastructure. The demonstrations initially shook Abdel Mahdi, who came to power last October after a strained alliance between the two largest parliamentary blocs, Saeroon and Fatah.

The protests divided them, with Fatah backing the premier while Saeroon leader and firebrand cleric Moqtada Sadr called for him to resign. But they closed ranks around the cabinet following a deal brokered by top Iranian commander Qasem Soleimani.

The tide turned again this week, culminating with Sistani's dramatic intervention. For weeks, the 89-year-old cleric had called for restraint and urged parties to get "serious" about reform. But he ramped up his demands on Friday.

"The parliament, from which this current government is drawn, is asked to reconsider its choice in this regard," he said in his weekly sermon. Within minutes, Saeroon as well as MP and former premier Haider al-Abadi had called for a vote of no-confidence.

The Fatah bloc called for "the necessary changes in the interests of Iraq".

Parliament is set to meet on Sunday and if it drops its support for the government, the cabinet would remain in place as caretakers until the president names a new premier. Iraq's constitution, drafted in 2005, does not include a provision for the resignation of the premier, so his intention to submit a letter to parliament would trigger a no-confidence vote.

The country is OPEC's second-largest crude producer but one in five Iraqis

Lives in poverty and youth unemployment stands at 25 percent, according to the World Bank.





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[Adel Abdel Mahdi](#)

Iraq death toll passes 400 in weeks of mass protests

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## [Breakaway former Turkish PM to form new party within weeks](#)

Author:

Reuters

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1575026268947980300

Fri, 2019-11-29 11:12

ANKARA: Former Turkish prime minister Ahmet Davutoglu, who was once President Tayyip Erdogan's closest ally but who broke away from the ruling AK Party in September, will form a new party within weeks, a source close to the matter said on Friday.

Davutoglu, 60, served as prime minister between 2014 and 2016 before falling out with Erdogan. This year, he slammed the president and the AK Party's (AKP) economic management, and accused them of curbing basic liberties and free speech.

"The new party which Davutoglu is forming is expected to file its application to the interior ministry and be officially established within a few weeks," the source, who was involved in the party's foundation, told Reuters.

"The final touches are being made to the new party. It will not be delayed into 2020. Buildings have been rented, a headquarters in Ankara and a provincial center in Istanbul," the source added.

On Sept. 13, Davutoglu announced his resignation from the Islamist-rooted AKP, which has ruled Turkey since 2002. He said at the time it was no longer able to solve the country's problems and no longer allowed internal debate. The source said some former political figures and some senior public sector officials would take up roles in Davutoglu's party.

Separately, former deputy prime minister Ali Babacan, who resigned from the AKP in July citing "deep differences," said this week he hoped to have formed a new political party by the end of the year to challenge the ruling party. Babacan was a founding member of AKP and served as economy and then foreign minister before becoming deputy prime minister, a role he held from 2009 to 2015.

But the source played down any prospects of Davutoglu and Babacan working together.

“The scope for acting together within Babacan’s party has narrowed because the two sides are taking their own line,” the source said, adding: “Of course there would have been many benefits in forming a joint party, but the will for this did not emerge.”



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## [Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman visits Expo 2020 with Dubai’s Sheikh Hamdan](#)

Author:

Fri, 2019-11-29 10:36

Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman visited the Expo 2020 site in Dubai on Thursday with Crown Prince of Dubai Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed Al-Maktoum.

The Saudi crown prince was briefed on the iconic Al-Wasl Dome where all the main events will take place, and listened to an explanation of the upcoming world expo's design.

Mohammed bin Salman and Sheikh Hamdan also visited the Saudi pavilion and were given an explanation about its various sections.

The pavilion is built on an area of more than 13 thousand square meters, which will include a showroom with approximately 50 seats and an exploration center.

The Dubai Expo will take place for six months, starting in October 2020.









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## [Libya's eastern parliament condemns deal with Turkey](#)

Author:

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Thu, 2019-11-28 15:28

CAIRO: Libya's eastern parliament denounced Thursday a maritime and security cooperation deal between the Tripoli-based UN-backed government and Turkey as a "flagrant breach" of the country's security and sovereignty.

This parliament is allied with the self-styled Libyan National Army, which launched an offensive under the command of Gen. Khalifa Haftar in April to



capture the capital from the Government of National Accord led by Fayez Sarraj.

Since 2015, Libya has been divided between two competing governments, in the east based in Benghazi and in the west in Tripoli. While the LNA and the eastern government enjoy the support of France, Russia and key Arab countries, the Tripoli-based government is backed by Italy, Turkey and Qatar. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's office said Thursday that the Turkish leader and Sarraj, reached an agreement on the delineation of maritime boundaries in the Mediterranean Sea while in Istanbul the previous day. The two leaders also signed a security and military cooperation agreement. Erdogan's office did not provide additional details.

The eastern parliament's Foreign and International Cooperation Committee issued a statement Thursday saying the deal amounts to a "defense pact" and grants the Turkish government the right to use Libyan airspace and waters as well as build military bases on Libyan soil.

The agreement "does not only threaten the Libyan national security but also threatens the Arab national security and peace in the Mediterranean Sea," read the statement.

Separately, the Libyan national oil company said Thursday that it resumed operations at the El-Fil oil field, following an earlier suspension due to fighting between armed factions.

The company's chairman, Mustafa Sanalla, declared Wednesday that operations were halted after clashes had erupted and militants allied with the UN-supported government had attacked guards protecting the field.

The facility, which pumps out 75,000 barrels a day was slightly damaged by the clashes and none of the workers were wounded, read a statement posted on the company's official Facebook page.

"I remind all parties that oil and gas fields are the main source of revenues in Libya and safeguarding them will benefit all Libyans. Hence, they should not be dealt with as military targets," said Sanalla.



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Libyan officials say US drone shot down by mistake

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## [Lebanese parliamentary panel to approve 2020 budget this year, committee head says](#)

Author:

Reuters

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1574947732140786000

Thu, 2019-11-28 13:23

BEIRUT: The Lebanese parliament's budget and finance committee will approve the 2020 budget by the end of the year and the next government must adopt it,

committee head Ibrahim Kanaan said on Thursday.

Lebanon has been grappling with the worst economic conditions in decades, amid protests that prompted Prime Minister Saad Al-Hariri to resign on Oct. 29, leaving the country in politically deadlocked.

Kanaan said the committee must quickly finalize a budget needed to restore confidence in the country and take account of bruising economic conditions. "Before the end of next month, the holiday season ... we will have finished the debate and approval of the 2020 budget," Kanaan said in a televised news conference. "It is not possible for the new government not to adopt this budget because when this budget is approved it will become a law."

Kanaan said treasury revenues had been almost non-existent for the last 45 days, but assured Lebanese that public-sector salaries would be paid. Lebanon is hoping to enact urgent economic reforms that can convince donors to disburse some \$11 billion in aid pledged at a conference last year.

Meanwhile, Lebanon paid back a Eurobond worth \$1.5 billion that was scheduled to mature Thursday, a Finance Ministry official said, pacifying concerns of a first-ever default on its debt amid the worst financial crisis in three decades.

The tiny Mediterranean country's economic emergency has ignited nationwide protests against widespread corruption and mismanagement, bringing the country to a standstill for over a month. The protests were initially sparked by new taxes, but have snowballed into calls for the entire political elite to step aside.

Prime Minister Saad Hariri resigned in late October, meeting a key demand of the protesters. But that has plunged the country into further uncertainty, with no clear path to resolving its economic and political problems. The Eurobond announcement came as a top Arab League official arrived in Lebanon, expressing readiness to help the country solve its political stalemate.

The repayment was being widely watched in Lebanon, which has one of the highest debt ratios in the world, standing at \$86 billion or 150% of the GDP. There were concerns that Lebanon, which always paid back its debt on time, might default. Lebanon has in recent weeks imposed unprecedented capital controls.

The Finance Ministry official, who spoke on condition of anonymity in line with regulations, gave no further details about the repayment. Local media reported that the payment was made from the reserves of the Central Bank. The office of Lebanon's president, Michel Aoun, said he discussed political and economic conditions with visiting Arab League assistant secretary general, Hossam Zaki. Aoun has not set a date for binding consultations with heads of parliamentary blocs to name a new premier. Hariri, who was Aoun's and the militant group Hezbollah's favorite to lead a new Cabinet, withdrew his candidacy on Tuesday.

Politicians have failed to agree on the shape and form of a new government. Hariri had insisted on heading a government of technocrats, while his opponents, including Hezbollah, want a Cabinet made up of both experts and politicians.

Furthermore, the protesters are demanding that the country's ruling elite be replaced, blaming them for failures in years that followed the 1975-90 civil war. The protests have remained overwhelmingly peaceful, resorting to road



closures and other tactics in an effort to pressure politicians into responding to their demands.

But in recent days, scuffles broke out in Beirut and other areas between protesters and Aoun and Hezbollah supporters, leaving dozens of people injured. As tempers flare, there are real concerns Lebanon could be sliding toward a prolonged period of instability.

"The current situation cannot take conditions and counter-conditions. We should all work together to get out of the crisis in what serves the interest of the Lebanese people," Aoun said in comments released by his office Thursday. He added that Arab support "should be translated into actual steps regarding assistance to improve the deteriorating economic conditions."

Zaki told reporters said there must be solution for the Cabinet formation crisis, adding that "it is important so that Lebanon avoids negative effects on its economic conditions and civil peace."

Scores of Lebanese businesses have closed in recent months and thousands of employees were either laid off or are getting half their salaries amid the crisis. Local banks have imposed capital controls worsening the economic conditions amid a liquidity crisis and shortage in US dollars.

Since 1997, the Central Bank has kept the pound stable at 1,507 to the dollar thanks to heavy borrowing at high interest rates but on the black market, the price of the dollar reached in recent days 2,100 pounds, a 40 percent over the official price. \* with AP



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Lebanon protesters block MPs as street battles erupt