

Lebanon protesters block MPs as street battles erupt

Author:

Wed, 2019-11-20 03:08

BEIRUT: Lebanese protesters set up roadblocks to prevent MPs reaching Parliament on Tuesday, accusing lawmakers of planning legislation that could offer amnesty to corrupt officials.

Amid angry scenes, protesters fought running skirmishes with riot police and formed human shields as they succeeded in shutting down Parliament for a second week.

Protesters took to the streets on Oct. 17 amid widespread anger over tax increases and government corruption, forcing Prime Minister Saad Hariri to resign 12 days later despite backing for the Lebanese leader from President Michel Aoun and Hezbollah.

Since then the country's powerful political blocs have been reluctant to form a new government of nonpolitical experts, as protesters have demanded. No new prime minister has been selected to form a government.

In order to accept his reappointment to form a government, Hariri stipulated that the new leadership should consist only of technocrats – a key protesters' demand – while Aoun and his allies insist that the government should be techno-political.

After Tuesday's clashes outside Parliament, Parliamentary Speaker Nabih Berri said: "The situation is very dangerous. We are facing deadlock in the formation of the government."

Army and internal security forces were deployed at road junctions leading to the Parliament on Tuesday amid unprecedented control measures.

Security forces established camouflaged corridors to allow deputies access. Hezbollah deputy Ali Ammar arrived on motorcycle after passing through a throng of protesters chanting "thieves."

MP Mohamed Nasrallah from the Berri bloc also arrived on foot.

Escorts for Finance Minister Ali Hassan Khalil's convoy fired shots in the air to keep protesters at bay. He managed to reach Parliament, but the shooting angered demonstrators, who hurled rocks at the car.

HIGHLIGHTS

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Protesters tried to remove barbed wire barricades in an attempt to break into Parliament's perimeter, but were fought back by security forces.

“How can they not hear our demands until now?” shouted one protester, Marwa. “We have been on the street for more than a month and they do not see us. They want to continue exercising power as usual. We will not allow them, even if it leads to our death.”

Protesters in Riad Al-Solh and Martyrs’ squares banged metal pots and chanted anti-government slogans.

“They are thieves and looters of public money. They want to take refuge in a general amnesty law that we will not allow them to pass,” said one.

Some parliamentary blocs decided to boycott the session “out of respect for the will of the people,” MP Dima Jamali said on Twitter.

More than 60 deputies from the Future Movement, Lebanese Forces, Phalange, Marada Movement, former leader Najib Mikati’s bloc and the Democratic Gathering bloc joined the boycott.

With only four deputies present, Secretary-General of the Parliament Adnan Daher announced the postponement of the session after two hours.

MP Nasrallah said the Parliament was “doing its duty to serve the protesters through an agenda of draft laws and proposals to serve the demands of the movement.”

Activist Mahmoud Fakhri told Arab News that protesters will continue to push the authorities to set a date for “binding parliamentary consultations to appoint a prime minister and form a national salvation government from technocrats and not from known political faces.”

He said: “The movement is under pressure and may be exposed to more pressure over time,” he said. “We know the authorities may try to turn us against each other. We should be aware of this.”



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Gina Rodriguez turns heads with the help of Lebanon's finest Banks in Lebanon reopen amid security increase

Iraqi protesters block commercial ports, split capital

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Tue, 2019-11-19 17:31

BAGHDAD: Anti-government protesters blocked access to a second major commercial port in southern Iraq on Tuesday, as bridge closures effectively split the capital in half, causing citizens to rely on boats for transport to reach the other side of the city.

Since anti-government protests began Oct. 1, at least 320 people have been killed and thousands wounded in Baghdad and the mostly Shiite southern provinces. Demonstrators have taken to the streets in the tens of thousands over what they say is widespread corruption, lack of job opportunities and poor basic services, despite the country's oil wealth.

Security forces have used live ammunition, tear gas and stun guns to repel protesters, tactics that Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said Monday would be punished with sanctions.

"We will not stand idle while the corrupt officials make the Iraqi people suffer. Today, I am affirming the United States will use our legal authorities to sanction corrupt individuals that are stealing Iraqis' wealth and those killing and wounding peaceful protesters," he said in remarks to reporters in Washington.

"Like the Iraqi people taking to the streets today, our sanctions will not discriminate between religious sect or ethnicity," he added. "They will simply target those who do wrong to the Iraqi people, no matter who they are."

Over a dozen protesters blocked the main entrance to Khor Al-Zubair port, halting trade activity as oil tankers and other trucks carrying goods were unable to enter or exit. The port imports commercial goods and materials as well as refined oil products.

Crude from Qayara oil field in Ninewa province, in northern Iraq, is also exported from the port.

Khor Al-Zubair is the second largest port in the country. Protesters had burned tires and cut access to the main Gulf commercial port in Umm Qasr on Monday and continued to block roads Tuesday.

Iraqi civilians are increasingly relying on boats to ferry them across the Tigris River as ongoing standoffs between demonstrators and Iraqi security forces on three key bridges has shut main thoroughfares connecting east and west Baghdad.

The Jumhuriya, Sinak and Ahrar bridges, which have been partially occupied by protesters following days of deadly clashes, connect both sides of the city by passing over the Tigris River. The blockages have left Iraqis who must make the daily commute for work, school and other day-to-day activities with no choice but to rely on river boats.

“After the bridges were cut, all the pressure is on us here,” said Hasan Lilo, a boat owner in the capital. “We offer a reasonable transportation means that helps the people.”



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Iraqi grand ayatollah: I support the people, and they want change

[Algerian court jails protesters over](#)

election

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Tue, 2019-11-19 13:15

ALGIERS: An Algerian court has jailed four protesters for 18 months for disrupting a candidate's campaign for the Dec. 12 presidential election which is opposed by a mass protest movement.

The court sentenced the four on Monday after protests on Sunday in the western city of Tlemcen, where one of the five candidates, Ali Benflis, was campaigning. No details were available on what their exact actions were. Algeria's authorities are trying to quell a protest movement that erupted in February to demand the departure of the country's ruling hierarchy, an end to corruption and the army's withdrawal from politics.

The army, which has emerged as the most powerful institution in the country, has pushed for next month's election as a means to end the protests and restore normality. The former president, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, quit in April. The judgment comes a week after a series of other prison sentences were handed down to protesters who had raised flags with Berber symbols during earlier demonstrations.

Several opposition leaders have also been held during the protests, and charged with contributing to damaging army morale.

However, the authorities have also detained numerous current and former senior officials on corruption charges, and have jailed some of them including the once untouchable former intelligence chief.

The protesters have rejected any presidential election carried out now, saying the continued presence of Bouteflika allies in the upper echelons of the government mean it cannot be free or fair.

Human Rights Watch said last week that the arrest of scores of protesters looked like "part of a pattern of trying to weaken opposition to Algeria's interim rulers and their determination to hold presidential elections."



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Algeria kicks off presidential campaign, 5 candidates to run
Iconic Algerian raï singer Cheikha Rimitti gets square named after her in Paris

[US declares Israeli settlements on occupied Palestinian land 'consistent' with international law](#)

Mon, 2019-11-18 22:37

WASHINGTON: The United States on Monday backed Israel's right to build Jewish settlements in the occupied West Bank by abandoning its four-decade position that they were "inconsistent with international law."

The announcement by Secretary of State Mike Pompeo sparked anger among

Palestinians who say the settlements are the main barrier to their future state.

The shift in US policy follows the Trump administration's decision to relocate the US embassy in Israel to Jerusalem last year, a move seen as undermining Palestinian claims to the eastern half of the city as a future capital.

Pompeo said US statements about the settlements on the West Bank – which Israel captured during a 1967 war – had been inconsistent, saying Democrat President Jimmy Carter in 1978 found they were not consistent with international law and Republican President Ronald Reagan in 1981 said he did not view them as inherently illegal.

“The establishment of Israeli civilian settlements is not, per se, inconsistent with international law,” Pompeo told reporters at the State Department, drawing criticism from a senior Palestinian figure even before his announcement.

“Another blow to international law, justice & peace,” Hanan Ashrawi, a veteran Palestinian negotiator and member of the Palestine Liberation Organization's Executive Committee, said on Twitter ahead of Pompeo's statement.

The announcement marked the third major instance in which the Trump administration has sided with Israel and against stances taken by the Palestinians and Arab states even before unveiling its long-delayed Israeli-Palestinian peace plan.

In 2017 Trump recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel before opening the embassy in the city. US policy had previously been that the status of Jerusalem was to be decided by the parties to the conflict.

In March, Trump recognized Israel's 1981 annexation of the Golan Heights in a boost for Netanyahu that prompted a sharp response from Syria, which once held the strategic land.

Trump's move might have been designed to help Netanyahu as he struggles to stay in power. Israeli politics is deadlocked after two inconclusive elections this year. Former military chief Benny Gantz's centrist Blue and White party emerged neck and neck with Netanyahu following a September vote, and both leaders have struggled to put together a ruling coalition.

*With Reuters



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Court says EU states must label Israeli settlement products
Israeli PM vows to annex 'all the settlements' in West Bank

[Iran's heavy water stock exceeds authorised limit: IAEA](#)

Author:

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Mon, 2019-11-18 18:16

VIENNA: The UN's nuclear watchdog said Monday that Iran's stock of heavy water for reactors has surpassed the limit set under its agreement with world powers.

The International Atomic Energy Agency said in a statement that Iran's heavy water production plant was in operation and that its stock of heavy water reserves was 131.5 tonnes, above the 130-tonne limit.

In Vienna, an IAEA spokesperson said: "On 17 November, the Agency verified that the Heavy Water Production Plant (HWPP) was in operation and that Iran's stock of heavy water was 131.5 metric tonnes."

Heavy water is not itself radioactive but is used in nuclear reactors to absorb neutrons from nuclear fission.

Heavy water reactors can be used to produce plutonium for nuclear weapons as an alternative to enriched uranium.

It was the first time the agency has recorded a volume greater than the level agreed upon as part of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) reached in 2015 with Britain, China, France, Germany, Russia, the United States and the European Union.

The US unilaterally withdrew from it last year, after which Iran began reducing its commitments in a bid to win concessions from those still party to the accord.

In Washington Monday, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said the US will lift sanctions waivers on Iran's Fordow nuclear plant, citing the resumption of uranium enrichment activities at the site already announced by Tehran.

"The United States will terminate the sanctions waiver related to the nuclear facility at Fordow effective December 15, 2019," Pompeo told a news conference.

Earlier this month, the IAEA said that uranium particles had been detected at an undeclared site in Iran.

The report also confirmed that Iran has ramped up uranium enrichment in breach of the 2015 deal, feeding uranium hexafluoride gas into previously mothballed enrichment centrifuges at Fordow, an underground plant south of Tehran.

That allows for the production of the most fissile isotope, Uranium 235.

Since September, Iran has also been producing enriched uranium at a facility in Natanz.

It has exceeded a 300 kilogramme limit on stocks of enriched uranium and has breached a uranium enrichment cap of 3.67 percent.

Iran has always insisted that its nuclear programme is exclusively peaceful and that acquiring nuclear weapons would be contrary to Islamic principles.



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Amnesty investigates 'dozens of deaths' in Iran protests as regime's Guards give ominous warning Iran spy agency leaks reveal Tehran's 'horrifying' grip on Iraq