

Lebanese army opens roads closed by protesters amid scuffles

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By HASSAN AMMAR | AP

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Tue, 2019-11-05 18:03

BEIRUT: Lebanese troops deployed Tuesday in different parts of the country to reopen roads and main thoroughfares closed by anti-government protesters faced resistance in some areas, leading to scuffles.

In most places, protesters withdrew peacefully as the troops moved in. But in Beirut's northern suburb of Zouk Mosbeh, a scuffle erupted when some demonstrators refused to move away from the main highway linking Beirut with northern Lebanon.

Several protesters were detained by troops. One protester, an older man, fainted and was rushed away in an ambulance; the Lebanese Red Cross later said he was in stable condition.

9:20pm – Outside Zaytouna bay as protesters chant [#LebanonProtests](#)
<https://t.co/wl3TMgrtS4> pic.twitter.com/Orks0ZvjK0

– Arab News (@arabnews) [November 5, 2019](#)

Human rights activist Wadih Al-Asmar said dozens were detained during the scuffles north of Beirut.

Later Tuesday, Moody's ratings agency downgraded the government of Lebanon's issuer ratings to Caa2, saying it remains on review for downgrade. The agency said the downgrade reflects the increased likelihood of a debt rescheduling or other liability management exercise that may constitute a default. Moody's downgraded Lebanon's issuer ratings to Caa1 in January but had maintained it there after protests broke out on Oct. 17.

Opinion

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

It estimates that Lebanon has a foreign exchange buffer of about \$ 5-10 billion and that would likely to be used to service external debt payments. Anti-government protesters have been holding demonstrations demanding an end to widespread corruption and mismanagement by the political class that has ruled the country for three decades. The protesters have paralyzed Lebanon by

closing roads inside cities as well as major highways. The protesters rejected an economic reform plan, demanding deeper changes to the government and election laws.

More photos from the protest in front of Nejme Square in Downtown Beirut [#LebanonProtests https://t.co/wl3TMgrtS4](https://t.co/wl3TMgrtS4)
pic.twitter.com/MXwJGTFZ8p

– Arab News (@arabnews) [November 5, 2019](#)

“We are not defying the army but we want our demands to be met,” said hairdresser Elie Abdu, 29, in Zouk Mosbeh. “We want a technocrat government, we want the poor to have food and medical care.”

The protesters have been demanding the new Cabinet not include politicians but consist of experts who can work on getting Lebanon out of its economic crisis.

Also in Beirut, in the nearby area of Jal el-Deeb, troops chased protesters who were closing a major road, running after them into streets until they rushed into a church and hid inside it.

Troops also opened the highway linking Beirut with southern Lebanon and several major avenues in the capital.

The protesters who have been closing roads for more than two weeks have started holding sit-ins inside and at the entrances of state-run companies and institutions, including the country’s two cellular telephone companies as well as the electricity company.

Last week, Prime Minister Saad Hariri resigned, meeting a key demand of the protests. The leaderless anti-government movement has united Lebanese from various religious sects in a call for the overthrow of the political system that has dominated the country since the civil war. Decades of corruption and economic mismanagement that followed have culminated in a severe fiscal crisis.

President Michel Aoun has not yet set a date for consultations with heads of parliamentary blocs to name a new prime minister, a procedure that follows the resignation of a Cabinet.





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Aoun tells thousands of supporters Lebanon must unite behind reforms
Protesters block roads in Beirut, other parts of Lebanon

[Iran bans cooperation with British Council](#)

Tue, 2019-11-05 16:19

DUBAI: Iran's intelligence ministry on Tuesday said any cooperation with the British Council was banned and would result in prosecution, the ministry's website reported.

"Britain ... was planning to implement a project for cultural networking purposes in cooperation with the British Council in Iran ... any cooperation with the British Council is prohibited and will result in prosecution," the ministry said in a statement.

In August, Iran's Supreme Court upheld a 10-year prison sentence for spying against an Iranian woman, Aras Amiri, who worked for the British Council in London. Amiri was arrested last year during a family visit to Iran.



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Iran sentences British Council worker to 10 years for spying for UKIran sentences 3 to long prison terms on spying charges

[Erdogan: Kurdish fighters have not left Syria 'safe zone' despite US,](#)

[Russia deals](#)

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Tue, 2019-11-05 10:15

ANKARA: Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan said on Tuesday that the Syrian Kurdish YPG militia had not withdrawn from a planned “safe zone” in northeast Syria despite Turkey’s agreements with the United States and Russia. Turkey struck two separate deals with the United States and Russia for the YPG, which Ankara views as a terrorist group, to withdraw from the “safe zone” it plans to form in northeastern Syria. While Washington and Moscow have said the fighters left, Erdogan has said this was not the case. Speaking to lawmakers from his AK Party in Ankara, Erdogan said YPG fighters remained in Tel Rifaat, Manbij and to the east of Ras al Ain, which Turkey targeted in its latest incursion. He also said Turkey would abide by its deals as long as the United States and Russia kept their own promises.



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Turkey captures sister of slain Daesh leader Baghdadi in northern

SyriaTurkey-backed fighters kill foreign medic in Syria's northeast

Iran-backed Iraq leaders agree on 'road map'

Tue, 2019-11-05 01:22

BAGHDAD: Iraqi politicians have agreed on a "roadmap" to resolve the current crisis and meet the demands of demonstrators, prominent allies of Prime Minister Adil Abdul Mahdi told Arab News on Monday.

Changing the prime minister's administrative and military team, a ministerial reshuffle involving more than half the Cabinet, changing electoral laws and the members of the electoral commission are the most prominent points of the proposals, negotiators said.

Baghdad and nine southern Shiite-dominated provinces have seen mass protests since October 1 against corruption, unemployment and a lack of basic services.

More than 250 demonstrators have been killed and more than 11,000 wounded, most of them in Baghdad, in a brutal crackdown led by Abdul Mahdi and his allies.

The demonstrations, the largest of their kind since 2003, are the first in which Shiite protesters represent have come out against the government, also largely Shiite.

Demonstrators, who returned to the streets last Friday in larger numbers after being stopped for two weeks over killings and arrests, have widened their demands to include the overthrow of Abdul Mahdi and early parliamentary elections, preceded by an amendment to the election laws.

After intense meetings over the past few weeks, Iranian-backed political forces agreed to a package of resolutions aimed at calming demonstrators and pleasing the supreme religious authority in Najaf, which has declared its full support for the demands.

The proposed road map, which includes dramatic changes in the composition of senior government staff, does not include any mention of early elections or the resignation of Abdul Mahdi within the options or solutions on the table.

"With our conviction that Adel (Abdul Mahdi) is not fit to remain as prime minister for another week ... we will not allow his dismissal or resignation now," a prominent ally of the government told Arab News.

"We believe that keeping him as prime minister is a must now, because his

fall means we will have to change a prime minister every six months.

“Agreeing on early elections is long story that needs Sunnis and Kurds involved, and this is difficult to achieve in short time.”

Sacrificing Muhammad Al-Hashemi, the head of the prime minister’s office, is the most significant change that will affect the Abdul Mahdi’s personal team.

“Everyone knows that Abu Jihad (Al-Hashemi) is the actual prime minister and is responsible for half of the devastation caused by the government until today,” one source told Arab News.

“If ‘Abu Jihad’ gets out of the prime minister’s office, everything will be fixed.”

Al-Hashemi, or “the bulldozer,” is a prominent leader in the Iraqi Islamic Supreme Council and former director of the office of the late Shiite leader Abdul Aziz Al-Hakim, the most prominent leader of the Iraqi opposition during the rule of Saddam Hussein.

Al-Hashemi, one of the chief negotiators of the pro-Iran Al-Binna’a Alliance, the second largest parliamentary bloc to name the prime minister and form the government in 2018, is credited with getting Abdul Mahdi into office.

“Abdul-Mahdi is tired and weak and his team is in chaos. In addition, ‘Abu Jihad’ enjoys the full support and confidence of the Iranians. This opened the door wide for ‘Abu Jihad’ to expand his powers.

Dismissing Al-Hashemi and other senior officials of Abdul Mahdi’s office is part of the proposed plan presented by Gen. Qassim Suleiman, commander of Iran’s Revolutionary Guard Corps and commander of field operations in Iraq, after returning from Najaf Saturday evening following a meeting with a representative of Grand Ayatollah Ali Al-Sistani, spiritual leader of Iraq’s Shiites and the most influential cleric in Iraq, who seen as the godfather of the political process since 2003, key negotiators told Arab News.

Suleiman’s plan also lists a Cabinet reshuffle, combined with a package of important new laws and amendments.

“We are racing against time. The situation is very critical and we have no more than a week or two to implement what we have agreed to calm the people and please Najaf (Al-Sistani),” a political ally of Abdul Mahdi told Arab News.

“Our priority was to exclude the threat of Shiite-Shiite fighting from the equation, and with the return of Muqtada Al-Sadr to Qom and the intervention of Najaf, this threat is now over.”

Suleiman, who has absolute influence over the majority of Shiite political forces and armed factions, arrived in Baghdad on Thursday and asked to meet Al-Sistani to “calm tensions” between Al-Sistani and Iran’s supreme religious leader, Ali Khamenei.

"Things are heading for calm. Najaf almost approved the plan, but the demonstrations will continue because Najaf wants them (protesters) to remain as well as the Americans, but there will be some kind of truce."

Influential Shiite cleric Al-Sadr, who has the largest parliamentary bloc and biggest armed faction with millions of followers, also announced his adoption of the protesters' full demands two weeks ago, and vowed to protect them from any threats.

Demonstrations in the provinces of Amara and Dhi Qar, Al-Sadr's southern stronghold, have witnessed bloody clashes between demonstrators and armed factions, including the Badr Organization and Asa'ib Ahl Al-Haq, the most powerful Shiite groups.

Suleimani, after leaving Najaf, met Al-Sadr and asked him to go back to Qom, in Iran, which he left a week ago at the request of the Iranian authorities in response to the abuses committed by his followers against the demonstrators.

"Sadr was seeking bloodshed and his removal from the scene was necessary," one Shiite source told Arab News.

A senior aide to Al-Sadr told Arab News on condition of anonymity: "All that was said about Al-Sadr's meeting with Suleimani and the agreement between them is not true, and Al-Sadr, wherever he is, will not sell Iraq or sell what he believes in."

Al-Sistani, meanwhile, will monitor the steps to implement changes in Iraq, "but will not loosen his grip on Abdul Mahdi or his allies," a source told Arab News.

"Najaf supports any measures to reform the situation in accordance with the constitutional contexts. Keeping Abdul Mahdi with his weak government now ensures that the demonstrators' demands will be met in a few weeks, because they (his allies) are desperate to defend him, and this will lead them to make more concessions."



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Iraqi security forces conducting large-scale arrest campaigns in Baghdad:
witnessesIraq PM says anti-government protests cost country 'billions'

[EU condemns new burst of Israeli settlement approvals](#)

Tue, 2019-11-05 01:11

JERUSALEM: The EU has criticized Israel's advancement of over 2,000 new homes in West Bank settlements.

In a statement on Monday, the EU reiterated its longstanding position that all settlement activity on occupied land is illegal and "erodes the viability" of the establishment of a Palestinian state.

The Israeli anti-settlement watchdog group Peace Now says Israeli authorities approved various planning stages for the construction of 2,342 new housing units in the occupied West Bank last month.

It says Israel has already pushed forward plans for over 8,300 settlement homes this year – an increase of 5 percent over all of 2018.

Israel's Foreign Ministry declined comment, and COGAT, the defense body that authorizes settlement construction, did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The EU statement came as the Israeli police said an enquiry had been opened and officers suspended after a video emerged online apparently showing a border guard shooting a Palestinian in the back with a sponge-tipped bullet. Israel's Channel 13 had broadcast the video on Saturday evening, showing border guards – part of the Israeli police – telling a Palestinian to turn back at a West Bank checkpoint on the edge of Jerusalem.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Israel has occupied the West Bank since 1967.
- Three million Palestinians live in the territory, alongside more than 400,000 Israelis in illegal settlements.
- Israeli checkpoints are key points of friction.

As the man walks away, his arms raised, one of the officers fires a sponge-tipped bullet, ammunition generally used for crowd control but which can be lethal at short distances.

The man instantly falls to the ground, shouting in pain.

Police spokesman Micky Rosenfeld said the Justice Ministry had opened an investigation into the incident, which he said took place a year and a half ago.

"As soon as the incident became known the female border police officer was removed from duty," he said.

"The other border policemen who were there were also removed and some of them were transferred from their positions."

On Sunday, the Palestinian Liberation Organization slammed Israel over the incident and urged the UN to act.

"The video shows the extent of blind hatred and Zionist racism," it said.

Israel has occupied the West Bank since 1967.

Three million Palestinians live in the territory, alongside more than 400,000 Israelis in settlements seen as illegal under international law. Israeli checkpoints are key points of friction.



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Jordan, Israel reach deal to free 2 Jordanian detainees
Israel may charge policewoman who shot Palestinian in back