

# Young Lebanese step up street rallies over spiraling economic woes

Author:

Mon, 2019-10-07 01:16

BEIRUT: Hundreds of young protesters took to the streets across Lebanon on Sunday for the second consecutive week, blocking roads and voicing their anger at deteriorating economic conditions in the country. Tires were set ablaze on major roads in the capital Beirut, while crowds chanted "Down with capitalism" and "Leave!" as they marched near Lebanon's Parliament amid heightened security. Protesters called for the overthrow of the government over its fiscal policies and failure to reduce the soaring cost of living. The demonstrations began with dozens of people gathering in Martyrs' Square in downtown Beirut, but the number quickly grew to several hundred. Children carried loaves of bread bearing the word "revolution," while young women raised placards calling for the formation of a new government of technocrats and the return of funds looted from the state treasury. "We want to live with dignity. If MPs, ministers and all the ruling class don't want to give back what they stole, they should at least stop stealing so the people can live," one protester said. Economist Louis Hobeika told Arab News that the protests were "legitimate, necessary and reflect the anger of the people."

He said that although the number of demonstrators was not large, "it showed that people can still make a difference." "Those who did not take to the streets are not yet convinced that this can lead to change in state policies," Hobeika said. Hobeika said that it is "essential to exert pressure on the government to amend its policies related to electricity, water and waste management." After a preliminary gathering in Martyrs' Square, demonstrators marched to Riad El-Solh Square, near the Prime Minister's office and the Lebanese Parliament. Police, including the anti-riot squad, set up security barriers to prevent demonstrators reaching the Prime Minister's office.

One woman voiced her anger to TV cameras next to the Prime Minister's office, saying her two young daughters "had not been admitted to school as she could not afford to pay their tuition fees." Security forces, army intelligence and the anti-riot squad mobilized reinforcements after protesters headed toward the headquarters of the Association of Banks in Lebanon.

Demonstrators were cut off at a nearby crossroads for a few minutes before it was reopened by security forces.

One activist, who declined to be named, said: "We will keep moving from one street to another because we want the people to sense the importance of taking to the streets to put pressure on the authorities."

## **HIGHLIGHT**

The demonstrations began with dozens of people gathering in Martyrs' Square in downtown Beirut, but the number quickly grew to several hundred.

Independent deputy and activist Paula Yacoubian, who took part in the protest, said that “the political authorities are a failure.” “We have reached the end of the president’s midterm, but have not witnessed any reforms or change,” she said. “We will remain on the street until we change this miserable situation in which the people live.” Deputy Nazih Najm, a member of the Future Movement bloc in the Lebanese Parliament, said the country’s dire economic situation is due to “Hezbollah’s weapons and US pressure on Lebanon because of that.” In Baalbek, dozens gathered in Seray Square in protest at poor living conditions in the city. One protester, Mohammed Deeb Othman, said: “We have become slaves of a corrupt political authority that has bypassed all limits in humiliating its own people. “There is no water, electricity, education or medical care. We only hear of these during elections.”



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[\*\*In Morocco, heroin addiction sweeps\*\*](#)

# cannabis corridor

Sun, 2019-10-06 22:15

TETOUAN, MOROCCO: In a filthy squat in a beach town in northern Morocco, drug users inject and smoke heroin, a relatively recent scourge plaguing a region long known for cannabis and contraband.

Rachid says he does nothing with his life, except heroin.

"I shoot up four or five times a day," the 34-year-old said, breathing raggedly.

He shows his arms, scarred from a decade of injecting, before taking a sniff of glue to "prolong the high."

Half-a-dozen others are shooting up or smoking heroin alongside Rachid in the squat, located behind a police station in Mediek, a Mediterranean resort near the city of Tetouan.

A dose of the powerful opiate they heat on aluminum foil sells for between €2.8 and €6.5 (\$3-7) for a tenth of a gram.

Every week, a team from the Association for the Fight Against AIDS (ALCS) comes to the squat to hand out syringes to prevent the spread of diseases like HIV and hepatitis.

The sale and consumption of heroin is illegal in Morocco, but thanks to the efforts of ALCS in Tetouan, "it is very rare that users are arrested for their own personal consumption," said Dr. Mohamed El-Khammas.

He runs the harm reduction program launched by ALCS in 2009, which combines awareness raising, distribution of materials like clean needles and screening.

"The idea is not to moralize, but to help the user to reduce negative effects," Al-Khammas said.

In this region, known worldwide for its hashish produced in the Rif mountains, heroin use is a relatively recent development that is growing exponentially, experts say.

"It's a public health priority, especially as the heroin being sold is very bad quality: It is mixed with talcum powder, paracetamol and glue," Al-Khammas said.

The typical user is a "single man, aged 30-35 with little or no education who has never worked or works on an occasional basis," according to a 2014 report from the National Observatory on Drugs and Addiction (ONDA).

The northern urban centers of Tetouan, Tangier and Nador are Morocco's worst affected areas.

The spread of heroin is facilitated by the “great population mobility” between southern Europe and northern Morocco, and the increased use of “well-established cannabis routes” by traffickers from Latin America to smuggle cocaine and heroin to Europe, ONDA said.

Those drug barons also barter heroin for cannabis in the Rif, according to ALCS staff.

The number of heroin users in Morocco is unknown.

According to ALCS, there are likely several thousand heroin users in Tetouan alone, a city of 380,000 people, which was once the seat of the Spanish administration under the dictator Francisco Franco.

Hassna, a 46-year-old ALCS caseworker, distributes clean drug paraphernalia from her backpack to users gathered in the Mediek squat.

“We urge them not to share syringes, we accompany them to health centers and we try to convince them to take care of themselves,” she said.

Rachid said he is “incapable of quitting.”

But he does want access to methadone: “That’s all we ask,” he said.

This opioid substitute is distributed by addiction treatment centers in Tetouan, but in “insufficient amounts,” Rachid said.

“Withdrawal is terrible, you have cramps, anxiety,” said his companion Mohamed, a waxen-faced 24-year-old with a syringe buried in his tattooed arm.

Every evening, an ALCS medical vehicle is parked in a different location, with a doctor, nurse and field workers on hand.

Once a week, the team parks near a cemetery overlooking Tetouan, a common spot for users. One of them, a 56-year-old named Said, said he “lost everything” because of heroin.

“I am at rock bottom,” he said.

“The hardest part is on the social level,” 37-year-old Abdelilah said.

“I lost 30 kilos because of this crap. When an old friend sees me in the street, he looks away.”



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## [Palestinian president says to discuss elections with Hamas, factions](#)

Author:

Sun, 2019-10-06 21:49

RAMALLAH: Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas said Sunday he would discuss plans for new parliamentary elections with all factions, including longtime rivals Hamas.

Meeting with senior Palestinian leaders in Ramallah in the occupied West Bank, Abbas renewed a pledge to hold the polls – the first since 2006 – but without giving a timeframe.

He announced they had formed committees to “communicate with the election commission and factions such as Hamas and all factions, as well as with the Israeli authorities.”

He said any elections should take place in “the West Bank, Jerusalem and the

Gaza Strip.”

Hamas and Fatah have been at loggerheads since 2007, when they seized Gaza and threw out Abbas’s forces, which retained control of the internationally recognized Palestinian government based in the West Bank.

No parliamentary elections have been held since 2006, with the two sides trading blame.

Multiple attempts at reconciliation have failed and analysts say new elections are impossible without improved relations.

Hamas said in a statement Saturday it didn’t “know what Abu Mazen means by general election,” using the common nickname for Abbas.

The movement said it had already committed itself to elections.

Abbas has previously pledged on multiple occasions to hold elections but without any results.

Meanwhile, Abbas also confirmed the Palestinian Authority (PA) had received on Sunday \$1.5 billion shekels (\$430 million) from Israel – representing taxes that had been withheld from the Jewish state.

Israel in February decided to withhold around \$10 million per month from revenues of some \$190 million per month it collects on the behalf of the PA, triggering Abbas’s fury.

The money comes from customs duties levied on goods destined for Palestinian markets that transit through Israeli ports and constitutes more than 50 percent of the PA’s revenues.



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## [Heart of Tunisia party claims victory in parliamentary election](#)

Sun, 2019-10-06 20:48

TUNIS: The detained Tunisian presidential candidate Nabil Karoui said in a statement that his Heart of Tunisia party had come first in Sunday's parliamentary election, without saying where the information came from.

Polling stations for the seven-million-strong electorate closed at 6:00 pm (1700 GMT). Ennahdha and Qalb Tounes (Heart of Tunisia) – led by detained business tycoon Karoui – were both swift to claim victory.

Two exit polls after the close of voting showed Ennahdha in the lead with 40 seats out of 217, while Qalb Tounes was in second, with one pollster giving it 35 seats, and another 33.

However, preliminary official results are not expected until Wednesday.

In the runup to the legislative vote, Ennahdha and Qalb Tounes officially ruled out forming an alliance, and with a plethora of parties and movements running, the stage could be set for complex and rowdy negotiations – or even a second poll.

The legislative vote comes after candidates aligned with traditional political parties were eclipsed by independent runners during the first round of presidential polls last month.

“According to preliminary results collected at voting stations, Qalb Tounes has come first”, party spokesman Hatem Mliki said.

But its main rival Ennahdha also claimed that it had “according to preliminary results... won the elections.”

In the first round of the presidential vote Karoui, held since August on money-laundering charges, came second behind Kais Saied, an independent law professor.

Courts rejected several appeals for his release during campaigning.



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## [Why Middle East publics have mixed views on climate change](#)

Author:

Sat, 2019-10-05 23:49

DUBAI: A majority of people in 28 countries believe that climate change will result in serious global economic damage, rising sea levels endangered cities, mass displacement of people and even wars, a YouGov poll has found.

But the survey of 30,000 people has revealed noticeable differences in attitudes between East and West.

People in Eastern and Middle Eastern countries are much more likely than those in the West to believe that climate change will have a serious impact, according to the poll.

In the Middle East, the survey polled public opinion in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman and Qatar.

"Climate change may never before have been as firmly fixed in the public consciousness as it is today," said the YouGov report.

"That climate change is happening and that humanity is at least partly responsible is a view held by a majority across the world."

Yet only 47 percent of respondents in the UAE and 39 percent in Saudi Arabia believe that they or their country could take more action on climate change.

"The area of concern that stands out for the Middle East in general is the proportion of respondents in the region who believe either they or their country could be doing more to combat climate change," Scott Booth, head of data products and services at YouGov MENA, told Arab News.

"Less than half of respondents in the region thought they or their country could be doing more," he said. "In all cases, a lower proportion thought they themselves could be doing more to tackle climate change."

“Unfortunately, this may reflect an attitude in the region that while climate change is a problem, it’s not ‘our’ problem. The likely impact, and thereby the onus for action, has been placed elsewhere.”

When asked to describe their views about the global environment, 52 percent of UAE respondents said they believe that the climate is changing and human activity is mainly responsible. Similarly, 42 percent of Egyptians stated the same, followed by 35 percent in Saudi Arabia.

Western countries such as Spain and Italy show a substantially larger proportion (69 percent and 66 percent, respectively) believing that climate change is due to human activity.

A further 7 percent of Egyptian and Saudi residents said the climate is changing but human activity is not responsible at all, while 6 percent of UAE respondents had the same opinion.

Of the countries included in the poll, these figures are only the same or higher in the US (10 percent), Norway (8 percent) and Sweden (6 percent).

Overwhelmingly respondents in the Middle East said they believe that the climate is changing and that it is mainly or partly due to human activity.

## **FAST FACTS**

- 39% – Saudi respondents who believe they or their country could do more on climate change.
- 35% – Saudi respondents who believe the climate is changing and human activity is mainly responsible.
- 75% – Saudi respondents who believe climate change will affect their lives substantially.

But Booth said that the issue of acknowledgement of climate change as a human problem is more pronounced in the Middle East.

Seven of the 10 countries where respondents were most likely to call climate change a human-caused issue are in South or Southeast Asia, compared with only one in the Middle East.

“Generally, the data would suggest that the GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) and Saudi Arabia are getting the message that the climate is changing, and they’re beginning to believe this change is largely human-caused,” Booth said.

“One area where respondents in the Kingdom stand out from the rest of the GCC is in perceived impact, with only three-quarters (76 percent) of Saudi respondents saying climate change will affect their life at least a fair amount.”

Muhammad Ishfaq, a senior economic analyst with the Dubai government’s finance department, told Arab News: “It was a general perception, before

cities grew and urbanization started, that nature was the main cause of climate change.

“Most Middle Easterners still believe nature is the main cause of climate change, as a big part of Saudi Arabia and the UAE was originally populated by nomadic people who experienced only rural development.”

He added: “Western countries experienced industrialization and urbanization much earlier than the Middle East.”

But Ishfaq said the perception is changing as industrialization and urbanization in the UAE, a limited agriculture base and low precipitation are accentuating the effects of climate change.

“The frequency and nature of dust storms in the UAE may change the future perception about nature and the causes of climate change as human or natural,” he added.

For the Middle East, described by the World Bank last year as “the most water-scarce in the world,” acknowledging and acting on the implications of climate change may be critical to the region’s future.

When respondents were asked to indicate who they think is responsible for the current situation with climate change, the study showed a general divide between regions.

Asian and Pacific people generally held international bodies accountable, while Middle Eastern respondents saw the governments of wealthy nations as responsible. More respondents in the US and Europe believe that businesses and industry are to blame.

Overall, the finger was pointed primarily at China and the US, with India further away in third place.

Booth said education is the main obstacle to wider acceptance by Middle Eastern populations that they or their country could be doing more on climate change, as is the case when “trying to get people anywhere in the world to consider and address a problem that doesn’t immediately and obviously impact their daily lives.”

But he added that education will have a limited impact so long as the problem appears unlikely to affect people’s lives directly.

“Another solution is to create a financial incentive for behaviors that combat the issue: Excise taxes can punish behaviors that are deemed damaging, while credits promote behaviors that positively affect the issue,” he said.

“For example, we may place an excise tax on gasoline and diesel fuel, while offering a credit for driving an electric vehicle.”

Ishfaq said water and land resources in the Middle East are under stress due to increasing industrialization and tourism.

“Rapid urbanization is becoming a major challenge for more food, larger greenhouse gas emissions, and social and energy security,” he said.

“For instance, with a growing population’s food requirements needing to be met, the UAE experiences overfishing and overgrazing, and waste is reaching (critical) levels.

“Meanwhile, the exploitation of oil and gas generates wealth but destroys environmental habitat.

“It’s essential for decision-makers and local populations to understand the modality of climatic trends in the Middle East.”

While some findings of the YouGov survey make for gloomy reading, the good news, as the report notes, is that “the public has faith that the worst effects of climate change can still be averted (and) that dramatic action will be needed in order to do so.”



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