

Lebanese demand civil marriage on home soil

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BEIRUT: Dozens of protesters rallied in the Lebanese capital Beirut on Saturday, calling on the government to recognise civil marriages carried out on home soil.

The demonstrators gathered in front of Lebanon's interior ministry, days after recently-appointed Interior Minister Raya al-Hasan said she is willing to engage in "serious and profound dialogue" over the issue.

The minister's comments prompted a backlash from religious bodies, including the highest Sunni authority in Lebanon, and stirred debate on social media. Lebanon has 15 separate personal status laws for its recognised religions but no civil code covering issues such as marriage.

Many Lebanese couples travel to neighbouring Cyprus to tie the knot in a civil ceremony, because Lebanese authorities recognise such unions only if they have been registered abroad.

Hasan, the first female interior minister in Lebanon and the Arab world, touched on the issue of civil unions in an interview with Euronews last week. She said she would "personally endorse" attempts to establish a framework to govern civil marriages in Lebanon.

"I will try to open the door for serious and profound dialogue on this issue with all religious authorities and others, with the support of Prime Minister Saad Hariri," she said.

Dar al-Fatwa, the highest Sunni authority in Lebanon, issued a response the day after Hasan's interview was published, saying it "categorically rejects" civil unions conducted on Lebanese soil.

Such unions "violate the provisions of Islamic law" and "contravene the provisions of the Lebanese constitution" regarding the authority of religious courts over personal status issues, it said.

The highest Shiite authority in the country also expressed opposition.

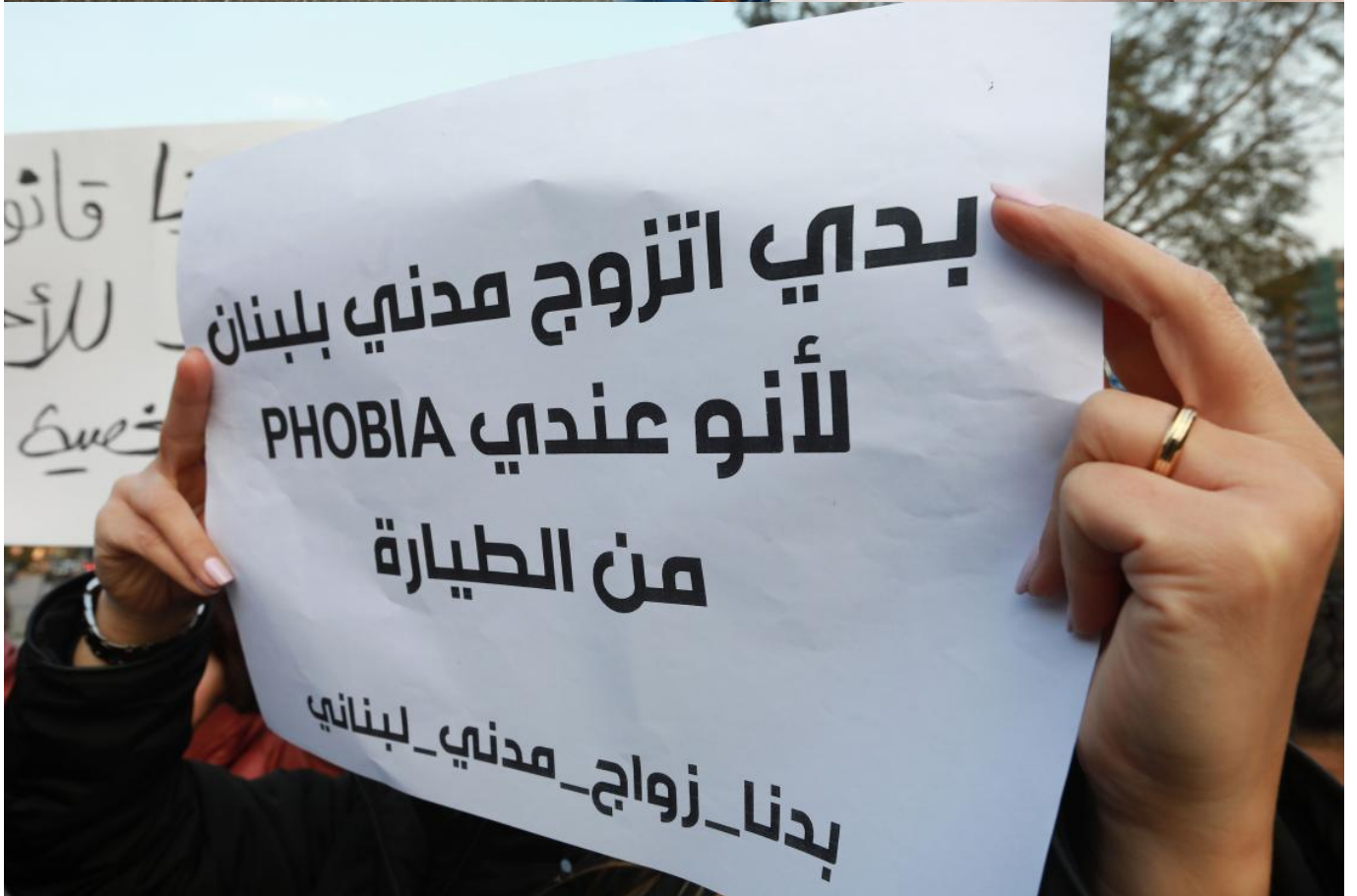
"The Lebanese constitution recognises that every sect has its own personal status laws," deputy head of the Supreme Islamic Shiite Council said Friday. "We strongly oppose civil marriage because it violates the constitution," he said.

The head of Lebanon's Maronite church, Beshara Rai, however, said he was "not against civil unions" conducted on Lebanese territory.

In 2013, the interior ministry took the unprecedented step of registering a civil marriage conducted in Lebanon.

However, only a handful of civil marriages have been recognised since the landmark decision, campaigner Lucien Bourjeily told AFP on Saturday.

Former president Elias Hrawi in 1998 proposed a civil marriage law, which gained approval from the cabinet only to be halted amid widespread opposition from the country's religious authorities.



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Lawmaker who changed Jordan's rape law takes on child marriageThe fight to end child marriage

[Egypt re-opens Port Tawfiq-Jeddah line after 14 years](#)

Author:

Sat, 2019-02-23 21:37

CAIRO: The Egyptian Red Sea Ports Authority has announced the re-opening of the Port Tawfiq-Jeddah navigation line between Egypt and Saudi Arabia after a 14-year hiatus.

Prior to 2006, Port Tawfiq was a private maritime port for travelers between Suez and Jeddah.

The line was suspended in that year, however, after the sinking of the ferry Al-Salam Boccaccio 98. About 1,000 people died in what was described as one of the worst maritime accidents in history.

Most of the passengers were Egyptian nationals working in Saudi Arabia, while others were pilgrims returning home from Hajj.

Malak Youssef, spokesperson for the Red Sea Ports Authority, told Arab News that the tragedy has caused much of the passenger traffic between the two ports to come to a halt. The Red Sea Ports Authority and Maritime Safety Authority have been in talks in recent years about the reopening of the line, he said.

The decision, according to Youssef, will attract companies and investors, and will boost trade. The Tawfiq line will be provided with up to six vessels.

The reception halls of Port Tawfiq can accommodate 2,500 passengers. A series of police checks will be implemented to ensure the security and safety of passengers.

Suez MP Abdelhamid Kamal had submitted a request to the head of Parliament in Cairo to consider the re-opening of the Suez navigation line. The closure had deprived Hajj and Umrah travelers and unofficial or unlicensed workers of an important route.

"Operating the port is one of people's major demands in Suez, following its closure in 2006," Kamal said.

Ayman Saleh, of the Red Sea Ports Authority, said in a statement that the operation of the navigation line will open door to thousands of jobs for the

youth of Suez Governorate. The project will also benefit the area with the upgrade of its infrastructure, its docks and reception halls.

According to Saleh, a completion date for the launch of the line has not been set yet.

The Red Sea Authority and Maritime Safety Authority are still working on the details of the reopening. "We will provide services to the public and provide them with security and protection," Saleh said.



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Saudi king arrives in Egypt on official visit
Egypt court sentences two monks to death over bishop killing

[Lebanon's Hezbollah suspends official over Parliament spat](#)

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By BASSEM MROUE | AP

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Sat, 2019-02-23 17:01

BEIRUT: Hezbollah's top commanding body suspended the political activities of a leading legislator because of his spat with rival politicians in Parliament last week, a Lebanese politician said Saturday.

Legislator Sami Gemayel, who heads the Christian Phalange party, said last week that Hezbollah's wide influence was seen when it got its ally elected president in 2016.

Hezbollah legislator Nawaf Musawi responded saying "it's an honor" for the Lebanese that President Michel Aoun came to his post alongside "the rifle of the resistance," a reference to the militant group, and "not on an Israeli tank."

Musawi's last reference was to late President-elect Bashir Gemayel who was assassinated in 1982 days after being elected during Israel's invasion of Lebanon.

Gemayel's son, Nadim, an MP, called Musawi's statements "unacceptable."

Two days later, the head of Hezbollah's 13-member bloc in parliament, Mohammed Raad, apologized during a meeting of the legislature saying that Musawi "crossed lines."

The politician who is familiar with Hezbollah's internal affairs spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak to the media. The daily Al-Akhbar, which is close to Hezbollah, said Musawi will be suspended from taking part in parliamentarian and the group's internal meetings for one year. He will also not be permitted to speak to the media, it said. The paper added that Musawi's comments violated a Hezbollah policy to avoid internal arguments with other groups.

Earlier this week, Musawi did not attend the weekly meeting of Hezbollah's parliamentary bloc. He was also not present on the day that Raad issued his apology.



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Lebanon censors caricature of Khamenei in French weekly
Lebanon marks 14 years since Hariri assassination

[Kurd forces welcome US decision to keep 200 troops](#)

Fri, 2019-02-22 20:57

BEIRUT, WASHINGTON: The Kurdish-led administration that runs much of northern Syria welcomed a US decision to keep 200 American troops in the country after a pullout, saying it would protect their region and may encourage European states to keep forces there too.

“We evaluate the White House decision ... positively,” Abdulkarim Omar, co-chair of foreign relations in the region held by the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), told Reuters.

The White House announced the plans on Thursday to keep “a small peacekeeping force” in Syria, partly reversing a decision by President Donald Trump in December to pull out the entire 2,000-strong force.

Trump’s abrupt announcement of the pullout had been opposed by senior aides including Defense Secretary Jim Mattis who quit in response, and stunned allies including the Kurdish-led SDF, which fought against Daesh with US backing for years.

“This decision may encourage other European states, particularly our partners in the international coalition against terrorism, to keep forces in the region,” Omar added.

“I believe that keeping a number of American troops and a larger number of (other) coalition troops, with air protection, will play a role in securing stability and protecting the region too,” he said.

Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., who had harshly criticized Trump’s decision to pull US forces out of Syria, applauded the president’s decision to leave a few hundred as part of an “international stabilizing force.” Graham said it will ensure that Turkey will not get into a conflict with SDF forces, which helped the US fight Daesh militants.

Moreover, Graham said leaving a small force in Syria will serve as a check on Iranian ambitions and help ensure that Daesh militants do not try to return.

“A safe zone in Syria made up of international forces is the best way to achieve our national security objectives of continuing to contain Iran, ensuring the enduring defeat of ISIS (Daesh), protecting our Turkish allies, and securing the Turkish border with Syria,” Graham said.

Sen. Jack Reed, a Rhode Island Democrat, called the decision a “betrayal of our Kurdish partners.”

The SDF is led by a Kurdish militia, which Turkey considers an enemy. Kurdish officials had feared that a total US withdrawal would create a security vacuum and allow Turkey to launch a long-promised offensive against them.

The Kurds, who seek autonomy within Syria, have made overtures to the government of Bashar Assad, seeking security guarantees as Washington withdraws.

“I believe that these forces in this region ... will be a motivation, an incentive and also a means of pressure on Damascus to try seriously to have a dialogue to resolve the Syrian crisis,” Omar said.

The SDF is currently involved in a standoff over the final sliver of land held by Daesh in eastern Syria, close to the Iraq border.

Many believe the Daesh threat will not end with the pocket’s recapture and an insurgency is underway.

In a foreboding sign on Thursday, Daesh claimed responsibility for back-to-

back suicide attacks that hit a village miles away, leaving more than a dozen people dead in a rare targeting of civilians.

It is unclear where the 200 remaining US troops will be stationed.

The U.S. military has a limited network of bases inside Syria. Troops work mostly out of small camps in remote parts of the country's northeast.

Also, U.S. troops are among 200 to 300 coalition troops at a garrison in southern Syria known as al-Tanf, where they train and accompany local Syrian opposition forces on patrols to counter the IS group. Al-Tanf is on a vital road linking Iranian-backed forces from Tehran all the way to southern Lebanon – and Israel's doorstep.

Trump spoke Thursday with Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

"On Syria, the two presidents agreed to continue coordinating on the creation of a potential safe zone," the White House said in a statement about the call.

The White House also said acting Defense Secretary Patrick Shanahan and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Gen. Joseph Dunford will be hosting their Turkish counterparts in Washington this week for further talks.



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US to leave 200 troops in Syria for a period of time – White House
Truckloads of civilians leave Daesh enclave in Syria

[Sudan President Omar Al-Bashir calls state of emergency and dissolves government](#)

Fri, 2019-02-22 20:38

KHARTOUM: Sudan's President Omar Al-Bashir declared a state of emergency and dissolved central and regional governments on Friday.

Addressing the nation, Bashir called on parliament to postpone constitutional amendments that would allow him to run for another term in a presidential election in 2020.

Bashir has been facing the biggest popular protests against his rule since he came to power 30 years ago.

Earlier Friday, security forces fired teargas to disperse hundreds of protesters who marched and chanted anti-government slogans following Friday prayers at a major mosque near the Sudanese capital.

The demonstration in the city of Omdurman outside Al-Sayed Abd Al-Rahman Al-Mahdi mosque, which has ties to the opposition Umma party, was the latest in what have become near-daily protests in Sudan since Dec. 19.

Protesters chanted "the revolution is the choice of the people" and "fall, that's it," to express that their only demand is the end of President Omar Al-Bashir's rule.

The demonstrations were triggered by price increases and cash shortages but have developed into protests targeting Bashir himself.

Activists say nearly 60 people have been killed during two months of protests, while authorities put the death toll at 32, including three security personnel.

Security forces have used tear gas and live bullets to disperse protesters, and have arrested people including opposition party members, activists and journalists.

Bashir is wanted by the International Criminal Court over charges of masterminding genocide in the Darfur region, which he denies. He has been lobbying for Sudan to be removed from a list of countries Washington deems state sponsors of terrorism.

The listing has blocked the investment and financial aid that Sudan was hoping for when the United States lifted sanctions in 2017, economists say. Sudan has been rapidly expanding its money supply in an attempt to finance its budget deficit, causing spiraling inflation and a steep decline in the value of its currency.



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Sudan government arrests opposition leaders ahead of protest
Sudan's economic decline provides fuel for anger against Bashir