

[Palestine TV offices in Gaza ransacked by gunmen](#)

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Fri, 2019-01-04 15:51

GAZA: The Gaza offices of President Mahmoud Abbas's official Palestine Television station were attacked and ransacked on Friday, adding to tensions between his Palestinian Authority and the hardline Hamas movement which rules the territory.

Rafat Al-Qidra, the office director, said five men broke into the premises early on Friday and destroyed cameras, editing and broadcast equipment worth nearly \$150,000.

"Whoever rules in Gaza must afford protection to everyone here," Qidra told Reuters.

The station broadcasts material supportive of Abbas's Western-backed Authority, whose power base lies in the West Bank. Station officials immediately blamed Hamas for the attack.

"Hamas is deeply involved in this conspiracy," said Ahmed Assaf, chairman of the Palestinian Broadcast Corporation (PBC), speaking to the channel in the West Bank city of Ramallah.

The PBC issued a statement saying the attack was a "clear reflection of the mentality of the Hamas movement and criminal gangs who believe only in their voice, and who seek to suppress freedoms."

Neither Assaf nor the PBC offered any evidence for their accusations, and Hamas officials swiftly condemned the incident.

"What happened is rejected, and we condemn it," Eyad Al-Bozom said in a statement issued by the Hamas-run Interior Ministry in Gaza. He urged the station's officials to cooperate with investigators.

There has long been antipathy between Hamas, which won the last Palestinian parliamentary elections in 2006 and is opposed to any peace negotiations with Israel, and with Abbas's more moderate and secular Fatah faction.

The two rivals have failed to end the divisions since 2007. Egypt has brokered a Palestinian reconciliation pact that provides for Hamas to cede control of Gaza to Abbas, but a dispute over power-sharing has hindered implementation of the deal.

The TV station was able to continue broadcasting from Gaza later in the day. The attack was widely condemned by other Palestinian political factions and by journalists.



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First Gaza rocket in six weeks draws Israeli response
Fatah says Hamas arrests members in Gaza ahead of rally

[Protests across Khartoum call on Al-Bashir to step down](#)

Author:

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Fri, 2019-01-04 14:42

CAIRO: Police on Friday used tear gas to disperse anti-government demonstrations across Sudan's capital, where two weeks of street protests there and elsewhere in the country are keeping pressure on autocratic President Omar Al-Bashir to step down after nearly 30 years in power.

The protests took place in at least eight different districts of Khartoum and its twin cities of Omdurman and Bahary, with thousands taking to the streets after the noon prayers chanting "freedom, peace, justice." The protesters also carried banners bearing the word "erhal," Arabic for "leave!" and chanted "Oh, you dancer, you made the people hungry," a reference to Al-Bashir's trademark dance to local music after speaking at rallies.

In Omdurman, after the noon prayers, protesters rallied around opposition leader Sadeq Al-Mahdi, Sudan's last freely elected government whose three years in power proved ineffective.

There were also protests in the railway city of Atbara, a traditional bastion of dissent and one of several cities where anti-government demonstrations began Dec. 19, initially over rising prices and shortages but which quickly shifted to calls for Al-Bashir to step down.

Kassala and the Red Sea city of Port Sudan, both in eastern Sudan, and Al-Gazeera region south of Khartoum also witnessed protests Friday.

At least 40 people are reported to have been killed in the protests so far. The government has acknowledged the death of 19 people and Al-Bashir this week ordered an investigation into the use of lethal force against protesters. His decision to probe the deaths came after several Western nations, including the United States, have expressed their alarm at the use of live ammunition by security forces and demanded an investigation.

Friday's protests were called by the country's largest opposition blocs as part of a series, with the next ones slated for Sunday and Wednesday.

Al-Bashir has been in power since 1989 when he led a military coup that toppled Al-Mahdi's elected government. He was indicted by the International Criminal Court in 2010 for genocide and crimes against humanity in the western Darfur region. The mainly animist and Christian south seceded a year later under a peace deal that ended a long civil war.

With the south seceding, Sudan lost three quarters of its oil wealth, plunging the economy into a protracted crisis that continues to this day. In recent weeks, a devaluation of the local currency sent prices soaring. An attempt to lift subsidies on bread, a main fare for most Sudanese, proved to be the last stroke.

Al-Bashir has acknowledged the country's economic woes, but used a mix of religion and promises of better days to ride out the current crisis. On Thursday, he pledged an increase in wages, continued state subsidies on basic food items, better services for pensioners and an overhaul of medical care. He did not elaborate.

Also this week, he said Sudan's problems were largely caused by international sanctions – Sudan is on the US list of countries sponsoring terrorism – and unnamed parties that sought to undermine Sudan's Islamic "experiment."



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Unrest disrupts Sudan's Bashir's push for vital financial supportSudan restricts social media access as largest opposition bloc calls for Al-Bashir to go

[Pompeo to visit Saudi Arabia, UAE during Middle East tour](#)

Fri, 2019-01-04 16:55

JEDDAH: US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo will travel to eight Middle East capitals next week for talks on security expected to focus on Yemen, Syria and Iran.

UN envoy for Yemen Martin Griffiths will also arrive in Sanaa on Saturday as international efforts aimed at ending the war in Yemen continue.

Griffiths will meet leaders of the Iran-backed Houthi rebels before traveling to Saudi Arabia for talks in Riyadh with Yemeni President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi.

Separately, US National Security Adviser John Bolton is visiting Israel and Turkey. His talks will focus on Syria and "how the US will work with allies and partners to prevent the resurgence of Daesh, stand fast with those who fought with us against Daesh, and counter Iranian malign behavior in the region," his spokesman said.

In his first Middle East visit since President Donald Trump's announcement that he intends to withdraw US forces from Syria, Pompeo leaves on Tuesday for an eight-day trip to Jordan, Egypt, Bahrain, the UAE, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Oman and Kuwait. The US hopes each country will play a significant role in a regional strategic partnership being called an "Arab NATO."

On his second stop in Cairo he will deliver a speech on the US "commitment to peace, prosperity, stability, and security in the Middle East," the State Department said.

Washington is seeking to build a consensus on how to deal with Syria and its backer Iran in the light of the US troop withdrawal.

It is also seeking a solution to the war in Yemen between the legitimate government supported by a Saudi-led coalition and Houthi militias backed by Iran.

Both sides have agreed to a cease-fire in the port city of Hodeidah while UN envoy Griffiths seeks to bring about a new round of talks.

The withdrawal of US troops from Syria was initially expected to be completed within weeks, but has been slowed as Trump has acceded to requests from aides, allies and US politicians for a more orderly pullout.



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Turkey: Pompeo comment on Kurds shows 'worrying lack of knowledge' Pompeo says cooperation with Israel over Syria and Iran to continue

[Lebanese trade union to strike over pay, lack of government](#)

Thu, 2019-01-03 23:32

BEIRUT: A major Lebanese trade union is to hold a general strike on Friday over living conditions and the political gridlock roiling the country.

Lebanon has no government eight months after an election, with rival parties fighting over Cabinet positions and Sunni representation in the country's sectarian power-sharing system.

The gridlock has heaped further pressure on the country's economy, which is saddled with high levels of debt, and there have been protests about unemployment, taxes and living costs.

Bechara Asmar, from the General Confederation of Lebanese Workers, said the strike would last for hours and that there would be no street protests.

Economic bodies condemned the strike, saying it would inflict "significant damage" on business because of its proximity to the Armenian Christmas Eve celebrated the following day.

Mohamed Choucair, the president of the Lebanese economic organizations, urged all firms to consider Friday a normal working day.

People should continue to work and prevent further losses and "protect institutions, workers and the national economy so as not to incur heavy losses that the economy cannot afford," he said.

He also cast doubt on the objectives of the strike, adding the formation of the government remained the first demand of all economic bodies.

Political parties were quick to meet with union representatives to understand the reasons for the industrial action.

Asmar, following a meeting with the Progressive Socialist Party, said: "The strike aims to pressure for the immediate formation of a government and is not directed against anyone nor does it carry a message for anyone."

Kataeb Party leader MP Samy Gemayel apologized for the hardships people were facing because of the political impasse.

"The people are suffering and there are families that cannot afford fuel oil for heating. People are hungry and in pain, and the economy is on the verge of collapse. Is it acceptable for us to remain without a government because of the dispute over a minister?"

Tourism Minister Awadis Kedianian, from the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF) or Dashnak party, also met Asmar.

The minister said: "Forming the government would support Lebanon's presence on the global tourism map, and a delay in its formation would harm this."

ARF was committed to supporting the public and refusing to commit to the strike implied indifference, he added.



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Lebanon resumes efforts to form governmentHariri hopes Lebanon will 'turn a new page' in 2019

[Brazil wants to move its Israel embassy, but no date yet -presidential aide](#)

Author:

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Thu, 2019-01-03 18:48

BRASILIA: There is still no date set for when Brazil will move its embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, but there is a clear intention to do so, the national security adviser to newly inaugurated President Jair Bolsonaro said on Thursday.

Speaking in the capital Brasilia, retired army general Augusto Heleno said there were, however, other considerations to take into account, and as such, Bolsonaro had still not made up his mind. Heleno added he did not think

Brazil would face any issues with Arab nations, which oppose the move and are major buyers of Brazilian meat.



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