

Hariri hopes Lebanon will 'turn a new page' in 2019

Author:

Mon, 2018-12-31 22:35

BEIRUT: Thousands of troops were on Lebanon's streets Monday as the country prepared to ring in 2019.

A huge party was held in central Beirut for the second consecutive year, attracting people from the city's neighborhoods and surrounding districts, and there were tough security measures in place from the military.

The Defense Ministry suspended issuing permits for carrying firearms on all Lebanese territory, and 13,000 military personnel were deployed to protect tourists, places of worship and commercial facilities, as well as manage traffic congestion.

Security forces reiterated their call for people to refrain from the deadly tradition of celebratory gunfire, saying that those carrying out this act would face prosecution.

Prime Minister-designate Saad Hariri, speaking at an event in the capital, said he hoped a new government would be formed in 2019.

The elections were in May 2018.

"I want the Lebanese to rejoice so that we turn a new page and think of the country and the people," he said. "I hope the celebration meets the aspirations of the Lebanese people, and especially the people of Beirut."

Economic bodies stressed the need to form a government at the beginning of 2019 and expressed their regret for the current turmoil, amid calls from social media users for a general strike.

The country's finance minister had earlier warned that Lebanon was entering a financial crisis.

"The repercussions and consequences of the economic crisis today are at their highest. "The crisis today has started to transform into a financial crisis from an economic crisis," said Ali Hassan Khalil late on Saturday, according to Lebanon's state-run National News Agency.

"We hope it will not become a monetary crisis," he said.

Grocery shops in Beirut were packed, a sign that some families were preparing to spend New Year's Eve at home, with prices for festivities skyrocketing to as much as \$1,500 per person.



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After year of political deadlock, financial woes, what next for Lebanon? Lebanon's Hariri hopes government will be finalised on Friday

[Sudanese police clash with anti-government protesters](#)

Mon, 2018-12-31 21:14

KHARTOUM: Sudanese police on Monday used tear gas to disperse thousands of protesters shortly after they began to march toward the Nile-side presidential palace in Khartoum to press their demands for President Omar Bashir to step down, according to activists and video postings.

There were unconfirmed reports of protesters being shot by live ammunition.

Video clips posted online by activists show pools of blood outside a small eatery in the city center. Another one shows protesters carrying a man whose head and shirt are bloodied. Scores of demonstrators run away as the sound of

gunfire is heard.

A female protester's voice is heard urging others, "don't run," as those around her violently cough from the tear gas.

"I am going to die," another female voice says.

Before the clashes erupted, the demonstrators sang the national anthem, chanted "peaceful!" – as if to emphasize their non-violent protest.

Earlier Monday, Human Rights Watch urged Bashir's government to instruct security forces not to use lethal force against protesters, citing independent groups as saying 40 people have been killed since the protests erupted nearly two weeks ago.

The New York-based group said Sudanese forces have been using tear gas and live ammunition against protesters, as well as beating and arresting many. Scores have been injured and hundreds arrested, it said. Last week, the US, Britain, Norway and Canada said in a joint statement that they have "reliable reports" that Sudan's security forces were using live fire.

Monday's demonstrations were called for by an umbrella of independent professional unions, which also urged Sudanese to take to the streets across the country.

Bashir, who has been in power since he led a 1989 military coup, vowed in a meeting with police commanders Sunday that his government would not tolerate any attempt to undermine the stability and security of Sudan, according to the state news agency.

"The objective is not to kill the protesters, but ... to safeguard the security and stability of citizens," he said.

"President Bashir appears to be making public speeches that justify excessive use of force instead of condemning this brutality," said HRW's Jehanne Henry. "With more protests planned, Sudanese authorities should send an unambiguous message to all security forces to respect the rights of protesters and not to use lethal force."

Amnesty International has said it has "reliable reports" that 37 protesters were killed in the first five days of protests, which began on Dec. 19. The government has acknowledged 19 deaths.

Monday's attempted march on Bashir's palace is the second such attempt – thousands tried to reach the white neo-colonial building in central Khartoum last Tuesday, clashing with policemen who used tear gas and batons to disperse them.

Although the protesters never reached the palace, their action showed the depth of popular discontent with Bashir's rule.

Protesters numbering in the hundreds or very low thousands gathered in a dozen or so venues across the city Tuesday and fought pitched battles with

police for hours before they dispersed after nightfall.

This time, the unions are urging protesters to stay on the streets until they usher in 2019 so that they can mark the anniversary of Sudan's independence on Jan. 1, 1956.

Sudan's economy has struggled for most of Bashir's rule. He has also failed to unite or keep the peace in the religiously and ethnically diverse nation, losing three quarters of Sudan's oil wealth when the mainly animist and Christian south seceded in 2011 following a referendum in which southerners voted overwhelmingly in favor of independence.

A year earlier, Bashir, now in his mid-70s, was indicted by the International Criminal Court for genocide in Sudan's western region of Darfur.



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Sudan's Bashir tells police not to use excessive force against demonstrators
Sudan security forces fire tear gas, stun grenades at protesters near Khartoum

Iraqi jets strike Daesh sites in Syria as Trump slows pullout schedule

Author:

Associated Press

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Mon, 2018-12-31 (All day)

JEDDAH: Iraqi warplanes hit a meeting of Daesh leaders near Deir Ezzor in Syria on Monday, destroying the building they were gathered in, the military said in a statement.

The statement said F-16 fighter jets carried out the raid around Al-Sousa village in eastern Syria, as “30 leaders from Daesh gangs” met in the building.

The strike came a day after Iraq’s government hinted at greater involvement for its armed forces in Syria as the US begins withdrawing troops from the country.

But President Donald Trump appeared to backtrack on Monday on shock plans for an immediate pullout of US troops from Syria, but said his drive to end American involvement in wars made him a “hero.”

The shift came as senior Republican Senator Lindsey Graham said Trump had promised to stay in Syria to finish the job of defeating Daesh.

Trump had earlier stunned allies – and prompted the resignation of his respected defense secretary, Jim Mattis – by abruptly announcing that Daesh was defeated and that US troops in Syria were ready to leave.

However, in a tweet early Monday, President Trump seemed to signal a more cautious schedule for pulling out the troops which support local forces.

“We’re slowly sending our troops back home to be with their families, while at the same time fighting” Daesh remnants, Trump wrote.

In contrast to previously emphatic victory declarations, Trump said that Daesh “is mostly gone.”

On Sunday, Graham, who is one of Trump’s principal allies in Congress, lunched at the White House to urge a rethink on Syria.

Graham emerged after two hours, saying Trump “understands the need to finish the job.”

“I think the president is committed to making sure when we leave Syria that Daesh is completely defeated,” Graham said.

Another prominent critic of the pullout plan was retired US Army General

Stanley McChrystal, the former commander of US and international forces in Afghanistan.

On Sunday, he warned that a US pullout would likely cause “greater instability” in the region.



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Syrian war claimed 20,000 lives in 2018, says monitor
Syria's Assad authorizes Iraqi forces to strike Daesh in Syria

[Iraqi education minister resigns over brother's Daesh links](#)

Author:

Sun, 2018-12-30 22:45

BAGHDAD: Iraq's new education minister has resigned over allegations her brother was a leader with Daesh just days after she was handed the post.

The scandal is the latest blow to Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi who has still not completed his Cabinet amid deep divisions between the Parliament's main political blocs over the key positions.

Shaima Khalil Al-Hayali was approved by Parliament last week to head the Education Ministry but had not yet taken the ministerial oath.

She submitted her resignation on Saturday to Abdul Mahdi after intelligence information emerged that her brother was a Daesh leader in Mosul between the summer of 2014, when the extremist group overran the city, and October 2016, when it was liberated by security forces.

Laith Khalil Al-Hayali, was an engineer working for the Nineveh Water Directorate, local security officials in Mosul told Arab News. He was dismissed from his post before 2014 for his association with Daesh, but he was reappointed as a director after 2014 when the militants seized the city.

Websites linked to Daesh published videos showing Laith praising the militants and inciting people to fight the Iraqi military.

The intelligence also said that two of Laith's sons were killed fighting for Daesh during the liberation of Mosul in 2016.

The first was killed in clashes between the militants and security forces, while the second one blew himself up in a bid to halt advancing forces.

The minister did not deny her brother's involvement with Daesh but said he was forced to work with them and that he showed up in the videos under the threat of being shot.

The information is an embarrassment to the leaders of the pro-Iran Al-Binna'a coalition who nominated Al-Hayali.

It was not clear whether the resignation was Al-Hayali's decision alone or whether her backers had ordered her to quit.

Abdul Mahdi was sworn in at the end of October but has faced a series of crises during his short time in the position.

This is not the first time he has presented his preferred candidates for ministerial positions without checking their security and political backgrounds – something that has deepened mistrust between the prime minister and political parties that could bring down his government.

He is still without without three key ministers – defense, interior and justice amid a dispute between the two main blocs in Parliament over the candidates, lawmakers told Arab News on Sunday.

Reform, led by the influential Shiite cleric Muqtada Al-Sadr, opposes the candidates nominated by Al-Binna'a for interior and defense. Al-Binna'a is led by Hadi Al-Amiri, commander of the Iran-backed Badr Organization, the most powerful armed faction.

Abdul Mahdi has not commented on Al-Hayali's resignation and not even announced whether he has accepted her letter.

The incident has brought to the forefront allegations against other new ministers. They include Communications Minister Naeim Al-Rubaie, a former senior figure in Saddam Hussein's Baath party. Anyone linked to the organization is banned from involvement in Iraq's government.

"It would be better for Abdul Mahdi to accept her (Al-Hayali's) resignation to save face," a key negotiator from Reform told Arab News.

"We asked him at the first session of Parliament to submit the names of the candidates to the security services to be checked. We also demanded that they be presented to the bodies of integrity and accountability and justice, but our requests were ignored.

"The result is that the government now includes a minister representing Daesh, another one representing Al-Qaeda and a third one representing Baath party."

Iraq has struggled to form a government since an election in May led to two main parliamentary camps, one pro Iran and the other anti. An agreement in September broke the deadlock, with the two coalitions agreeing to try and negotiate a new Cabinet led by Abdul Mahdi.



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Iraqis demand US troop pullout Trump declares end to US 'policeman' role in

surprise Iraq visit

[30 children of Russian Daesh militants return home from Iraq](#)

Author:

Sun, 2018-12-30 22:40

BAGHDAD: Thirty Russian children whose mothers are in Iraqi prison for belonging to Daesh left Baghdad on Sunday to return home, a Russian diplomatic source said.

The fathers of the children, young boys and girls between the ages of three and 10, are believed to have been killed in combat during Iraq's three-year war against the militants, the source said.

Chechen strongman Ramzan Kadyrov said earlier this week that he expected the children to arrive in Moscow on Sunday.

He said 24 of them were from Dagestan, and another three were from Chechnya.

Several thousand Russians traveled to join the militants in their once sprawling "caliphate" straddling Syria and Iraq, according to estimates from the Russian security services. Some took their families with them.

Since last year, around 100 women and children – mostly from Russia's Muslim-majority Caucasus – have returned under a program championed by Kadyrov.

But in mid-November, Chechen activist Kheda Saratova accused Russia's FSB security service of blocking attempts to bring back the remaining widows and children of Russian Daesh militants.

"According to our organization, there are over 2,000 of them left in Syria and Iraq," Saratova, who is on Kadyrov's human rights council, said at the time.

Meanwhile on Sunday Iraqi Prime Minister Adel Abdel Mahdi held talks in Baghdad with Anna Kuznetsova, the Russian president's envoy for the rights of children. During the meeting, Abdel Mahdi said a "distinction should be made between humanitarian issues and terrorist crimes," according to a statement from his office.

"These children are also victims," he added.

More than 300 people, including around 100 foreigners, have been sentenced to death and many others to life imprisonment in Iraq for joining Daesh, which at its peak controlled nearly a third of the country.

Baghdad declared victory against Daesh in December last year, but the militants maintain sleeper cells and have carried out periodic hit-and-run attacks.



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30 Daesh suspects arrested in Ankara Syria's Assad authorizes Iraqi forces to strike Daesh in Syria