

Journalists join Sudan protests, announce three-day strike

Author:

Thu, 2018-12-27 21:30

A network of Sudanese journalists went on strike on Thursday in the wake of deadly protests sparked by a hike in bread prices, while opposition groups called for further rallies.

Angry crowds have taken to the streets in the capital Khartoum and several other cities since Dec. 19, leading to a crackdown in which a number of protesters have been killed.

"We declare a three-day strike from Dec. 27 to protest against the violence unleashed by the government against demonstrators," said the Sudanese Journalists' Network which advocates free speech.

Sudanese authorities say eight protesters have been killed in clashes, but Amnesty International has put the death toll at 37.

The Popular Congress Party, which is part of President Omar Bashir's government, says that 17 people have been killed and 88 wounded in clashes.

Journalists in Sudan frequently complain of harassment from the authorities, and the African country has a dire rating on international press freedom rankings.

Entire print runs of newspapers are often confiscated over articles deemed offensive by the powerful National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS), which is spearheading the current crackdown on protesters.

Police and security officers remained deployed in several parts of the Sudanese capital on Wednesday, but for the first day in a week no new demonstrations were reported.

Activists and opposition groups have called on people to take to the streets again over the next few days. "We urge the Sudanese people to continue their demonstrations until success is achieved by overthrowing the regime," the Sudanese Communist Party said in a statement.

Egypt minister visits

Egypt's foreign minister and intelligence chief visited Khartoum on Thursday for talks with Sudanese government officials in the midst of the ongoing deadly protests.

Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry and Gen. Abbas Kamel went into meetings with their Sudanese counterparts soon after arriving, officials said, adding the two were later expected to meet Bashir.

Egypt's Foreign Ministry said earlier that the talks were part of "directives by the leaders of both countries to develop bilateral relations."

The visit follows more than a week of demonstrations in Sudan that evolved into deadly clashes between riot police and protesters angered by increased bread prices.

Cairo and Khartoum have recently sought to iron out their differences in a bid to improve relations roiled by a longstanding border dispute and an impasse in talks over Ethiopia's Nile dam.

In October Sudan lifted a ban on agricultural imports from Egypt during a visit to Khartoum by Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi.

Several members of the party have been arrested by security agents since the protests started.

"We also call on all opposition parties to unite and work together to coordinate this movement."

Protests initially started in towns and villages and later spread to Khartoum, as people rallied against the government tripling the price of a loaf of bread from one Sudanese pound to three (from about 2 two 6 US cents).

Demonstrators have also been marching against Sudan's dire economic situation and some have called for the president to resign.

After the protests erupted Bashir, who has been in power since a 1989 coup, vowed to "take real reforms" to tackle the country's financial difficulties.

Sudan is facing an acute foreign currency crisis and soaring inflation, despite the lifting of an economic embargo by Washington in October 2017.

Inflation is running at 70 percent and the Sudanese pound has plunged in value, while shortages of bread and fuel have regularly hit several cities.



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Sudan Islamist party urges probe into killing of protesters
Egypt foreign minister, spy chief visit protest-hit Sudan

[France urges Israel to reconsider settler home approvals in West Bank](#)

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Thu, 2018-12-27 15:57

PARIS: France on Thursday called on Israel to reconsider recently issued approvals for more than 2,000 settler homes in the occupied West Bank, saying they would violate international law.

Israel's Higher Planning Committee approved 2,191 new housing units in Israeli settlements on Dec. 25 and 26, though no building permits have been issued yet.

"France condemns this decision, which expands settlement activity in the West Bank," the French foreign office said in a statement.

The settlements undermined the conditions for a two-state solution, "the only

way to ensure a just and lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians, and heightens tensions” it said, calling on the Israeli authorities to reconsider the decisions.

Some 500,000 Israelis live in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, areas captured by Israel in the 1967 Middle East War that are also home to more than 2.6 million Palestinians.

Settlements are one of the thorniest issues in efforts to restart Israeli-Palestinian peace talks, frozen since 2014.

Most countries consider all settlements that Israel has built in captured territory to be illegal. Israel disputes this and says their future should be determined in peace talks with the Palestinians.

While Israel’s settlement projects have regularly drawn condemnation from the Palestinians and in Europe, the US administration under President Donald Trump has taken a largely uncritical public stand.



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Israel army destroys Palestinian attacker’s West Bank home
Airbnb to remove listings in West Bank settlements

[Popular former military chief jumps](#)

into politics in Israel

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Thu, 2018-12-27 (All day)

JERUSALEM: A popular former Israeli military chief jumped into the political fray Thursday, announcing he would run for office in the upcoming election and instantly injected perhaps the strongest challenge to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's lengthy rule.

Retired Lt. Gen. Benny Gantz has been polling favorably in recent weeks, emerging as a fresh, exciting face in Israel's staid political landscape. By officially registering his new party, "Israel Resilience," Gantz shakes up a snap three-month election campaign that has been widely seen as Netanyahu's to lose.

Even before officially entering the fray, several polls showed Gantz's hypothetical party coming in second only to Netanyahu's ruling Likud in the run-up to the April 9 vote.

Gantz has yet to comment publicly on the party and was not expected to make any statement Thursday.

Though Gantz has yet to lay out his worldview or political platform, he flaunts stellar military credentials – a must in security-centric Israel – and a squeaky-clean image to contrast Netanyahu's corruption-laden reputation.

While still short of the kind of widespread support likely needed to become prime minister, his candidacy captures a yearning in Israel for a viable alternative to emerge against the long-serving Netanyahu, seeking his fourth consecutive term in office.

With a commanding lead in the polls, and a potential indictment looming against him, Netanyahu called early elections this week, seeking to pre-empt corruption charges and return to office to become the longest serving premier in Israeli history.

Police have recommended charging Netanyahu with bribery and breach of trust in three different cases. Netanyahu has denied any wrongdoing, dismissing the allegations as a media-orchestrated witch hunt aimed at removing him from office.

Even with Netanyahu's legal woes, Israel's established opposition parties have remained splintered and have been unable to produce a viable challenger. Gantz seems to be taking votes away from all the major parties and may not tip the scales away from Netanyahu just yet. But the emergence of the tall, telegenic ex-general with salty hair makes things more interesting, as he could spark new alliances with other moderate parties to give the hard-line Likud a good fight.

"It's too early to tell, but he definitely strengthens the center-left camp," said Mina Tzemach, a leading Israeli pollster, whose most recent survey gave Gantz's new party as many as 16 seats in the 120-seat Parliament. "He projects security and integrity. And the fact that he looks good doesn't hurt either."

Gantz, 59, was a paratrooper who rose up the ranks to command special operations units and other various units before becoming Israel's 20th military chief between 2011-2015. His term was marked by two wars with Hamas militants in Gaza and a covert air campaign in Syria against Iranian arms shipments to Hezbollah guerrillas in Lebanon. Since his discharge, he's been highly coveted by several Israeli political parties.



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Israeli parliament approves early elections
Poll shows Israel's Netanyahu
cruising toward re-election

[Saudi Arabia condemns terrorist attacks in Libya, Afghanistan and Iraq](#)

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Thu, 2018-12-27 00:07

JEDDAH: Saudi Arabia condemned in the strongest terms on Wednesday the attack on the Libyan Foreign Ministry building in Tripoli, reported the state run SPA.

An official source at the Saudi Foreign Ministry also condemned the attack on the Afghan government building in Kabul and Tuesday's car bombing in Iraq's Tal Afar, which caused several casualties.

The source reiterated the Kingdom's rejection of terrorist attacks and their violation of all international laws.

The source offered condolences, on behalf of the Kingdom, to the families of the victims in all three countries, as well as to their governments and people.



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elections

Author:

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Wed, 2018-12-26 19:22

JERUSALEM: Israeli lawmakers on Wednesday voted overwhelmingly to dissolve parliament and hold snap elections on April 9.

Legislators backed the move 102 for and two against after Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's coalition agreed Monday on early polls.

The premier's coalition was left with a one-seat majority after defense minister Avigdor Lieberman stepped down in November over a controversial Gaza cease-fire deal.

Party leaders have failed to agree on a key bill regulating drafting ultra-Orthodox Jews to the army, and that was the immediate reason to move toward elections.

Analysts, however, say that Netanyahu wanted the polls before Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit announces his decision on whether to indict the premier in three different corruption cases.

While no official timeframe has been given, reports say such an announcement could come in mid-April.

With politicians now entering campaign mode, Netanyahu met in Jerusalem on Wednesday with leaders of Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank and made his pitch for why they should stick with him.

Netanyahu's current coalition is seen as the most right-wing in Israel's history.

"We'll see an attempt by the left-wing to overthrow our rule with the help of the media and others," he said.

"They can't succeed, because if they do – that will pose a clear danger to the settlement movement."

Calling on their support in the elections, Netanyahu told the settler leaders they should not take the fate of their enterprise for granted.

"We had to work hard, with the current American administration as well, for the great achievements we brought the settlements," he said in remarks relayed by his office.

While Netanyahu portrays himself as the champion of the settlements, settler leaders say he has not done enough, with three prominent heads of West Bank settlements boycotting the Wednesday meeting in protest.

Key members of his coalition are however strong settlement backers and oppose a Palestinian state.



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Poll shows Israel's Netanyahu cruising toward re-election
Israel to hold early elections in April