

# Hundreds rally in rare southern Syria protest

Author:

Sat, 2022-02-12 00:29

BEIRUT: Hundreds took to the streets of a southern Syrian city on Friday to demand better living conditions and democracy in a rare protest inside regime-held areas, a war monitor said.

More than 300 protesters, gathering for a fifth consecutive day in Sweida after authorities cut off 600,000 families from its subsidies program, staged their biggest rally yet, according to the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

"We want a civil, just, democratic state," a young man told a cheering crowd of demonstrators in video footage broadcast by local media network Suwayda24. The footage shows protesters raising the flag of the Druze, a religious minority whose heartland is Sweida.

In one video, an elderly man in traditional Druze costume lamented price hikes.

"We cannot live or get our rights, we don't have any gas or diesel," he told the crowd. "We want to live in a homeland that guarantees our dignity and our rights."

The rally went ahead despite a heavy deployment of security forces, who sealed off main roads.

Earlier this month, the government excluded a large number of people from its subsidies program, in a country where 90 percent of the population is poor. Those who were cut off lost access to lower-priced food and oil, a move that triggered rare protests and criticism from within government-held areas of Syria.

Most protesters took to the streets for the first time in their lives to demand better living conditions, while others demanded democracy, Nour Radwan of Suwayda24 told AFP.

Smaller protests over similar issues were held in Sweida in 2020.

But the Druze, who made up less than three percent of Syria's pre-war population, largely kept out of the country's conflict.

Sweida has been mostly spared by the fighting in the decade-old war, and only faced sporadic jihadist attacks which were repelled.

Syria has grappled with an economic crisis compounded by Western sanctions, the Covid-19 pandemic and a rapid devaluation of the local currency.



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Syria's security forces raid journalist's home for criticizing Assad

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## [Protesters take to Sudan's streets again, decrying coup and arrests](#)

Author:

Fri, 2022-02-11 02:31

KHARTOUM: Sudanese protesters marched in neighborhoods across the capital and the country on Thursday in protest at October's military coup and a wave of political detentions.

The takeover ended a partnership between the military and civilian political parties, drawing global condemnation and plunging Sudan into political and economic turmoil.

Protests organized by resistance committees have drawn hundreds of thousands of people, and at least 79 have been killed and more than 2,000 injured in

crackdowns.

On Thursday, hundreds of protesters diverged from planned routes to renew efforts to march on the presidential palace, but were met with tear gas and a heavy security presence a little more than a kilometer from their goal.

"We will continue demonstrating in the streets until we bring down military rule and bring back democracy," said 22-year-old university student Salah Hamid.

Other protests took place across the Nile in the cities of Omdurman and Bahri, and farther away in Gadarif and Sennar.

The US Embassy in Sudan said on Twitter that acts of civil disobedience were expected to take place in Khartoum and other states, warning of decentralized demonstrations, road blockages, and business closures. The embassy instructed Americans to avoid crowds and demonstrations and to keep a low profile.

Sudan's long-standing economic woes have been exacerbated since last month by the blockade of the Northern Artery, a key route for trucks carrying exports from Sudan into Egypt.

That protest, originally against a rise in electricity prices for farmers, has expanded to reject military rule and demand more support for both farmers and traders, and has trapped hundreds of Egyptian trucks in Sudan.

While some protesters in Khartoum said they were opposing a normalization of relations with Israel that has been spearheaded by the military, others marched for the more than 2,000 people who lawyers say have been arrested since the coup.

More than 100 remain in jail, one lawyer said on Thursday.



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Sudanese envoy in Israel to promote ties, source tells Reuters

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## [200 Jordanian phones linked to Israeli hacking scandal](#)

Thu, 2022-02-10 23:53

AMMAN: Almost 200 phones belonging to Jordanian journalists, activists and members of the royal court were among the thousands targeted in the hacking scandal linked to Israeli companies, a local news agency has revealed.

Samir Hiari, the publisher of Ammon News, said he was alerted to the breaches by a Reuters journalist who was doing a report on the subject.

The report revealed that Apple had sent messages about a possible security breach to several Jordanians, including lawyer Hala Ahed, social media influencer Deema Amad and Senator Mustafa Hamarneh.

“Once we collected the info we discovered that a little bit less than 200 – among them royal court and Olympic committee members and activists – were victims of the hacking, which included scrapping everything on their phones, including WhatsApp content, messages, photos, videos and text messages,” he said.

Ammon News reporter Ahmad Hiari quoted a US source as saying it was still unclear if “any local parties cooperated with Tel Aviv in the (phone) hacking.”

Rana Sabbagh, co-founder and former executive director of Arab Reporters for Investigative Journalism, told Arab News how she discovered that her phones had been hacked.

“A friend told me that they received a message from Apple ... so I decided to send both my phones to OCCRP data security experts to be tested.”

Sabbagh, who is now a senior editor at the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, said the forensic test showed the two phones had been compromised.

“We found that they had been hacked in July 2020 and in April 2021. Another colleague from the same organization discovered their phone was hacked in September 2021,” she said.

Sabbagh, a veteran Jordanian reporter and former chief editor at the Jordan Times, said that the dates were important as it was just before the publication of the Pandora Papers.

“It is really worrisome ... we know generally that we are being always checked but what upsets me is that I don’t want my sources to be hurt.

“It is upsetting when you discover that your entire life has been invaded in a mega way. They took away all our documents, photos and videos. I am not sure if the attack is local or international.”

Hiari said that he was worried about how the hacked information might be used.

“I know that there is always an effort to listen to our phones. This action is inhuman and illegal and we know this happens. I am worried about how the info is being used.

“I am worried about people being blackmailed, we need international protection,” he added.

Neither Hiari or Sabbagh would say if they thought local parties were involved in the hacking of the Jordanian phones.

Hiari said: “We don’t have any information about local parties, but our international contacts assured us that the software that was used against Jordanian phones was used and bought from external countries.”

Botrus Mansour, a Palestinian lawyer and citizen of Israel, told Arab News that the Israeli-created Pegasus software was part of Israel's security ecosystem.

The system had been used not only used against Palestinians and others around the world but also to hack the phones of Israelis, including directors of ministries and mayors without any legal warrants or criminal suspicion, he said.

"The occupation has corrupted Israeli morality inside Israel, and what happens in the occupied territories is reflected inside Israel itself and has caused a major erosion of Israeli democratic values even against Israelis – a phenomena accelerated by the attempts of the last Israeli prime minister to escape court."

Wadie Abu Nassar, a Haifa-based commentator on Israeli politics, told Arab News that Israel had crossed moral red lines before.

"Espionage is an old habit in Israel," he said. "The red line was crossed long ago but it is revealed now and with an indication it was systematically used against everybody."



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## [Lebanese officials busy themselves with border dispute discussions against backdrop of port blast anger](#)

Thu, 2022-02-10 23:28

BEIRUT: Lebanese officials on Thursday began internal discussions in preparation for a response to US envoy Amos Hochstein, who has urged them to settle a maritime border dispute with Israel.

Hochstein conveyed ideas for advancing the negotiations, which have been stalled for several months.

After he met Prime Minister Najib Mikati on Thursday, presidential adviser and former minister Elias Abi Saab said: "We evaluated the meetings that took place, where is Lebanon's interest, and what are the next steps for this visit. There is a step forward in what the mediator presented, but nothing is final yet, and we will see how its results will be.

"Some things must be completed internally, and there are things that Hochstein will present later."

Hochstein, who is the US State Department's senior adviser for global energy security, arrived in Lebanon on Tuesday to revive talks between Lebanon and Israel over a maritime border dispute that is holding up oil and gas exploration.

While the ideas he conveyed to the Lebanese side were not revealed, it was reported that he had "made a positive offer regarding Line 23, giving Lebanon the area of 860 sq. km that it demands, in addition to preserving the entire Qana field."

Before leaving Lebanon on Wednesday evening, Hochstein said that Lebanon had an opportunity to reach a deal. "We are at the moment of bridging the gaps in the maritime delimitation file," he said.

He linked reaching an agreement with addressing the economic crises that Lebanon is mired in, emphasizing that Lebanon needed to support itself. "Let's see something that works, that the reforms that are necessary are

passed, are in place, and are serious, and then the international community will support Lebanon," he said.

The head of the Lebanese Phalange Party, Sami Gemayel, said in response to the visit: "In a failed state, the international negotiator must negotiate with all the political and security authorities and turn into a judge of peace among them."

Businessman Bahaa Hariri tweeted: "The time has come for the maritime border demarcation file to witness the birth of a solution that is far from the political class's quotas and the mistakes that Lebanon made as a result of its influence.

"Reaching an agreement as soon as possible may be a step toward mitigating the severity of the economic collapse."

Retired soldiers staged a sit-in at the intersection of the Presidential Palace in Baabda, coinciding with a Cabinet session.

They called on the Cabinet not to approve the 2022 draft budget because it did not guarantee "justice, equality and the right to a decent life, livelihood and medicine."

They said the draft budget did not secure the "life needs and concerns of the military in active service and retirement, but rather imposes additional taxes and fees that they cannot bear."

The movement of retired service personnel extended to Tripoli, in north Lebanon, where protesters staged a sit-in in front of the Tripoli Finance Building branch and marched to the home of Mikati.

Others staged a sit-in in front of the house of Finance Minister Youssef Khalil in the southern city of Tire, and a similar move was carried out in front of the Zahle Saray in the Bekaa.

Also on Thursday, dozens of families of the Beirut port blast victims stormed the Justice Palace in Beirut to demand faster court decisions in the case.

They were objecting against the delay in deciding on requests for response against the investigator, Judge Tarek Bitar, to enable him to resume his investigations into the crime and issue the indictment.

Riot police tried to prevent the families from entering the building and a stampede broke out.

The families managed to enter the palace, holding pictures of their loved ones, the Lebanese flag, and banners calling for "support for justice and for Judge Rola Al-Masry to speed up the response requests that obstruct the investigation and justice process."

They stressed the need for Bitar to resume his work and investigations.

Judge Suhail Abboud, the first president of the Courts of Cassation, met the



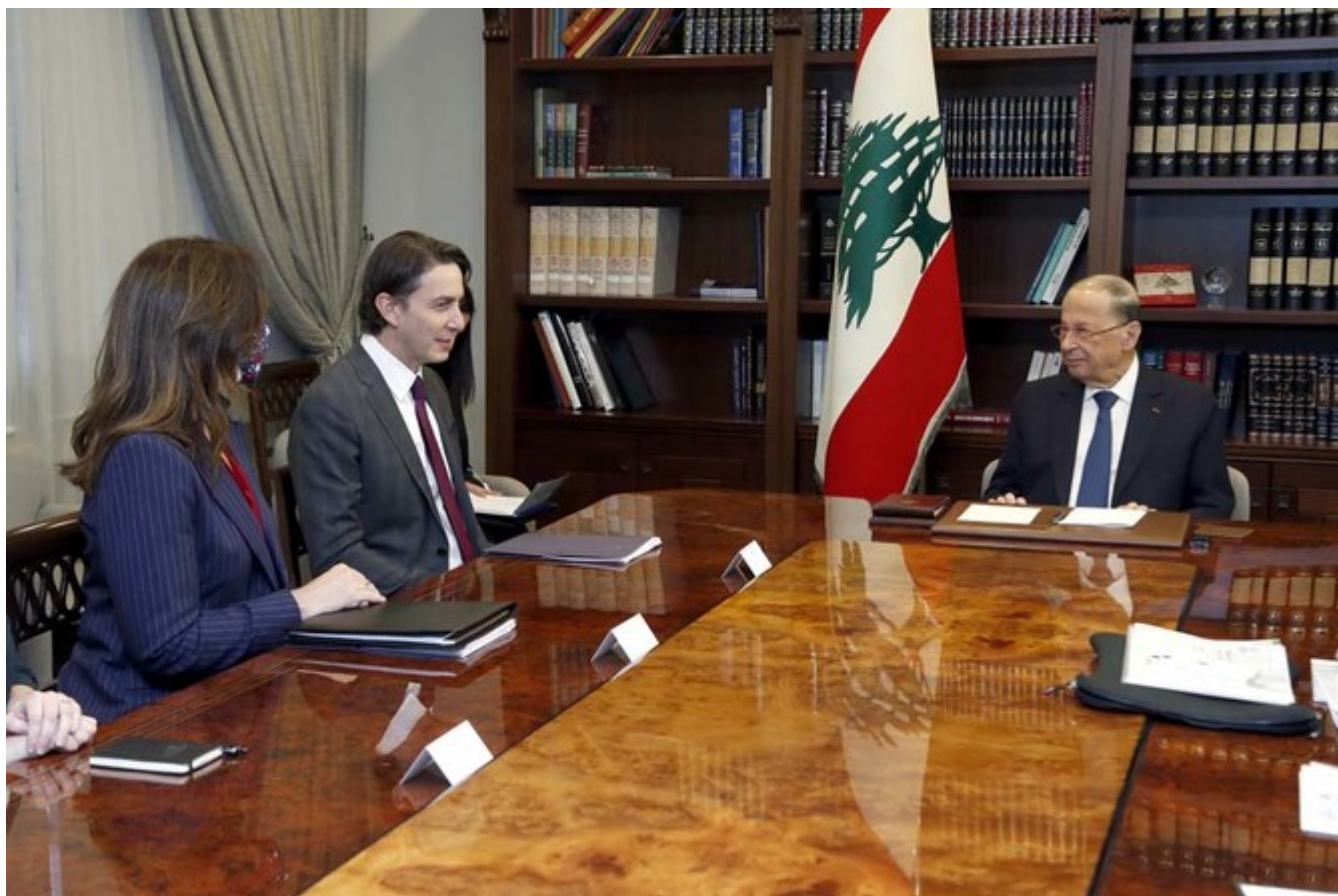
protesters upon the insistence of the families and the activists accompanying them.

He told the activists that Al-Masry was studying the case carefully and she would retire only in April and not this month.

The families' spokesman William Noun, who is also a brother of one of the blast victims, expressed his fear of the issue becoming diluted through the way the case was being dealt with.

"This is totally unacceptable by the families of the martyrs," he said.





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US urges Lebanon to resolve maritime border issue with Israel  
Families of Beirut port blast victims demand accountability

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## [\*\*Egypt seeks to advance cooperation with Algeria: El-Sisi\*\*](#)

Thu, 2022-02-10 19:37

CAIRO: Egypt's president has reaffirmed the fraternal relations between his country and Algeria, as well as Cairo's aspiration to advance bilateral cooperation at various levels.

During a phone call he received from his Algerian counterpart Abdelmedjid Tebboune, Abdel Fattah El-Sisi expressed his "pride in the visit of his brother" to Egypt on Jan. 24.

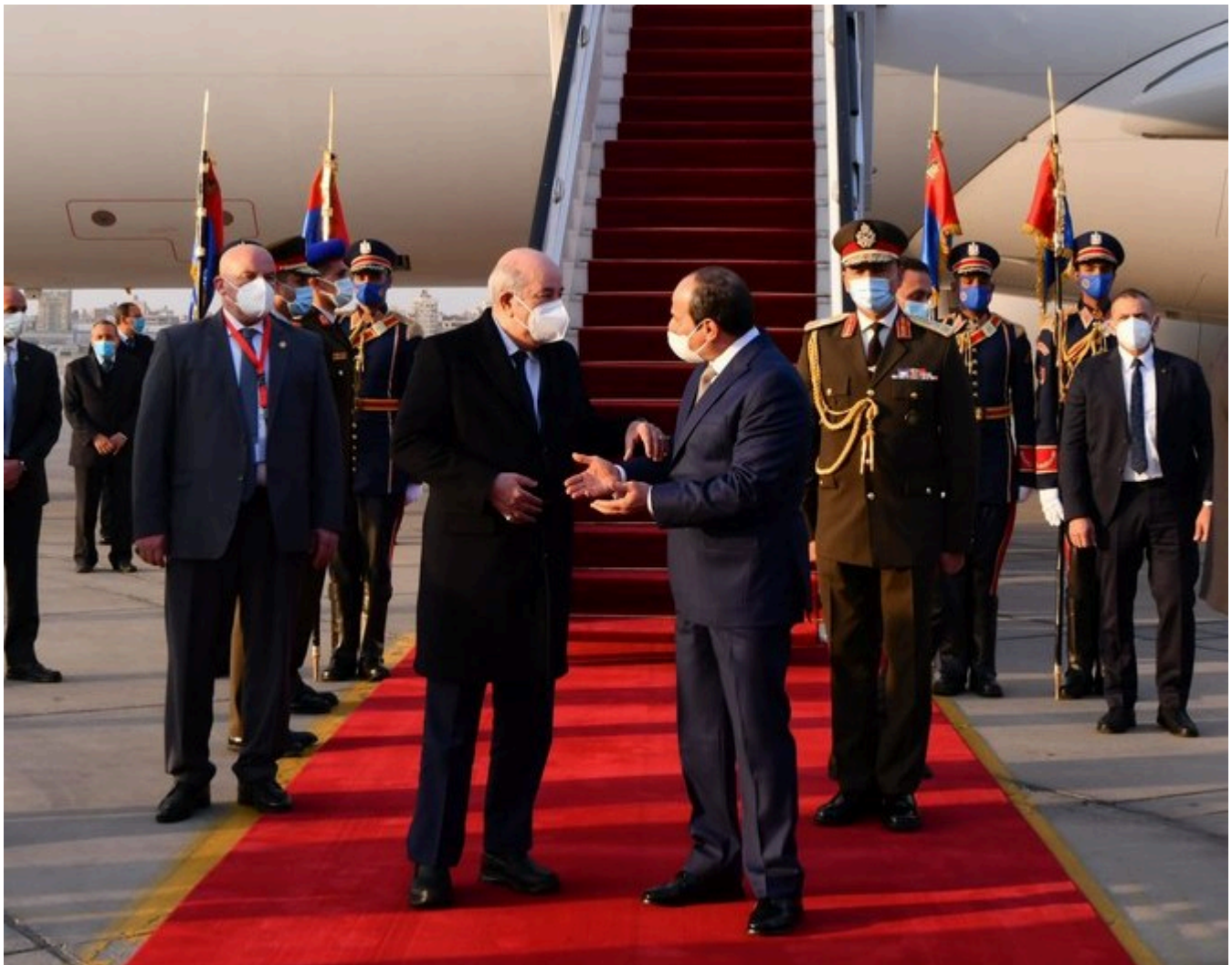
It was Tebboune's third foreign trip since taking office in December 2019. The visit included discussions on economic, political and strategic files.

El-Sisi said Egypt seeks to increase trade and investment with Algeria, and to strengthen security and military ties.

They discussed regional issues of common interest, especially the situation in Libya. They agreed that Libyan state institutions should be supported, as should efforts to achieve security and stability, and to preserve the country's unity and sovereignty.

Bassam Rady, spokesman for the Egyptian presidency, said Tebboune expressed his appreciation for the warm reception and hospitality he received during his visit, which witnessed fruitful discussions.

Tebboune said: "Algeria is proud of the close and distinguished ties it has with Egypt at the official and popular levels, and its interest in intensifying bilateral cooperation in all fields, especially economic and security."



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