

Lebanese security forces on high alert as violent protests continue

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Tue, 2021-06-29 22:02

BEIRUT: Lebanon's Supreme Defense Council has asked the military and security services to stay on high alert to prevent attempts to destabilize the security situation amid the financial and political crises the country is facing.

The council, headed by President Michel Aoun, convened on Tuesday amid protests against the fuel shortage.

Promises to provide fuel after the partial lifting of subsidies have not reduced the public anger nor the never-ending queues at gas stations.

During the meeting, Aoun said that "what happened in front of the gas stations is unacceptable," stressing that "humiliating citizens is unacceptable under any circumstances, and all concerned parties should work to prevent the recurrence of such scenes."

Aoun objected to "roads being closed as they cause additional suffering to citizens."

He said: "Everyone is entitled to their opinion, but it should not turn into chaos and riots, and the security authorities should not be lenient."

The attempt to contain the chaos coincided with a comprehensive strike carried out by all banks in Lebanon on Tuesday to protest the attack on the headquarters of the Lebanese Swiss Bank on Hamra Street in Beirut.

The bank said that "about a hundred people occupied the bank's general administration building on Monday and beat the employees, injuring three of them, as they used violence to force managers to make money transfers to Turkey."

Since November 2019, banks have refrained from making transfers abroad in light of the financial crisis.

The bank's administration said the attackers belonged to a charity called Baneen, which had demanded the courts approve the transfers, but the Judge of Urgent Matters dismissed the case.

The banks' association condemned the attack and called on "the competent judicial and security agencies to pursue the perpetrators."

Meanwhile, street protests continued on Tuesday as citizens blocked roads in different areas to express their anger over dire living conditions and the fuel shortage.

The rush to the gas stations that dared to operate amid the tense climate inspired several brawls.

Protesters destroyed a gas station in the Akkar region due to the owner's reluctance to sell diesel and petrol, despite not running out, but was waiting to sell the fuel at higher prices.

Fadi Abu Shakra, a representative of the union of fuel distributors and gas stations in Lebanon, told Arab News: "A delegation from the union met the

minister of interior in the caretaker government to discuss the security situation at gas stations in light of the many fights that are erupting. "The minister asked gas station owners to refrain from filling gallons to prevent them from being stored in homes since this poses a danger to citizens, and to only sell small quantities for motorcycle owners to prevent them from selling fuel on the black market."

Abu Shakra stressed that "fuel will be available to the Lebanese within a few days, as the remaining ships will be unloaded and the quantities delivered after the Banque du Liban began opening credits for ships anchored off the Lebanese coast."

While covering the long queues in front of a gas station in Beirut's southern suburbs, a foreign journalist was attacked and detained by Hezbollah on Monday.

In a statement, the Tahalof Watani publication condemned the attack on Matt Kynaston, a correspondent of the Beirut daily, NOW Lebanon, "who was only doing his job," demanding the security and judicial agencies "pursue the aggressors and punish them as required by justice and to protect the freedom of media professionals, which is guaranteed by the Lebanese Constitution." In a similar vein, an investigation session with the anti-Hezbollah cleric, Ali Al-Amin, was postponed. A case was filed against him by Hezbollah supporters, who accused him of participating in a meeting in Bahrain that was allegedly attended by Israelis.

A sit-in was organized in front of the Palace of Justice in Beirut in solidarity with Al-Amin on Tuesday.

The protesters raised banners saying, "ideas are more powerful than your guns," and "violent messages do not silence the voice of our freedom."

Samy Gemayel, the head of Lebanon's Kataeb Party, expressed his solidarity with Al-Amin "and support for his free and open mind in the face of oppression and close-minded people."

He added: "We will not accept intimidation, and we will bring down the police state and the militias behind it."



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[UN expert backs probe into Iran's 1988 killings, Raisi's role](#)

Author:

Reuters

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Tue, 2021-06-29 17:28

GENEVA: The UN investigator on human rights in Iran has called for an independent inquiry into allegations of state-ordered executions of thousands of political prisoners in 1988 and the role played by President-elect Ebrahim Raisi as Tehran deputy prosecutor.

Javaid Rehman, in an interview with Reuters on Monday, said that over the years his office has gathered testimonies and evidence. It was ready to share them if the United Nations Human Rights Council or other body sets up an impartial investigation.

He said he was concerned at reports that some "mass graves" are being destroyed as part of a continuing cover-up.

"I think it is time and it's very important now that Mr. Raisi is the president (-elect) that we start investigating what happened in 1988 and the role of individuals," Rehman said from London, where he teaches Islamic law and international law.

A probe was in the interest of Iran and could bring closure to families, he said, adding: "Otherwise we will have very serious concerns about this president and the role, the reported role, he has played historically in those executions."

Raisi, a hard-line judge, is under US sanctions over a past that includes what the United States and activists say was his involvement as one of four judges who oversaw the 1988 killings. Amnesty International has put the number executed at some 5,000, saying in a 2018 report that "the real number could be higher."

Raisi, when asked about allegations that he was involved in the killings, told reporters: "If a judge, a prosecutor has defended the security of the people, he should be praised ... I am proud to have defended human rights in every position I have held so far."

Rehman said: "We have made communications to the Islamic Republic of Iran

because we have concerns that there is again a policy to actually destroy the graves or there may be some activity to destroy evidence of mass graves.”

“I will campaign for justice to be done,” he added.

Raisi succeeds Hassan Rouhani on Aug. 3, having secured victory this month in an election marked by voter apathy over economic hardships and political restrictions.

Rehman denounced what he called “deliberate and manipulative strategies adopted to exclude moderate candidates and to ensure the success of a particular candidate.”

“There were arrests, journalists were stopped from asking specific questions about the background of the presidential candidate Mr.Raisi and there was intimidation toward any issues that were raised about his previous role and background.”

Iran has never acknowledged that mass executions took place under Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the revolutionary leader who died in 1989.

“The scale of executions that we hear imply that it was a part of a policy that was being pursued...It was not just one person,” Rehman said.

He said there had also been “no proper investigation” into the killing of protesters in Nov. 2019, the bloodiest political unrest since the 1979 Islamic revolution.

“Even by conservative estimates we can say that more than 300 people were killed arbitrarily, extrajudicially, and nobody has been held accountable and no compensation,” he said.

“There is a widespread and systemic impunity in the country for gross violations of human rights, both historically in the past as well as in the present.”



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Raisi's hard-line stance 'could spell trouble' Continuity of aggressive Iranian policies assured with Raisi's election: Former senior CIA official Norman Roule

[Police, Palestinians clash as Israel begins demolition in Jerusalem's Silwan](#)

Author:

Reuters

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Tue, 2021-06-29 16:36

JERUSALEM: Israel demolished a Palestinian shop in the East Jerusalem neighborhood of Silwan on Tuesday, triggering scuffles between police and protesters who accused authorities of discriminatory enforcement of building permits in the holy city.

Palestinians seek East Jerusalem, which Israel captured in a 1967 war, for a future state. Israel deems all of Jerusalem its capital – a status not recognized internationally – and has encouraged Jewish settlement of predominantly Palestinian areas.

A bulldozer escorted by Israeli police flattened Harbi Rajabi's butchers shop in the neighborhood which is overlooked by the Al-Aqsa Mosque, the third holiest shrine in Islam and the most sensitive site in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The shop is one of at least eight properties that residents said were slated for demolition. The residents say many have been there for decades, even from before 1967. The authorities have earmarked the land for a park and say the shops and homes have been built illegally.

Mahmoud Basit who runs the butchers told Reuters 14 family members depended on income from there. "We have no other way to support our families," said Basit, who added he would have to look for new work from scratch.

Deputy Jerusalem Mayor Arie King said "around 20" buildings in Silwan – which Israel refers to by its Hebrew name Shiloach – had received demolition orders. Around another 60 buildings there were in violation of Israeli zoning laws, he told Reuters.

Palestinians in Silwan say it is near-impossible to get building permits.

They see the demolitions as designed to drive them from Jerusalem. Disputing this, King said the municipality had approved hundreds of new Palestinian homes in Silwan.

Palestinian medics said 13 people were injured in Tuesday's confrontations in Silwan. Police said two officers were hurt by stone-throwers and that three people were arrested for disorderly conduct and assault.

The municipality had given Palestinians until June 28 to dismantle the structures themselves. King said the land would be cleared to make way for the park and public buildings, adding that Silwan's biblical links made it "an important historical site."

Nader Abu Diab, who also received a demolition order, lives in fear of the knock on the door from municipal inspectors.

"My grandchildren ask me questions and I can't answer them. They're children. What can I tell them? That they're going to demolish our home?" Abu Diab, 55, said.

His brother, Fakhri Abu Diab said he applied seven times for an Israeli permit to expand his home in Silwan "but it was always rejected". He added that over a hundred Palestinians could become homeless if the current round of demolitions continues.

The future of another East Jerusalem neighborhood, Sheikh Jarrah, was one of the flashpoints at the heart of fighting between Israel and Palestinian militants last month.







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Jerusalem's Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood eviction appeal delayed

[Abu Dhabi will only allow vaccinated people in some public spaces from Aug. 20](#)

Mon, 2021-06-28 22:04

ABU DHABI: Abu Dhabi has announced that a wide range of public places will soon be accessible only to those vaccinated against the coronavirus in a bid to encourage more people to get shots.

The Emirati government on Monday said that starting August 20, authorities

will begin restricting access to shopping malls, restaurants, cafes, sporting activities, museums, gyms, schools and universities, the emirate's media office said in a tweet on Monday.

The decision doesn't apply to those who are unvaccinated because of an exemption, nor to children aged 15 and below, the media office added.

The Abu Dhabi Emergency, Crisis and Disasters Committee has approved allowing only those vaccinated to enter some public places, after vaccinating 93 per cent of target groups in the emirate and to preserve public health. pic.twitter.com/KUGz9YWqTa

– مكتب أبوظبي الإعلامي (@admediaoffice) [June 28, 2021](#)

The unvaccinated will effectively be barred from entering any business in the UAE capital except for supermarkets and pharmacies.

Abu Dhabi has already rolled out a “green pass” system that limits public access to those who have either received the shot or can show a negative virus test.

It comes as the country looks to economic reopening helped by its speedy vaccination campaign. The government says at least 93% of Abu Dhabi's population has received at least one dose of the vaccine.

The neighboring travel hub of Dubai also has introduced some vaccination restrictions on mass entertainment and sporting events. However, malls and other businesses remain open to the unvaccinated.

The UAE boasts one of the world's fastest inoculation campaigns, with 15.1 million doses administered to its population of some 9 million.

* With AP and Reuters



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Abu Dhabi COVID-19 app removes vaccine option for visitors

[US announces normalization of](#)

relations with Sudan

Mon, 2021-06-28 21:53

LONDON: US relations with Sudan have returned to normal, according to an embassy spokesperson in Khartoum.

Amber Baskett, the Chargé d’Affairs at the American embassy in the Sudanese capital, confirmed the decision came as a result of the achievements of the interim transitional government.

Sudanese Foreign Minister Maryam Al-Sadiq, who hosted Baskett on Monday, welcomed the American move, which she said was deserved for the progress the country had made since the ousting of Omar Bashir in 2019.

She added that the US decision would support Sudan’s democratic transition efforts and address its challenges.

American relations with Sudan have been on an upward trajectory since 2019, and included the removal of the African country from the US list of state sponsors of terrorism in 2020.



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