

US asks Israel, Palestinians to avoid 'provocations' after Jerusalem march approved

Wed, 2021-06-09 21:34

WASHINGTON: The United States on Wednesday urged Israelis and Palestinians to avoid "provocations" and preserve a ceasefire after Israel approved a controversial nationalist march in Jerusalem.

"We believe it's essential to refrain from steps that exacerbate tensions," State Department spokesman Ned Price said when asked about the march. He said the United States was engaged in diplomacy and wanted to do "everything we can to try to prevent escalations or provocations that might provide a spark to renew violence."

Asked if the United States was opposed to the march, Price declined to respond directly but said: "We all saw what precipitated the last flare-up of violence and we know just how delicate the situation is."

The office of outgoing Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu gave the green light to a march through Jerusalem next week, amid threats by Hamas to resume fighting if it goes ahead.

Earlier rallies by far-right Jewish groups raised tensions in Jerusalem, prompting a police intervention in the holy Al-Aqsa mosque compound that was cited by Hamas as it fired rockets into Israel.

The unrest triggered rocket attacks by Hamas, which prompted a military conflict that killed 260 Palestinians and at least 13 people in Israel last month.



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Israeli govt authorizes controversial Jerusalem march: PM's office
Palestinian teen bears scar of eviction battle in East Jerusalem

[Yemen condemns Houthi attacks on Marib in letter to UN Security Council](#)

Wed, 2021-06-09 20:27

LONDON: Yemen on Wednesday condemned the Houthi attacks on Marib in a letter to the UN Security Council, saying the Iran-backed militia's targeting of civilians in Marib is causing a humanitarian catastrophe.

The Houthi militia launched a brutal offensive to take control of oil and gas-rich Marib from the internationally-backed government.

The offensive sparked international condemnation as it has served as a safe

haven for tens of thousands of internally displaced persons who have been fleeing the fighting since the conflict began almost 7 years ago. During the session, Yemen also called on the UN Security Council to push for an end to Houthi attacks on civilians in Marib and Hodeidah. Meanwhile, the Iranian opposition leader said during the session that Iran's human rights violations cases should be referred to the Security Council. "The leaders of the regime must be brought to justice for their crimes against humanity over the past four decades," she added.



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Senior Houthi leader killed in clashes in Yemen's Al-Jawf province Houthi-run court starts trial of abducted Yemeni model

[Iran expert: Election candidates offer no roadmap to solve country's crises](#)

Wed, 2021-06-09 19:35

LONDON: An Iran expert on Wednesday warned that none of the candidates in the country's presidential election on June 18 offer a route out of its many crises.

Nazila Fathi, an independent journalist and non-resident scholar at the Middle East Institute, was speaking at an event hosted by Chatham House titled "Iran's presidential election: Domestic and international implications" and attended by Arab News.

"Coronavirus has really wreaked havoc in Iran. The death tolls are huge. While it's true that the country started vaccines before the elections, no one knows what shots they'll get, what the plan is, and how the majority of people under 50 are going to get vaccinated," she said. "People are traveling out of the country for huge prices to get vaccinated."

Opinion

This section contains relevant reference points, placed in (Opinion field)

Iranians have also faced intense political pressure with "the suppressions of 2018 and 2019," and the regime "has used extreme force and violence to crack down on any kind of dissent," said the former New York Times Iran correspondent.

"People are just fed up. They don't feel like there's a reason for them to take part in the election or any other political event that would show support for the regime," she added.

"Long before the candidates were decided, people were calling for boycotting the election because they don't want their vote to be counted as support for the regime," Fathi said.

"Unfortunately none of the candidates, including Ebrahim Raisi – who seems to be the frontrunner – have been able to offer a policy, a roadmap or any kind of agenda that describes how they'd address the serious concerns that people have.

"Economic problems are deep and serious. They've impacted people in very profound ways. But none of the candidates have offered any policy on how they'll address the problem, including the head of the central bank, who has been in charge of monetary policy."

Fathi added: "People don't know what's going to happen to them on basic questions that every presidential candidate should answer."

She said the regime is increasingly disinterested in the views of the people, and the outcome of the election has been manufactured with the disqualification of candidates.

"The regime is on a trend where it cares less and less about how people are going to vote. It's showing less and less accountability," she added.

"The regime doesn't care about turnout, and they want to move with this election so there would be no risk to Raisi winning."



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Ebrahim Raisi: hard-line challenger in Iran
Close ally of supreme leader is favorite to win Iran election

[Dollar exchange rate reaches 14,000 Lebanese pounds on black market](#)

Author:

Tue, 2021-06-08 21:35

BEIRUT: The Lebanese pound hit a new low on the black market, reaching 14,000 for \$1 after it had been somewhat stable in recent weeks at 12,000.

This coincided with a new circular from the Banque du Liban (BDL) instructing commercial banks to gradually repay foreign currency deposits from July. The circular comes into effect as of June 30 for one year, subject to change or renewal.

Under the circular, a depositor can withdraw \$400 per month either in

banknotes, by transferring it abroad or via bank card transactions that can be used in Lebanon and abroad.

The circular also stipulates that a depositor can withdraw in parallel the equivalent of \$400 in Lebanese pounds per month at the prevailing exchange rate on Sayrafa, BDL's official platform.

Commercial banks have yet to reveal whether their financial capabilities will allow them to implement the circular.

Meanwhile, the Capital Control bill to control the movement of dollars and prevent their transfer outside Lebanon, except in exceptional cases that do not harm the public interest, was approved by Parliament's budget and finance committee.

"The BDL circular and the approval of the Capital Control draft bill are long overdue," Dr. Ahmed Al-Lakkis, director general of the Administrative and Financial Affairs Department in Parliament, told Arab News.

"Lebanon may experience the same scenario as Greece, which had around 400 banks before the (financial) crisis but ended up with six afterward. Some banks in Lebanon can handle the new situation, but some may not be able to do so," he added.

"The fact that the exchange rate has risen by 1,000 Lebanese pounds against the dollar within two days may be caused by the anticipation of the money that will enter the market in light of BDL's circular. However, I believe that those who'll be able to withdraw dollars won't spend them ... but rather hide them at home because they trust neither the state nor the banks."

Meanwhile, people are taking to the streets to protest living conditions, blocking roads in several regions. The Lebanese Army is working to reopen them.

The General Labor Union is expected to carry out a comprehensive strike on June 15. It condemned "all parties obstructing the formation of the government because this is a betrayal of the homeland and the interests of the people."



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Aoun okays \$197 million treasury loan to avoid blackout in Lebanon
Israeli army carries out sweep at border with Lebanon

[Torture victims detail suffering at hands of Iranian election candidate](#)

Author:

Tue, 2021-06-08 20:46

LONDON: As Iran prepares for presidential elections on June 18, citizens have spoken out about the torture and abuse they received at the hands of candidate Ebrahim Raisi, current head of the judiciary.

He is accused of having been central to the 1988 massacre of Iranian political prisoners. It is alleged that he was a member of the so-called "Death Commission" in Evin and Gohardasht prisons.

According to first-hand reports, Raisi was a prosecutor sentencing people to death. He was just 21 during the 1988 executions, with limited education and training.

Iranian opposition members have said Raisi served as then-Supreme Leader Ruhollah Khomeini's "fixer," being sent to conduct purges in provinces such as Lorestan, Kermanshah and Semnan.

Now, members of the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI) have detailed abuses they suffered at Raisi's hands.

At a press conference on Tuesday attended by Arab News, Farideh Goudarzi detailed horrific abuses she endured throughout the 1980s.

"In 1983 I was arrested on charges of supporting the Mojahedin Organization, and for nearly six years in the prisons of Hamedan and Nahavand I witnessed the heinous crimes of the criminal Ebrahim Raisi," she said.

Goudarzi was heavily pregnant at the time of her arrest, and she gave birth very soon after she began her time in captivity.

She detailed abuses at the hands of her captors, including Raisi, who she said watched on as she was tortured by being flogged with electric cables in a tiny, blood-splattered room.

She said there is "a painful memory that's still lingering before my eyes every moment even after 38 years," referring to the use of her child as a torture tool on Sept. 24, 1983.

Goudarzi said Raisi and some guards "entered my cell, picked up my son – who was only a 38-day-old baby – while he was asleep and threw him on the ground in a cruel and ruthless manner. Ignoring his cries, they took off his clothes as they said they were looking for documents and evidence.

"The next day, from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m., I was taken to court with my son and interrogated. More than 10 ruthless torturers were present in the interrogation room, one of whom was Raisi," she added.

"During the six hours of interrogation, one of them took my son by the hand and ... he slapped him on the back in front of me and the others laughed. Raisi was watching this scene. I expressed this bitter memory to say that we, the survivors of the 1988 massacre, will neither forget nor forgive this crime and the other crimes in the 1980s."

Nasrallah Marandi, a prisoner in Evin, Ghezel Hesar and Gohardasht prisons from 1981 to 1991, told the press conference that on Aug. 6, 1988, guards transferred him from solitary confinement to the main corridor of Gohardasht Prison, called "the corridor of death."

He added: "When I was taken to the corridor of death, both sides of the corridor were full of prisoners who were waiting to be taken to the Death Commission ... Many of them were my friends, and it was around noon when I was taken to the Death Commission."

He said Raisi was there, adding that he "played an active role in the execution of prisoners and he was endorsing the death certificate. After a few minutes I was returned to the corridor of death, and on the same day many

of my friends were executed by Raisi and other members of the Death Commission.”

Marandi said: “After signing the death sentence, Raisi went to the execution hall to carry out and supervise the executions.”

He added that the Death Commission did not spare the mentally or physically ill, and that prisoners were killed regardless of age.

“They executed everyone, and in the fall of 1988 only one small ward in Gohardasht Prison, called Ward 13, made up all the political prisoners who had survived the massacre,” Marandi said.

Mahmoud Royaei detailed the suffering experienced by Kaveh Nasari, who suffered from severe epilepsy and was paralyzed following severe torture.

He said Nasari “was attacked due to epilepsy. They used to hit his head and face hard on the ground, due to which his face was always injured. On Aug. 9, 1988, Nasari was taken to the death corridor. He had an epileptic fit but Raisi still sentenced him to death. On the same day, despite serving his sentence in full, Nasari was executed.”

Royaei added: “I have no doubt that Kaveh would’ve survived if Raisi ... wasn’t present on that death panel.”

Royaei said: “Many of the prisoners were students at the time of their arrest. Some were just 15 or 16. After seven years of brutal torture, they were hanged after Raisi signed their death verdict.”

Marandi urged the US, UN and EU to condemn Raisi’s candidacy, saying the “sham” election should not be recognized.

Ali Safavi, an official with the foreign affairs committee of the Paris-based NCRI, told Arab News: “The expected presidency of a mass murderer like Raisi lays bare the real and evil nature of medieval theocracy ruling Iran.”

He added: “For more than four decades, Western powers cloaked appeasing the mullahs under the veneer of empowering the illusory moderates, to the detriment of the Iranian people and regional peace and stability.

“This is no longer justifiable. The time has come for the international community to uphold the values they claim to champion, denounce the sham election and hold the Iranian regime and its criminal leaders, like Raisi, accountable for numerous crimes against humanity.”



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Hard-liners make early gains in restricted Iran election
Close ally of supreme leader is favorite to win Iran election