

# Activists protest against total closure in Lebanon

Author:

Wed, 2020-11-18 22:48

BEIRUT: Activists from civil movement groups staged a sit-in outside the Ministry of Interior in Beirut on Wednesday afternoon to protest the deteriorating economic situation in light of the lockdown imposed until the end of November.

The activists carried the Lebanese flag and chanted slogans, including "the revolution will go on." A large number of Internal Security Forces (ISF) personnel were deployed in the vicinity of the ministry to prevent protesters from entering its premises.

The protesters said they were not against the decision to close businesses due to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, but were calling on the state and authorities to help the most impoverished people in light of deteriorating difficult living conditions.

Khalid Abu-Ismail, head of economic development and poverty at the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), said a few days ago that Lebanon's ranking had dropped and poverty rates had doubled, hitting 55 percent of the total population.

Abu-Ismail said that there was a loss of food security, most pronounced in the poorest areas in northern and southern Lebanon, especially among workers with daily wages.

Just as the protests took place, Nicolas Chammas, president of the Beirut Traders Association, conveyed to Caretaker Interior Minister Brig. Gen. Mohammed Fahmy that "traders are angry due to the decision to completely close businesses, the disparity in the implementation of this decision in different regions, and the impact of the closure on traders in light of the deteriorating economic situation." He asked the minister to reconsider the decision.

Chammas told Arab News: "Hunger can spur riots that lead to dangerous consequences. We are fully aware of the decisions taken to protect the public's health, but there is also hunger (to take into consideration). Some of those affected (by the closure) are calling for civil disobedience or the violation of the closure decision."

Tony Eid, head of Achrafieh's Merchants Association, told Arab News: "Traders are demanding greater discipline during the period of complete closure, and we are keen to implement the measures to contain the spread of the virus.

"We hope that things will improve next month as it is full of holidays, and we count on this to compensate for our losses," he added.

On Wednesday the civil movement groups denounced the arrest of Makram Rabah, a political activist and lecturer at the American University of Beirut, at Rafic Hariri International Airport in Beirut as he was leaving for Dubai on Monday.

The groups, affiliated with Liqaa Teshrin (the October Meeting), condemned "the security practices, the suppression of freedoms, and the negativity adopted by the corrupt system to impede the prospects of achieving the desired reforms to save the country."

On Wednesday Rabah expressed his concerns about "tyrannical practices and the fabrication of files" against him.

He explained in a statement to the Central News Agency (Al-Markazia) that he was arrested without a judicial warrant, and a security file was fabricated against him due to his political stances.

Rabah said: "I am against any person or party that violates Lebanese sovereignty, and the first of these are Israel and Hezbollah because, in my view, they are equal in their violation of Lebanon's sovereignty.

"My political position is very clear, and even if I raised any suspicions, there are standard procedures that are supposed to be implemented," he said. "However, in my case, I am a lecturer at the American University of Beirut and a consultant, and my father is a former member of the Supreme Judicial Council, and all my stances are known. Therefore, whoever wants to obtain the contents of my phone can access my social media pages and follow my media appearances, but requesting the confiscation of my passport is not acceptable."

He added: "If there is a reason for my arrest, the decision must be issued by the Public Prosecutor at the Court of Cassation, not by an officer in the security services."



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## [Amnesty International urges Qatar to crack down on abusive employers](#)

Author:

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Wed, 2020-11-18 19:56

LONDON: Qatar should crack down on abusive employers and strengthen enforcement of its labor reforms if the state is to deliver on promises to protect workers' rights, Amnesty International said on Wednesday. The human rights group warned in a report that further action needed to be taken to guarantee that migrant workers receive wages, have access to justice and are protected from exploitation. The report said that although the country has introduced a series of major



reforms which include better pay and access to justice, little has been done to enforce them.

"Qatar needs to do much more to ensure legislation has a tangible impact on people's lives," said the head of economic and social justice at Amnesty International, Steve Cockburn.

Cockburn said that many migrant workers had not benefitted from the reforms and will remain trapped in an exploitation cycle.

"Positive reforms have too often been undermined by weak implementation and an unwillingness to hold abusive employers to account. Inspection systems are inadequate to detect abuse, and it remains challenging for workers to lodge complaints without risking their income and legal status."

The report, which was released two years ahead of the 2022 FIFA World Cup, urged Qatar to respect the right of migrant workers to form trade unions and strengthen mechanisms to spot and put an end to abuses.

Although the 2022 World Cup host nation introduced a number of reforms aimed at bettering the conditions of migrant workers since 2017, thousands of workers in Qatar still face labor abuses.

A separate Amnesty report showed how many domestic workers in Qatar continue to work around 16 hours a day without a day off, despite a law being introduced to limit shifts to ten hours and stipulating one day off every week.



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## Palestinians urge Pompeo to call off settlement visit

Author:

Wed, 2020-11-18 02:05

GAZA CITY: Israeli plans to build 1,257 settlement units south of occupied Jerusalem have been condemned by Palestinian experts, who say the move will “kill the two-state solution.”

The settlement plans come on the eve of a tour of the region by US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, who is expected to visit an Israeli settlement built on Palestinian land in Ramallah.

The new announcement is in line with Israel’s large settlement project, a plan it has tried to implement for three decades. It aims to link the settlement of Givat Hamatos, which is built on Palestinian land in the towns of Beit Safafa and Beit Jala – part of which is owned by the Lutheran Church in Jerusalem – with other settlements in the West Bank.

Khalil Tafakji, a map and settlement expert, said the new plans are dangerous because they form a “link in the chain” of settlements in the Jerusalem 2020 Project, through which Israel aims to completely isolate Jerusalem from its Palestinian surroundings.

“Israel aims to establish what can be called a ‘Jewish Bethlehem’ by linking the settlement of Gilo and Jabal Abu Ghneim, and establishing about nine hotels to seal the entire closure of Jerusalem from the southern side and the towns of Sur Bahir, Beit Safafa and Al-Sharafa, which will completely isolated from the cities of Beit Sahour and Bethlehem,” Tafakji told Arab News.

Israel seized the areas in the 1990s and allowed the Ethiopian Jewish community to move and build there. The country has since faced several obstacles that prevented the launch the settlement project, but it is exploiting the “unlimited support” it receives from US President Donald Trump to move forward with the ambitious plans, Palestine experts said.

“In contrast to the raging Israeli policy of demolition against Palestinian homes and facilities in Jerusalem, Israel’s plans include building more than 58,000 settlement units by 2030,” Tafakji said.

More than 600,000 settlers reside in Israeli settlements that are classified as illegal according to international law, of which about 200,000 live in

settlements in occupied East Jerusalem, which Palestine views as the potential capital of a future state.

Israeli anti-settlement organization Peace Now said that the settlement project in Givat Hamatos would "severely impede the prospects of a two-state solution."

The organization accused the Israeli government of "using the last weeks of the Trump administration to impose facts on the ground."

A similar sentiment was expressed by Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh, who said in a Monday meeting that "what is going on is an escalating and intense attack plan for the next 10 weeks, in a race against time to impose a new status quo before Trump leaves the White House."

During his four years in office, Trump showed strong and unprecedented support for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, and approved of Israel's settlement projects, including the "annexation plan" to control vast swathes of land in the West Bank.

Peace Now said that settlement numbers in the Palestinian territories doubled one-and-a-half times during the Trump presidency.

Pompeo's visit to a West Bank settlement during his upcoming tour will be the first by a US secretary of state, with experts warning that it will give Israel tacit approval to continue annexation efforts.

Spokesman for the Palestinian presidency Nabil Abu Rudeineh said the new decision is a continuation of Israel's attempts to "kill the internationally supported two-state solution" and deny international decisions that confirm the settlements are illegal.

Although many Palestinians see Trump's election loss as a "gain" for them, they are doubtful of "major change" arriving in the form of President-elect Joe Biden, experts say.

Head of the Palestinian National Initiative Mustafa Barghouti said that Trump's disappearance does not mean the disappearance of the "deal of the century," and Israel will use every minute to move forward with its implementation.

"Israel is racing against time and is working to anticipate the changes in the US in light of Trump's loss. He was the US president who was most supportive of its aggressive settlement policies," Barghouti told Arab News.

EU Special Representative for the Middle East Peace Process Susanna Terstal said that Israel's bid to build new settlement units between occupied Jerusalem and Bethlehem is a "very worrying development."

In a press release, Terstal said: "I visited the region last month and saw on the ground how any settlement building in this prime location would harm prospects for a viable two-state solution with Jerusalem as the future



capital of both states. There is an urgent need for Israel to reverse its decision.”

The settlement issue is the most prominent obstacle to a two-state solution, after negotiations for a permanent political settlement between the Palestinian Authority and Israel were suspended in mid-2014.

UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Nikolai Mladenov said in a statement: “The Israeli settlement projects, if built, would further consolidate a ring of settlements between Jerusalem and Bethlehem in the occupied West Bank.

“It would significantly damage prospects for a future contiguous Palestinian state and for achieving a negotiated two-state solution based on the 1967 lines, with Jerusalem as the capital of both states.

“The construction of settlements is illegal under international law,” Mladenov added.



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Palestinian Authority to resume coordination with Israel

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# Yemeni officials repeat warnings over Safer oil tanker

Author:

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AL-MUKALLA: Iran-backed Houthi's use of naval mines and bomb boats, and the group's resistance to maintaining the Safer tanker are serious threats to international maritime traffic and ecological life in the Red Sea, senior Yemeni officials warned on Monday.

The officials repeated concerns about the collapse of the tanker, urging the international community to act now to avert a major disaster in the Red Sea.

Yemeni Vice President Ali Mohsen Al-Ahmer said that the Yemeni government is still open to all peace initiatives, but the Houthi's continuing use of land mines and their refusal to allow UN experts to visit the decaying tanker show that they are not serious about peace, state news agency SABA reported.

During a meeting with Gov. of Hodeidah Al-Hassan Ali Taher, Al-Ahmer said that the Houthis pose an "increasing" threat to maritime navigation in the Red Sea through their mines and explosive-laden boats that target commercial ships.

For months, Yemeni government officials and Western diplomats have pressured the Houthis to allow a team of UN experts access to the tanker to conduct vital maintenance, warning the rebels that they would be held responsible if the tanker crumbled and caused a predicted environmental and humanitarian catastrophe.

Loaded with more than 1 million barrels of crude oil, the stranded ship off the western city of Hodeidah has decayed over the last five years due to lack of maintenance.

Yemeni Minister of Planning and International Cooperation Dr. Najeeb Al-Ouj on Monday echoed the same concerns about the crumbling of the tanker and potential environmental disaster.

## **FASTFACT**

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SABA quoted the minister as saying that the international community has an “ethical and moral” responsibility to keep pressure on the Houthis until they allow UN experts to board the tanker and assess the damage.

Al-Ouj repeated local and international experts in saying that an oil spill from the ship would jeopardize ecological life and prevent Yemeni fishermen from working.

Foreign Minister Mohammed Al-Hadrami also told New Zealand’s nonresident Ambassador to Yemen James Monroe on Monday that the international community should urgently address the tanker issue by pressuring the Houthis.

### **Commanders killed**

Yemeni President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi mourned the death of a field commander who was killed in fighting with Houthis in the northern province of Juf.

The official news agency reported that Hadi sent a letter to the family of Brig. Yahya Al-Bakri, chief of staff of the 1st Mountain Infantry Brigade, who was killed while “resisting the Iran-backed Houthi scheme” in Yemen.

The vice president also mourned the same commander, describing him as a “hero” who led military operations against the Houthis in Marib, Juf and Sanaa.

Local media reports and government-allied accounts on social media announced the death of Ahmed Hamed Al-Tharhani, chief of 141 Brigade operations, on Monday night following fatal injuries suffered during fighting with Houthis in Juf.

Dozens of Houthi fighters, including field commanders, were also killed in Juf during the last couple of days.

Rabia Al-Qurashi, the Yemeni army spokesman in the province, told Arab News on Tuesday that warplanes from the Arab coalition on Monday targeted a gathering of Houthi fighters in an area east of Hazem, Juf’s capital, killing Zayed Ali Al-Marani, the chief of Houthi Preventive Security and a brother of the rebel-allied governor of Juf.

Fighting has raged in Juf over the last couple of months as Yemeni government forces and the Houthis push to make territorial gains in the strategic province.



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## [Rocket attack on Baghdad's Green Zone kills child](#)

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By QASSIM ABDUL-ZAHRA | AP

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Tue, 2020-11-17 20:05

BAGHDAD: Rockets struck Iraq's capital Tuesday with four landing inside the heavily fortified Green Zone, Iraq's military said, killing a child and wounding at least five people, signaling an end to an informal truce announced by Iran-backed militias in October.

Two Iraqi security officials said one of the rockets that hit the Green Zone struck close to Iraq's National Security Service, just 600 meters from the American Embassy. Some of the rockets were intercepted by the C-RAM air defense system installed by the U.S. earlier this year, they said.

Iraq's military said three rockets landed outside the Green Zone, one hitting close to Baghdad Medical City hospital, one at the gate of a public park, and a third exploded in the air. One child was killed and five civilians were wounded, the military statement said.

Officials said two Iraqi security forces personnel were also wounded inside the Green Zone. They spoke on condition of anonymity in line with regulations. There was no immediate claim of responsibility.

The military said the incident would not go without "prosecution and accountability."

US troops invaded Iraq in 2003 and left in 2011 but returned in 2014 after the Islamic State group overran large parts of Iraq.

Frequent attacks targeting the US Embassy and vehicles transporting equipment for U.S. troops have led Washington to threaten to close its Baghdad diplomatic mission and sparked a diplomatic crisis prior to the U.S. presidential election.

The attack comes after a recent announcement by the Pentagon that it would reduce troop levels in Iraq from 3,000 to 2,500.

In mid-October, Iran-backed, mostly Shiite, militia groups said they would temporarily halt attacks targeting the American presence in Iraq, including the embassy. That came with the condition that U.S.-led coalition troops withdraw from the country in line with a non-binding resolution passed in the Iraqi Parliament in January.

The resolution was passed by mostly Shiite lawmakers and urged the government to take action and expel US-led coalition troops from the country.

The resolution followed the Washington-directed airstrike that killed top Iranian Gen. Qassem Soleimani, the head of Iran's elite Quds Force, and powerful Iraqi militia leader Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, outside Baghdad airport. US officials, supportive of withdrawals in principle, have insisted they take place based on a scheduled timeline. Most Iraqi government officials agree with a gradual drawdown and face pressure from Iran-aligned groups who prefer an immediate exit.

A planned drawdown has been underway in Iraq for months, with coalition troops withdrawing from several Iraqi bases.

Iraqi forces have increasingly been conducting anti-Daesh operations without U.S. assistance, triggering the coalition to begin a scheduled drawdown in March that was conceived late last year. Assistance has become increasingly limited to high-level capabilities that Iraqi security forces lack, such as surveillance and air support.



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