

Protester killed in southern Iraq as tensions flare again

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By NABIL AL-JURANI | AP

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Fri, 2020-11-06 19:00

BASRA: Iraqi security forces opened fire during clashes with hundreds of protesters in the southern city of Basra on Friday, killing one demonstrator and wounding several others as tensions flared once again, hospital officials said.

The clashes erupted after some of the protesters tried to set up tents in a public square, a week after similar, previously erected protest tents in Basra and Baghdad had been removed.

Dozens of young Iraqis were seen running away in panic after the shots were fired in Basra. The slain protester was identified as Omar Al-Thiabi, a 29-year-old unemployed Iraqi.

Last Saturday, Iraqi forces cleared out sit-in tents from Baghdad's central Tahrir Square that had been the epicenter of anti-government mass protests that erupted last year. They also removed tents in Basra's Bahriya Square and in other southern cities that have seen major protests throughout the past year.

The removal of the tents has led to tensions and protesters in Basra have been trying to erect them again, holding demonstrations in the city for the past three days. They are also demanding the sacking of the governor and an investigation into previous killings of protesters.

The hospital officials said seven protesters were wounded in Friday's clashes. They spoke on condition of anonymity in line with regulations.

More than 500 people were killed during the months-long protest movement that began in October 2019 in Baghdad and across the mainly Shiite south, many of them demonstrators shot by Iraqi security forces.

Despite reaching unprecedented numbers in late 2019 and successfully mounting pressure on the country's elites, the anti-government protests have been largely dormant in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic. Activists also blamed the drop in numbers on a violent crackdown by Iraqi security forces and militia groups, as well as kidnappings and targeted assassinations.





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[Eight Syrian ministers added to EU sanctions list](#)

Author:

AFP

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Fri, 2020-11-06 15:56

BRUSSELS: The EU on Friday added eight ministers from the new Syrian government formed in August to its sanctions blacklist for their role in President Bashar Assad's violent repression of civilians.

The decision by the EU's 27 member countries bans the ministers from traveling to Europe and will see their assets frozen.

The EU's official journal on Friday added the names of the ministers of oil and mineral resources, industry, health, agriculture and three ministers of state.

The ministers of finance, justice, trade, transport, culture, education and water resources had already been added on October 16.

The new government of Prime Minister Hussein Arnous, who has been on this list since 2014, is the fifth to be formed in Syria since the beginning of the conflict in 2011.

With the additions, the crisis in Syria has put 288 people and 70 entities under EU sanctions.

EU sanctions have been in force against the Assad regime since December 2011 and are subject to annual review.

The Syrian conflict erupted in early 2011 when Assad's forces staged a brutal crackdown on anti-government protests, sparking violence that has since claimed hundreds of thousands of lives.

After nine years of war, Assad controls some 70 percent of Syrian territory.



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[Palestinian held by Israel ends hunger strike after 103 days](#)

Author:

Reuters

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Fri, 2020-11-06 16:48

RAMALLAH: A Palestinian on Friday ended a 103-day hunger strike against his detention without charge by Israel after being assured his four-month detention would not be extended, the Palestinian Prisoners' Club said. There was no immediate comment from Israeli authorities on whether they had

offered any special assurances to Maher Al-Akhras, 49, who has been in an Israeli hospital suffering from heart pain and convulsions, according to his wife.

Akhras, a resident of the city of Jenin in the north of the Israeli-occupied West Bank, was taken into custody in July under an Israeli “administrative detention” order.

Israel’s Shin Bet internal security agency says Akhras was detained after it received information that he was an operative of the Islamic Jihad militant group, an allegation his wife has denied.

He had vowed to continue to refuse solid food despite an October decision by Israel’s Supreme Court not to extend his detention beyond Nov. 26.

But after receiving what it called “a firm commitment (by Israel) not to renew his administrative detention ... Maher Al-Akhras decided to end his hunger strike starting today, Friday Nov. 6,” the Palestinian Prisoners Club, which works on behalf of prisoners, said in a statement.

“He will spend the remaining period until his release receiving treatment in the hospital,” the statement added.

The Israel Prison Service referred questions to the Israeli military, which did not immediately provide comment.

There are around 5,000 Palestinians in Israeli jails, 350 of them under administrative detention, Palestinian officials said. Israeli officials say detention without trial is sometimes necessary to protect the identities of undercover operatives.



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[US hits 'corrupt' Lebanese political leader Gibran Bassil with sanctions](#)

Author:

Reuters

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Fri, 2020-11-06 05:18

CHICAGO: Lebanese political leader Gibran Bassil has been hit by US sanctions, with Secretary of State Michael Pompeo accusing him of being "notorious for corruption."

Bassil, who has held various ministerial roles and heads the Free Patriotic Movement, has had his US assets frozen and is barred from entering the country.

Pompeo said Bassil was in violation of President Donald Trump's Executive Order 13818, which targets rights abuses and corruption under the 2015 Magnitsky Act.

The Magnitsky Act gives the president the power to block US entry and impose property sanctions against any foreign person, or entity, who is responsible for extrajudicial killings, torture, or other gross violations of internationally recognized human rights or is engaged in government corruption.

"Bassil has served in multiple high-level posts in the Lebanese government, including as minister of foreign affairs and emigrants, minister of energy and water, and minister of telecommunications," Pompeo said. "Throughout his government career, Bassil has become notorious for corruption and has been linked to the purchase of influence within Lebanese political circles. While minister of energy, Bassil was involved in approving several projects that would have steered Lebanese government funds to individuals close to him through a group of front companies."

Pompeo said the action expanded on similar sanctions imposed under Executive Order 13224 on two other former Lebanese officials, including Yusuf Finyanus, who was Lebanon's minister of transportation and public works, and Ali Hassan Khalil, who previously served as minister of public health and then later as

minister of finance.

Finyanus and Khalil “put personal interests and those of Iran-backed Hezbollah ahead of the welfare of the Lebanese people,” Pompeo said. “Through his corrupt activities, Bassil has also undermined good governance and contributed to the prevailing system of corruption and political patronage that plagues Lebanon, which has aided and abetted Hezbollah’s destabilizing activities. Lebanese political leaders should be aware that the time has long passed for them to put aside their own narrow self-interests and instead work for the people of Lebanon.”

Pompeo said he was also strengthening punishments against Bassil by applying two other powerful instruments of US sanctions, including Section 7031(c) of the Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, 2020 (Div. G, P.L. 116-94), due to his involvement in significant corruption that blocked Bassil’s travel to the US.



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[Pressure grows on Turkish government over use of earthquake taxes](#)

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Fri, 2020-11-06 00:12

JEDDAH: In the aftermath of the magnitude 7.0 earthquake in Izmir last Friday that killed at least 110 people, pressure is growing on the Turkish government to explain what happened to billions of dollars raised by a mandatory earthquake tax Turks have been paying for more than 20 years. The tax was introduced after a magnitude 7.4 quake in the Marmara region in 1999 that killed 17,000 people. The money from it is supposed to be used to fund projects to reinforce buildings and prepare cities to better cope with earthquakes.

However, experts and opposition politicians say that much of the revenue from the tax was not spent on earthquake-protection measures, and there are growing calls for detailed information about how the money was used. Turkish citizens have paid as much as 147.2 billion Turkish lira (\$17.5 billion) in earthquake taxes since 1999. The country's main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) accuses the government of misusing more than 71 billion lira that should have been used to protect cities from quakes. On Thursday, prominent Turkish journalist Fatih Altayli said that since 2011 some of these taxes might have been spent on dealing with about 5 million Syrian refugees. Turkey has received €6 billion (\$7bn) in EU aid to help the country cope with migrants and refugees.

This allegation was also raised by CHP leader Kemal Kilicdaroglu during a parliamentary speech. He asked where the earthquake taxes went and added: "But when it comes to Syrians, there is a lot of money."

Alpay Antmen, a lawyer and CHP politician, told Arab News: "This money was meant to be used for urban transformation and for making housing areas in the earthquake zones much more resilient. However, about 70 billion lira of these taxes was spent on other purposes, and this capital was transferred to the builders close to the government."

Last year, he said he submitted a parliamentary inquiry to Treasury and Finance Minister Berat Albayrak about the use of earthquake taxes. He was referred to the Interior Ministry, which told him it had no information.

“They are collecting these taxes from taxpayers as earthquake taxes, then they merge it into the general budget,” said Antmen. “The financial resources of the government are so depleted that it uses all available tools.”

AFAD, Turkey’s Disaster and Emergency Management Agency, which operates under the Interior Ministry, was harshly criticized for its response to the Izmir earthquake, after it asked people to send a text message if they needed blankets.

Allegations of corruption in the use of earthquake taxes are not new. In January, for example, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan responded to such claims by saying: “We spent it where it was meant to be spent ... we do not have the time to provide accountability for matters like this.”

The CHP is now calling the government to account and demanding full transparency about how the taxes were used.

“When you spend the money of the citizens, you have to account for it,” said Antmen. “Otherwise it is unacceptable. Tens of billions of dollars have, however, been squandered for the relief of pro-government contractors’ debt burdens.”

CHP said that had revenue from the earthquake tax been used properly, millions of buildings around the country could have been strengthened to help them survive powerful earthquakes that are expected to hit Turkey, which lies on several active fault lines, in the coming decades.



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