

Jordan's King Abdullah accepts resignation of Prime Minister Omar Al-Razzaz

Sat, 2020-10-03 22:31

AMMAN: Jordan's King Abdullah on Saturday accepted the resignation of Prime Minister Omar al Razzaz but asked him to stay on as a caretaker premier until he designates a successor to oversee parliamentary elections on Nov. 10, state media said.

The monarch dissolved parliament last Sunday at the end of its four-year term in a move that under constitutional rules meant the government had to resign within a week.

A new government will pave the way for the November vote, as the country grapples with the rapid spread of COVID-19 infections over the last month that the last government had been widely criticised for.

King Abdullah appointed Prime Minister Omar al Razzaz in the summer of 2018 to defuse the biggest protests in years over tax increases sought by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to reduce Jordan's large public debt.

The monarch hopes a wider shake-up and a new assembly could ease popular disenchantment over economic hardships worsened by the blow of COVID-19 and limits on civil and political freedoms under emergency laws.

Jordan's economy is expected to shrink by 6% this year as it tackles its worst economic crisis in many years, with unemployment and poverty aggravated by the pandemic.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Jordan](#)

[Jordan's King Abdullah II](#)

[Prime Minister Omar Al-Razzaz](#)

Jordan's monarch dissolves parliament in preparation for November election
Hundreds of schools in Jordan return to online classes as COVID-19 cases rise

[Beirut reconstruction making little progress](#)

Author:

Zaynab Khojji

ID:

1601752309128027200

Sat, 2020-10-03 22:32

BEIRUT: Reconstruction is progressing slowly in the area of Beirut devastated by the Aug. 4 explosion in the Lebanese capital's port.

"The first obstacle hindering restoration work is financial. All private and official international bodies have no confidence in the Lebanese government so they've refrained from giving aid," Jad Thabet, head of the Engineers Syndicate, told Arab News.

"Any plan assumes the existence of a government, and the international campaign we saw when the explosion happened has withdrawn due to the political situation in Lebanon. Unfortunately there's total chaos," he said, adding that winter will make matters worse.

"There are people who'll be displaced and buildings that will collapse. The rain will wash away stones and soil, and block roads and sewers. There will be subsequent disasters for the people."

The explosion of some 2,750 tons of ammonium nitrate that had been stored in Beirut's port since 2013 killed 195 people, injured about 6,500, displaced 300,000 and caused billions of dollars' worth of damage.

Thabet said he intends to travel to Paris in an attempt to urge UNESCO to provide assistance to Lebanon, but he does not expect much in light of his country's political situation.

Many residents in Beirut are complaining about the lack of repairs to their damaged homes, and have no faith in the government.

There is also a lack of progress on the judicial front, with Judge Fadi Sawan saying he "hasn't yet received any report from any security service that was carrying out investigations in the explosion site."

Among the teams that helped with the investigations were a French one and an American one.

An FBI spokesman said earlier this week that it has not been concluded that the explosion was a deliberate crime. The FBI is helping with the investigations at the Lebanese government's request, he added.

Sawan issued two arrest warrants last Thursday against the Russian captain and the owner of the ship that transported the ammonium nitrate to Beirut. The state prosecutor has asked Interpol to arrest them.

Ali Hinnawi, head of the Public Safety Committee at the Engineers Syndicate, said: "People need to return to their homes, livelihoods, work and interests. Is there anyone who listens and is aware of the importance of this?"

He added: "Social conditions are getting more difficult and winter is approaching. People are kept away from their homes due to negligence and mismanagement."



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Lebanon](#)

[Beirut](#)

Lebanon pins economic hopes on talks with Israel
Lebanon announces local lockdowns as COVID-19 cases rise

[Lebanon pins economic hopes on talks with Israel](#)

Author:

Zaynab Khojji

ID:

1601750456537915400

Sat, 2020-10-03 22:01

BEIRUT: The first session of US-mediated Lebanese-Israeli talks under UN auspices will kick off on Oct. 14 in the Lebanese border town of Naqoura. The negotiations aim to demarcate the disputed maritime border and, later, the land border. Lebanon is hoping that successful talks will provide an

appropriate security environment for oil and gas companies to do exploration work off its coast.

The first session will have low-level representation, with military and Energy Ministry officials representing Lebanon.

The UN-demarcated land border between Lebanon and Israel – the Blue Line – includes several points that are disputed by the two sides.

Lebanon signed in 2018 its first offshore oil and gas exploration and production contracts with three companies – France’s Total, Italy’s Eni and Russia’s Novatek – to explore Block 4 and Block 9 in the Mediterranean. The latter block is disputed by Israel.

Successful exploration would provide a lifeline for Lebanon’s ailing economy. The contracts signed between Lebanon and the consortium obligates the drilling of an exploration well before the end of 2020.

These companies have two options: Either proceed with the drilling despite the Israeli-Lebanese dispute, or negotiate with Beirut to postpone the exploration.

“Negotiating with Israel has important political and security results as it will lead to reducing current tensions,” said Muhannad Al-Hajj Ali, a researcher at the Carnegie Middle East Center.

He added that demarcating borders would remove the justification of the Lebanese Shiite militia Hezbollah for possessing weapons.

“Lebanon is entering a new phase. It’s possible to negotiate a final solution to the Lebanese-Israeli conflict, and then weapons will be included in Lebanon’s internal formula and, through a gradual phase, in a military strategy,” he said.

“The Lebanese Army, therefore, becomes the umbrella, and Hezbollah’s cadres may be integrated into the army or be a stand-alone wing under the army’s command, in return for a political gain that doesn’t violate the balance and parity. There’s talk of making the army’s command Shiite.”



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Lebanon](#)

[Israel](#)

Lebanon announces local lockdowns as COVID-19 cases rise
Lebanon, Israel to hold maritime border talks

[Yemen kills three Al-Qaeda militants, captures two in raid in Mahra](#)

Author:

Fri, 2020-10-02 22:10

AL-MUKALLA: Yemeni security forces, backed by the Arab coalition, killed three Al-Qaeda militants and captured two others in a raid on their hideout on Friday in Al-Ghaydah city, the capital of the western province of Mahra, local media and residents said.

Large explosions rocked many districts in the city of Al-Ghaydah on Friday morning as security forces raided a building, triggering a gunfire battle.

“The explosions began shaking the city at nearly 2.30 a.m. and lasted for

nine hours," a resident who preferred to remain anonymous told Arab News by telephone, adding that security authorities sealed off the area, preventing people from leaving their homes.

Army troops and security forces also intensified security measures and checkups at the province's main entrances. Local media said that when security forces were about to storm the building, an Al-Qaeda militant blew up his explosive-laden belt, killing himself and two others.

Two other militants surrendered during the raid, local media reported. Mohammed Ali Yasser, the governor of Mahra, did not answer Arab News calls.

Al-Qaeda in Yemen, also known as Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula or AQAP, has suffered fatal blows since early 2016 when Arab coalition-backed Yemeni forces pushed them out of their main strongholds in southern Yemen after killing a large number of their operatives. In 2015, the militants cashed in on the anarchy and security vacuum that ensued from the earlier military expansion of the Iranian-backed Houthis to seize control of the main cities in southern Yemen, including the city of Al-Mukalla, the capital of the southeastern province of Hadramout.

Prisoner swap

The internationally recognized government and pro-independence Southern Transitional Council (STC) on Thursday swapped dozens of prisoners who were captured during fighting this year.

A local army officer told Arab News that the army released 21 separatists in exchange for 37 army soldiers, including Brig. Sayf Al-Ghoufesh, the commander of 115 Brigade in Abyan. "The prisoner swap took place in Sheikh Salem area in Abyan following a successful mediation," the officer said.

In May, a major offensive by army troops triggered heavy fighting with STC forces in the southern province of Abyan and led to the death of dozens of troops on both sides. Despite the heavy fighting, neither the army nor the separatists managed to make any major military breakthrough. A Saud-led military committee is currently in the contested areas in Abyan to monitor a cease-fire agreed under the Riyadh Agreement.

Determination

Yemeni Defense Minister Lt. Gen. Mohammad Ali Al-Maqdashi said on Thursday that army troops and allied tribesmen were determined to foil Iranian designs in Yemen and put an end to the Houthi coup against the internationally recognized government.

Inspecting liberated areas in the northern province of Jouf, Al-Maqdashi thanked the Arab coalition for its military support to the Yemeni army, adding that tribesmen in Marib, Jouf and Al-Bayda have shored up army troops in their continuing battle against the Houthis.

"Today we are more confident that our people will prevail and the Houthis and the Iranian project will not survive," Al-Maqdashi said, according to the official news agency SABA.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Yemen](#)

[Al-Qaeda](#)

Saudi project clears 1,250 more mines in Yemen

[Russia to send 25m doses of coronavirus vaccine to Egypt, sources say](#)

Author:

Zaynab Khojji

ID:

1601656166069840000

Fri, 2020-10-02 19:50

CAIRO: Russian sources claim that their country will deliver 25 million doses of the Sputnik coronavirus (COVID-19) vaccine to Egypt. The Egyptian government has not confirmed the claims.

Russia's sovereign National Wealth Fund (NWF) said it had approved the delivery of 25 million doses of its potential vaccine to Egypt via FARCO-

PHARMA, which it described as a “pioneering pharmaceutical company” in Egypt. In a report published in the Lancet medical journal, Russian scientists said that those who were injected with the Sputnik vaccine had developed COVID-19 antibodies without showing any dangerous side effects. Russia licensed the vaccine for domestic use in August, becoming the first country to take such a step.

Egypt’s Ministry of Health and Population spokesman Dr. Khaled Megahed said a number of companies in different countries had submitted reports to the ministry to conduct clinical research on COVID-19 vaccines and that some of those companies had expressed a desire to cooperate with Egypt in manufacturing the vaccine. However, he said that none of those requests has been approved and all are pending further reviews.

The Ministry of Health is currently conducting third-phase clinical testing on two COVID-19 vaccines in cooperation with the Chinese companies SINOPHARM and Sinovak.

So far, 103,198 cases of COVID-19 have been recorded in Egypt, with 96,494 recoveries and 5,930 fatalities.

A number of countries have already purchased the Sputnik vaccine, including India, which has signed a deal with the NWF for the delivery of 100 million doses. India has recorded the second-highest number of cases of COVID-19 in the world.

Brazil reportedly purchased 50 million doses of the vaccine and will start testing it in October on 10,000 volunteers. Mexico purchased 32 million doses, Uzbekistan 35 million, and Nepal 25 million.

Egypt’s Minister of Health Hala Zayed took part in the third phase of a clinical trial two days ago as part of the G42 package and the For Humanity initiative, a cooperative project between the Chinese government and Emirates Healthcare Group, which includes research into potential COVID-19 vaccines as well as cooperation in manufacturing any successful vaccine. Zayed said Egypt is taking part in the third phase of two clinical trials – along with 100 other countries.

The For Humanity initiative, in cooperation with the Chinese government, involves trials in four Arab countries: Egypt, the UAE, Bahrain and Jordan.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Coronavirus](#)

[Russia](#)

[Egypt](#)

Saudi Arabia announces 29 more deaths from COVID-19Dubai announces amendments to COVID-19 travel rules