

# Thousands gather in Israel for anti-Netanyahu weekly rallies

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JERUSALEM: Thousands of Israelis demonstrated Saturday in Jerusalem in a continuation of summer-long weekend rallies demanding the resignation of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who faces a corruption trial and accusations of mishandling the coronavirus crisis.

Smaller protests also took part in other parts in Israel, including overpasses and outside Netanyahu's private house in the upscale town of Caesaria.

At the main rally in Jerusalem, protesters gathered at the entrance of the city and marched to Netanyahu's official residence, holding Israeli flags and black flags symbolizing one of the protest movements. "Enough with Division!" and "This is not politics, this is crime" read some of the placards.

Netanyahu's governing coalition temporarily survived collapse this week after an agreement with "alternate prime minister" Benny Gantz, his rival and main coalition partner, to delay a budget vote until December. If the two coalition partners had failed to agree on delaying the budget's approval, the government would have collapsed and Israel would have gone to its fourth general elections in less than two years.

Netanyahu of the Likud party and Gantz' Blue and White formed the coalition in May after three inconclusive elections, but differences between the two remain.

The coronavirus crisis is fueling the protest movement. After controlling the virus in its first stages in the spring, Israel reopened the economy too fast in May, leading to a spike of cases. Israel is struggling with a number of confirmed infections exceeding 113,000 cases and the death toll is approaching 1,000.

Business owners, day-to-day workers and smaller, vulnerable entrepreneurs who were hard hit by the pandemic-triggered closures take part in anti-Netanyahu demonstrations. The unemployment rate is hovering over 20%.

Netanyahu's three corruption cases also have added momentum to the protests. Last year, he was charged with bribery, fraud and breach of trust.

Many protesters say Netanyahu should not serve as a prime minister at a time when he is on trial for serious charges.

In January, his trial will move to a witness phase with three sessions a week.



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Israeli demonstrators stage anti-Netanyahu protest  
Israel strikes Hamas in Gaza over rockets, fire balloons

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## [Egypt announces failure to reach draft on Renaissance Dam](#)

Sat, 2020-08-29 21:55

CAIRO: The Egyptian Ministry of Irrigation has announced the failure to reach a unified draft on the Renaissance dam negotiations.

This came after the end of the current round of negotiations between Ethiopia and the downstream countries of Egypt and Sudan, during which they discussed a consensual preliminary formula for an agreement that regulates the rules for filling and operating the dam.

The Egyptian Ministry of Water Resources said in a statement that a meeting was held on Saturday, based on the outcomes of the African mini-summit,

headed by the water ministers from the three countries under the auspices of the African Union (AU) and in the presence of observers from the member states of the AU Union Office, the US and the EU, and experts of the AU Commission, to discuss reaching an agreement.

The ministry stated that the incompatibility between the three countries continued on many legal and technical points regarding the initial compiled version of the draft prepared, as it had not yet lived up to its presentation to the AU office body headed by South Africa.

The ministry revealed that after a lengthy discussion, the water ministers agreed that each individual country would send a letter to the South African president that included its vision for the next stage of the negotiations.

The Sudanese Ministry of Irrigation stated that the current negotiating round ended without setting a new date for its resumption.

The ministry said: "There is a need for political will to reach an agreement. The continuation of the negotiations in their current form will not lead to achieving practical results."

Sudanese Minister of Irrigation Yasser Abbas announced that the merger of the proposals of Sudan, Egypt and Ethiopia in one draft on the Renaissance Dam had stalled.

He added: "During the session, the experts of the three countries presented a report on the work of the committees in an attempt to come up with a unified draft agreement from the combined draft of the proposals submitted by the three countries."

"After a careful evaluation of the development of the negotiations and a review of the work of the expert teams over the past days, it became clear that the process of merging the three drafts had stalled," he said.

Former Minister of Irrigation Dr. Muhammad Nasruddin Allam said on Friday that the main differences between the three countries were about filling and operating the Renaissance Dam in periods of drought, the extent of the legal obligation of the agreement, the clause of dispute settlement, future Ethiopian projects and the rights of Addis Ababa in a water share from the Blue Nile.

He said: "It is clear that the technical disputes are limited compared to the legal and political disputes, and that the upcoming negotiations, if there is any intention to continue them, must be political with technical support, led by, for example, the minister of foreign affairs."

A member of the former Sudanese delegation to the negotiations, Dr. Ahmed Al-Mufti, said that his country should consider the Ethiopian intransigence and the storage of water without agreement, a violation of international law and the directives of the UN Security Council and the AU, and a threat to international peace and security, which gives Sudan the right to self-defense under Article 51 of the UN Charter.

He also called on Khartoum to demand that Ethiopia stop any activities related to the dam until an agreement was reached that satisfied the three parties, with the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam being emptied of the water of the first, illegal filling, during the coming drought season.

Al-Mufti also requested that the UN Security Council nominate a UN delegate to oversee the negotiations, on the condition that Ethiopia did not return to any activity related to the Renaissance Dam until after the conclusion of a binding agreement that serves the interest of the three parties.

A US State Department official said on Friday, that “the work done by Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan during the past months shows the possibility of reaching a balanced and fair agreement regarding the Renaissance Dam, which takes the interests of the three countries into consideration.”

The official, who asked not to be named, said in statements carried by Sky News Arabia that “Washington is convinced that a solution can be reached through constructive dialogue and cooperation between the parties. The United States is committed to staying in contact with the three countries until an agreement is reached.”

A Pentagon official had previously refused to confirm the accuracy of the Foreign Policy magazine’s report that Washington had frozen aid to Addis Ababa worth \$130 million due to the Renaissance Dam crisis.



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Renaissance Dam meetings held to bridge negotiation gap  
Sudan asks for delay in Renaissance Dam talks

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## [Libya unity government names new defense officials after protests](#)

Author:

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TRIPOLI: The head of Libya's unity government on Saturday appointed a new defense minister and army chief, after days of protests against poor public services and living conditions.

The decrees followed the announcement hours earlier by Libya's UN-recognized Government of National Accord (GNA) that it had suspended its interior minister after militia gunmen fired on peaceful demonstrators last week. GNA chief Fayez Al-Sarraj promoted deputy and acting defense minister Salah Eddine Al-Namrush to the ministry's top job and appointed General Mohammad Ali Al-Haddad as head of the army.

Haddad hails from Misrata, 200 kilometers (125 miles) east of Tripoli, the home of powerful armed groups that have fought on the side of the GNA in the battle against eastern-based military strongman Khalifa Haftar, who tried to seize the capital last year.

The appointments come days after Sarraj announced a government reshuffle in response to growing popular discontent in Tripoli and other western Libyan cities under its control.

Hundreds of demonstrators staged rallies from Sunday in Tripoli against corruption and extended shortages of power, water and fuel in the oil-rich North African country. Gunmen fired on crowds on several occasions.

In response, the GNA said Interior Minister Fathi Bashagha "has been temporarily suspended" pending an inquiry "on his statements about the protests and incidents in Tripoli and other cities."

Bashagha, who was visiting the GNA's main backer Turkey, said in a statement posted on the interior ministry's Facebook page early on Saturday that he was ready to submit to an investigation.

But he demanded any hearing be broadcast live for the sake of transparency. He is set to return to Tripoli on Saturday evening.

Libya has endured almost a decade of violent chaos since the 2011 NATO-backed uprising that toppled and killed veteran dictator Muammar Qaddafi, with the GNA and a Haftar-backed eastern administration now vying for power against a backdrop of dozens of local conflicts.



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UN expresses concern over 'dramatic turn' in Libya crisis  
Rights group urges release of abducted Libyan protesters

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## [Deadly firefight in Lebanon sparks warnings of more sectarian trouble](#)

Sat, 2020-08-29 01:19

BEIRUT: A deadly battle between two major Lebanese sectarian groups has prompted warnings of more violence as the country is pushed to the breaking point by a financial meltdown and political tensions.

Two people – a 13-year-old Lebanese Sunni boy and a Syrian man – were killed in the Khaldeh area south of the capital in the shootout on Thursday night. Machine guns and rocket-propelled grenades were used in the fighting, which witnesses said lasted four hours.

A Sunni Arab tribe to which the boy belonged accused members of the Iran-

backed Shiite group Hezbollah of opening fire.

The Lebanese army, which was heavily deployed in the area on Friday, said the problem spiralled out of a row over a poster put up by Shiites.

Lebanese President Michel Aoun has set Aug. 31 as a date for binding parliamentary consultations to designate a new prime minister to succeed Hassan Diab's government.

Sources close to the former leaders told Arab News: "There is a decision not to give President Aoun political authority, and we have to wait to see who will respond to Aoun's invitation to the consultations on Monday in light of the significant political dispute with him."

Leader of the Progressive Socialist Party Walid Jumblatt said: "After a delay in calling for consultations and violating the Taif Agreement, it appears that some political forces are already examining a new constitution, and some are loudly calling for it."

## **FASTFACT**

Former Prime Ministers Tammam Salam, Saad Hariri and Najib Mikati have shown no interest in heading the new government.

Aoun objected to Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri's proposal to nominate Hariri to head the next government, and Hezbollah objected to nominating Nawaf Salam, a judge on the International Court of Justice in The Hague, and Mohammed Baasiri, who was vice-governor of the Banque du Liban and the secretary of the Special Investigation Commission fighting money laundering.

Aoun's office released a schedule of the consultations that will begin Monday morning and end in the afternoon. The person who gets the largest backing from parliamentary blocs and members will be asked by Aoun to form a new Cabinet.

French President Emmanuel Macron will next week meet iconic singer Fairuz and members of Lebanon's political leadership as he returns to the country in search of serious reform in the wake of the devastating Beirut port blast.

Macron will be in Lebanon on Monday and Tuesday for his second visit in less than a month.

Fairuz, 85, is one of the rare figures in Lebanon who is admired across the multi-confessional country.

Karim Emile Bitar, a political science professor in France and Lebanon, tweeted it was an "excellent decision" by Macron to meet Fairuz, describing her as "arguably the most iconic, dignified and consensual Lebanese figure."

An official in the French presidency said that Macron's visit to Beirut aims "to pressure Lebanon's political leaders to move forward in forming a government that can implement urgent reforms. The president will not give up."



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UN rights expert urges international help for Lebanon to 'avert hunger crisis' Global aid for Lebanon depends on 'very serious' reforms: Canadian FM

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## [Israel strikes Hamas in Gaza over rockets, fire balloons](#)

Author:

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GAZA: Israeli tanks and warplanes struck Hamas positions in Gaza on Friday

and Hamas forces fired half-a-dozen rockets toward southern Israel, as a three-week-old flare-up showed no let-up despite international mediation efforts, the military said.

There were no reports of casualties on either side.

Warning sirens sounded before dawn in Israeli communities near the border as the pre-dawn airstrikes and shelling prompted Hamas to launch a salvo of six rockets in retaliation.

Hamas, which has controlled Gaza since 2007, said the rockets were a "direct response to the escalation by the Israeli occupier."

Israel's military said it struck underground infrastructure and a military post belonging to Hamas overnight in response to incendiary balloons launched from the Palestinian enclave that have burned Israeli farmland.

Gaza militants then fired six rockets toward Israel, the military said, drawing a second round of Israeli strikes which hit a Hamas armed training camp.

An Israeli military spokesman said he did not have any information on where the Gaza rockets landed, but that none of them were intercepted by its Iron Dome system.

Hamas has been trying to pressure Israel to ease its blockade of Gaza and allow more investment, in part by letting Palestinians launch dozens of helium balloons carrying incendiary material toward southern Israel in recent weeks. But so far Israel's response has been to tighten the blockade.

The Israelis are reported to have said they are willing to resume fuel deliveries for the power plant and ease their blockade if there is an end to the fire balloons.

## **FASTFACT**

**Israel has bombed Gaza almost daily since Aug. 6, for the past two weeks, saying it would not tolerate the balloons.**

The fire bombs, crude devices fitted to balloons, inflated condoms or plastic bags, have triggered more than 400 blazes in southern Israel, according to fire brigade figures.

Mediators from the UN, Egypt and Qatar have been working to restore calm. An Egyptian delegation has been shuttling between the two sides to try to broker a renewal of the truce.

Israel has bombed Gaza almost daily since Aug. 6, for the past two weeks, saying it would not tolerate the balloons.

With tension high, Israel has closed its only commercial crossing with Gaza, banned sea access and halted fuel imports into the coastal strip, leading to its only power plant shutting down last week.

Health officials have voiced concern that the power plant shutdown could aggravate a novel coronavirus outbreak in impoverished Gaza, which is home to 2 million Palestinians.

Financial aid for the impoverished territory from gas-rich Qatar has been a major component of the latest truce first agreed upon in November 2018 and renewed several times since.

But Israel also undertook other measures to alleviate unemployment of more than 50 percent in the territory of some 2 million people. Disagreements over their implementation have fueled repeated flare-ups on the border. Such flare-ups escalated into major conflicts in 2008, 2012 and 2014, and mediators have been striving to prevent a new war.



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Israel lists first commercial passenger flight to UAE Turkey-Israeli ties fragile under the shadow of Hamas