

Angry Lebanese set up mock gallows amid calls for 'revenge' over blast

Sat, 2020-08-08 23:00

BEIRUT: Thousands of protesters set up a mock gallows in Beirut's Martyr's Square on Saturday and demanded "revenge" against politicians widely held responsible for the deadly explosion that devastated large swathes of the Lebanese capital.

At least 60 people are still missing after the massive blast in Beirut port, which killed more than 150 people, injured 5,000 others and left thousands homeless.

As the dust settles from the disaster, the political fallout is intensifying.

Police fired teargas and rubber bullets at thousands of people who gathered in the capital calling for the downfall of the country's political elite, chanting:

"The people want the regime to fall."

More than 100 protesters were injured in the clashes.

After demonstrators set up the mock gallows, effigies of political leaders, including former prime minister Saad Hariri and Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah, were displayed in some of the most explicit signs of public anger seen in years.

Police shot live ammunition in the air in an attempt to disperse the protesters, who responded by hurling rocks and charging security cordons.

One of the protesters, who gave her name only as Lina, said: "We came from Hasbaya in solidarity with Beirut. We came to stand together in grief and offer condolence for the loss of sons and daughters.

"We came to tell all the leaders to leave so that we can rebuild what you have destroyed, what happened is because of your negligence and greed," she said.

Meanwhile, the three-member Kataeb party parliamentary bloc resigned on Saturday in protest at the blast, bringing to five the number of MPs to quit since the disaster.

In an emotional speech during a funeral service for a top party official who died in Tuesday's blast, party leader Samy Gemayel announced his resignation and that of the two other MPs.

Independent MP Paula Yacoubian also resigned, while MP Michel Daher announced his withdrawal from the Strong Lebanon bloc led by the Free Patriotic Movement head Gebran Bassil.

FASTFACT

Effigies of political leaders, including that of Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah, were displayed in some of the most explicit signs of public anger seen in years.

As international aid flows into shell-shocked Beirut, Arab League Secretary General Ahmed Aboul Gheit, Turkish Vice President Fuad Oktay and European Council President Charles Michel arrived in the city to deliver relief aid and offer support.

After meeting President Michel Aoun and inspecting damage at the Foreign Ministry, near the port, Gheit said he would ask the Economic and Social Council to meet in the next two weeks to “examine the situation in Lebanon and how to help.”

He described the situation as “a disaster,” and said that “we must recognize that the Lebanese situation is difficult and complex.”

The Netherlands Foreign Ministry announced that the wife of Dutch envoy to Lebanon Jan Waltmans died of wounds sustained in the blast.

The Syrian Embassy in Lebanon said that 43 Syrians were among those killed in the explosion.

Military teams working at the blast site carried out tests for chemical, radioactive or biological agents on Saturday, Col. Roger Khoury told Arab News during a media tour.

Rescue teams are working round the clock looking for cell phone signals in the search for those missing after the blast.

However, the teams say they are being hampered by debris from the explosion, including concrete rubble from grain silos destroyed in the blast.

Military divers searching the port and nearby ocean for victims of the blast found a body hurled 500 meters by the force of the blast.

By early Saturday, a total of 61 relief planes had landed at Beirut airport carrying medical and relief supplies as well as food, Ministry of Defense Operations Room Commander Brig. Gen. Jean Nohra told Arab News.

He said that medical supplies are being distributed in coordination with the Ministry of Health.

Supplies are being stored at the headquarters of the Central Military Medical Authority in Beirut before being distributed, he said.



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Lebanon prime minister Diab to call for early polls after deadly Beirut blast
Canada launches a Lebanon relief fund after Beirut blast

[Yemen's attorney general orders probe into Aden ammonium nitrate reports](#)

Author:

Sat, 2020-08-08 22:14

AL-MUKALLA: Yemen's attorney general on Friday ordered prosecutors in the southern port city of Aden to launch a quick probe into reports about tons of ammonium nitrate abandoned in the city's seaport for several years.

In a letter addressed to Aden province's chief appeal prosecutor, Ali Ahmed Al-Awash ordered an investigation to determine the veracity of media reports that 130 containers of ammonium nitrate, the same explosive materials that devastated Beirut last week, had been abandoned in the seaport for some time.

Yemeni journalist Fatehi Ben Lazerg, the editor of the Aden Al-Ghad news site and newspaper, published a story on Friday saying that roughly 4,900 tons of ammonium nitrate stored in 130 containers had been gathering dust at the port for the last three years.

The story prompted Yemen Gulf of Aden Ports Corporation, a government body that runs Aden seaport, to strongly deny storing ammonium nitrate at the site, saying the reporter was referring to old seized shipments of 140 containers of the organic compound urea, which, like ammonium nitrate, is used as an agricultural fertilizer.

The corporation claimed the material was not "explosive or radioactive". Urea nitrate, however, has been used in making bombs across the world, including those detonated in the 1993 World Trade Center bombings.

Ben Lazerg later fleshed out the story by publishing a letter from Brig. Abdul Salam Al-Ameri, the chief of Aden Free Zone police, from April 12, 2012 and addressed to the Saudi-led coalition leadership, complaining that the confiscated containers were due to expire and might "cause great harm" to the seaport infrastructures and workers.

"The ball is in their court now," Ben Lazerg told Arab News, referring to the government officials, saying that he published the story to alert the public about the hazardous materials.

On Friday, Yemeni lawmakers joined voices that demanded an immediate investigation into allegations of stranded containers of ammonium nitrate. Ali Hussein Ashal, a member of the Parliament of Yemen, sent a letter to the government requesting clarifications about the presence of 130 40-foot containers of fertilizer abandoned in Aden seaport, and the reasons for importing the materials.

Mohammed Alawi Amzrabeh, the chairman of Yemen Gulf of Aden Ports Corporation, told Arab News they kept the containers of "safe" agricultural fertilizers in the port after the Saudi-led coalition rejected the shipment's entry into the country. Despite the corporation's assurance that the materials in question do not pose a risk, several government officials told Arab News that the Saudi-led coalition and the internationally recognized government had classified urea fertilizer as an explosive material that could be used by the Iran-backed Houthis for military purposes, banning Yemeni seaports from importing it without prior permission.

In February, Arab News reported that the Yemeni coast guard seized a ship carrying 20 tons of urea fertilizer off the country's west coast. State media outlets have also reported multiple confiscations of urea shipments on land in Yemen, destined for the Houthi-controlled territories in the north of the country.



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Yemenis fear decaying oil tanker could cause major disaster
Yemen asks UNESCO to help save heritage sites

[Canada launches a Lebanon relief fund after Beirut blast](#)

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Sat, 2020-08-08 18:16

MONTREAL: The Canadian government announced on Saturday the launch of a Lebanon relief fund, calling on citizens to give generously to victims of the massive explosion that killed more than 150 people and injured 6,000 in Beirut.

“Every dollar donated by individual Canadians between August fourth and 24th will be matched by the government of Canada... up to a maximum of Can\$2 million,” or \$1.5 million, said International Development Minister Karina Gould at a news conference.

The money will go to the Humanitarian Coalition, which brings together a dozen Canadian humanitarian organizations on the ground in Lebanon, she said. It will use its expertise to distribute the aid in areas such as water supply, sanitation, food and shelter.

“I encourage Canadians to donate to the Lebanon Matching Fund to help save lives and meet the urgent needs of the affected population,” said the minister, adding it was the best way for citizens to help.

The assistance is part of the Can\$5 million aid package announced earlier this week by Ottawa.

A group of Lebanese-Canadian businessmen has announced plans to raise at least \$2.5 million to help the disaster-stricken population.

Tuesday’s massive explosion leveled Beirut port and killed at least 158 people.

A fire at the port had ignited a large stock of ammonium nitrate, triggering an explosion that was felt as far away as Cyprus and destroyed entire neighborhoods.

It was widely perceived as a direct consequence of corruption and incompetence, an egregious case of callousness on the part of an already reviled ruling elite.



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Lebanese diaspora in London protest in support of Beirut protestersRafiq

[‘Your time is up’: Thousands protest against Netanyahu over economy, corruption allegations](#)

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Sat, 2020-08-08 18:17

JERUSALEM: Thousands of Israelis rallied outside Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's residence in Jerusalem on Saturday as anger mounted over corruption allegations and his handling of the coronavirus crisis.

"Your time is up," read the giant letters projected onto a building at the protest site, as demonstrators waved Israeli flags and called on Netanyahu to resign over what they say is his failure to protect jobs and businesses affected by the pandemic.

The protest movement has intensified in recent weeks, with critics accusing Netanyahu of being distracted by a corruption case against him, in which he denies wrongdoing.

The right-wing leader, who was sworn in for a fifth term in May after a closely-fought election, has accused the protesters of trampling democracy and the Israeli media of encouraging dissent.

Protests have stretched beyond Netanyahu's official residence in Jerusalem, with many Israelis gathering on bridges and highway junctions across the country.

On a busy highway overpass north of Israel's commercial hub of Tel Aviv, demonstrators waved black flags and chanted slogans while cars honked their horns from the road below.

One protester, Yael, said she had lost her job at a Tel Aviv restaurant and that government aid has been slow to come.

"You'd think that a once-in-a-lifetime crisis like this would push Netanyahu to act, and it hasn't. Enough is enough," she said, declining to give her last name.

Israel in May lifted a partial lockdown that had flattened an infection curve. But a second surge of COVID-19 cases and ensuing restrictions has seen Netanyahu's approval ratings plunge to under 30%.

Many restrictions have since been lifted to revive business activity, but unemployment hovers at 21.5% and the economy is expected to contract by 6% in 2020.



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Netanyahu warns foes after Israeli retaliatory strikes in Syria
Israeli artist takes aim at Netanyahu with life-size statue

[Seth Rogen's Israel comments highlight fraught diaspora ties](#)

Sat, 2020-08-08 01:24

TEL AVIV: It began as a lighthearted conversation between two Jewish comedians, riffing on a podcast about the idiosyncrasies of their shared heritage. But after talk turned to Israel, it didn't take long for Marc Maron and Seth Rogen to spark an uproar.

Their comments about Israel – especially Rogen saying the country “doesn't make sense” – infuriated many Israel supporters and highlighted the country's tenuous relationship with young, progressive Jewish critics in the diaspora.

Israel has long benefited from financial and political support from American Jews. But in recent years the country has faced a groundswell of opposition from young progressives, disillusioned by Israel's aggressive West Bank settlement building, its perceived exclusion of liberal streams of Judaism and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's cosy relationship with President Donald Trump.

"What Seth Rogen said is par for the course among our generation and the Israeli government has to wake up and see that their actions have consequences," said Yonah Lieberman, spokesman for If Not Now, an American Jewish organization opposed to Israel's entrenched occupation of the West Bank.

Rogen's remarks follow a dramatic shift by an influential Jewish American commentator who recently endorsed the idea of a democratic entity of Jews and Palestinians living with equal rights on the land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. Peter Beinart's argument that a two-state solution – Israel and Palestine – is no longer possible sent shock waves through the Jewish establishment and Washington policymaking circles.

For many Jews, Israel is an integral part of their identity, on religious grounds or as an insurance policy in the wake of the Holocaust and in a modern age of resurgent anti-Semitism. But polls have shown that while most American Jews identify with Israel and feel a connection to the country, that support has waned over recent years, especially among millennials.

Some have even embraced the Palestinian-led movement calling for boycotts, divestment and sanctions against Israel to protest what it says is Israeli oppression of Palestinians. Israel accuses the movement of waging a campaign to delegitimize its very existence.

SPEEDREAD

Their comments about Israel – especially Rogen saying the country 'doesn't make sense' – highlighted the country's tenuous relationship with young, progressive Jewish critics in the diaspora.

In the podcast, Rogen, who appeared in such smash comedies as "Superbad" and "Knocked Up," talked about attending Jewish schools and Jewish summer camp while growing up in Vancouver. He said his parents met on an Israeli kibbutz. As they continued to chat, Rogen appeared to question why Israel was established.

"You don't keep all your Jews in one basket. I don't understand why they did that. It makes no sense whatsoever," Rogen said. "You don't keep something you're trying to preserve all in one place especially when that place has proven to be pretty volatile. I'm trying to keep all these things safe. I'm going to put them in my blender and hope that that's the best place to, that'll do it."

Rogen then said he was "fed a huge amount of lies" about Israel during his youth. "They never tell you that 'oh, by the way, there were people there.' They make it seem like, 'the (expletive) door's open.'"

Maron and Rogen both joked about how frightened they were about the responses they would receive from Israel's defenders. Their concerns were justified.

Rogen's comments immediately lit up "Jewish Twitter." They unleashed a flurry of critical op-eds in Jewish and Israeli media. And they prompted Rogen to call Isaac Herzog, the head of the Jewish Agency, a major nonprofit that works to foster relations between Israel and the Jewish world.

In a Facebook post, Herzog said he and Rogen had a frank and open conversation. He said Rogen "was misunderstood and apologized" for his comments.

"I told him that many Israelis and Jews around the world were personally hurt by his statement, which implies the denial of Israel's right to exist," Herzog wrote.

In an interview with the Israeli daily Haaretz, Rogen said he called Herzog at the urging of his mother and he denied apologizing. He said the comments were made in jest and misconstrued.

"I don't want Jews to think that I don't think Israel should exist. And I understand how they could have been led to think that," he said.

Rogen also said he is a "proud Jew." He said his criticism was aimed at the education he received, and he believed he could have been given a deeper picture of a "complex" situation.

Ironically, Rogen was on the podcast to promote his new movie, "An American Pickle," about a Jewish immigrant to the US at the start of the 20th century who falls into a vat of pickle brine and emerges 100 years later. He called the project a "very Jewish film."

Lieberman, from If Not Now, said the uproar shows "how much the conversation has changed" about Israel among American Jews.

Shmuel Rosner, a senior fellow with the Jewish People Policy Institute, a Jerusalem think tank, said Israel should not be expected to change its "security and foreign policies" based on growing estrangement from Jews overseas.

But he said it can take realistic steps to close the gap, such as establishing a pluralistic prayer site at the Western Wall, long a sticking point between Israel's Orthodox establishment and more liberal Jews in the US "It's a challenge for Israel. It's inconvenient. We want everyone to love us, especially other Jews," he said. "Israel can do certain things to make it somewhat better."



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