

Financial Action Task Force tightens screws on Tehran over terror financing

Sat, 2020-02-22 02:20

PARIS: An international agency monitoring terrorism funding announced tough new financial scrutiny of Iran on Friday and added seven countries to a watch list.

Pakistan, meanwhile, won a reprieve from the Financial Action Task Force at its meetings in Paris this week. The monitoring body gave Pakistan's government another four months to crack down on terrorism financing and did not put the country on a damaging "black list."

Iran and North Korea are the only two countries currently on the agency's black list. That means international financial transactions with those countries are closely scrutinized, making it costly and cumbersome to do business with them. International creditors can also place restrictions on lending to black-listed countries.

The FATF decided on Friday to further tighten the screws on Iran, imposing extra measures that could require audits or more transactions and make it even harder for foreign investors to do business there.

The group made the decision because Iran failed to fulfill its promises to the FATF despite repeated warnings. In a statement, the organization said that Iran hasn't done enough to criminalize terrorist financing, require transparency in wire transfers or freeze terrorist assets targeted by UN sanctions.

Opinion

This section contains relevant reference points, placed in (Opinion field)

The head of Iran's central bank, Abdolnasser Hemmati, said the decision will not affect the country.

"Such incidents will create no problem for Iran's foreign trade and currency," he said in a statement. Hemmati said the FATF decision was based on the "enmity" of the US and Israel toward Iran.

Pakistan, meanwhile, has been trying to get off the FATF gray list, the color code for countries that are only partially fulfilling international rules for fighting terrorism financing and money laundering.

Pakistan's government has been working to shore up the country's faltering economy and attract foreign investment and loans, making the FATF's assessment especially important.

The FATF said that Pakistan had fulfilled 14 of 27 steps to get off the watch list, but still must do more to track money transfers and investigate and prosecute terrorism financiers.

The Pakistani government said in a statement that it “stands committed for taking all necessary action required” to fulfill the remaining steps. “A strategy in this regard has been formulated and is being implemented.”

The Financial Action Task Force also put seven new countries on its gray list because of gaps or failures in stemming the financing of terrorist groups or money laundering. The countries – Albania, Barbados, Jamaica, Mauritius, Myanmar, Nicaragua and Uganda – were ordered to take a series of legal and other steps to be removed from the list and avoid further financial punishment.



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US blacklists five Iranian officials for impeding ‘fair’ elections

A Jordanian NGO takes on social ills in Amman neighborhoods

Sat, 2020-02-22 00:55

CAIRO: A local initiative in Jordan is rejuvenating neighborhoods in the kingdom's capital, bringing together communities and encouraging residents to work collectively to improve their environment.

The Harra, an NGO which translates into "neighborhood," has so far renovated five areas in Amman under the guidance of its founder, the social entrepreneur Mohammed Abu Amerah.

When Abu Amerah returned to Jordan after many years away in 2005, he was saddened to find his local community in disarray – epitomized by ugly concrete boxes and overflowing litter – and quickly decided to take action to reinvigorate the local area.

Abu Amerah believes that traditional "harra" life in Jordan has been compromised by Amman's explosive growth, as it struggles to contain growing numbers of refugees from across the country's borders.

"A class system has developed, encouraging discrimination and degradation of the community," he said.

Abu Amerah said he was spurred into action when he heard the news that his neighbor had been shot at in a dispute over a parking space.

"The idea for Harra came to me slowly. I saw that the lack of elegant structures in the community reflected not just the public space, but also created a negative psychological space among inhabitants."

The Harra founder said that worn-out built environments not only lack "function" but also breed discontent, insecurity and even violence.

Abu Amerah has since created a Harra "identity plan" which he uses as a guide to breathe life and renewed confidence into communities.

The Harra rejuvenation strategy, which is funded by Jordanian aid, is based around physical, environmental, educational and social aspects – which are then mobilized into the community.

It has taken Abu Amerah 12 years to successfully rejuvenate five harras in Amman: Al-Ashrafiyah, Yarmouk, Jabal Jouffah, Al-Nasr and Wihdat refugee camp, which are some of the most deprived areas in the Jordanian capital.

The Harra Initiative brings neighborhood residents together to develop and implement rehabilitation projects that address common problems.

"The rehabilitation projects ultimately lead to improving the living conditions in the neighborhood," said Abu Amerah.

The main drive in Harra is the community itself and the need to show members of the locality how to use their power to change their own lives and those of their children and their neighborhood.

This starts with the physical rebuilding of the neighborhood, including the renovation of walls and streets, adding address numbers to houses and collecting garbage, which lasts between 12 and 14 months. But the purpose of this phase is also to build social nets in the Jordanian community.

The process of rehabilitation brings with it the creation of neighborhood associations, the establishment of recycling and energy saving projects or creating ways of generating income.

“The methodology rests on a community participatory approach, which unlocks residents’ own innovative thinking and creative energies,” said Abu Amerah. “Harra interventions are designed to foster a sense of accountability and collective ownership.”

The social entrepreneur said the benefits of the Harra programs have been very tangible. “The programs have provided the initial motivation and leadership needed to inspire change within each targeted community.

“They have also promoted recognition and sensitivity towards social, behavioral processes, cultural and economic diversity.”

Abu Amerah said that reclaiming the public space has helped to reduce violence, created a community voice and promoted social cohesion and resilience among communities.

“Creating the sense of collective ownership among residents was the biggest challenge of all,” Abu Amerah said.

“We have successfully created the voice of harra to address and influence the issues that shape our reality and future in all aspects.”

- *The Middle East Exchange is one of the Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum Global Initiatives that was launched to reflect the vision of the UAE prime minister and ruler of Dubai in the field of humanitarian and global development, to explore the possibility of changing the status of the Arab region. The initiative offers the press a series of articles on issues affecting Arab societies.*



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A female entrepreneur brings crowdclending to Saudi ArabiaBank helps Jazan's budding entrepreneurs with \$67 million funding

['Who controls Lebanon's destiny?' asks former president](#)

Author:

Sat, 2020-02-22 00:43

BEIRUT: Former Lebanese President Amine Gemayel asked: "Who controls power now in Lebanon? Is it the legitimate authority, or illegitimate armed groups? Who controls Lebanon's destiny? Is it legitimate armed institutions, or illegitimate ones – whether Hezbollah or any other group?"

Gemayel added that the state is "searching for solutions away from legal and financial ones related to the well-being of the country, by (working) alongside the Central Bank of Lebanon to nurture the treasury and financing

its expenditure from private bank deposits of residents or expatriates.” Gemayel also complained about “the absence of good governance and total absence of the political authority with regards to handling the current crisis in Lebanon,” noting the “indifference of many states, and the lack of interest of brotherly and friendly states in helping Lebanon under the current government and situation.”

Lebanon’s ongoing crisis is set to worsen in the near future, with a \$1.2 billion Eurobond due on March 9. Its total debt is around \$30 billion, divided between banks and investment funds.

On Wednesday, Lebanon formally requested technical assistance from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to tackle its economic crisis. Minister of Finance Ghazi Wazni said meetings with an IMF delegation in Beirut are still in their “consultative stage to help Lebanon set a rescue plan.”

His media office said: “Deliberations are taking into consideration all available data and possible options based on the delegation’s evaluation of the situation in Lebanon.”

Wazni claimed: “Lebanon has set a plan to face and resolve the crisis, and (has asked) that the IMF give its point of view in light of the current situation regarding the challenges and ways to overcome them, in addition to the economic and financial reforms that Lebanon needs.”

Twelve legal and financial consulting firms have reportedly made offers to give advice on the best options to restructure Lebanon’s debt and prepare for negotiations with creditors.

Lebanese President Michel Aoun told Ján Kubis, the UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon, “Solutions are in place to resolve the financial and economic crisis in collaboration with the IMF.”

According to Aoun’s media office, “The measures that will be adopted aim at protecting the finances of Lebanon and the rights and interests of its citizens.”

FASTFACT

On Wednesday, Lebanon formally requested technical assistance from the IMF to tackle its economic crisis.

Kubis urged the Lebanese authorities to implement the promised reforms and gave his assurance that the UN “supports the reforms that the government intends to undertake.”

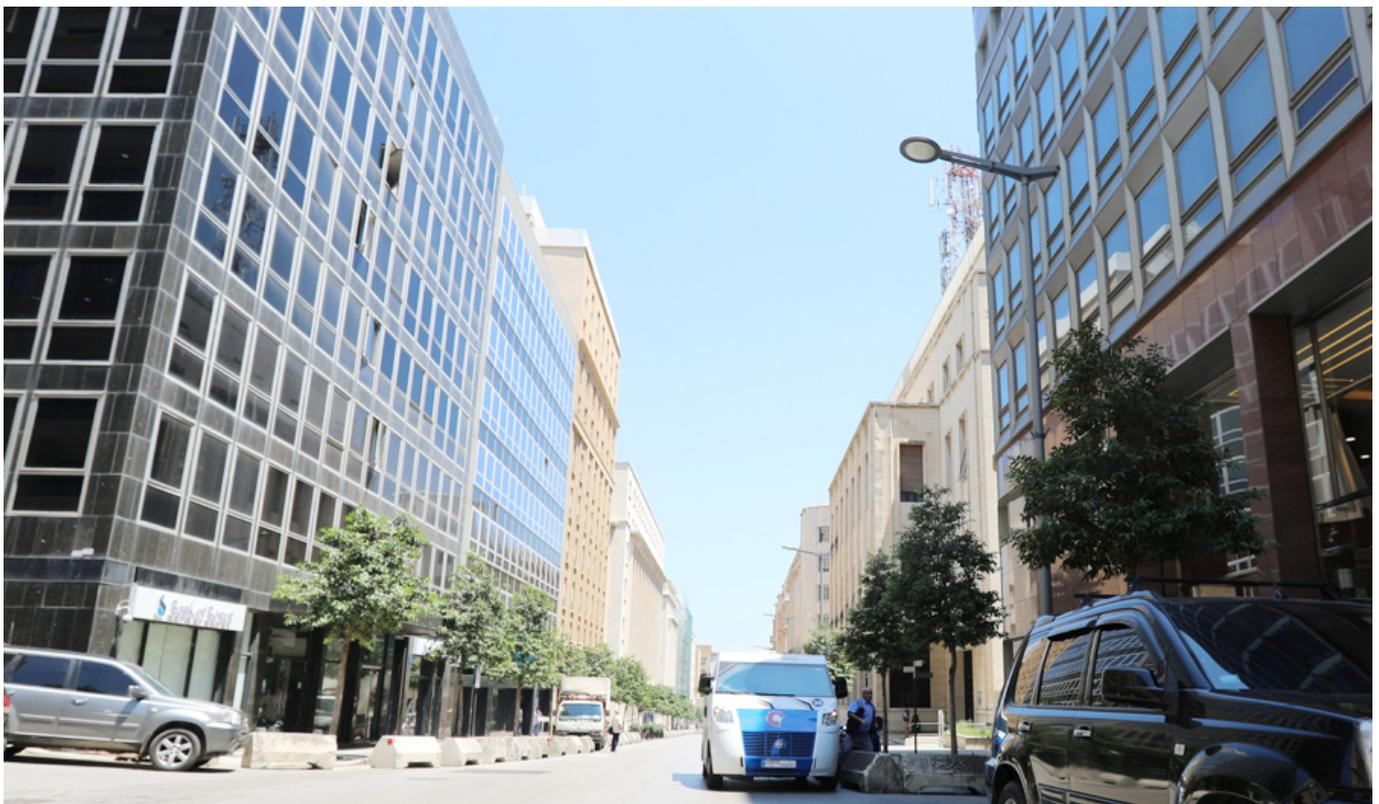
Prime Minister Hassan Diab said: “The crisis that we are passing through today is unprecedented in the history of Lebanon – even in the 1980s and 1990s, when the Lebanese Pound faced sharp decline, the situation was different. Lebanon is going through a turning point in its history and our government is working day and night to find solutions within 30 days to a 30-year crisis.”

As the government is reportedly considering postponing the payment of the Eurobond and negotiating a restructuring of its debt, the exchange rate of the dollar to the LBP remains as high as LBP2,450 or 2,500 for \$1 in exchange offices, while the official exchange rate remains LBP1,515 for \$1.

The Lebanese Bakeries and Ovens Unions warned on Friday of “new burdens due

to the increase of the US Dollar exchange rate,” and called on the state to “satisfy the country’s wheat needs, as citizens cannot bear more pressure.” Nicolas Chammas, president of the Beirut Traders Association, expressed the concern and anger of the commercial sector regarding the Lebanese political class. “Ever since the war in Syria erupted nine years ago, our situation has been in steady decline due to displacement, smuggling, unfair competition and mismanagement by the state,” he said. “One week before protests erupted, more than 100,000 merchants staged sit-ins in front of their shops and (gave warnings about) the serious situation they were passing through.” The protests, he claimed, “have exacerbated our problems due to the impossibility of transferring money, and restrictions on bank deposits which made us strive for survival.”

On the streets, tensions were again running high this week, as supporters of the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) staged a protest in front of the Central Bank in Hamra Street. FPM demonstrators clashed with supporters of the Progressive Socialist Party (PSP) for the first time – due to rumors that the FPM supporters intended to move their protest to the nearby house of PSP leader Walid Jumblatt – before the army intervened to separate the two sides. Jumblatt later asked his supporters to disperse.



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Lebanon confirms first coronavirus case as death toll hits 4 in Iran ‘Social explosion’ in Lebanese camps imminent, warn officials

Jordanians voice anger at Mideast peace plan

Author:

Sat, 2020-02-22 00:29

AMMAN: Widespread protests against the US Mideast peace plan continued for a fifth Friday in Jordan with Palestinians, Jordanians and other nationals massing on Jordan's streets to voice their support for Palestine.

Hundreds of protesters responded to a call to defeat the so-called "deal of the century" by gathering outside the US Embassy in Amman and chanting slogans, such as "Jerusalem is a red line; the deal of the century will disappear forever; Amman is the twin city of Jerusalem; and we will not mortgage ourselves to the occupation and become partners in the crime."

Murad Adaileh, secretary-general of the Islamic Action Front, told Arab News that Jordanians traveled from around the country to join protests against US President Donald Trump's peace deal.

"This plan and those who adopted it are against Jordan and its people. This morning Jordanians came out in their thousands for the dawn prayers to express their commitment not to give up on our holy places," he said.

In Palestine, thousands gathered at Al-Aqsa Mosque during pre-dawn prayers to stage a seventh Friday of demonstrations.

Mahdi Abdul Hadi, a member of the Islamic Waqf in Jerusalem, said that protests "cemented the Palestinian identity and ensured the transfer of the sacred trust to the new generation."

HIGHLIGHT

Hundreds of protesters responded to a call to defeat the so-called 'deal of the century' by gathering outside the US Embassy in Amman and chanting slogans warning that 'Jerusalem is a red line.'

"Fear has been defeated and people are willing to bear the responsibility and result of the protests," he added.

"These morning prayers in Naser Mosque in Nablus, the Ibrahimi Mosque in Hebron and in Jenin, Qalqilya and other locations show the unity of the people and their communal message of steadfastness and resistance with dignity," he told Arab News.

In Gaza, protests were held after Friday prayers in many locations.

Talal Abu Tharifeh, a leader of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, said the protests highlighted Palestinian unity. "These protests in which Islamic and national forces are combined reflect the unity of the people in rejecting the Trump-Netanyahu vision."

Firas Abadi, head of the Shury Party, said that the message to the US and Israel is that "this plan will not pass."

“The public is aware and willing to sacrifice for the Palestinian cause.” In the northern Jordanian city of Irbid hundreds protested after the Friday prayer by chanting “This is a treasonous and shameful plan and that some countries have conspired against Jordan and Palestine,” he added. In Jordan’s Zarqa city, protesters came out in large numbers to voice their anger at a Jordanian gas deal with Israel. “From Zarqa, we are all willing to sacrifice for Al-Aqsa,” they chanted. Hamzeh Mansour, the Islamic Movement leader, said: “From Ramtha to Aqaba, the Palestinian blood has mingled with Jordanian blood. We are all committed to stopping this dangerous chapter of the Palestinian cause in which Jerusalem, refugees and the Palestinian state all have been denied their rights.”



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Israel bans Palestinian agricultural exports via Jordan
Palestinian leaders hit back at Kushner claims Palestine to blame for West Bank violence

[Libya cease-fire talks in ‘right direction,’ says UN envoy](#)

Author:

Sat, 2020-02-22 00:20

GENEVA / MOSCOW: Cease-fire talks between Libya's warring sides are going in the "right direction" while hitting hurdles over violations of an arms embargo and a truce declared last month, the UN envoy for Libya Ghassan Salame told Reuters on Friday.

Salame, in an interview during a break in military talks in Geneva, said that he expected political-level talks to convene in the Swiss city on Feb. 26 but was already working on confidence-building measures.

"In parallel we are trying to make air travel a bit safer in Libya especially from Mitiga as well as Misrata. We are also trying to reopen the port to be a safe harbor," Salame said. "And we are also trying ... to help in an exchange of prisoners between the parties."

A day earlier, Salame had said that his mission to secure a lasting cease-fire and eventually a political solution was "very difficult" but "possible."

Haftar warns Turkey

Libya's eastern commander, Gen. Khalifa Haftar, vowed on Friday to fight Turkish forces if peace talks in Geneva failed, in comments to a Russian news agency.

The eastern military commander, who is backed by Russia, gave the interview to RIA Novosti after meeting Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu on Wednesday.

"If talks in Geneva do not achieve peace and security for our country, if mercenaries do not return to where they were brought from, the armed forces will fulfill their constitutional obligations ... to defend against the Turkish Ottoman invaders," Haftar said in translated comments.

Talks between the warring parties in Geneva ended earlier this month with no result.

If talks in Geneva do not achieve peace and security for our country, the armed forces will fulfill their constitutional obligations ... to defend against the Turkish Ottoman invaders.

Gen. Khalifa Haftar, Libya's eastern commander

A second round began Tuesday, but broke down after rocket fire hit a port in Tripoli. Talks then resumed Thursday.

The country has been mired in chaos since 2011 when a NATO-backed uprising led to the killing of longtime ruler Muammar Qaddafi. Haftar launched an offensive to capture Tripoli in April.

Turkey supports the UN-recognized government in Tripoli led by Prime Minister Fayez Al-Sarraj, with whom Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in November signed a deal on security, maritime and military cooperation.

"As we've said, our patience is at the limit due to the regular violations of the cease-fire by groups of fighters hired by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Libyan Prime Minister Sarraj," Haftar said, accusing them of failing to fulfill promises they made in Berlin.

At a Berlin summit last month, countries including Russia, Turkey, France and Egypt agreed to end foreign interference in Libya and respect a UN arms embargo.

Haftar added that his forces "are assessing the situation in Tripoli, are in

contact with the international sides and are ready for all options.”
Moscow and Ankara together brokered a tenuous truce in Libya last month. The two sides agreed to end fighting, but the cease-fire has been violated. Haftar said Friday that his conditions for a cease-fire were “withdrawal of Syria and Turkish mercenaries, Turkey stopping supplies of weapons to Tripoli and the liquidation of terrorist groups.”



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Libya's Haftar says any cease-fire would be contingent on Turkish withdrawal
UN-backed Sarraj: Support for Haftar 'prolonging' Libyan war