

Palestinian Authority cuts back wages in tax, prisoner dispute with Israel

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RAMALLAH: The Palestinian Authority is scaling back wages paid to its employees in response to a cash crunch deepened by a dispute with Israel over payments to families of militants in Israeli jails, it said on Sunday. In February, Israel announced it was deducting five percent of the revenues it transfers monthly to the Palestinian Authority (PA) from tax collected on imports that reach the occupied West Bank and Hamas-run Gaza Strip via Israeli ports.

Israel said the sum represented the amount the PA pays to families of Palestinians jailed in Israel or killed while carrying out attacks or other security offenses.

Palestinians see their slain and jailed as heroes of a national struggle but Israeli and US officials say the stipends fan Palestinian violence and are scaled so relatives of prisoners serving longer sentences receive larger payments.

After Israel's deduction announcement, Palestinian President Mahoud Abbas said the PA would not accept any of the tax revenues, which totalled 700 million shekels (\$193 million) in January and account for about half of the authority's budget.

As a result, Palestinian Finance Minister Shukri Bishara said the PA would pay full salaries – which had been due on March 1 – only to its lowest-earning employees, or the 40 percent of its workforce that takes home 2,000 shekels (\$550) or less a month.

Civil servants earning more than that, including cabinet ministers, will have their wages cut by half, he told a news conference.

However, Bishara said prisoners' families will continue to be paid their full allocations.

"No force on earth can alter that," he told a news conference.

Bishara said the PA will have to take bank loans of between \$50 million to \$60 million for the coming five to six months to weather the crisis.

An Israeli official, commenting on condition of anonymity, said the PA had a cash-flow problem as a result of US cuts in aid to the Palestinians and the tax revenues dispute but that the situation would not spiral out of control. "The nightmare scenario of the PA collapsing, or of PA security coordination with Israel ceasing, won't happen," the official said.

"No one, including us and the United States, would allow that. If need be, we'll look for ways of preventing this."

The US has cut all aid to the Palestinians, including \$360 million it used to give to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian refugees. The cuts were widely seen as a bid by Washington to press the Palestinians to re-enter peace talks with Israel that collapsed in 2014.

(\$1 = 3.6288 shekels)



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Tags:

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[tax](#)

[prisoner](#)

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[Morocco repatriates eight alleged militants from Syria](#)

Author:

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Sun, 2019-03-10 16:47

RABAT: Morocco said Sunday it had repatriated eight of its nationals from Syria, who will be investigated for “suspected involvement in acts linked to terrorism.”

“The competent Moroccan authorities proceeded on March 10 to repatriate a group of eight Moroccan citizens who were in conflict zones in Syria,” the

interior ministry said in a statement.

The Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces launched a final offensive against the Daesh group's last redoubt in the east of the war-torn country a month ago.

Backed by an international military coalition, the SDF has arrested thousands of Daesh extremists who have fled the shrinking stronghold.

Many of those flooding out of Daesh territory are foreign fighters and their families – including some Moroccan women, according to AFP journalists on the ground.

The SDF wants foreign fighters and their families to be repatriated by their countries of origin.

Sunday's operation had a "humanitarian character" and allowed the Moroccans to return to their home country safely, the ministry added.

In 2015, the number of Moroccans in extremist ranks in Iraq and Syria was estimated at more than 1,600.

Those who return are arrested and receive sentences of 10 to 15 years in prison.

Syria's multi-fronted war has killed more than 360,000 and displaced millions since it erupted in the wake of the government's bloody repression of street protests in 2011.



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Syrian Democratic Forces begin attack on Daesh's last enclave

Sun, 2019-03-10 19:48

BAGHOUZ, Syria: The US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) launched an assault on Sunday against the final Daesh enclave in eastern Syria, aiming to wipe out the last vestige of its self-declared "caliphate" that once spanned a third of Iraq and Syria.

While the Baghouz enclave represents the last shred of populated land held by the extremists, the group is still widely seen as a big security threat with remote territory elsewhere and the continued capacity to launch guerrilla attacks.

The SDF, spearheaded by the Kurdish YPG militia, has been poised to advance into the enclave for weeks, but has repeatedly held back to allow for the evacuation of civilians, many of them wives and children of Daesh fighters. Mustafa Bali, head of the SDF media office, said no further civilians had emerged from the enclave at the Iraqi border since Saturday and the SDF had not observed any more civilians in the area, prompting the decision to attack.

"The military operations have started. Our forces are now clashing with the terrorists and the attack started," he said.

Tens of thousands of people have streamed out of the shrinking territory held by Islamic State over the last months.

Bali said more than 4,000 militants had surrendered to the SDF in the past month.

Earlier on Sunday, a Reuters correspondent saw SDF forces advance into a tented area of Baghouz after Daesh fighters withdrew from it. SDF fighters gathered some ammunition and rifles left behind by the extremists.



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SDF to resume attack on Daesh enclave if nobody else emerges by Saturday afternoon
Yazidi slave women emerging from Baghouz recount rape, torture

[Sudan opposition leader sentenced to jail for protest](#)

Author:

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Sun, 2019-03-10 14:26

KHARTOUM: A Sudanese emergency court Sunday sentenced an opposition leader to a week in jail as police detained several people intent on marching on parliament to protest a state of emergency.

Mariam Al-Mahdi – daughter of opposition Umma Party chief and ex-prime minister Sadiq Al-Mahdi – was sentenced to a week in prison by an emergency court, Mohamed Al-Mahdi, another of the party's leaders, told AFP.

Mariam Al-Mahdi and her sister Rabah were among those arrested earlier on Sunday.

Protest organizers had called for a march to challenge the state of emergency, imposed nationwide by President Omar Al-Bashir on February 22. Bashir's move came after an initial crackdown on demonstrations that have taken place against his iron-fisted rule since December failed to rein in the protest movement.

The president has ordered a slew of tough measures to quell the demonstrations, including banning all unauthorized rallies and setting up special emergency courts to probe transgressions.

Sunday's procession was to start at the Umma Party's offices in the capital's twin city of Omdurman.

"As some of our leaders came out of the party office to lead the march, security agents arrested them," said Mohamed Al-Mahdi, who is not connected to the former premier's family.

Bashir swept to power in an 1989 Islamist-backed coup that had toppled the then government of Sadiq Al-Mahdi.

Alongside the two daughters of the former premier, "five other leaders of our party have also been taken away by security agents," Mohamed Al-Mahdi said.

"We are still awaiting court verdicts for Rabah and the other five," he added.

He said riot police fired tear gas at protesters who had gathered outside the party office.

"Police dispersed the protesters before they could stage the march," a witness said.

"Protesters have now launched demonstrations in some areas of Omdurman. Many of them have been arrested," the witness added.

Protests initially broke out on December 19 after a government decision to triple the price of bread.

The demonstrations escalated into nationwide rallies against Bashir's rule. Anger has mounted for years over soaring inflation and an acute foreign currency shortage.

Officials say 31 people have died in protest-related violence so far, while Human Rights Watch says the death toll is at least 51, including medics and children.



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[Palestinian president appoints ally Shtayyeh as new PM](#)

Author:

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Sun, 2019-03-10 13:08

RAMALLAH: Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas appointed longtime ally Mohammad Shtayyeh as prime minister on Sunday, a senior official said, in a move seen as part of efforts to further isolate Hamas.

Abbas asked Shtayyeh, a member of the central committee of the Palestinian president's Fatah party, to form a new government, Fatah vice president Mahmoud Al-Aloul told AFP.

Official Palestinian news agency Wafa also reported the move.

Some analysts view bringing in Shtayyeh to replace outgoing prime minister Rami Hamdallah as part of Abbas's efforts to further isolate his political rivals from Hamas, the Islamist movement that runs the Gaza Strip.

Shtayyeh, born in 1958, is a long-term Abbas ally, while Hamdallah was

politically independent.

The previous government was formed during a period of improved relations and had the backing of Hamas.

This government is instead likely to be dominated by Fatah, though other smaller parties will be represented. Hamas is not expected to be included.



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[Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas](#)

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