

'Yellow Vest' rally against delay in Lebanese government formation

Sun, 2018-12-23 23:51

BEIRUT: The Lebanese capital, Beirut, witnessed angry protests in response to the general situation in the country and amid a further delay in the formation of a new Cabinet.

About 3,000 demonstrators responded to a call on social media and gathered in Martyrs' Square, carrying banners bearing their grievances and criticizing the country's leaders. They chanted slogans demanding social freedom and calling for the overthrow of the regime.

An Internal Security Forces (ISF) officer told Arab News: "Security Forces knew about the protest through social media and took all the necessary measures," he added, noting that "none of the demonstrators had permission to demonstrate from the Ministry of Interior."

The protesters had various objectives. Some wore yellow vests, some hid their faces, and others even brought their children or dogs along. Many of them had their own tale of personal suffering.

"I am unemployed, I do not have any kind of health insurance and taxes are imposed on everything," said Hassan Khamis, 20 years old. "I came here so that my voice can be heard. I am from the southern suburbs of Beirut, but I do not follow any of its political parties."

Cinderella Abou Chakra, who wore a yellow vest to demonstrate against corruption, said that she did so not to imitate French protesters, but to show that they too suffer from high taxes and low salaries.

"I am a retired employee and my husband was fired from his job because his employers could not afford to pay him the minimum wage anymore. I am part of the civil society and I hope that this non-sectarian protest will bring change and accountability."

Activists from the political party Sabaa also took part in the demonstrations.

"They are bringing back the same faces to the government in a different format, while each of them is taking their share of the benefits," said Ali Hassan, a Lebanese army veteran.

"The solution lies in the formation of a technocratic government not related to any of the political parties. It should be considered a national rescue government and not a national unity government."

A member of a group of masked young men told Arab News that they were from the southern city of Tyre.

They had come together through a Whatsapp group chat to stand against corruption and to express their frustration with the politicians.

“They are not smarter than us. We are aware of what they are doing. They want to treat us like herds of sheep of different colors,” he said.

Participants raised the Lebanese flag and sang the national anthem. Some also held the flag of the Nejme football club to reaffirm that “they are participating as civilians and are not affiliated with any political party.”

Protesters then moved from Martyrs’ Square to the nearby Riad Al-Solh Square, close to the Lebanese Parliament and the Grand Serail, the seat of the government.

They held banners that read “We want a government now” and “Approve the law to recover stolen funds.”

Among the protesters were three Muslim clerics who are social media activists representing the Sunnis and the Shiites.

“We are participating to say that the situation has become unbearable. Hunger and economic crises are looming. Politicians must recognize the extent of people’s dissatisfaction,” said Sheikh Mohammed Ali Al-Hajj Al-Alami.

Sheikh Waleed Alama noted that: “Some people in Lebanon sold their minds to the political parties. We are here today to make heard the voices of those holding on to coexistence.”

Malak, a 39-year-old social media influencer, said: “I have been unemployed for three years. I am one of the people who called for the protests because the situation can no longer be tolerated. What the politicians are doing is very provocative. Our government does not care about us, it does not listen to the suffering of its people.”

The demonstrators tried to approach the metal barriers set in front of the government’s headquarters, while some threw water bottles at the security forces.

Later, they divided into smaller groups and closed some roads in Beirut such as Hamra Street, one of the major thoroughfares in the city, setting garbage bins on fire.

The Lebanese Army moved in to reopen the roads, and asked the protesters not to damage public and private properties and to preserve the peaceful nature of the demonstrations.









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Formation of new Lebanese government delayed
Lebanon's Hariri hopes government will be finalised on Friday

[UAE best place for religious tourism: Sikh leader](#)

Author:

Sun, 2018-12-23 21:43

DUBAI: The UAE is the best place for religious tourism given the diversity and beauty of its places of worship, said the chairman of the Gurdwara Guru Nanak Darbar in Dubai, the largest Sikh temple in the Gulf.

Be it mosques, churches, or Sikh or Hindu temples, "all these places of worship showcase the beauty of peace and tolerance in the UAE," Surender Singh Kandhari, who has been living in the country since 1975, told Arab News.

The UAE has declared 2019 the Year of Tolerance. Kandhari said the country is a living example of tolerance and being a bridge between peoples of different cultures in a respectful environment that rejects extremism and emphasizes

acceptance of the other.

“It’s the only country where more than 180 different nationalities live together in harmony. You can’t find such an example anywhere in the world,” he added.

“This is perhaps the only country where followers of every faith will find their places of worship. These places aren’t meant for worship only. They’re gorgeous pieces of art and architecture,” he said.

“Every building has its own story to share, and everyone is welcome to find solace in any place of worship. Everyone is allowed to go to any place of worship. This kind of peace and tolerance one can’t find in any other part of the world.”

Visionary leadership

The multi-story gurdwara was opened in January 2012 at a cost of more than \$20 million.

Praising the UAE’s construction of a Sikh temple “in the heart of an Islamic state,” Kandhari said: “To add to the joy and sense of wellbeing, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum, vice president and prime minister of the UAE, bestowed a piece of land free of charge for the Sikhs to build their temple.”

Kandhari added: “This could only happen in a country such as the UAE, which has such a visionary and big-hearted leadership.”



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[Turkey bolsters military on Syrian border as US readies pull out -media](#)

Author:

Reuters

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Sun, 2018-12-23 14:02

ISTANBUL, QAMISHLI: Turkey is sending reinforcements to its border with Syria, Demiroren News Agency (DHA) reported on Sunday, adding that some 100 vehicles including mounted pickup trucks and weaponry had made their way to the area.

The heightened military activity comes days after President Tayyip Erdogan said Turkey would postpone a planned military operation on Kurdish YPG militia east of the Euphrates river in northern Syria following the United States' decision to withdraw from Syria.

DHA said the Turkish convoy, headed toward the southern border province of Kilis from another border province, Hatay, included tanks, howitzers, machine guns and buses carrying commandos.

Part of the military equipment and personnel are to be positioned in posts along the border while some had crossed into Syria via the district of Elbeyli, DHA said.

Elbeyli is situated 45 kilometers (27.96 miles) northwest of the northern Syrian town of Manbij, which has been a major flashpoint between Ankara and Washington.

In June, the NATO allies reached an agreement that would see the YPG ousted from Manbij but Turkey has complained the roadmap has been delayed.

Footage from broadcaster TRT World showed parts of the convoy entering Syria via the Turkish border town of Karkamis in the southeastern province of Gaziantep, 35 kilometers north of Manbij.

The convoys are crossing into area controlled by the Free Syrian Army (FSA), a Turkish ally, and are heading to the frontlines of Manbij, TRT World said.

A senior Kurdish official on Saturday urged the US to stop Turkey launching an offensive against Kurdish areas in northern Syria.

Aldar Khalil, who played a key role in establishing Syria's semi-autonomous Kurdish region in 2013, said the US and its partners "must honor their commitments" while operating in the country.

"And even if they leave, they can at least work toward an international resolution," he told AFP.

"It's their duty to prevent any attack and to put an end to Turkish threats."

Turkey, with support from the FSA, carried out two cross-border operations in northern Syria, dubbed "Euphrates Shield" and "Olive Branch," against the YPG and Daesh.

The military offensives were focused on areas to the west of the Euphrates and Turkey has not gone east of the river, partly to avoid direct confrontation with US forces. The operations carved out de facto buffer

zones, which are currently under the control of Turkey and the FSA.

Erdogan said on Friday that Turkey will take over the fight against Daesh militants in Syria as the United States withdraws its troops, adding that the planned operation would also target the YPG.

Ankara considers the US-backed YPG militia a terrorist organization and an extension of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which has waged an insurgency in Turkey since the 1980s.



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Netanyahu seeks to calm Israeli concerns over Trump's Syria pullout
In areas backed by Turkey, Syrians welcome US withdrawal

Egypt appoints new military intelligence chief

Author:

Reuters

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Sun, 2018-12-23 11:35

CAIRO: Egypt has appointed Major General Khaled Megawer to serve as the head of the country's military intelligence service, replacing Mohamed Al-Shahat, two security sources told Reuters on Sunday.

Egypt's military and intelligence services play a leading role in top level decision making, taking a more public role since current president Abdel Fattah El-Sisi led the 2013 military overthrow of Egypt's first freely-elected president, Mohamed Mursi of the Muslim Brotherhood.

The sources did not give a reason for Al-Shahat's dismissal, but El-Sisi has replaced several high-ranking security officials in the military, interior ministry and the general intelligence service over the last couple of years. El-Sisi appointed close ally Major General Abbas Kamel to serve as chief of the country's General Intelligence Service in June , two weeks after replacing the defense and interior ministers.

Megawer previously served as deputy head of the military intelligence body, Commander of the Second Field Army and Defense Attaché at the Egyptian embassy in Washington.



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[Netanyahu seeks to calm Israeli concerns over Trump's Syria pullout](#)

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Sun, 2018-12-23 11:01

JERUSALEM: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu sought on Sunday to calm domestic concerns over US President Donald Trump's decision to withdraw from Syria, saying his country will still act against Iran there.

Trump last week said the Daesh group had been defeated and he was withdrawing the United States' 2,000 troops from Syria.

Israel has seen the US presence in neighboring Syria as a bulwark against its main enemy Iran and a counterweight to Russia.

Both Russia and Iran support Syrian President Bashar Assad's regime in the country's civil war.

"The decision to remove the 2,000 US soldiers from Syria won't change our consistent policy," Netanyahu said at the start of a cabinet meeting.

"We will continue to act against Iran's attempt to establish a military presence in Syria, and if the need arises, we will even expand our activities there."

He added that he wanted to "calm those concerned."

"Our cooperation with the United States continues full-force, and takes place in many fields – the operational field, the intelligence field, and many other security fields."

Trump's decision to withdraw from Syria – as well as reduce forces in Afghanistan – led US Defense Secretary Jim Mattis to quit in disagreement. The US special envoy to the coalition fighting the Islamic State, Brett McGurk, has also resigned.

The withdrawal abruptly ends American influence in the war-ravaged country and gives Turkey an opening to attack US-backed Kurds in Syria.

But Israel is particularly concerned about the presence of Iran there as well as Hezbollah, the Lebanese Shiite group backed by Tehran.

Israel has carried out hundreds of air strikes in Syria against what it says are Iranian military targets and advanced weapons deliveries to Hezbollah.

A friendly fire incident in September that led to a Russian plane being downed by Syrian air defenses during an Israeli strike has however complicated Israeli operations there.

Russia subsequently upgraded Syrian air defenses with the delivery of the advanced S-300 system, which Damascus had said would make Israel “think carefully” before carrying out further air raids.



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