

Tension as controversial Israeli lawmaker visits Jerusalem flashpoint

Author:

Sun, 2022-02-13 23:06

JERUSALEM: Israeli police clashed with Palestinians in the flashpoint East Jerusalem neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah on Sunday, as a visit by a controversial far-right Jewish lawmaker inflamed tensions.

Police said two people were arrested as they tried to contain “a violent riot,” in the area of annexed East Jerusalem that has emerged as a symbol of Palestinian resistance against Israeli control of the city.

Scuffles broke out as Itamar Ben Gvir of the far-right Religious Zionism alliance opened a parliamentary office in Sheikh Jarrah, in what he described as an effort to show support for its Jewish residents.

More than 200,000 Jewish settlers live in East Jerusalem, in communities widely regarded as illegal under international law.

Efforts by settler groups to expand the Jewish presence in East Jerusalem, which Palestinians claim as their future capital, have further fueled hostilities.

Ben Gvir, a Jewish nationalist with a long history of incendiary comments about Palestinians, accused police of failing to react to alleged arson attacks on a settler home in Sheikh Jarrah.

“Jewish lives have become worthless,” Ben Gvir charged in a tweet before his visit.

He told reporters in Sheikh Jarrah on Sunday that he would remain there until police “looked after the security of the (Jewish) residents.”

The Palestinian Authority, based in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, condemned Ben Gvir’s visit as a “provocative and escalating move that threatens to ignite ... violence that will be difficult to control.”

Tensions that erupted in Sheikh Jarrah last year – as several Palestinian families faced eviction by settler groups – in part sparked the May conflict between Israel and armed groups in Gaza.

Hamas, the Islamists who control Gaza, warned there would “consequences” over Israel’s repeated “attacks” on Sheikh Jarrah.

Palestinians across East Jerusalem accuse Israeli police of using heavy-handed tactics to quell protests. Six people were arrested in the neighborhood during unrest late Saturday.

Israel captured East Jerusalem in the 1967 Six Day War and later annexed it,

in a move not recognized by most of the international community.



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Author:

Sun, 2022-02-13 22:06

BEIRUT: Lebanon's Grand Mufti Sheikh Abdel Latif Derian warned on Sunday that the country was once again "falling apart as if those in charge had not learned from previous experiences, which have cost the Lebanese their lives and livelihoods."

His warning came as Lebanon prepares to commemorate the 17th anniversary of the assassination of late Prime Minister Rafik Hariri on Monday amid an ongoing political dispute, fueled by Hezbollah, over how the Cabinet will approve the 2022 draft budget.

The commemoration of Feb. 14 in Beirut is taking place amid uncertainty within the Future Movement after Sunni leader and former Prime Minister Saad Hariri announced his withdrawal from political life and asked his parliamentary bloc not to run for the upcoming parliamentary elections under the party's name.

Hariri will thus participate in commemorating his father's assassination without giving his usual speech.

Meanwhile, several political and religious figures visited Rafik Hariri's tomb in downtown Beirut on Sunday.

"How long can the list of martyrs get? Lebanon itself has almost become a martyr," Derian commented as he stood before the tomb.

He added: "Today, Lebanon is mired in moral corruption, political failure, and financial and economic collapse.

"Honoring the martyr Hariri lies in preserving his moral and national heritage and continuing public work in light of the constructive approach that he adopted throughout his career until his last breath."

Also speaking before the tomb, former Prime Minister Fouad Siniora said: "The moment Hariri was assassinated on Feb. 14, 2005, the project to destroy the state was launched, aiming at creating multiple powers and disrupting the state's pillars.

"The attempts to sabotage Lebanon's parliamentary democratic system are ongoing, intending to change Lebanon's identity and append it to the well-known regional project."

Siniora stressed Lebanon's need for national rescue action by reviving the principles of Rafik Hariri's national project.

"This is based on restoring the role of the state and extending its full authority over all its lands and facilities," said Siniora, adding that there is a need to adopt reform policies and rely on Islamic-Christian coexistence.

Siniora stressed the importance of respecting the constitution and implementing the Taif Agreement to restore the national, economic and social wellbeing of Lebanon and the Lebanese.

Meanwhile, Hezbollah and the Amal Movement accused President Michel Aoun and Prime Minister Najib Mikati of "passing the budget in the last session without voting on it and making appointments that were not agreed upon."

Culture Minister Mohammed Wissam Al-Murtada said: "The draft budget was still under discussion, but some proposed amendments and some figures had not yet been handed over to the ministers, despite our repeated requests.

"This means that the Cabinet did not conclude its discussion of the draft budget, did not vote on it, nor did it approve or reject it."

Al-Murtada claimed that the appointments that were made were not on the Cabinet's agenda.

"We objected, but suddenly and without a vote, and after the session was adjourned, we learned that the Cabinet had decided on the appointments."

Ali Khreis, an MP with the Development and Liberation bloc headed by Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri, said that what happened "does not reflect any responsibility toward basic issues, and only reflects the reality of the law of the jungle and chaos."

The recovery plan that the government is working on and the draft budget approved by the Cabinet face political and popular objections, mainly from Hezbollah and the Amal movement.

Activists staged a sit-in on Saturday evening near Mikati's residence, expressing their anger at burdening the people.

The National Salvation Front said: "The ruling authority wants to place the losses of the economic and financial crisis on citizens' shoulders in defense of the interests of its mafia-militia alliance, without taking any reform steps that help the country overcome the crisis."

Addressing the Lebanese after approving the draft budget, Mikati said that "a correction has been made to taxes and fees based on the inflation occurring in the exchange rate," meaning that the budget will adopt the price of an exchange platform in which the dollar exchange rate is equivalent to the black-market rate.

He noted that the economic recovery plan that was being worked on "is the basis for discussion with the (International Monetary Fund). We must set our priorities and carry out the required reforms.

"There are over 14 reform decrees that must be issued by the government, and over 30 reform laws must be issued by parliament."

Mikati added: "We can no longer provide electricity, telecom, and water for free, and citizens should be more understanding."

The prime minister warned: "If we do not speed up reform, we may reach a point where we may no longer be able to import wheat. If the issue had been resolved a year ago, the fiscal deficit would have been around \$40 billion, while today it is around \$70 billion."

Greek Orthodox Metropolitan Bishop of Beirut Elias Audi referred to the economic crisis during his Sunday sermon.

The bishop said: "From where will citizens get the money to pay the expected price increases when they are barely able to feed their children?"

"Are citizens responsible for the state's collapse and bankruptcy and the Lebanese pound devaluation?"

“Is it not the state’s duty to put an end to corruption in its institutions, control its borders, stop waste and smuggling, curb tax and customs evasion, close useless funds and unproductive councils, and collect their dues?”



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[President Erdogan’s UAE visit will turn a page in relations: Gargash](#)

Sun, 2022-02-13 21:53

LONDON: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s visit to the UAE will turn a page in bilateral relations between the two countries, the diplomatic advisor to the UAE President said on Sunday.

Erdogan will visit the UAE on Feb. 14-15 and will attend the Expo 2020 in Dubai on Tuesday.

His visit comes after the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed

Al-Nahyan visited Ankara in November last year.

The president's visit will turn a "new positive page in bilateral relations between the two countries," and is in line with the UAE's aim to strengthen bridges of communication and cooperation in order to achieve stability and prosperity in the region, Anwar Gargash tweeted.

"The UAE continues to strengthen channels of communication with various countries in order to support the stability and prosperity of the region and the well-being of its people," Gargash said.

"The UAE's policy is positive and rational and is in the interests of security, peace and regional development. President Erdogan's visit to Abu Dhabi comes within this framework that we are betting on to ensure a prosperous future," he added.



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Abu Dhabi crown prince, Philippines president talk growing ties

Author:

Sun, 2022-02-13 02:00

RIYADH: Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed received a message from Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte on ways to strengthen bilateral relations, Emirati state news agency WAM reported on Saturday.

The message was delivered to Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed, UAE minister of foreign affairs and international cooperation, during a meeting with Duterte's special envoy and presidential assistant on foreign affairs, Robert Borje, at Expo 2020 Dubai.

Sheikh Abdullah also handed Borje a message from Sheikh Mohammed to the Philippines president, which dealt with bilateral relations, WAM said.

The two sides discussed joint cooperation and a number of issues of common interest.

They also reviewed Manila's participation at Expo 2020 and its role in enhancing joint cooperation between the two countries in a number of important fields, such as industry and trade.

Borje praised the impressive organization of Expo 2020 Dubai, which drew wide participation from about 192 countries, and has provided an important global platform to create promising opportunities for cooperation and partnership between states.

He said that the Philippines was keen to elevate joint cooperation with the UAE in all fields, praising its leading regional and international position.

Reem Al-Hashimi, UAE minister of state for international cooperation and director-general of Expo 2020 Dubai, attended the meeting.

The Philippines celebrated its National Day at Expo 2020 Dubai on Friday, with a host of activities marking the country's strong ties with the UAE.



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[Two women, two children among six killed in Syria regime shelling on Idlib](#)

Author:

Sun, 2022-02-13 01:32

MAARAT AL-NAASAN: Syrian regime shelling killed six civilians including women and children on Saturday in Idlib province, the country's last main rebel bastion, a war monitor said.

A photographer at the scene reported seeing several bodies being taken away from a wrecked home in Maarat Al-Naasan, an area close to regime-controlled territory.

"The shell fell on a civilian home," said the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based group with a network of sources on the ground in the war-torn country.

The monitor said two women and two children were among those killed, who were all from the same family. Many others were wounded.

The shelling had begun at around 1130 GMT, with more shells fired intermittently afterwards.

The Syrian regime and its ally Russia have regularly targeted hospitals and civilian areas since the start of the war in 2011, according to the observatory. The Idlib region bordering Turkey is home to about 3 million people and it is one of the last pockets to oppose Damascus.

Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham, a former Syrian branch of Al-Qaeda, controls with its allies about half of the region and parts of neighboring provinces.

After a months-long military campaign to flush out the enclave sparked fears of the war's worst bloodshed yet, a ceasefire deal was reached in March 2020.

The agreement brokered by the regime and the rebels' main backers – Russia and Turkey respectively – has largely held since, despite sporadic flare-ups. But Damascus has intensified attacks on southern Idlib since June.

The war in Syria has killed around half a million people and displaced millions more, the observatory says.



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