

[Arab coalition carry out air strikes on Houthi weapons storage in Sanaa](#)

Author:

Fri, 2021-12-24 02:37

RIYADH: Arab coalition forces have started carrying out air strikes to destroy Houthi weapons at a stadium in the Yemeni capital, Sanaa, after a deadline given to remove them had expired, the alliance said early Friday.

(Developing story)

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[UN calls on Libyan authorities to honor millions who registered to vote](#)

Author:

Fri, 2021-12-24 02:02

NEW YORK: The UN on Thursday reminded the Libyan authorities that presidential and parliamentary elections, conducted “in the appropriate conditions, on a level playing field among all candidates” are indispensable for a peaceful solution to Libya’s political crises.

"The current challenges in the electoral process should in no way be instrumentalized to undermine the stability and progress which has been achieved in Libya over the past 15 months," said Stephanie Williams, the UN's special adviser for Libya.

Calling on leaders to honor the will of millions of Libyans who had registered to vote, Williams also urged politicians to remain focused on the electoral process and strive to create the necessary conditions for the elections to be secure, fair and free.

The long-awaited Libyan presidential election, initially slated for Dec. 24, was pushed back by a month on Wednesday, following the recommendation of the High National Election Commission amid disputes over the laws governing elections, the eligibility of several divisive candidates, and occasional infighting among various armed groups.

The electoral process had also been dogged by east-west rivalry, and the presence of thousands of foreign fighters and mercenaries, with several reports of harassment by militias of electoral workers, judges and security staff.

A Libyan parliamentary committee said that it has become "impossible" to hold the elections on Friday.

Amnesty International's Diana Eltahawy cited intimidation by armed groups and militias which "not only enjoy rampant impunity but are integrated into state institutions without any vetting to remove those responsible for crimes under international law."

Williams said the UN "welcomes (the HNEC's) commitment to the ongoing electoral process and to continuing the review of the applications of the candidates for parliamentary elections."

The special adviser, who arrived in Tripoli earlier this month and met with "hundreds of people from all of Libya's regions," said she was pleased to witness "a shift from a discourse of conflict to one of peaceful dialogue.

"Even those who only last year bore arms against each other have continued to come together," she said. "Despite the many hardships endured by many Libyans, including in southern Libya, and the pleas of those still displaced by the conflict that has torn the country apart during the past 10 years, I have met many Libyans who have recovered a sense of normalcy.

"I have heard stories of separated families that could finally travel to visit relatives, a development made possible by the ceasefire and resumption of flights and the reopening of roads."

Williams had overseen UN mediation efforts which led to an October 2020 ceasefire and the formation of a transitional government, as well as the elections scheduled for Dec. 24.

"I have also heard time and again the overwhelming desire of Libyans to go to the ballot box to determine their future and to end the long transitional

period through the holding of inclusive, free, fair, and credible elections," she said, adding: "I have also heard their genuine hopes that elections must be part of the solution, and not part of the problem, in Libya."





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New chaos in Libya as Dec. 24 election is postponed
Libya parliament says 'impossible' to hold presidential vote

[Palestinian shot dead by Israeli soldiers in West Bank](#)

Author:

Fri, 2021-12-24 00:02

RAMALLAH: Israeli forces shot dead a Palestinian in a car they were pursuing in the occupied West Bank on Wednesday, Palestinian paramedics said. The Israeli military said troops shot a Palestinian who had fired at them from a vehicle.

The incident followed several Palestinian attacks on Israelis in recent weeks. Palestinians also complain of attacks by Israeli settlers, whose residence in the West Bank the international community considers illegal.

In a statement, the military said the soldiers had come under fire from a passing vehicle while searching for Palestinians spotted approaching the Jewish settlement of Psagot.

“The troops responded with fire and hit the assailant,” the military said, adding that none of the soldiers was hurt in the incident.

Palestinian medics said the troops had chased a car up to the entrance of a refugee camp and then opened fire, wounding the Palestinian man in the back. They said he was taken to a hospital, where he was pronounced dead.

The medics said they did not know whether he had taken part in the alleged attack on the Israeli troops.

The violence came a day after Israeli soldiers shot dead a Palestinian motorist they suspected of attempting to drive his vehicle into a military checkpoint near the settlement of Mevo Dotan in the West Bank.

Tor Wennesland, the United Nations Mideast peace envoy, last week said he was “alarmed” by the recent escalation of violence on both sides, saying the situation had become “volatile.”



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Palestinian tries to ram Israel soldiers in West Bank, shot dead
Israeli police detain Palestinian woman accused of stabbing settler

Iraq pays final Kuwait war reparations

Author:

Fri, 2021-12-24 00:29

BAGHDAD: Iraq has paid its last war reparations to Kuwait more than 30 years since the invasion of the Gulf country by former autocrat Saddam Hussein, officials said on Thursday.

On Aug. 2, 1990, Hussein ordered his army to invade Kuwait and seize what he described as "Iraq's 19th province," before being pushed back seven months later by a US-led coalition.

"Iraq has closed the file of the Kuwait war reparations, having paid the last of its dues," Mozher Saleh, the prime minister's economic adviser, was quoted as saying by the official Iraqi News Agency.

In total, Iraq has paid \$52.4 billion in reparations, he said. "This is not a small amount," he added. "The sum would have been enough to construct an electricity network that would have served Iraq for many years."

Despite being rich in hydrocarbons, Iraq's electricity infrastructure has suffered from years of negligence and successive wars, facing regular power cuts.

Saleh said he hoped that the slice of budget previously allocated for reparations would now be directed to development projects.

The central bank announced on Tuesday the payment of the final portion of the reparations, valued at \$44 million.

The payments were suspended in 2014 when Daesh took over large swathes of Iraq but were resumed in 2018, following the group's defeat.

Funds for the reparations come from a 5 percent tax levied on sales of Iraq's petroleum and petroleum products.



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Building on tradition: Iraqi laborer preserves calligraphic art
Kuwait to make COVID-19 vaccine booster compulsory

[Beirut residents sue Hezbollah leader over deadly clashes](#)

Author:

Thu, 2021-12-23 22:58

BEIRUT: Beirut residents who suffered damages after deadly Hezbollah clashes have filed a criminal case on Thursday against the Iran-backed group's leader.

Lawyers filed the complaint before the Appeal Public Prosecution office in Mount Lebanon against Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah and "everyone who appears in the investigation."

This legal intervention follows Hezbollah also taking a hardline stance against the judge investigating the August 2020 Beirut blast, causing a row that has left Prime Minister Najib Mikati's Cabinet unable to meet since Oct. 12, even as crises mount and poverty and hunger worsen.

The lawyers filed the complaint on behalf of the residents of the Ain El-Remmaneh area.

The residents were affected by the Tayyouneh incidents on Oct. 14 as a result of Hezbollah and the Amal Movement's supporters entering the area and attacking properties.

Violent clashes broke out as Hezbollah and its Amal movement staged protests, calling for the removal of Judge Tarek Bitar, who is leading the blast probe.

The Oct. 14 protest turned Beirut into a war zone, with live-fire exchanges between rival parties leaving seven dead.

Thursday's criminal complaint coincides with a rift between the Free Patriotic Movement and virtually its sole ally in power, Hezbollah.

The rift follows the Constitutional Council's decision to turn down the appeal presented by the FPM over the changes to the electoral law added by the parliament.

Lebanese President Michel Aoun and his political team, represented by the FPM, believe that these changes are not in their interest.

FPM leader Gebran Bassil – in coordination with Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri – showed his displeasure with Hezbollah during a press conference on Tuesday where he held the group responsible for what happened.

FPM supporters also took to social media platforms to share their anger and displeasure with the group.

This rift between the two allies is the first of its kind since the Mar Mikhael agreement of February 2006.

Despite the differences between the FPM and Hezbollah for more than 15 years, their relationship was never deeply shaken.

The FPM "is facing an electoral crisis," said political observers.

They voiced doubts about the possibility of the FPM winning 12 deputies at the next elections, noting that it has the largest bloc in the parliament.

They added: "Even analyses indicate that Bassil's parliamentary seat is under threat, as there are 27,000 votes in the third electoral district where he will run and most will vote against him."

It is uncertain whether Hezbollah and the FPM will meet soon in light of Bassil's fierce criticism.

Bassil, among 10 FPM deputies, requested to schedule a parliamentary accountability session for the government.

The Cabinet has been paralyzed since mid-October as a result of Hezbollah and the Amal Movement deciding that their ministers would boycott sessions until

two demands are met.

They are demanding Judge Bitar's removal from the port explosion probe and for the arrest of everyone involved in the shooting of their supporters Ain El-Remmaneh during the Tayouneh incident.

Judge Naji Eid, head of the First Chamber of the Civil Court of Cassation, accepted on Thursday the response request submitted by the representatives of former ministers Ali Hassan Khalil and Ghazi Zeaiter against Bitar, in regard to the port explosion probe.

Bitar was informed about this response, which is the seventh proposal for his dismissal from the investigation.

In relation to Hezbollah not responding to Bassil's criticism, the party responded to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres's positions less than 12 hours after he left Lebanon, emphasizing the need to implement the Security Council resolution 1701, which was written with the intent of ending the 2006 war.

Meanwhile, a number of young men in Shaqra, in the Beqaa Valley south of the Litani river, intercepted a UN Interim Force patrol, breaking car windows and attacking the troops, under the pretext of them entering the town without the Lebanese army and filming neighborhoods.

Hezbollah often conducts similar violent protests under the pretense that its members are acting as concerned citizens.

The Lebanese army arrived on the scene and protected the international soldiers and their vehicles.

UNIFIL put the Lebanese authorities in charge of this "dangerous incident," asking them to investigate and bring the offenders to justice.

A statement from Candice Ardel, the deputy director of UNIFIL Media Office, referred to the emphasis of Guterres – when he visited the blue line in the south of Lebanon – on the need for UNIFIL's operations to have full access – without any obstacles – to all the areas in accordance with UN Security Council resolution 1701.

At the conclusion of his visit to Lebanon, Guterres emphasized during a press conference on Wednesday that "the Lebanese leaders do not have the right to punish the people by continuing to disagree."

He also stressed "the need for Hezbollah to become a political party like the rest of the political powers in the country."



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Political rift between Hezbollah and political rivals widens in Lebanon
Beirut blast investigator demands immediate arrest of ex-minister