

Tripoli on brink of disaster as power outage fuels unrest in Lebanon

Author:

Wed, 2021-06-30 21:27

BEIRUT: The security and social situation deteriorated on Wednesday in Tripoli, Lebanon's second-largest city, where more than half of the population lives in poverty and the city has been left without electricity.

To make things worse, a child on oxygen support died after his machine stopped working and generators were turned off due to the acute shortage of diesel.

"People are angry. They took to the streets, some carrying weapons, and started closing down the shops by force," an eyewitness told Arab News.

Tripoli's mayor Riyad Yamaq said on television that "the situation in the city is out of control."

The Lebanese Army patrolled the streets but stones and chairs were thrown at the soldiers, leading them to respond by firing their weapons into the air.

After calm was partially returned, the protesters moved to the Kadisha Electricity Company located in Tripoli's Al-Bahsas area.

They stormed the building and forced its employees to supply some regions with electricity.

Mustafa Alloush, vice-president of the Future Movement, who is from Tripoli and practices medicine there, said: "What was expected has started from Tripoli and the social explosion has begun from this city. More will come if nobody intervenes immediately to halt the collapse."

As the army regained control in Tripoli, the Lebanese Parliament held a session at the UNESCO Palace in Beirut. The area was heavily guarded. This infuriated people who took to social media to insult the Lebanese lawmakers and authorities they blamed for causing the collapse.

The MPs, who were sweating because the air conditioners were not functioning due to the power cut, approved the controversial ration card in the absence of a government capable of making such decisions. In response, the MPs of the Lebanese Forces parliamentary bloc left the hall to express their objection.

The card targets the neediest individuals without determining their final number. However, the number could reach up to 700,000 people, keeping in mind that the World Bank had estimated that more than 50 percent of the Lebanese people are now living in poverty.

During the session, the head of the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) Gebran Bassil accused "security apparatus, MPs and politicians of being involved in

the cross-border smuggling network and operations.”

MP Michel Moussa of the Development and Liberation bloc said the ration card “will be financed from some aid and existing loans that have not been used yet. We are keen not to finance it from the depositors’ funds that are frozen in the banks.”

The Syndicate of Hospitals in Lebanon said in a statement that “a number of hospitals have used the stock of diesel they had, while the rest have quantities that are not enough to cover the next 24 hours.”

In Beirut, a violent knife fight broke out in front of a gas station near Dar Al-Fatwa. The army intervened to stop it.

An explosion of a diesel tank in the town of Al-Khyara in West Bekaa killed a man in his thirties.

In other developments, the Federation of Syndicates of Banks Employees in Lebanon expressed its concern after people launched a call on social media to storm bank branches starting Thursday to protest their inability to access frozen deposits.

It consequently threatened to close the banks if any bank was attacked.

Taxi drivers refused to abide by the decisions of their syndicates as some raised the fare to LBP8,000 (\$0.45) instead of LBP4,000 due to the increase in the fuel price that followed the partial lifting of subsidies.

Meanwhile, Bassil took to Twitter to relaunch the provocation campaign against the Prime Minister-designate Saad Hariri, calling on him to “decide whether he wants to form a government or step down.”



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Economic crisis, severe shortages make Lebanon 'unlivable' Lebanon's struggling army offers tourists helicopter rides to boost revenue

[Iraqi military: Bomb explodes in Baghdad suburb, wounding 15](#)

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Wed, 2021-06-30 21:19

BAGHDAD: Iraqi security officials say an explosion struck a busy market in Baghdad on Wednesday, wounding at least nine people.

The Iraqi military confirmed the explosion without providing details.

The blast was heard in a market in Sadr City, a suburban district of the capital. The military did not elaborate on casualties or the extent of the damage.

Two security officials said at least nine people were wounded in the blast. They spoke on condition of anonymity in line with regulations.

It was the second time this year an explosion targeted a market in the densely populated neighborhood. In April, at least four people were killed in a car bomb attack in Sadr City. That explosion was caused by an explosive device attached to a parked car at the market.

It was not immediately clear what caused Wednesday's explosion. Large bomb attacks, once an almost daily occurrence in Baghdad, have slowed in recent years since the Daesh group was defeated in 2017.



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Car bomb blast kills four, injures 20 in Baghdad's Sadr City Two rockets target Baghdad airport base housing US troops

[Jordan king in talks with Abbas ahead of Biden summit](#)

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Wed, 2021-06-30 21:18

AMMAN: Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas held talks on Wednesday with King Abdullah before the Jordanian monarch's key visit to Washington.

The king will be the first Arab leader to meet at the White House with President Joe Biden and his team.

Two Jordanian army helicopters flew to Ramallah to transport Abbas and his team to the talks.

After a one-on-one meeting in the presence of Crown Prince Hussein, Jordanian and Palestinian teams joined their leaders.

Palestinian Foreign Minister Riyad Malki, senior Fatah official Hussein Sheikh, Palestinian intelligence service chief Majed Faraj, and senior diplomatic adviser Majdi Khalidi attended the meeting.

On the Jordanian side, Prime Minister Bisher Khasawneh, Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi, General Intelligence Director Ahmad Hosni and other officials were present, according to the Palestinian news agency Wafa.

Jordan's Petra news agency said the king reiterated Jordan's support for Palestinians "to obtain their just and legitimate rights in establishing their independent, sovereign and viable state, on the June 4, 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital."

King Abdullah stressed the need to translate the cease-fire agreement in Gaza into a permanent truce in order to pave the way for Palestinian rights, Petra said.

Abbas highlighted Jordan's critical role in defending the rights of Palestinians in international circles.

Samir Habashneh, a former Jordanian interior minister, told Arab News that the Biden administration has yet to decide on its approach to the Palestinian conflict.

"For sure, it is different from the Trump administration's direction and for sure it is in support of the two-state solution, but it hasn't yet identified the alternative," he said.

Habashneh, a leading member of a reform committee set up by King Abdullah, said that in a recent meeting the monarch stressed the importance of support for the two-state solution.

"The king's strong opposition to the Trump plan played a major role in its defeat, but we need to work out the mechanism for how to move forward," he said.

Habashneh said that he hopes Jordan can influence a Palestinian reconciliation.

"If I can whisper in the ears of our Palestinian brethren, it would be to move fast in the reconciliation process in order to block Israeli efforts to avoid dealing with the Palestinian leadership."

Hazem Kawasmi, a Jerusalem-based political activist, told Arab News that the situation is quickly deteriorating and there is a need to "find ways to put out all these fires."

He said: "Things in Jerusalem, and especially in Silwan, with tens of homes slated for destruction, are worrying as is the internal Palestinian protests in light of the death of Nizar Banat and the attacks on peaceful Palestinian protesters by the Palestinian security."

The family of Banat, a prominent critic of the Palestinian Authority, who died in detention on June 24, said that security forces broke into his house in the occupied West Bank city of Hebron and hit him repeatedly with a metal rod before arresting him.

Oraib Rantawi, director of Al-Quds Center for Political Affairs, told Arab News that the Biden administration is stepping up its coordination with Jordan and Egypt, while "Trump and his people gave preference to the Gulf countries, and disregarded Jordan and Egypt."

Rantawi said: "I expect that the internal situation is worrying Jordan, and Abbas will most certainly receive friendly advice from King Abdullah on the need to address internal issues that have weakened Abbas and his administration."

Lamis Andoni, a longtime observer of Jordanian-Palestinian relations, told Arab News: "What is happening in Jerusalem, and its effects on the region and the future, will be an important topic discussed between them."

Trump's policies were a major problem for both Jordan and Palestine, she added.

"The policies of the previous US administration gave legitimacy to Israel to increase its expansion into Palestinian lands," Andoni said.

She said that the Jordan visit is intended to strengthen Abbas' standing amid growing protests and criticism directed at the Palestinian leader, she said.

"He needs to appear to be still representing the Palestinian Authority."



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Criticism of Palestinian security forces raises pressure on Abbas

[Jail suicide bid ordeal of Yemeni model persecuted by Houthi militia](#)

Wed, 2021-06-30 20:58

ALEXANDRIA: The Yemeni model abducted and put on trial in Sanaa by the Iran-backed Houthi militia was being treated in hospital on Wednesday after trying to kill herself in prison.

Entesar Al-Hammadi's suicide attempt took place on Monday inside a Houthi-controlled jail. Her lawyer, Khaled Mohammed Al-Kamal, told Arab News she had tried to hang herself shortly after the Houthis moved her into a wing for "prostitutes." She was saved when a child cried out after seeing her hanging.

"She felt humiliated by the Houthis shaming her," Al-Kamal said. "Her mental and physical condition is very, very difficult."

Born to a Yemeni father and an Ethiopian mother, Al-Hammadi, 20, was snatched from a street in Sanaa with two friends on Feb. 20 and on put on trial on charges of prostitution, drug dealing, and breaching Islamic norms.

The Houthis refused to release her despite intense local and international pressure, and after placing her in solitary confinement, the group banned media coverage of the case and replaced a prosecutor who had ordered her release.

Al-Hammadi denied the accusations and threatened a hunger strike if the Houthis refused to free her. Yemeni activists who visited her in prison in May said she told them that the Houthis punished her for refusing to spy for them.

Michael Page, deputy Middle East director of Human Rights Watch, said Al-Hammadi was facing an unfair trial and the Houthis had prevented her lawyer from seeing case documents.

“The Houthi authorities should ensure her rights to due process, including access to her charges and evidence against her so she can challenge it, and immediately drop charges that are so broad and vague that they are arbitrary,” he said.

Ahmed Arman, Yemen’s minister of legal affairs and human rights, told Arab News the Houthi handling of the case was typical of their mistreatment of prisoners.



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Houthis sought to recruit me as spy, abducted Yemeni model says from prison

[Egypt guards against entry of new virus strains](#)

Author:

Wed, 2021-06-30 20:38

CAIRO: Egypt is monitoring ports and airports to prevent any new COVID-19 variants entering the country, according to a health official.

Mohammed Awad Taj El-Din, adviser to the president for health and preventive affairs, said: "The peak of the third wave of the coronavirus has ended, and the number of infections and deaths is decreasing.

"We are in a period of practical relaxation, and we are taking advantage of this opportunity to support hospitals that need equipment, maintenance and supplies."

However, since the coronavirus crisis has yet to end, precautionary and preventive measures must be taken "with all available means," he added.

The health official's comments come amid a push by President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi and the Egyptian government to step up the country's vaccination program.

Under an agreement, Africa will receive 400 million doses of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine produced in South Africa, with Egypt getting 20 million doses, Taj El-Din said.

The vaccines were due to be administered in September, but intense negotiations launched by Egypt mean the country will get the jabs from July.

Taj El-Din said that only one dose of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine is needed and that its price has been reduced from \$10 per dose to \$7.50 following the talks.

"We will need to be revaccinated against coronavirus after six months, nine months at the most. We are studying whether the revaccination will be done twice or only once," he said.

Meanwhile, Hala Zayed, the health minister, described the local production of the first 300,000 doses of Egyptian-made Sinovac vaccine as "a great

victory.”

Zayed said that two factories affiliated with the Egyptian Holding Company for Biological Products and Vaccines have been opened, the first with a production capacity of 300,000 doses per day and an annual production capacity of 110 to 220 million doses.

The second factory will operate with a production capacity of 3 million daily doses and 1 billion annual doses, she said.

Egypt, together with experts from India and China, is working to equip the factory in order to export the jabs to Africa and the region.

According to government data, Egypt is witnessing a significant decrease in new cases, with 261 recorded on Tuesday, the lowest number since Nov. 16, 2020.

The latest figure marks a dramatic fall compared with the 376 cases recorded on Monday and brings the overall total to 281,031.



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