

Palestinian labor minister quits amid anti-govt protests

Sun, 2021-06-27 22:23

RAMALLAH: The labor minister in the Palestinian Authority resigned Sunday, a member of his party said, as security forces braced for further protests demanding president Mahmoud Abbas step down.

The decision comes after three days of heavy protests against the Palestinian Authority (PA), triggered by the violent arrest and death in custody of an activist.

Nizar Banat, a 43-year-old known for social media videos denouncing alleged corruption within the PA, died on Thursday shortly after security forces stormed his house and violently arrested him, his family said.

New protests are slated for Sunday evening in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, in both Ramallah – the seat of the PA – and Banat's hometown of Hebron.

The left-wing Palestinian People's Party withdrew from the Fatah-led PA government due to "its lack of respect for laws and public freedoms," party member Issam Abu Bakr said.

Nasri Abu Jaish, the labor minister and the People's Party representative in the government, has therefore resigned, said Abu Bakr.

The PA has announced the opening of an investigation into Banat's death, but it has done little to appease anger on the streets.

According to the autopsy, injuries indicated Banat had been beaten on the head, chest, neck, legs and hands, with less than hour elapsing between his arrest and his death, pathologist Samir Abu Zarzour said.

On Saturday, protesters in Ramallah hurled rocks at Palestinian security forces, who opened fire with a barrage of tear gas canisters, with reports of several injured.

Protesters called for 86-year-old Abbas to quit.

Banat had registered as a candidate in Palestinian parliamentary elections, which had been set for May until Abbas postponed them indefinitely.

The original mandate of Abbas expired in 2009, and he has since governed by decree.

In May, Abbas declared that legislative and presidential polls set for May and June respectively should not be held until Israel guaranteed voting could take place in annexed east Jerusalem.

In addition to holding the presidency, Abbas is also head of Fatah and president of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), recognized internationally as representing the Palestinians.

But Fatah faces a growing challenge from its longtime rivals, the militant Islamist organization Hamas, which rules the Palestinian coastal enclave of Gaza.

The PA exercises limited powers over some 40 percent of the West Bank, occupied by Israel since the Six-Day War of 1967.

Israel, which controls all access to the territory and coordinates with the PA, directly administers the remaining 60 percent.



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[UAE says 70 percent of population vaccinated against COVID-19](#)

Sun, 2021-06-27 19:41

AMMAN: The UAE said on Sunday that 70 percent of the country's population has been vaccinated against COVID-19.

The UAE also said that 16 percent of those who have been vaccinated have tested positive for coronavirus.

The Emirates added that Beta, Delta and Alpha variants of COVID-19 are currently prevalent in the country.

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[Oman reports record number of COVID-19 deaths in 72 hours](#)

Author:

Reuters

ID:

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Sun, 2021-06-27 11:24

DUBAI: Oman reported a record number of COVID-19 infections and deaths in the past 72 hours, with 119 dying from the disease during this period, the

newspaper Oman News said on Sunday.

A total of 5,517 people were diagnosed with the virus in the same period, it said.



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[Israel FM tells Blinken of 'serious reservations' on Iran](#)

Author:

Reuters

ID:

1624779253248548400

Sun, 2021-06-27 06:57

ROME: Israel has serious reservations about the Iran nuclear deal being put together in Vienna, new foreign minister Yair Lapid told his American counterpart, as he pledged to fix "the mistakes made" between the two countries over the past few years.

In their first face-to-face meeting since Israel's new government was sworn in two weeks ago, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Lapid said they

would also discuss Israel's normalization accords with Gulf Arab states. Blinken said he would also be raising the issue of humanitarian assistance into Gaza.

Blinken said the US supports Israel's normalization accords, but they cannot be a substitute for engaging in issues between Israelis and Palestinians. Iran and the United States have been holding indirect talks on reviving the 2015 nuclear deal between Tehran and major powers that imposed restrictions on Tehran's nuclear activities in exchange for lifting international sanctions.

"Israel has some serious reservations about the Iran nuclear deal that is being put together in Vienna. We believe the way to discuss those disagreements is through direct...conversations, not in press conferences," Lapid said in his brief remarks before the meeting in Rome began. He also said Israel will be working to improve ties with Washington.

"In the past few years, mistakes were made. Israel's bipartisan standing was hurt and we will fix those mistakes together," he added.



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US, France warn Iran that time running out to revive nuclear deal

Iran refuses to give nuclear site images to IAEA

Author:

Reuters

ID:

1624780415188567500

Sun, 2021-06-27 07:46

DUBAI: The speaker of Iran's parliament said on Sunday Tehran will never hand over images from inside of some Iranian nuclear sites to the UN nuclear watchdog as a monitoring agreement with the agency had expired, Iranian state media reported.

"The agreement has expired ... any of the information recorded will never be given to the International Atomic Energy Agency and the data and images will remain in the possession of Iran," said Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf.

The announcement could further complicate talks between Iran and six major powers on reviving a 2015 nuclear deal. Three years ago then US President Donald Trump withdrew from the pact and reimposed crippling sanctions on Tehran; Iran reacted by violating many of the deal's restrictions on its nuclear program.

A spokesman for parliament's National Security and Foreign Affairs Committee warned that "Iran will also turn off the IAEA cameras if the United States fails to remove all sanctions," the state-run Tehran Times newspaper's website reported.

The IAEA and Tehran struck the three-month monitoring agreement in February to cushion the blow of Iran reducing its cooperation with the agency, and it allowed monitoring of some activities that would otherwise have been axed to continue.

Under that agreement, which on May 24 was extended by a month, data continues to be collected in a black-box-type arrangement, with the IAEA only able to access it at a later date.

On Friday, the IAEA demanded an immediate reply from Iran on whether it would extend the monitoring agreement, prompting an Iranian envoy to respond that Tehran was under no obligation to provide an answer.

Iran said on Wednesday the country's Supreme National Security Council would decide whether to renew the monitoring agreement only after it expires.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Friday that any failure by Tehran to extend the monitoring agreement would be a "serious concern" for broader negotiations.

Parties involved in the talks on reviving the deal, which began in April in Vienna, have said there are major issues still to be resolved before the nuclear deal can be reinstated.



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