

Over Corruption Scandals

Israeli Protesters Urge Netanyahu Resignation

AL-QUDS (Dispatches) - Some 2,000 Israelis have once again taken to the streets of Tel Aviv to demand the resignation of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu over a series of corruption scandals.

Saturday's event was the eighth consecutive weekly anti-corruption demonstration in Tel Aviv, where the protesters carried placards reading, "Crime Minister."

They also chanted slogans such as "Shame," "Bribe, bribe, bribe," "Corporate power, organized crime," "The most important thing is not to be afraid," "The people demand social justice," "We won't give up," "We are obliged to rally every week" and "Bibi Netanyahu to the Ma'asiyahu prison."

The Ma'asiyahu prison is specifically designated for illegal immigrants and others awaiting deportation.

The protesters are angry at a notice issued by Tel Aviv earlier this month for thousands of African migrants to leave the occupied territories or face imprisonment. The threat sparked condemnations by human rights groups.

"This is a struggle that is persisting, Saturday after Saturday," said Ildad Yaniv, protest organizer.

Demonstrator Aylon Vaidya said he attended the rally to save Israel "from the corruption, from the fascism, from



Thousands of Israelis once again protest in Tel Aviv against corruption amid fresh controversy over a leaked tape featuring PM Netanyahu's son.

going down. They are trying to deport foreigners - asylum seekers - and the prime minister and his friends are full of corruption."

In addition to Tel Aviv, the cities of Haifa, Afula and Petah Tikva witnessed similar anti-corruption demonstrations on Saturday.

In Petah Tikva, the demonstrators heckled Zionists' Attorney General

Avichai Mendelblit as he left a synagogue. He is accused of foot-dragging in investigations against the prime minister.

Netanyahu is suspected of being involved in bribery, fraud and breach of trust.

He has been questioned in two separate cases, involving allegations that he received lavish gifts from

wealthy businessmen and negotiated a deal with a newspaper owner for more favorable coverage. He has denied any wrongdoing.

Another bribery scandal, called the "submarine affair," also involves Netanyahu associates.

The Zionist premier has described the weekly events as part of efforts meant to topple him "at any cost."

Iraq's Supreme Court Rules Against Election Delay

BAGHDAD (Dispatches) - **Iraq's Supreme Federal Court on Sunday ruled against calls by Sunni and Kurdish lawmakers to delay a parliamentary election, expected to be called for May, to allow hundreds of thousands of people displaced by war to return home.**

Shi'ite politicians, including Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, argued delaying the election would be unconstitutional.

The election must be held "within the timeframe provided by

the constitution," the court said in a statement.

Parliament is expected to meet on Monday to validate May 12 as the date for the ballot, as suggested by the government, or agree another date in May.

Abadi is seeking re-election, building on a surge in his popularity among Iraq's majority Shi'ite Arab community after leading the three-year fight against Islamic State militants, supported by a U.S.-led coalition.

"Postponing the elections would set a dangerous precedent, undermining the constitution and damaging Iraq's long-term democratic development," the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad said in a statement on Thursday.

The United States had shown understanding for Abadi's move in October to dislodge Kurdish fighters from the oil rich northern region of Kirkuk, even though the Kurds are traditional allies of Washington and played a key part

in the war against the terrorist group of Daesh.

Tens of thousands of Kurds were displaced as a result of the takeover of the ethnically mixed areas of Kirkuk and its surroundings by Iraqi forces supported by Iranian-backed paramilitary groups.

The United Nations estimates the total number of people who remain displaced in Iraq at 2.6 million, mostly Sunni Arabs from areas previously controlled by terrorist group of Daesh.

UN to Launch Funding Campaign For Palestinian Refugees

GAZA (Dispatches) - **The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) will launch on Monday a funding campaign to face its budget deficit, a UNRWA official said on Sunday.**

"UNRWA Commissioner-General Pierre Krahenbuhl will hold a press conference in Gaza on Monday where he will announce the kick-off of the campaign," UNRWA's media advisor Adnan Abu Hasna told media.

The conference will send a message to the international community to start a funding campaign to help UNRWA



Palestinians protest against the U.S. for withholding \$65 million from Palestinian aid programs, in front of the UNRWA offices in the Nusseirat refugee camp, central Gaza Strip, Wednesday, Jan. 17, 2018.

continue providing its services to the Palestinian refugees.

"The agency is facing unprecedented challenges," Abu Hasna said.

The campaign comes days after the United States decided to decrease its contribution to UNRWA in 2018 from \$125 million to 65 million dollars.

UNRWA, which provides assistance in education, health and food to some 5 million registered Palestinian refugees in the Middle East, is already suffering from a 49-million dollars financial deficit and any fund suspension would have a negative impact on its work.

Is ...

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"Our people are holding on to their land and do not accept surrender ... we repeat our determination to protect our people in Afrin against the attacks," the YPG said overnight.

Turkey's state-run Anadolu news agency reported that four rockets fired from Syria hit the border town of Kilis overnight, damaging houses. Turkish security forces retaliated, it said.

The operation pits Turkey against Kurdish militants allied to the United States at a time when ties between Ankara and Washington appear close to a breaking point.

Turkey sees the YPG as an extension of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which has carried out a three-decade insurgency in Turkey's mainly Kurdish southeast.

Trump ...

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Armed services personnel abroad got their first taste of the cuts when they were told they would not be able to watch Sunday's NFL playoff games, because the armed forces broadcasting network had shut down.

With crisis talks under way, Trump cancelled a trip to his Florida retreat at Mar-a-Lago, where he had hoped to celebrate his year in office at a gala dinner.

Instead, as protesters marked their own anniversary of major anti-Trump demonstrations outside the White House and in other major cities, the president stayed in Washington, firing off angry tweets.

At a press conference, House minority leader Nancy Pelosi alluded to a tweet Trump wrote in May 2017, saying a shutdown would be good for the country.

"Happy anniversary Mr. President, your wish came true," Pelosi said. "You won the shutdown. The shutdown is all yours."

Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), Obama-era legislation that allowed approximately 700,000 Dreamers to stay in the country, is set to expire on 5 March after being rescinded by Trump. Democrats have refused to support any spending bill that does not restore such protection.

In a CNN poll, 31% blamed Democrats for the shutdown, 26% blamed Republicans and 21% held Trump responsible. Although there is broad support for protecting Dreamers, a majority thought it was more important to avoid a shutdown.

Trump's presidential campaign released a new ad - which claimed Democrats were "complicit in all murders by illegal immigrants".

Taliban ...

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During a news conference, Danish said that early investigations show that six insurgents entered the hotel from the northern side and stormed its kitchen. Two attackers were killed by special forces on the 6th floor of the hotel.

Danish said initial reports indicated that a person or persons inside the hotel helped the attackers get inside. He added that the investigation is not completed.

Mumtaz Ahmad, a provincial telecommunication employee for Helmand province who survivor the attack said, "I was on my way from my room toward the reception, when I the elevator door opened, I saw two-armed suicide bombers. People were escaping and the attackers were firing at them."

Afghan security officials confirmed that 34 provincial

officials were gathered at the hotel to participate in a conference organized by the Telecommunication Ministry.

A fire broke out at the hotel as the fighting raged, and the sound of explosions could be heard throughout the standoff. Live TV footage showed people trying to escape through windows on the upper stories.

Capt. Tom Gresback, spokesman for NATO-led forces, said in a statement that Afghan forces were leading the response efforts. He said that according to initial reports, no foreign troops were hurt in the attack.

Neighboring Pakistan condemned the "brutal terrorist attack" and called for greater cooperation against militants. Afghanistan and Pakistan routinely accuse each other of failing to combat extremists along their long and porous border.

Afghan forces have struggled to fight the Taliban since the U.S. and NATO formally concluded their combat mission at the end of 2014. They have also had to contend with a growing Daesh affiliate that has carried out a number of big attacks in recent years.

In the northern Balkh province, insurgents burst into a home where several members of a local pro-government militia were gathered late Saturday, leading them outside and killing 18 of them, said Gen. Abdul Razeq Qaderi, the deputy provincial police chief. Among those killed was a tribal leader who served as the local police commander, he said.

In the western province of Farah, a roadside bomb killed a deputy provincial police chief and wounded four other police early Sunday, according to Gen. Mahruf Foad, the provincial police chief.

The Taliban claimed both attacks.

In the western province of Herat, a roadside bomb struck a vehicle carrying 13 civilians, killing all but one of them, said Abdul Ahad Walizada, a spokesman for the provincial police chief. No one immediately claimed the attack, but Walizada blamed Taliban insurgents, who often plant roadside bombs to target Afghan security forces.

Tillerson ...

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On Tuesday in Paris, Tillerson will meet senior French officials on the same issues, then spend two days in Davos shadowing Trump at his first visit as president to the annual economic forum.

By Friday, he will be in Poland for more talks with senior officials on security and economic matters.

Minister ...

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"They will pursue this matter until these forces withdraw from irrelevant economic activities," Hatami was quoted as saying in an interview late Saturday to Iran newspaper.

Defense forces have economic holdings in Iran's construction, energy, banking, insurance and telecommunications industries.

Hatami said that according to Iran's constitution the force must assist and support the government on various projects at its request and this could take the shape of economic activities.

"These tasks are of another nature and are in order to help various sectors," Hatami said. "Depending on the requirements of the government, this work can continue or it may not."

"Our success depends on market conditions," he said but did not name the companies that would be privatized.

UAE, WEF to Co-Launch Center for "4th Industrial Revolution"

DUBAI (Xinhua) - **The United Arab Emirates (UAE) will co-launch with the World Economic Forum (WEF) a center for the fourth industrial revolution in the UAE, Emirati state news agency WAM reported on Sunday.**

Mohammad Al-Gergawi, the UAE minister of cabinet affairs and the future, will sign the deal

with Klaus Schwab, founder and executive chairman of the WEF during its annual forum in Davos, Switzerland.

The new center will aim at providing technical support to government authorities in the field of "transforming the industrial revolution principles into real applications," according to WAM.

Al-Gergawi and Schwab will also sign a cooperation agreement concerning the fourth industrial revolution protocol that would emphasize building a legal and organizational framework for the governance of information.

This agreement will relate "to the various sectors of the industrial change which includes artificial

intelligence, robotics, internet of things, drones and autonomous vehicles," said the report.

The signing of both agreements is in accordance with the framework of UAE directives and the vision of its government to adopt innovative directions for the future government that represents the fourth industrial revolution.