

Displaced Palestinians Live in Caves Due to Zionist Settlement Expansion

RAMALLAH (Dispatches) – It has been a year since Monzer Abu Arram, was forced to move into a mountain near al-Khalil, West Bank, after being displaced due to the settlement expansion by the Zionist regime.

The Palestinian man from the West Bank town of Khibet Jinba lives in a cave with his family members after the occupying regime's army demolished their house.

The 48-year-old father of four said his family now lives in dire conditions without any access to water and electricity.

"Israel denies giving me any permission to rebuild my house and my kids are scared all the time because living in a cave exposes them to the potential sting of scorpions or snakes," he told Xinhua.

"Our life is tough, and Israel is working to displace us from our land in order to implement the scheme of annexation and settlement expansion and impose its control on all Palestinian lands," Abu Arram's wife Halima said.

The town of Khibet Jinba is classified as Area C.

Oslo accords signed between the Zionist regime and the Palestinians in 1993 had divided the West Bank into three areas, as Area A is under the full security and administrative control of the Palestinian Authority (PA).

Area B is under joint Zionist control and PA administrative rule, while Area C is under full Zionist control.

"There is a significant and unprecedented Israeli escalation of confiscating lands and expanding settlements in Area C to impose new realities on the ground," Walid Assaf, head of the National Commission to Resist the Wall



Palestinians check a house after it was demolished by the Zionist regime's authorities on November 28, 2019, in the village of Beit Kahil near the occupied West Bank city of al-Khalil.

and Settlements in the West Bank, recently said.

Sameera al-Jabarin, a 38-year-old mother of six, also lives in a cave located in the town of Khirbet al-Fakhit, south of al-Khalil city, after the Zionist regime's bulldozers demolished her house three times.

Besides dire living conditions, al-Jabarin said she faces sporadic attacks of Zionist settlers residing in the area.

Meanwhile, Abdul Hadi Hantash, a Palestinian expert in settlement affairs in the West Bank, accused the occupying regime of systematically working to "Judaize" al-Khalil.

"We are facing daily crimes against the Palestinian population in al-Khalil, which requires us to file lawsuits against Israel before the International Criminal Court, and urge them to issue decisions that do justice to the Palestinians," Hantash told Xinhua.

Third of Afghans Estimated to Have Contracted Virus

KABUL (AFP) – Nearly a third of Afghanistan's population – or 10 million people – has been infected with the coronavirus, according to health ministry estimates published Wednesday.

The figure comes from a survey based on antibody tests on around 9,500 people across the country, with technical support from the World Health Organization, health minister Ahmad

Jawad Osmani said at a press briefing.

The survey estimated that 31.5 percent of the population had contracted the virus, with the highest infection rate in Kabul where more than half of the city's five million population were thought to have been infected.

But the country of around 32 million people has only limited

testing capacity and has officially declared just 36,000 cases and more than 1,200 deaths.

"A second wave of the infection is happening everywhere in the world and we cannot be an exception. We will use the findings of this survey to better prepare ourselves for a possible second wave," Osmani said.

More than 18 million people

worldwide have been infected with the virus since it first emerged in China late last year.

The virus entered Afghanistan in February. Since then Afghanistan, already wracked by decades of war, has been ravaged by COVID-19.

A survey on the mortality rate of coronavirus Afghanistan is underway.

Clashes Break Out in Jordan Protest

AMMAN (Dispatches) – Protesters have clashed with security forces in Jordan as hundreds of people took to the streets to demand the release of leading members of an opposition-run teachers' union.

Demonstrators staged a rally in the southern city of Karak to voice objection to the detention of the members of the Jordanian Teachers Syndicate.

The protesters tried to block roads and threw stones at the security personnel, who came to disperse them.

Security forces then used tear gas to break up the gathering.

A government source said seven security forces were injured during the demonstration, the official Petra news agency reported.

The Jordanian government on July 25 arrested leaders of the 100,000-strong union, raided its offices and suspended its activity for two years, in what was considered as a major crackdown on a group that has become a leading source of dissent.

Prosecutors charged Nasser Nawasreh, the acting head of the syndicate, with incitement as well as financial and administrative wrongdoing.

Murad Adailah, head of the Islamic Action Front – Jordan's largest opposition party, said at the time that the crackdown on the union would "only further aggravate political tensions by the government at a time

when people are being choked under hard economic conditions."

Human Rights Watch (HRW) also criticized the crackdown last week.

"Shuttering one of the Jordan's few independent labor unions following a protracted dispute with the government and on dubious legal grounds raises serious concerns about the government's respect for the rule of law," said Michael Page, the deputy director of the HRW's Middle East and North Africa division.

Last year, the Jordanian Teachers Syndicate went on strike and closed its offices across the country for a month.

In recent weeks, its leaders have criticized the government of failing to stand committed to a deal struck last October that ended the strike.

The agreement included a 50 percent pay rise this year, which authorities now say cannot afford due to the economic fallout of the coronavirus pandemic.

Opposition activists say the government has been exercising stringent emergency laws since March, when the coronavirus lockdown was enacted in order to curtail civil and political rights.

Protests have grown in recent years in the kingdom over degrading living standards, corruption and the slow pace of political reforms.

Turkey Considering Quitting Treaty on Women: AKP

ISTANBUL (Dispatches) – President Tayyip Erdogan's AK Party is considering whether to pull Turkey out of an international accord on women, party officials say, alarming campaigners who see the pact as key to combating rising domestic violence.

The officials said the AKP is set to decide by next week whether to withdraw from the deal.

Many conservatives in Turkey say the pact, ironically forged in Istanbul, encourages violence by undermining family structures. Their opponents argue that the deal, and legislation approved in its wake, need to be implemented more stringently.

The row reaches not just within Erdogan's AKP but even his own family, with two of

his children involved in groups on either side of the debate about the Istanbul Convention.

The AKP will decide in the next week whether to initiate legal steps to pull out of the accord, a senior party official told Reuters.

"There is a small majority (in the party) who argue it is right to withdraw," said the official.

Another AKP official argued that the way to reduce the violence was to withdraw, adding that a decision would be reached next week.

Opponents of the accord say it is part of the problem because it undermines traditional values which protect society.

"It is our religion which determines our fundamental values, our view of the family,"

said the Turkish Youth Foundation, whose advisory board includes the president's son Bilal Erdogan. It called for Turkey to withdraw from the accord.

The Women and Democracy Association (KADEM), of which Erdogan's daughter Sumeyye is deputy chairwoman, rejects that argument. "We can no longer talk about 'family'...in a relationship where one side is oppressed and subject to violence," KADEM said.

Turkey would not be the first country to move towards ditching the accord. Poland's highest court is to scrutinize the pact after a cabinet member said Warsaw should quit the treaty which the nationalist government considers too liberal.

Aid Pours...

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"This grievous disaster, along with its unprecedented repercussions and damage it had caused on several levels, requires a national stand by all Lebanese people and powers in a bid to overcome this ordeal," it said.

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad wrote to his Lebanese counterpart Aoun that "on behalf of the Syrian Arab people, we extend our sincere condolences to you and the Lebanese people".

President Aoun said a state of emergency should be declared in Beirut for two weeks, and called for an emergency cabinet meeting on Wednesday.

Aoun, in remarks published on the Presidency Twitter account, said it was "unacceptable" that 2,750 tonnes of ammonium nitrate was stored in a warehouse for six years without safety measures and vowed that those responsible would face the "harshest punishments".

"What happened today will not pass without accountability," Prime Minister Diab said. "Those responsible for this catastrophe will pay the price."

The explosion was the most powerful ever to hit Beirut, leaving the port district wreck of mangled masonry and disabling the main entry port for imports to feed a nation of more than 6 million people.

Lebanese musician Jad Choueiri said the scenes near his home in the Achrafieh neighborhood "looked like the apocalypse."

More than 300,000 people have been left homeless with the damage of the blast estimated to cost over \$3 billion.

Smoke still rose Wednesday from the port, where a towering building of silos was half destroyed, spilling out grain. Hangars around it were completely toppled.

The economy minister said Lebanon's main grain silo at Beirut port was destroyed in the blast, leaving the nation with less than a month's reserves of the grain but enough flour to avoid a crisis.

Raoul Nehme said Lebanon needed reserves for at least three months to ensure food security and was looking at other storage areas.

"There is no bread or flour crisis," the minister said. "We have enough inventory and boats on their way to cover the needs of Lebanon on the long term."

The economy was already in meltdown before the blast, slowing grain imports as the nation struggled to find hard currency for purchases.

Iran's Judiciary Chief Ebrahim Raeisi called on the international community to take action to help lift U.S. sanctions against Lebanon to prevent a humanitarian catastrophe.

The blast knocked out a crater some 200 meters (yards) across that filled with seawater — it was as if the sea had taken a bite out of the port, swallowing buildings with it.

Much of downtown was littered with damaged vehicles and debris that had rained down from the shattered facades of buildings.

Initial investigations indicate years of inaction and negligence over the storage of ammonium nitrate that caused the explosion, an official source familiar with the findings said.

"It is negligence," the official source told Reuters, adding that the issue on storing the material safely had come before several committees and judges and "nothing was done" to order the material be removed or disposed of.

The source said a fire had started at port warehouse 9 on Tuesday and spread to warehouse 12, where the ammonium nitrate was stored.

Another source close to a port employee said a team that inspected the material six months ago warned it could "blow up all of Beirut" if not removed.

Beirut port's general manager said that the facility had warehoused highly-explosive material six years ago based on a court order, local broadcaster OTV reported.

The broadcaster quoted Hassan Koraytem as telling it that the customs department and state security had asked authorities for the material to be exported or removed, but that "nothing happened".

Modi...

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building of a Hindu temple on the disputed site in Uttar Pradesh state.

The Babri Masjid mosque was destroyed by Hindu radicals with pickaxes and crowbars in December 1992, sparking massive Hindu-Muslim violence that left some 2,000 people dead, most of them Muslims. The Supreme Court's verdict allowed a temple to be built in place of the demolished mosque.

Muslims comprise about 14% of Hindu-majority India's population of 1.3 billion. The temple-mosque dispute badly divided Hindus and Muslims, often triggering communal clashes.

Prominent Muslims have said they fear the new temple could embolden Hindu nationalists to target two other mosques in Uttar Pradesh.

Many members of India's Muslim minority saw last year's court ruling awarding the site to Hindus as part of a pattern by the Hindu-nationalist government aimed at sidelining Muslims.

The site of Ayodhya and divided Kashmir have been two of the most divisive communal issues of the past 30 years in India, and Modi has attempted to draw a line under both in his second term.

For his fans both steps confirm Modi as a decisive leader, and India's most important in decades. His critics see him as remolding the country as a Hindu nation, at the expense of India's 200 million Muslims, and taking it in an authoritarian direction.

"Modi has certainly been India's most transformative leader in recent memory," Micheal Kugelman from the Wilson Center told AFP. "This has made him wildly popular, but also highly controversial and quite divisive."

Other actions have also alarmed Modi's critics and delighted his fans. Last year a new law made it easier for millions of illegal immigrants from three neighboring countries to get citizenship, but not if they are Muslims.

A "citizenship list" in Assam state left off millions who were unable to prove they were Indian, many of them Muslims, a process many fear the BJP wants to roll out nationwide.

More may be in the pipeline.

On the BJP's wishlist is a uniform civil code, doing away with personal laws for religious minorities in areas such as marriage, family and death — a policy aimed primarily at Muslims.

"Clearly, it's full speed ahead with the Hindu nationalist agenda," Kugelman said. "The government knows it has some major challenges with the economy and the pandemic. By focusing on the social agenda... it can distract its rank and file and shore up political support."

Japan...

(Continued From Page One)

major U.S.-Russia nuclear arms control treaty, unless China also agrees to be bound by its constraints. Beijing has not committed either way. New START expires in February, just weeks after there's a new, or renewed, U.S. president in the White House.

Marshall Billingslea, the top U.S. envoy for nuclear negotiations, has confirmed the Trump administration has discussed holding the first nuclear test since 1992.

U.S....

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Ravanchi stressed that Iran will not accept "anything less than full implementation" of the provision lifting the arms embargo.

Russia's UN Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia has dismissed as "ridiculous" the possibility of the Trump administration trying to use the snapback provision, stressing that since the U.S. pulled out of the JCPOA "they have no right" to use any of its provisions.