



High-Tech Workers Protest Against Netanyahu

WEST BANK (Dispatches) – Hundreds of high-tech workers in the occupied territories protested Tuesday against a proposed judicial overhaul, saying the regime's controversial plans will hurt the sector. Prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu's regime says judges have too much power over elected officials, arguing the proposed reforms -- such as allowing parliament to overrule Supreme Court decisions through a majority vote -- are essential to correct the imbalance. On Tuesday, around 500 high-tech workers held a protest, saying the industry would suffer if foreign firms lost confidence in the regime's already failing legal system. The demonstration blocked a road in Tel Aviv while some protesters held anti-Netanyahu placards.

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Islamic Jihad Warns of Imminent Confrontation With Zionist Regime

WEST BANK (Dispatches) – The Palestinian Islamic Jihad resistance movement has censured the recurrent desecration of the sacred Al-Aqsa Mosque compound and other holy places across the occupied territories, warning of a serious face-off with the occupying regime.

Islamic Jihad spokesman Tariq Salmi denounced Monday morning's incursion of hundreds of extremist Jewish settlers into the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound in occupied East Al-Quds, calling it a "brazen attack on Palestinians, Arabs and Muslims."

"The assault on the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound and performance of provocative rituals in the courtyard of the sacred site reveals the stubborn determination of the far-right administration of the occupying Israeli regime to imple-



Palestinians protest in Khan al-Ahmar against a Zionist plan to evacuate the Bedouin village, which lies in the occupied West Bank, January 23, 2023.

ment its evil plans. Such moves are viewed as a declaration of war on Al-Quds and the entire Palestinian nation," Salmi said.

"We are teetering on the edge of a full-fledged confrontation and the

situation would go off at any time in case all relevant parties do not fulfill their responsibilities to stop the crimes of the Israeli regime. We would then recognize no reservations to defend Al-Quds and Al-

Aqsa Mosque," he added.

Salmi asserted that Palestinians are fairly capable of defending their land and sanctities, as they proved during the 11-day Operation Sword of Al-Quds in May 2021.

Gaza-based resistance forces launched Operation Sword of Al-Quds in defense of Palestinians in Al-Quds against the Zionist regime's atrocities and desecration of Al-Aqsa Mosque.

During that operation, Palestinian resistance groups overwhelmed the Zionist regime by firing over 4,000 rockets and missiles into the occupied territories. Israel, shocked by the unprecedented barrage of rockets from Gaza, announced a unilateral ceasefire on May 21 that year, which Palestinian resistance movements accepted with Egyptian mediation.

Rights Group Raises Alarm Over Fate of Jailed Activists in Saudi Arabia



The maximum-security al-Ha'ir Prison, located approximately 40 kilometers (25 miles) south of Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

RIYADH (Dispatches) – A human rights organization has sounded the alarm over the fate of political dissidents incarcerated in Saudi jails, amid the Riyadh regime's aggressive crackdown on any whiff of dissent.

In its latest report, Sanad human rights organization, which monitors and exposes human rights violations in Saudi Arabia, said civil rights activists and distinguished scholars feel really insecure anytime they express their opinions and make critical comments.

The organization lamented that concerns about the fate of imprisoned activists in Saudi Arabia have increased in light of the House of Saud's heavy-handed clampdown, arrest campaigns, persecution of dissidents, and pervasive distortion and misrepresentation of facts.

It said the situation of civil rights and personal freedoms in Saudi Arabia has deteriorated significantly since Mohammed bin Salman was named the kingdom's crown prince in 2017, and arbitrary arrests and deliberate abuses are increasingly getting common.

Sanad, citing human rights sources requesting anonymity, reported that Saudi forces have illegally and arbitrarily arrested and imprisoned rights activist Ibrahim al-Dhahan, without providing any reasons.

The rights group also pointed to

another Saudi activist, Abed bin Nasser al-Mashal, saying he had been sentenced to 17 years in prison by the country's judiciary on trumped-up charges.

Sanad finally called upon relevant state institutions in Saudi Arabia to respect the rights of citizens, observe freedom of speech, prevent arbitrary arrests, and release prisoners of conscience.

Saudi authorities have detained dozens of officials in a new alleged anti-corruption case amid reports that bin Salman is seeking to get rid of potential rivals to the throne. The English-language daily newspaper Saudi Gazette, citing the country's Oversight and Anti-Corruption Authority (Nazaha), reported that 142 individuals were jailed on charges of bribery, abuse of influence, money laundering and forgery.

The report added that the defendants were employed in the ministries of defense, interior, health, justice, education, municipal and rural affairs as well as housing. There were also officials and employees from Zakat, Tax and Customs Authority in addition to Nazaha.

The Saudi Gazette added that the arrests were made after Nazaha authorities carried out 2,364 inspections.

UN Palestinian Refugee Agency Appeals for \$1.6bn in Funding

GAZA STRIP (AFP) – The UN agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA, appealed Tuesday for \$1.6 billion for its work in 2023, as it struggles to overcome chronic budget shortfalls.

UNRWA -- which provides services to nearly six million Palestinians registered in the Palestinian territories, including occupied east Al-Quds, as well as in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria -- warned that "compounding challenges" had placed it under "immense strain".

The agency, which counts nearly 30,000 staff -- most of them Palestinian refugees -- runs more than 700 schools that offer education to half a million children, and provides health,

sanitation and social services, including food and cash assistance.

Out of the \$1.6 billion requested, UNRWA said \$848 million was needed for such core services.

It said another \$781.6 million was needed for emergency operations.

UNRWA chief Philippe Lazzarini said the agency played "an indispensable role" for millions of Palestinian refugees.

"We work to maintain the delivery of basic services in an incredibly difficult financial and political context," he said in a statement.

The agency warned that most Palestinian refugees now live

below the poverty line and a growing number are dependent on UNRWA for assistance, sometimes for their "sheer survival".

Lazzarini said he had just returned from a trip to Syria where he had "witnessed firsthand indescribable suffering and despair".

That situation, he said, was "sadly mirrored in other places like Lebanon and Gaza where Palestine refugees are hitting rock bottom."

"Many told me that all they asked for was a life of dignity; that's not much to ask for."

UNRWA has long faced chronic budget shortfalls, which worsened dramatically in 2018

when former U.S. president Donald Trump cut support to the agency.

His administration branded UNRWA "irredeemably flawed," siding with the Zionist regime's criticisms of the agency founded in 194.

Last year, UNRWA only raised nearly \$1.2 billion of the \$1.6 billion it had appealed for, Lazzarini said.

"We cannot and should not be always scrambling to bring in funds to cover our contribution to human rights and stability," Lazzarini said, stressing the need for "a more sustainable model of funding... a predictable, long-term and regular source of funding."

Beirut Explosion Investigator Charges Former PM, Top Prosecutor

BEIRUT (Reuters) – The judge probing the 2020 Beirut blast has charged Lebanon's top public prosecutor, the then-premier and other senior current and former officials in connection with the devastating explosion, judicial sources said and court summons show.

Judge Tarek Bitar unexpectedly resumed an inquiry on Monday after it was paralyzed for more than a year by political resistance and legal complaints filed by top officials he was seeking to question.

The explosion on Aug. 4, 2020 was caused by hundreds of tons of ammonium nitrate that had been stored at the port in poor conditions since it was unloaded in 2013. So far, no senior official has been held to account.

Bitar has charged prime minister Hassan Diab and former ministers with homicide with probable intent, according to court summons seen by Reuters on Tuesday.

He also charged Prosecutor General Ghassan Oweidat, the head of Lebanon's domestic intelligence agency Major General Abbas Ibrahim, former army commander Jean Kahwaji and other current and former security and judicial officials, court sources said.

It was not immediately clear what they had been charged with, but one judicial source said Bitar had found Oweidat had not acted responsibly with regards to the ammonium nitrate.

Reuters could not immediately reach Diab or Oweidat for com-

ment. Ibrahim declined to comment on reports he had been charged when contacted by Reuters on Monday. Kahwaji declined to comment.

All those previously charged by Bitar have denied wrongdoing.

Oweidat on Tuesday sent Bitar an official letter saying that Bitar's probe remained suspended and that no official decision had been taken on whether he could continue investigating, according to a copy of the correspondence seen by Reuters.

Bitar's previous efforts to interrogate top officials over the explosion that killed 220 people and shattered parts of Beirut have been hindered by political factions and accused Washington of meddling in the probe.

France Repatriates 47 More Women, Children From Camp in Syria

PARIS (AFP) – France Tuesday repatriated 15 women and 32 children held in a prison camp for militants in Syria, the foreign ministry said, in the third major return of French citizens from the country.

Rights groups have been pressing for years for France to take back the wives and children of Daesh militants held in the camps, since the terrorist movement was ousted from its self-declared "caliphate" in 2019.

But the government refused a blanket repatriation, saying the return of potentially radicalized Daesh family members would pose security risks in France, which has seen a wave of terrorist attacks since 2015.

Instead it said individual cases would be examined, leading to the first group repatriation of 16

mothers and 35 children from Syria in July 2022, and a further 55 in October.

The women and children returned to France on Tuesday were at the Roj camp in northeast Syria under Kurdish administration, near the Turkish and Iraqi borders.

They were placed with social services and the mothers will be brought before judicial authorities, the foreign ministry said, thanking "the local administration in northeastern Syria for its cooperation, which made this operation possible".

Lawyer Marie Dose, who represents relatives of those held in several camps in Syria, has said 150 French women and children were living in these camps before Tuesday's transfer.

Contacted by AFP, the French

foreign ministry declined to say how many more women or children might be returned.

Tuesday's operation came after the United Nations Committee Against Torture last week said that in refusing to repatriate women and minors in Syria, France was violating the UN Convention against torture and cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment.

In a version of a ruling dated November 16, 2022, shared by Dose, the committee said that "not taking all reasonable measures in its power to repatriate the plaintiffs' relatives would constitute a violation by a member state of articles two and 16 of the convention".

French families have been held in the Roj and al-Hol camps in Kurdish-held territory.