

International

Lebanese man dies of wounds as troops and protesters clash

US aid for Palestinian refugees won't cover shortfall: UN

TRIPOLI: A man died of his wounds yesterday in Lebanon after clashes between security forces and protesters angered by the combined impact of a severe economic crisis and a coronavirus lockdown.

Omar Tayba sustained a bullet wound late Wednesday when protests in the northern city of Tripoli turned violent for the third night running, his brother Ahmad told AFP.

"My brother was in Tripoli watching the protests when he was hit," he said. "He was transferred to hospital and died this morning. The 29-year-old man, who was employed in a bakery, became the first fatality-reported also by local media-of the protests that erupted earlier this week in Tripoli.

According to the National News Agency, a total of 226 people received treatment Wednesday night. Tripoli was already one of Lebanon's poorest areas before the coronavirus pandemic piled new misery onto a chronic economic crisis. Many of its residents have been left without an income since Lebanon imposed a full lockdown earlier this month in a bid to stem a surge in Covid-19 cases and prevent its hospitals from being overwhelmed.

A round-the-clock curfew is in force nationwide and grocery shopping is restricted to home deliveries-a service that is often unavailable in poorer areas. Authorities have extended the lockdown by two weeks to February 8.

The UN agency for Palestinian refugees expressed hope yesterday that the United States will resume its funding, but said it still would not



TRIPOLI: Lebanese mourners attend the funeral of Omar Tayba, who died during clashes between anti-government protestors and security forces the previous night, in the northern port city of Tripoli yesterday. — AFP

be enough to cover a shortfall. Under former president Donald Trump, the United States halted its support for the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, or UNRWA. On Tuesday, Washington's interim UN envoy Richard Mills said President Joe Biden intends to "restore US assistance programs that support economic development and humanitarian aid for the Palestinian people", without mentioning UNRWA.

"We welcome the Biden administration's decision to restore assistance to Palestinians and look forward to continuing conversation with them about resumption of aid to UNRWA," said the UN agency's spokeswoman, Tamara Alrifai. Alrifai said the "2021 financial year looks very difficult".

"While the overall budget will remain at \$806 million, same as 2020, the income forecast in the best estimates will lead to an expected shortfall equivalent to three months of operations. "We therefore expect a cashflow crisis as of March this year. More broadly, the expected deficit would be untenable and could lead to a financial collapse of the agency," Alrifai said. "Our financial forecast takes into consideration the expected re-engagement of the US administration, so we predict a bit more income than 2020 but this slightly improved income will not cover the huge liabilities that UNRWA already has." The agency had entered 2021 with liabilities of \$75 million from the last financial year, and its annual deficit was expected to reach \$200 million in the current year, she added.—AFP

Once-jailed Japarov sworn in as Kyrgyz president

BISHKEK, Kyrgyzstan: Populist Sadyr Japarov was sworn in as president of ex-Soviet Kyrgyzstan yesterday, completing a remarkable transformation from prisoner to president in just a few months. Japarov, 52, was serving jail time on hostage-taking charges before being freed during a political crisis over a parliamentary vote in October, beginning a dizzying rise to the top job.

He won a January 10 presidential election by a landslide with close to 80 percent of the vote.

Japarov yesterday swore to "preserve the integrity of the people and the security of the country" as he placed his hand on the Kyrgyz constitution, which is set to be overhauled in the coming months. Voters chose a presidential form of government over a parliamentary model in a referendum held in parallel to the presidential vote. A Kyrgyz cabinet official said Japarov would make his first foreign trip as president to Russia, where hundreds of thousands of Kyrgyz live and work. Japarov called the exodus a "tragedy" at his

inauguration ceremony. "I, like all patriots of the country, dream that Kyrgyzstan will become economically developed, dynamic, strong and free," Japarov said.

"A country where human rights are observed, where there is a dictatorship of law, and youth look to the future with optimism." Japarov's "dictatorship of law" comment parrots the famous catchphrase of Russian leader Vladimir Putin. Yet Moscow has taken a dim view of political upheavals in the mountainous country of 6.5 million that looks to next-door China for loans and investment. Putin last year called the overthrow of the previous government a "misfortune" and chided Bishkek for seeking a political model based on Western democracies.

The new constitution is likely to grant the head of state sweeping new powers when it is passed and reverse the single-term limit imposed on presidents after a bloody uprising ousted the country's second leader in 2010. Two of Japarov's



BISHKEK: Kyrgyzstan's President Sadyr Japarov reviews a parade following his inauguration ceremony in Bishkek yesterday. — AFP

vote challengers Abdil Segizbayev and Kursan Asanov were detained by law enforcement earlier this week, raising fears that Japarov's reign will continue the cycle of revenge and selective justice that has defined local politics.

Segizbayev, who was serving as national security chief at the time of Japarov's arrest in 2017, was detained over charges of abuse of office. Asanov, who proclaimed himself acting interior minister during the same unrest that propelled Japarov to power, has been detained for his alleged role in seizing the ministry building during demonstrations.—AFP

Russia detains Navalny allies after apartment raids

MOSCOW: Several allies of jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny were taken into custody early yesterday after police raided their apartments and offices ahead of planned demonstrations. The searches were connected to a criminal probe launched by the interior ministry over alleged violations of coronavirus restrictions during protests last week, Navalny's aides said. The opposition has called for fresh demonstrations on Sunday to demand freedom for Navalny, who was arrested on his return from Germany where he had been covering from a poisoning attack.

Navalny's lawyers intend to appeal against his arrest later yesterday. Ivan Zhdanov, the head of Navalny's FBK Anti-Corruption Foundation, said prominent aide Lyubov Sobol and Navalny's brother Oleg were detained for 48 hours as suspects.

Sobol's lawyer Vladimir Voronin said both she and Oleg Navalny were questioned by police during the night. Searches were also carried out at the flat of Navalny's wife Yulia, and in the office of FBK, Navalny's organization, which is known for its investigations into the wealth of Russia's elites.

Police also arrived at the home of Navalny's doctor Anastasia Vasilyeva, who was also detained for 48 hours. In a video posted on Twitter by Vasilyeva's press secretary, the doctor is playing Beethoven on the piano as people in uniform arrive at the door.

According to Mediazona, a news website that focuses on opposition detentions, police carried out at least 18 searches on Wednesday.

'Real counterweight'

Tens of thousands of Russians across the country rallied last weekend in support of Navalny, who is awaiting a trial that could see him imprisoned for several years on charges of violating a 2014 suspended sentence. Officials have also threatened to fine social media including Instagram, Twitter and TikTok for failing to delete posts urging young people to join illegal rallies. Protests in Russia are banned if they are not approved by the authorities, as are calls for people under 18 to join in. President Vladimir Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters yesterday that the state did not want social networks to become "platforms to announce illegal protests".

The Investigative Committee, which probes major crimes, said it had launched a probe against Leonid Volkov, the head of Navalny's regional network, for persuading young people to protest. The opposition plans to hold more rallies on Sunday, which in Moscow will take place outside the headquarters of the FSB, the security agency that Navalny says targeted him in the near-fatal poisoning attack. —AFP