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Protests sweep Lebanon; fury at ruling elite grows

Kuwait, Saudi, UAE warn citizens against travelling to Lebanon



BEIRUT: Lebanese security forces block a road as protesters rally in downtown Beirut yesterday on the third day of demonstrations against tax increases and official corruption. — AFP

BEIRUT: Security forces fired tear gas and chased down protesters in Beirut after tens of thousands of people across Lebanon marched to demand the demise of a political elite they accuse of looting the economy to the point of collapse. Riot police in vehicles and on foot rounded up protesters, according to Reuters witnesses. They fired rubber bullets and tear gas canisters, dispersing demonstrators in Beirut's commercial district. Dozens of people were wounded and detained.

Prime Minister Saad Al-Hariri blamed his partners in government for obstructing reforms that could ward off economic crisis and gave them a 72-hour deadline to stop blocking him, otherwise hinting he may resign. Hariri, addressing protesters, said Lebanon was going through an "unprecedented, difficult time". Lebanon's biggest protests in a decade recall the 2011 Arab revolts that toppled four presidents. Lebanese from all sects and walks of life have come out on to the streets, waving banners and chanting slogans urging Hariri's government to go.

The rallies follow warnings by economists and investors that Lebanon's economy and graft-riddled financial system are closer to the brink than at any time since the war-torn 1980s. "There are those who have placed obstacles in front of me ... and in the face of all the efforts that I have proposed for reform," Hariri said, without naming names. "Whatever the solution, we no longer have time and I am personally giving myself only a little time. Either our partners in government and in the nation give a frank response to the solution, or I will

have another say," he said. "The deadline left is very short. It's 72 hours."

Protesters poured through villages and towns as well as the capital Beirut for the third day. No political leader, Muslim or Christian, was spared their wrath. Their chants called for leaders including Hariri, President Michel Aoun, and Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri to step down. The mood was a mixture of rage, defiance and hope. As night fell, crowds waving Lebanese flags marched through the streets as patriotic music blared from loudspeakers. They shouted: "Our demands are one, our objective is one: the people want the downfall of the regime."

Some protesters fainted as security forces fired tear gas. The Red Cross said its teams had treated 160 people wounded in protests since Thursday evening. "You should be protecting us. Shame on you," a young man yelled as he covered his face against the choking fumes. Lebanon's internal security apparatus said 52 police were injured on Friday and its forces arrested 70 people. Some protesters, including men in black hoods, blocked roads, set tyres on fire and used iron bars to smash storefronts in Beirut's posh downtown district.

As fires blazed, some streets in the capital looked like a battlefield, strewn with rubber bullets, smashed up cars, broken glass and torn billboards. Firefighters struggled late into the night to douse the flames. With demonstrators crowding around Aoun's palace in Baabda, the United Nations urged all sides to refrain.

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News in brief

Kuwait, Saudi to seal deal

KUWAIT: Negotiations between Kuwait and Saudi Arabia concerning the joint oil zone are almost concluded, a high-ranking official said, noting that both countries signed a related protocol last Thursday. The official added that oil production at Al-Khafji oil field would be resumed as soon as protocol procedures and environment-related forms are filled - while oil production at Wafra field would be resumed within three months. He added that a Kuwaiti delegation headed by ambassador Majdi Al-Thafeiri and including KPC's CEO Hashem Hashem, the head of the Fatwa and Legislation department Salah Al-Saad and the Oil Ministry Undersecretary Sheikh Nemer Al-Malek Al-Sabah went to Saudi Arabia last Thursday to sign the protocol. — Al-Qabas

Mali army kills 50 militants

BAMAKO: The Malian army said it had killed around 50 militants during an operation in which it managed to rescue some of the soldiers who were captured during deadly attacks last month on two bases in the centre of the country. Unidentified assailants killed 38 soldiers during the Sept 30 attacks, among the heaviest losses for Mali's army this year as it struggles to repel increasingly brazen raids by militant groups, some with links to Al-Qaeda and Islamic State. "Around 50 enemy neutralized, around 30 wounded, and equipment destroyed," the army said in statement detailing the results of its counter-operation. The army said it had freed 36 of around 60 of its soldiers who were missing following the September raids. — Reuters

69 killed in mosque blasts

KABUL: Police and local people searched yesterday for more bodies in the rubble of a mosque in Afghanistan's eastern Nangarhar province after bomb blasts in which at least 69 people were killed during Friday prayers. The explosives were placed inside the mosque in Jawdara area of Haska Mena district. Sohrab Qaderi, a member of Nangarhar's provincial council, said the mosque, with capacity of more than 150 worshippers at a time, was full of people when the bombs exploded. — AFP



Volunteers carry an injured man on a stretcher to a hospital, following a bomb blast in Haska Mina district. — AFP

First all-female spacewalk: US makes history

WASHINGTON: US astronauts Christina Koch and Jessica Meir have become the first all-female pairing to carry out a spacewalk—a historic milestone as NASA prepares to send the first woman to the Moon. "It symbolizes exploration by all that dare to dream and work hard to achieve that dream," Meir said after the 7-hour, 17-minute spacewalk to replace a power controller on the International Space Station.

The mission was originally planned for earlier this year but had to be aborted due to a lack of properly fitting

spacesuits, leading to allegations of sexism. Koch and Meir began the walk with standard safety checks on their suits and tethers, before making their way to the repair site on the station's port side, as the sunlit Earth came into view.

In a call to reporters just a few minutes before, NASA administrator Jim Bridenstine emphasized the symbolic significance of the day. "We want to make sure that space is available to all people, and this is another milestone in that evolution," he said. "I have an 11-year-old daughter, I want her to see herself as having all the same opportunities that I found myself as having when I was growing up."

The first all-female spacewalk was supposed to take place in March but was canceled because the space agency had only one medium-sized suit.

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IN SPACE: This grab of a handout video shows US astronauts Christina Koch and Jessica Meir during their spacewalk outside the International Space Station (ISS) to replace a power controller. — AFP

Turkey and Kurds trade accusations

RAS AL-AIN: Turkish and Kurdish leaders accused each other of violating a US-brokered truce in northeastern Syria even as it appeared to be taking hold on its second day yesterday. The deal announced late Thursday is intended to halt a Turkish-led offensive against Kurdish forces launched on October 9, on condition they pull out of a "safe zone" on the Syrian side of the border.

The offensive has killed dozens of civilians, mainly on the Kurdish side, and prompted hundreds of thousands to flee

their homes in the latest humanitarian crisis of Syria's eight-year civil war. Yesterday, Turkey accused Kurdish forces of violating the truce. "The Turkish armed forces fully abide by the agreement" reached on Thursday with the United States, the defense ministry said in a statement.

"Despite this, terrorists... carried out a total of 14 attacks in the last 36 hours," it said, using its usual term for Kurdish fighters. The ministry said 12 of the attacks came in the battleground border town of Ras Al-Ain, one in Tal Abyad and another in the Tal Tamr area. Heavy weapons fell silent in Ras Al-Ain after sporadic clashes on Friday evening, an AFP correspondent reported.

Turkish troops and its Syrian rebel proxies seized part of the town on

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TAL TAMR: Mourners attend the funeral of civilians and fighters who died during attacks by Turkish-led forces on the border town of Ras Al-Ain in a cemetery in Tal Tamr yesterday. — AFP

'The voiceless': Britons protest for a new vote

LONDON: Hundreds of thousands of Britons marched through London yesterday to demand a new Brexit referendum, saying their views were being ignored as lawmakers in parliament decided the fate of Britain's departure from the European Union. The protesters, some having travelled for hours from around the United Kingdom to get to the capital, waved EU flags under sunny skies and held placards that employed creativity and wit.

The crowd clogged vast stretches of central London, with thousands of people waiting to begin the march at Hyde Park by the time others had reached parliament as lawmakers held the first Saturday session since the 1982 Falklands war. "I am incensed that we are not being listened to. Nearly all the polls show that now people want to remain in the EU. We feel that we are voiceless," said Hannah Barton, 56, a cider maker from central England, who was draped in an EU flag.

"This is a national disaster waiting to happen and it is going to destroy the economy." After more than three years of tortuous debate, it is still uncertain how, when or even if Brexit will happen as Prime Minister Boris Johnson tries to

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LONDON: Demonstrators with placards and EU and Union flags gather in Parliament Square in central London yesterday as they take part in a rally by the People's Vote organization calling for a final say in a second referendum on Brexit. — AFP