



BEIRUT: A protester climbs a street lamp in downtown Beirut as hundreds continued to gather for a third day of protests against tax increases and alleged official corruption after the security forces made dozens of arrests. — AFP

Lebanon's 'kick queen' hits government where it hurts

BEIRUT: A woman who kicked an armed ministerial bodyguard in the groin has become a symbol of growing anti-corruption protests in Lebanon. The video of the incident went viral on Lebanese social media Thursday night, helping fuel fresh demonstrations Friday. The woman, whose identity remains unknown, has drawn comparisons to the so-called Nubian Queen, a Sudanese woman whose image went viral after she was pictured directing protests that ultimately led to the overthrow of long-time dictator Omar Bashir in April.

Lebanese media reports said the incident happened Thursday evening when the convoy of Education Minister Akram Chehayeb was confronted by demonstrators in central Beirut. One of the minister's bodyguards got out of the car and fired an assault rifle in the air, sparking an angry reaction from the crowd. In a scuffle, as another bodyguard steps back while holding a gun in the air, the woman leans back and fires a left-footed side kick into his groin.

The man, seemingly shocked, staggers forward. The video has been shared thousands of times online and highlighted as a symbol of two days of demonstrations against corruption and proposed tax hikes. "When they

steal your money, corrupt your country, and pull a machine gun at you - you give them a quick kick in the groin!" one user said on Twitter. "Our women don't just kick ass, they kick men with guns," another said.

One blogger shared a stylized screen grab of the image, saying it should be called "Lebanon's Kick-their-Ass Revolution." Demonstrators took to the streets Thursday evening for the largest protests in several years. Many are calling for an overhaul of Lebanon's sectarian system and voicing contempt for their leaders. At renewed protests Friday, demonstrators said the video made them determined to press on. "I felt the anger in her and (her) just doing it, without anything else in her mind," Marina, 25, said.

"She was angry and she expressed it in the movement, not just by speaking. Usually a woman doesn't act (out physically)," Jen, a 26-year-old who works in advertising, said: "I think all the women felt like somebody is representing them and somebody is fighting for them." "It showed that women don't need a man to fight for them," she said. Hannah, 24, said the video inspired her to fight against a "patriarchal society". "We shouldn't be afraid to hit this man, we shouldn't be afraid of them," she said. "It is time to show our strength." — AFP

demos planned in other European cities.

German police are on high alert to ward off any new violence from protests over the Turkish offensive after clashes erupted on the sidelines of a demonstration on Monday in the western city of Herne. Turks performed the "wolf salute" hand gesture linked to the country's nationalist far right as a Kurdish protest passed. It was one provocation too far for some marchers, and a fight erupted leaving five injured. In Germany, the hand sign mimicking a wolf's head remains legal, but in neighboring Austria it has been banned - just like the Nazi-era Hitler salute.

In a small cafe in the German capital, Mohamad Khalil, 23, is keeping an eye on a slew of charging walkie-talkies which will be distributed to fellow demonstration organizers to keep order during planned marches this weekend. "For now, all we have left is protest," the student acknowledges bitterly, underlining the helplessness he feels over the lot of fellow Kurds.

Germany's Kurds fear that Ankara's offensive could pulverize the foundations they have built in Rojava, the self-proclaimed Kurdish zone in northeast Syria. Ankara for its part says the main Kurdish militia in Syria is a "terrorist" group with links to its own outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which has been waging an insurgency in Turkey for three decades. — AFP

would be among the largest ever in Britain. "We don't provide estimates of numbers as it's such an inexact science. However it is fair to say it is now very busy throughout the procession route," London police said on Twitter.

The mood of protesters ranged from anger to despair. Many railed against political leaders championing Brexit for being elite and out of touch. Some were young people who were unable to vote during the 2016 referendum and described the fight for another vote as the defining political event of their lives. "If we leave the EU this is not the end of this, we will keep fighting to rejoin until that happens," said Victoria Paynter, 17, who held a sign "check us before you wreck us". In 2016, 52% backed Brexit, while 48% backed remaining in the EU.

Some opinion polls have shown a slight shift in favour of remaining in the EU, but there has yet to be a decisive change in attitudes and many voters say they have become increasingly bored by Brexit. Since July 2017 there have been 226 polls asking people whether they support Leave or Remain, according to a poll of polls by YouGov published last week. Of those, 204 have put support for remaining in the EU ahead, seven have given a lead to leave and a few have been tied.

Other polls suggest most voters have not changed their mind: 50% of the public want to respect the referendum result, 42% want Britain to remain in the EU and 8% said they don't know, the largest Brexit poll since 2016 carried out by ComRes found. Supporters of Brexit say holding another referendum would deepen divisions and undermine democracy. The challenge for pro-referendum forces is finding enough support in parliament, and even if another referendum were agreed, it would take months to organize and there would be disputes about the question. — Reuters

Protests sweep Lebanon; fury...

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from actions that could lead to more tensions and violence. Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates warned their citizens against travelling to Lebanon. Bahrain told its nationals to leave at once.

Foreign Minister Gebran Bassil, Aoun's son-in-law, also blamed other parties for blocking reforms, saying the government must work to stop corruption and avoid imposing new taxes. The latest unrest erupted out of anger over the rising cost of living and new tax plans, including a fee on WhatsApp calls. "We came to the streets because we can no longer bear this situation. This regime is totally corrupt," said Fadi Issa, 51, who marched with his son.

"They are all thieves, they come into the government to fill their pockets, not to serve the country." In an

unprecedented move, Shiite protesters also attacked the offices of their deputies from the influential Hezbollah and Amal movements in southern Lebanon.

To boost revenues, a government minister on Thursday unveiled a new fee for WhatsApp calls that fuelled outrage. But as the protests spread hours later, Telecoms Minister Mohamed Chouair revoked the planned levy. In a country fractured along sectarian lines, the unusually wide geographic reach of the protests highlights the deepening anger of the Lebanese. The government, which includes nearly all Lebanon's main parties, has repeatedly failed to implement the reforms needed to fix the national finances.

Foreign allies have pressured Hariri to enact reforms long promised but never delivered because of vested interests. Shattered by war between 1975 and 1990, Lebanon has proportionally one of the world's highest debt burdens. Economic growth has been hit by regional conflict, while unemployment among the under-35s runs at 37%. Sectarian politicians, many of them civil war militia leaders, have used state resources for their own benefit and are reluctant to give that up. — Agencies

First all-female spacewalk: US...

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A male-female team performed the required task at a later date. The failure by traditionally male-dominated NASA to be adequately prepared was denounced in some quarters as evidence of implicit sexism.

When Koch and Meir had been outside the space station for about five hours, President Donald Trump reached them in a video call and told them they had made history. "You are very brave, brilliant women," Trump said. "You represent this country so well," the president added. "We are very proud of you." Meir, a 42-year-old marine biologist who was recruited by NASA in 2013, answered by paying tribute to female pioneers of the past. "We don't want to take too much credit because there have been many other female spacewalkers before us," she said.

"There's been a long line of female scientists, explorers, engineers and astronauts. We have followed in their footsteps, to get to where we are today." After the call, the astronauts got back to their repair work. "That is a view," one of them-it was not clear which-said at one point, as the earth was lit up in bright light from the sun. Koch, an electrical engineer who is leading the mission, was carrying out her fourth spacewalk and was hooked up to the station's robotic arm.

Meir, making her first spacewalk, carefully made her way using handles. The two were working to replace a faulty battery charge/discharge unit, known as a

Turkey and Kurds trade...

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Thursday, hitting a hospital. Turkey wants to push Kurdish fighters away from its southern border by establishing a 30 kilometer deep "safe zone" on the Syrian side of the frontier. A Britain-based war monitor said the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) had yet to start pulling back yesterday. "The SDF have not withdrawn until now from any point," the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

SDF commander Redur Khalil said deadly bombardments by Turkey's forces on Friday were a major breach of the truce and called on Washington to ensure Ankara honored its side of the deal. On Friday, Turkish air strikes and mortar fire by allied Syrian fighters killed 14 civilians in and around the village of Bab al-Kheir, the Observatory said.

"The Turkish side is not committing to the ceasefire and is not allowing the opening of a security corridor to evacuate the wounded and besieged civilians from Ras Al-Ain," Khalil said. "The US side bears responsibility for the non-compliance as it is the guarantor and mediator of the ceasefire." The Observatory said at least 32 wounded people in Ras Al-Ain, mostly fighters, were in need of immediate treatment yesterday but an evacuation convoy could not reach them.

Six SDF fighters had died of their wounds, the

BCDU. The station relies on solar power but is out of direct sunlight for much of its orbit and therefore needs batteries. The BCDU's regulate the amount of charge that goes into them. The current task was announced Monday and is part of a wider mission of replacing aging nickel-hydrogen batteries with higher-capacity lithium-ion units.

The US sent its first female astronaut into space in 1983, when Sally Ride took part in the seventh space shuttle mission, and has now had more women astronauts than any other country. But the first woman in space was Soviet cosmonaut Valentina Tereshkova in 1963, followed by compatriot Svetlana Savitskaya in 1982, who was also the first woman spacewalker two years later.

NASA acting associate administrator Ken Bowersox said he hoped that an all-female spacewalk would soon be a "routine" matter that would not require celebration. Asked why it had taken so long-Meir is the 14th US woman spacewalker-he said men's added height provided an advantage. "There have been a lot of spacewalks where very tall men were the ones that were able to do the jobs because they were able to reach and do things a little bit more easily," he said.

Democratic presidential hopeful Kamala Harris said the spacewalk was more than historic. "It's a reminder that for women, even the sky doesn't have to be the limit," she tweeted. NASA plans to return to the Moon by 2024 for the first time since the Apollo landings of 1969-1972. The new mission is named Artemis, after the twin sister of Apollo in Greek mythology. The mission will likely see the first woman set foot on the lunar surface, perhaps as part of a male-female combination, as the space agency looks ahead to a crewed Mars expedition in the 2030s. — AFP

monitor added. The Turkish military and its Syrian proxies-mostly Arab and Turkmen former rebels used as a ground force-have so far seized around 120 kilometers of territory along the Syrian-Turkish border. Syria's Kurds had been a key partner in the US-backed battle against the Islamic State group in Syria, overrunning the last remnant of their self-proclaimed "caliphate" in March.

But earlier this month, US President Donald Trump announced he would withdraw US troops from northern Syria, in a move that was seen as green-lighting a Turkish attack. The move has come under widespread criticism, even from within Trump's own Republican party. It has sparked concerns that thousands of IS suspects and their family members in Kurdish custody could break out and bring about a resurgence of the extremist group.

US Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell called Trump's decision "a strategic nightmare". "Withdrawing US forces from Syria is a grave strategic mistake," McConnell wrote in The Washington Post. "It will leave the American people and homeland less safe, embolden our enemies, and weaken important alliances."

US Vice President Mike Pence brokered the ceasefire deal on a visit to Turkey this week. US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, who accompanied Pence to Ankara, said in an interview with Politico he was "confident" the ceasefire would take hold. The suspension of hostilities looked designed to help Turkey achieve its main territorial goals without fighting. But Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan warned the same day that he would resume a full-offensive if Kurdish forces did not pull back. — AFP

'Powderkeg' in Germany

BERLIN: Syrian Kurd Mohamed Zidik, 76, still buys his bread and baklavas from his Turkish neighbors in Berlin, but he knows better than to expound on his views about Ankara's offensive in his hometown. Since Turkish forces launched their assault on Kurds in northeastern Syria, tensions have risen in Germany where millions of Turks and Kurds live side by side.

Shops have been trashed, knife attacks reported and insults traded, prompting Germany's integration commissioner Annette Widmann-Mauz to call for restraint. "We have a responsibility to prevent the conflict in the region from becoming a conflict in our society," she said in an interview with the Funke newspaper group.

Of the roughly three million people with Turkish nationality or roots living in Germany, around one million are Kurds. "We are sitting on a powderkeg in Germany," Turkish expert Burak Copur told ZDF broadcaster. "The emotions here cannot be viewed in isolation from the political developments in Turkey, which are mirrored in Germany." Some 15,000 pro-Kurdish demonstrators are set to take to the streets in Cologne yesterday, with similar

'The voiceless': Britons protest...

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pass his new Brexit deal and plots a way out of the deepest political crisis in a generation.

While Brexit has divided families, parties, parliament and the country, both sides agree Saturday could be one of the most important days in recent British history: a juncture that could shape the fate of the United Kingdom for generations. Many protesters carried placards, some comparing Brexit to the election of US President Donald Trump. Some wore elaborate costumes with one group dressed as fruit and vegetables.

There were also effigies mocking politicians such as Johnson and his key adviser Dominic Cummings. Many of the signs displayed a dry British sense of humor. One said: "I am very cross about this" while another was: "I made this sign instead of screaming". As the marchers advanced some blew whistles and erupted in shouts of "Stop Brexit". A percussion band played and a gathering sang the EU's anthem "Ode to Joy".

James McGrory, director of the People's Vote campaign, which organized the march, said ahead of the protest the government should heed the anger of pro-Europeans and hold another referendum on EU membership. "This new deal bears no resemblance to what people were promised and so it is only right that the public deserve another chance to have their say," he said.

Campaigners are confident that the protest will rival a similar demonstration in March when organizers said 1 million people took to the streets. A rally this size