

Jordan protests snowball over IMF-backed austerity



Members of the Jordanian gendarmerie and security forces stand on alert as protesters shout slogans and raise a national flag during a demonstration outside the Prime Minister's office in the capital Amman late on June 2, 2018 **Khalil MAZRAAWI (AFP)**

Angry protests rocked cities across Jordan overnight against IMF-backed austerity measures including a new income tax draft law and price hikes, hours after the government and unions failed to reach an agreement to end the standoff.

Around 3,000 people faced down a heavy security presence to gather near the prime minister's office in central Amman until the early hours of Saturday morning, waving Jordanian flags and signs reading "we will not kneel".

Protests have gripped the country since Wednesday, when hundreds flooded the streets of Amman and demonstrated in other cities to demand the fall of the government.

Last week the government proposed an income tax draft law, yet to be approved by parliament, aimed at increasing taxes on employees by at least 5 percent and on companies by between 20 and 40 percent.

It is the latest in a series of economic reforms and repeated price hikes on basic goods since Amman secured a \$723-million three-year credit line from the International Monetary Fund in 2016.



Jordanian protesters shout slogans and raise a national flag during a demonstration outside the Prime Minister's office in the capital Amman late on June 2, 2018 **Khalil MAZRAAWI (AFP)**

The Economist Intelligence Unit earlier this year ranked Jordan's capital as one of the most expensive in the Arab world.

Since January, Jordan — which suffers high unemployment and has few natural resources — has seen repeated price rises including on bread, as well as tax hikes on basic goods.

Overnight, protesters outside premier Hani Mulki's office shouted slogans including "the ones raising prices want to burn the country" and "this Jordan is our Jordan, Mulki should leave".

The prime minister met on Saturday with trade union representatives who

demanded the income tax law be revoked, but failed to reach an agreement.



Members of the Jordanian gendarmerie detain a protester during a demonstration outside the Prime Minister's office in the capital Amman late on June 2, 2018

Khalil MAZRAAWI (AFP)

The head of Jordan's federation of unions, Ali Obus, demanded that the state "maintain its independence and not bow to IMF demands".

King Abdullah II called on parliament to lead a "comprehensive and reasonable national dialogue" on the new tax law.

"It would not be fair that the citizen alone bears the burden of financial reforms," he told officials on Saturday evening.

A majority of 78 out of parliament's 130 representatives have pledged to vote against the income tax law introduced by the government last month.

The speaker of Jordan's senate called a consultative meeting for Sunday.

Mulki told reporters on Saturday that meetings would continue, adding: "Sending this bill to the house of representatives does not mean that the house of

representatives will approve it”.

Source: <https://www.i24news.tv/en/news/international/middle-east/176255-180603-jordan-protests-snowball-over-imf-backed-austerity>

[Disclaimer]