
PROTESTS AGAINST POOR SERVICES RE-ERUPT IN IRAQ'S BASRA

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Asharq Al-Awsat (21 June 2019)

Baghdad - Fadhel al-Nashmi

Protests against poor services, corruption and a lack of job opportunities re-erupted in the southern oil-rich Iraqi province of Basra on Thursday.

Hundreds of protesters converged in the surrounding areas of the provincial council headquarters after security forces prevented them from meeting in front of the building.

Security sources told Asharq Al-Awsat that the security and anti-riot police had cordoned off the building to prevent the protesters from setting it on fire as they did during last years rallies.

Contrary to last years movement, which erupted over the same reasons, clashes did not break out between the protesters and security forces. The situation is however, likely to escalate if the rallies persist and if the federal authorities fail in tackling the peoples grievances that have been piling up for years.

Basra residents have for years complained of official negligence in the province, of poor services and lack of jobs despite the provinces oil wealth. The wealth reaps in revenues worth 90 percent of the states budget.

Basra police chief Rashid al-Fleih stressed that his forces are bound to protecting the protesters regardless of their demands. He warned them however, that force will be used against anyone violating public and private properties.

Activist Ahmed al-Basri told Asharq Al-Awsat that protester demands have been the same for years. They are demanding improved services, greater job opportunities and an end to corruption and sectarianism.

Basra residents are constantly provoked to take to the streets because of the local and federal authorities disregard for their demands, he added.

This time, the protesters are calling for the resignation of the provincial council and local government because they appear incapable or heedless of the peoples demands, he revealed.

He said that the people will hold another demonstration on Sunday, predicting that they will continue as long as their demands remain unfulfilled.

Last year, Basra was rocked by demonstrations in which government offices, including the main

provincial council building, was ransacked and set alight by protesters angry about corruption.

Unrest first erupted in July over poor government services, but intensified in September, before dwindling down.

Residents said they were driven onto the streets by corruption and misrule that have allowed infrastructure to collapse, leaving no power or safe drinking water.

<https://aawsat.com/english/home/article/1777771/protests-against-poor-services-re-erupt-iraq%E2%80%99s-basra>

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