

Assir supporters rally in Beirut, Tripoli

Supporters of Sunni Sheikh Ahmad al-Assir late Tuesday gathered in Beirut and Tripoli to block roads in support of the cleric after he said his mosque was encircled by the Lebanese army.

"[We] call on followers across Lebanon to take to the streets and block streets without resorting to burning tires or [violence]," a statement issued by his press office said late Tuesday night.

Assir warned later in the night that his supporters "would take to the streets with weapons after confirming that 'Shabiha' cars of armed Amal Movement [members] were [driving] around Sidon and threatening residents."

Following the first press release, dozens of supporters of the cleric gathered in Beirut's Tariq al-Jedideh area, after which they started burning tires in the Kola roundabout leading into the neighborhood, an eyewitness told NOW.

Lebanese security forces arrived afterward to reopen the road and disperse the demonstrators. However, shortly before midnight the protesters attempted once again to close the West Beirut roundabout.

The Lebanese army fired tear gas at the youths gathering in Tariq al-Jedideh at least three times, while the protesters rolled flaming tires toward Kola, the eyewitness added. The situation returned to calm after the demonstrators failed to block the roundabout.

Meanwhile in Tripoli, hundreds of supporters of the Sunni Sheikh gathered in the city's Abd al-Hamid Karami Square to protest the army's alleged besieging of his mosque.

The National News Agency reported that the sounds of guns being fired into the air echoed in the area, while security forces took extra measures in the square.

Meanwhile, a number of youths blocked the Abda-Akkar road, Lebanon's state news agency added.

Earlier in the day, Assir's press office said that the Lebanese army surrounded his Bilal bin Rabbah Mosque in the Sidon neighborhood of Abra, adding that the troops threatened to "storm the mosque... by force of arms."

However, the National News Agency reported that the Lebanese army did not besiege the Bilal Bin Rabbah Mosque.

"The army seized a car bearing a forged number near the mosque, which prompted Assir's supporters to mobilize," the NNA said.

Meanwhile, Assir's press office said that one of the mosque's Sheikhs, Assem al-Arffi, had been involved in a "minor license violation," after which the army threatened to arrest him.

"When Assir attempted to resolve the situation... the present army servicemen threatened to use their arms against the Sheikh and those with him," the statement added.

Media reports said the wanted Sheikh was holed up in Assir's mosque.

Assir rose to prominence for his anti-Hezbollah stances, and in recent weeks has stirred controversy with his calls for protests outside apartments near his Sidon mosque that he claims house Hezbollah fighters.

Hezbollah leader Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah in his last public address warned against inciting action in the southern Lebanese city.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonnews/assir-supporters-briefly-cut-r...>