

Jordan: Teachers Union Reach Deal to End 1-Month Strike - Many parents in solidarity

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AMMAN, JORDAN - Jordan's government said Sunday it has reached a pay deal with the teachers union to end a one-month strike, the country's longest public sector strike that disrupted schooling for more than 1.5 million students.

The deal came after the strike threatened a deepening political crisis when the government last week began legal steps against the unions after they rejected meager pay hikes they said were "bread crumbs" and the government said it could not afford to give more.

The pay deal that raises allowances from 35% to 60% to teachers from next year comes after weeks of deadlock with the government intransigent over meeting an original 50% pay rise demanded by the unions it said would strain the heavily indebted country's finances.

Officials said King Abdullah had ordered the government to reach the hefty wage deal which tests the ability of Prime Minister Omar al Razzaz to stay on track in implementing tough fiscal reforms backed by the International Monetary Fund aimed at reducing a record \$40 billion public debt.

The government fears new pay demands by other public sector employees, including doctors, and pension increases for retired soldiers would wreck efforts to restore fiscal prudence needed for a sustained economic recovery.

Photo: A girl holds a placard in front of a Jordanian national flag as public school teachers take part in a protest in Amman, Jordan, Oct. 3, 2019. The placards read: "We will ensure the safety of our students and our strike continues."

Dozens of activists from the powerful teachers union, whose members succeeded in forcing the government to agree to substantial pay hikes after a four-week standoff, celebrated in front of their headquarters in Amman.

"The teachers got their demands," said Nasser Al Nawasrah, deputy head of the Jordanian Teachers Syndicate. He called on his organization's 100,000 members to immediately resume teaching pupils in around 4,000 public schools that had been affected by the strike.

Many parents had kept their children at home out of solidarity with the striking teachers.

In many of the country's rural areas and smaller cities, traditional heartlands of support for the monarchy, the strike also became a protest against successive governments' failure to deliver on promises of economic growth.

Growing disenchantment among ordinary Jordanians over tough IMF austerity measures and high taxes spilled into large street protests in the summer of 2018 that railed against corruption and mismanagement of public funds.

Officials say Jordan can no longer afford to sustain a public sector in which salaries eat up much of the central government's \$13 billion budget in a country with some of the world's highest government spending relative to its economy.

The debt is due, at least in part, to the adoption by successive governments of an expansionist fiscal policy marked by job creation in the public sector.

Reuters

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