

Tunisia rallies after a “black day,” president’s health improves

Author:

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TUNIS: Tunisia’s president is recovering his health and speaking to colleagues, authorities said on Friday, signalling a return to normality after a turbulent 24 hours in which the elderly leader fell ill and militants staged attacks in the capital.

President Beji Caid Essebsi, 92, a major player in the North African country’s transition to democracy following a 2011 revolution, was taken to a military hospital on Thursday after suffering a “severe health crisis.” His health emergency coincided with attacks by two suicide bombers who blew themselves up in Tunis, killing one officer and wounding several others. The attacks, claimed by Daesh, took place months before an election and at the peak of a tourist season in which Tunisia is hoping for a record number of visitors.

Alarmed by the spate of troubling news, many Tunisians described Thursday as a “black day.”

But on Friday, normal life appeared to be returning.

Shops reopened in Charles De Gaulle, a commercial street, and cafes were crowded in the main Habib Bourguiba street. Tourists and Tunisians alike wandered the markets as normal.

“We are not afraid, we will not give up,” said a woman who gave her name as Sana.

“We will continue our lives and our democracy, which frightens them.”

Tourism Minister Rene Trabelsi told reporters that the incident would not affect tourism in the country, adding that tourist sites were under tight security surveillance.

“Desperate act”

The presidency spokeswoman said Essebsi’s health had improved significantly and he had called the defense minister to discuss the situation in the country.

Essebsi has been a prominent figure in Tunisia since the overthrow of Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali in 2011, which was followed by uprisings against autocratic leaders across the Middle East.

On Friday, Prime Minister Youssef Chahed played down the impact of the attacks and said it was a “desperate act of the collapse of terrorist groups.”

Tunisia has battled militant groups operating in remote areas near the border with Algeria since the 2011 uprising. High unemployment has also stoked unrest in recent years.

Security has improved since authorities imposed a state of emergency in November 2015 after dozens died in militant attacks earlier that year – one at a museum in Tunis and another on a beach in Sousse. A third attack targeted presidential guards in the capital and killed 12. Daesh claimed responsibility.

Those actions scared off holidaymakers and investors, worsening an economic

crisis.

But this year Tunisia expects to receive a million tourists for the first time, seeking to restore confidence in its ability to protect its lifeline tourist income.

Essebsi's health episode raised questions on social media about the management of the country in the event that the post president became vacant unexpectedly. But Nourredine Benticha, a top adviser to Essebsi, said there would be no constitutional vacancy.

Parliamentary elections are expected to be held on Oct. 6 with a presidential vote following on Nov. 17.



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Tunisian president hospitalised 'in severe health crisis' One dead, several wounded in suicide bomber attacks in Tunisian capital

[UN puts brakes on peacekeepers' pullout from Sudan's Darfur](#)

Author:

Fri, 2019-06-28 21:37

UNITED NATIONS: The UN Security Council voted unanimously Thursday to put the

brakes on the withdrawal of the joint UN-African Union peacekeeping force in Sudan's vast western Darfur region as the country deals with a political crisis.

The council approved a resolution to extend the current mandate of the force, known as UNAMID, for four months until October 31.

It asks Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to provide an update in 60 days on the situation on the ground – and it asks the UN and AU to make recommendations by Sept. 30 on what the council should do about continuing the withdrawal.

Last July, the Security Council voted to dramatically cut the UNAMID force in response to reduced fighting and improved security conditions. The target for ending the mission is June 30, 2020.

Britain's UN deputy ambassador Jonathan Allen, whose country co-sponsored the resolution with Germany, said the council made "the responsible decision to pause the withdrawal," which he said aligns with the decision of the AU Peace and Security Council.

"Moreover, it recognizes that Darfur is affected by wider instability in Sudan and that there is a need for continued protection of civilians in Darfur," he said.



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Palestinian leaders call for anti-Manama unity to continue

Author:

Fri, 2019-06-28 00:52

EAST JERUSALEM: Palestinian officials breathed a sigh of relief as the controversial Manama economic workshop – which they considered a failure – ended on Thursday, but warned against complacency in its aftermath.

“The Bahrain workshop was an exercise in futility,” said Palestine Liberation Organization executive committee member Hanan Ashrawi.

She called for robust efforts to build on the united stand adopted by Palestinians in opposition to the US-led conference and the economic plan it promoted, and to seize the chance to reinvigorate the Palestinian national cause by working with allies around the world.

“We need to return to our people and build on the national unity that was accomplished, through giving the people a chance to cast their vote in general elections,” she said.

Palestinian Deputy Premier Ziad Abu Amer echoed Ashrawi’s comments by calling for serious engagement, in particular with countries that have stood by Palestine.

“We were not against the economic workshop, had it been done within the context of a political process that was focused on the two-state solution,” said Amer.

He added that Palestinians must build on the unity that Gaza and the West Bank had witnessed, and engage with the world using a proactive strategy that can reinforce the consensus coming out of Bahrain.

“The workshop in Manama showed clearly that you can’t place the cart before the horse,” he said. “All of us have been involved in track-two diplomacy and we are convinced that it is futile unless it is a fulfilment of a political process, and not a precursor to it.”

Amer said that the failure of the Bahrain workshop was due in large part to the steadfastness of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas.

“President Abbas had the courage to stand up and say ‘no’ and this inspired many people and countries to reject an American process that attempts to circumvent the two-state solution,” he added.

Abbas met Sabastian Pinera, the president of Chile, in Ramallah on Thursday and presented him with the Medal of Bethlehem. During a joint press

conference, Abbas said that national rights are not real estate property that can be bought and sold.

He added that the correct political process will require “freedom, dignity, independence and justice for the Palestinian people.”

While he rejected the Bahrain workshop, Abbas said that Palestinians yearn for peace.

“Despite all that has happened, we are holding on to the aspirations for peace on the basis of international law, signed agreements and the Arab peace plan,” he said. Palestine will work with any international mechanism that can help Palestinian institutions to develop and empower the economy, he added.



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[UN wants US, Russia to move Syria](#)

peace process

Author:

Fri, 2019-06-28 00:17

GENEVA: "A deeper understanding" between Russia and the US is needed to move the Syrian peace process forward, UN Syria envoy Geir Pedersen said in an interview published on Thursday.

Successive UN envoys have failed to stop Syria's eight-year war, which has caused hundreds of thousands of deaths and led to an exodus of refugees.

Pedersen, the fourth man in the job, is trying to arrange a committee to oversee the reform of Syria's constitution – a modest effort, compared with former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's attempt to reach a peace agreement at an international conference in 2012.

"Obviously, a Constitutional Committee in itself will not change much," Pedersen said in an interview published by the Geneva-based Center for Humanitarian Dialogue. "But if handled correctly, and if there is political will, it could be a door-opener for a broader political process.

HIGHLIGHTS

Successive UN envoys have failed to stop Syria's eight-year war, which has caused hundreds of thousands of deaths and led to an exodus of refugees.

He told the key players that he needed "a different international setup," Pedersen said, and wanted to convene a group of influential states alongside the Constitutional Committee meeting.

It would include the five permanent UN Security Council members and two groups of countries that have been politically active on Syria: The "Astana Group" comprising Iran and Turkey as well as Russia, and the "Small Group," which includes Egypt, Germany, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, France, Britain and the US.

"This is indicative of the fact that we are in a new phase ... this has been going on for too long, and it should be possible to move forward. This would, of course, require a deeper understanding between Russia and the US on how to move forward," he said. "We are also working on that."

The UN envoy said he had pressed the Syrian regime and the opposition Syrian National Commission on the importance of tackling the issue of people who had been detained or abducted or were missing, and he had appealed to them for "bigger unilateral steps on this."



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Syrians returning home to reach 1 million once safe zone created: Erdogan

[Sudan police fire tear gas as students protest near palace](#)

Author:

Fri, 2019-06-28 00:04

KHARTOUM: Sudanese riot police on Thursday fired tear gas at scores of students who rallied against the ruling generals near the presidential palace in downtown Khartoum, witnesses said.

Protesters have been staging sporadic and scattered demonstrations in recent days in the capital ahead of mass rallies called by protest leaders on June 30 against the generals, who have seized power since the ouster of longtime ruler Omar Al-Bashir on April 11.

Chanting "freedom, peace, justice," the catchcry of the protest movement that brought down Bashir, about 300 students stepped out of their banking college in downtown Khartoum and held a spontaneous protest, witnesses said.

“Many of them were holding banners calling for civilian rule as they protested not far from the presidential palace,” a witness told AFP. He said the riot police swiftly arrived and fired tear gas at the demonstration.

The umbrella protest movement, the Alliance for Freedom and Change, has called for mass rallies in Khartoum and other cities on June 30 against the ruling generals.

It is the first such nationwide call since a brutal crackdown on a protest camp outside the army headquarters on June 3 left dozens killed and hundreds wounded.

The crackdown was carried out by men in military fatigues after talks between protest leaders and generals collapsed over who should lead a new governing body – a civilian or soldier.

The ruling military council took power after the army ousted Bashir following months of nationwide protests against his rule. But since then the generals have resisted to transferring power to a civilian administration as demanded by protesters and several Western countries.

About 130 people have been killed since the June 3 crackdown, the majority of them on that day itself.

Officials say 61 people died nationwide on June 3.



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Sudan protesters dispute generals' take on transition plansSudan protesters

accept Ethiopia proposal for political transition