

Turkish opposition candidate officially declared Istanbul's new mayor

Wed, 2019-04-17 10:02

ANKARA: Turkey's main opposition party candidate on Wednesday was finally declared as the new mayor of Istanbul.

Republican People's Party (CHP) prospect Ekrem Imamoglu's official mandate from the city's election board came almost three weeks after votes were cast and despite a pending appeal from Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) for a rerun of the poll.

The decision follows results showing Imamoglu marginally ahead in the disputed mayoral election in Turkey's biggest city.

The long-awaited news, which will see Imamoglu take office for five years, quickly started trending on social media with Twitter hashtags #MazbataGeldi (MandateHasCome) and #BaharGeldi (#SpringHasCome).

"I'm getting the mandate of 16 million residents of Istanbul," Imamoglu, the new rising star of Turkish politics tweeted on his way to the electoral board's offices where hundreds of supporters welcomed him.

Although a little-known district mayor of an Istanbul suburb, Imamoglu, the 48-year-old challenger to Erdogan and his party, energized and consolidated the opposition votes by using a conciliatory tone during his campaign.

A recount of all votes, including invalid ones, in several districts of Istanbul confirmed Imamoglu to be ahead by 13,729 votes.

The AKP's electoral defeat in Istanbul – Turkey's cultural, financial and commercial hub – as well as in the capital Ankara, has created political tension in the country, with the uncertainty hitting the value of the lira.

Losing Istanbul also marked a personal blow for Erdogan who began his rise up the political ladder as mayor of the city in 1994.

However, the country's Supreme Electoral Council (YSK) is yet to rule on whether the AKP's formal demand for a new election has any merit. If the YSK accepts the application, based on alleged widespread irregularities, Imamoglu's mandate could still be taken back.

An announcement from the YSK on whether to rerun the vote in early June is expected in the coming days.

"This is a big victory for the Turkish opposition in a competitive authoritarian regime, which showed a great resilience," Orcun Selcuk, an expert on comparative politics, told Arab News.

“Unlike previous elections, the Turkish opposition looked organized and caught the incumbent party by surprise. The AKP leaders failed to provide logical arguments to back up their claims of systematic manipulation,” Selcuk said.

Imamoglu gave a rousing speech to supporters in front of the Istanbul metropolitan municipality building.

In an exclusive interview with Arab News, CHP parliamentarian Burhanettin Bulut said the decision to give Imamoglu his certificate of mandate had avoided throwing Turkey into chaos.

“Now it is time to restore our country, beginning in the cities, by taking into consideration social expectations. The political pressure of the new executive presidential system at the top can only be balanced by local governance at the grassroots,” he said.

Sezgin Tanrikulu, Istanbul CHP deputy and a well-known human rights lawyer, said he did not think the YSK would give the green light to an election rerun as the AKP’s application was legally flawed.

“This decision ended 25 years of control of Istanbul by the AKP and its Islamist predecessors. From now on, an egalitarian, transparent and democratic approach will prevail,” Tanrikulu told Arab News.

Nezih Onur Kuru, a doctoral researcher on political psychology from Koc University, in Istanbul, said Imamoglu had refrained from using polarizing language after the elections, and his popularity had increased as he organized rallies in every district of Istanbul where the CHP had won.

“Imamoglu kept his calm even though Erdogan and his nationalist ally MHP continuously targeted him with their statements. Imamoglu, however, stated that he would not discriminate against AKP supporters,” Kuru told Arab News.

According to Kuru, the new mayor, who comes from a conservative family, prevented the AKP and MHP voters from rallying behind his rival Binali Yildirim.



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Turkey freezes assets of senior Houthi militia leaders
Turkey's opposition takes office in Istanbul, appeal still pending

[UN envoy sees troop withdrawal in Yemen's Hodeidah within weeks](#)

Author:

Reuters

ID:

1555610747679138100

Thu, 2019-04-18 17:46

DUBAI: Yemen's warring parties could start withdrawing forces from the main port city of Hodeidah within weeks, a move needed to pave the way for political negotiations to end the four-year war, the UN special envoy said on Thursday.

Martin Griffiths said he had received on Sunday the formal acceptance of the legitimate government and the Iran-backed Houthi group to implement a first phase of troop redeployments, while discussions were still underway for the second phase.

The United Nations has struggled to implement a pact agreed at talks last

December in Sweden, the first major breakthrough in peace efforts to end the war that has killed tens of thousands and pushed Yemen to the brink of famine.

"The two parties agreed formally to the concept of operations for phase one. What we are doing now is ... moving on as planned from there to agree on phase two," Griffiths told Reuters in a telephone interview without elaborating, adding that talks would "intensify" in coming days.

"So we don't have an exact date at the moment for the beginning of this physical redeployment," he said. "It's got to be weeks ... hopefully few weeks."

Sources have told Reuters the first phase would see the Houthis leave the city's ports and pro-government forces leave some areas on the city's outskirts. In the second phase, both sides would pull troops to 18 km from the city and heavy weapons 30 km away.

The Hodeidah deal was a trust building step aimed at averting a full-scale assault on Hodeidah by the Arab coalition trying to restore the legitimate government of Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi, and paving the way for political talks to set up a transitional government.

Danish general Michael Lollesgaard, head of the UN observer team in Hodeidah, chairs a Redeployment Coordination Committee (RCC) tasked with hammering out details not spelled out in the pact.

A cease-fire in Houthi-held Hodeidah has largely held but violence has escalated elsewhere in the country. The troop withdrawal was due to have been completed by Jan. 7 but stalled over disagreement on who would control the Red Sea port city.

Asked if that issue had been resolved, Griffiths said: "We have ideas on how to bridge the gap on the issue of the local security forces" but it would be up to the parties represented in the RCC headed by Lollesgaard to resolve it. Three sources told Reuters last month that the first phase would see the Houthis pull back 5 km (3 miles) from the ports of Saleef, used for grain, and Ras Isa, for oil. Then the Houthis would quit Hodeidah port while coalition forces would retreat 1 km from the city's "Kilo 8" and Saleh districts.

This would restore access cut off since September to the Red Sea Mills, which holds some 50,000 tons of World Food Programme grain, enough to feed 3.7 million people, and allow humanitarian corridors to be reopened.

Hodeidah handles the bulk of Yemen's commercial and aid supplies and is critical for feeding the population of 30 million people. It became a focus of fighting last year, raising concern that an all-out assault could disrupt supply lines and trigger mass starvation in the poorest Arabian Peninsula nation.

"I know we're spending an enormous amount of time, and rightly so, on Hodeidah, but it's the gateway to the comprehensive settlement and of course failure in Hodeida is not an option," Griffiths said.

"The aim ultimately of an agreement which will resolve the conflict and end this war is to return governing of Yemen to politicians, to return to the people of Yemen accountable government."



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Trump card: Veto on Yemen hailed as 'timely and strategic'
Sudanese troops to remain in Yemen: military council deputy

[UN urges resolving fate of 2,500 foreign children at Syria camp](#)

Author:

Reuters

ID:

1555585890436793000

Thu, 2019-04-18 11:09

GENEVA: Around 2,500 foreign children are stuck in a guarded section of a Syrian camp after fleeing Daesh's last stronghold, a senior United Nations official said on Thursday, urging governments not to abandon them.

The children's plight at the Al-Hol camp in northeast Syria is a dilemma for nations who saw citizens leave and fight for the extremist movement in Syria and Iraq only to find themselves in limbo after the fall of their self-proclaimed "caliphate."

Panos Moutzis, UN humanitarian coordinator for the Syria crisis, said home nations must take responsibility for repatriating their citizens, prosecuting where necessary.

"Really nobody should be rendered stateless and every effort should be made to find a solution for these people," he told a Geneva news briefing.

The children are among 10,000 non-Syrian and non-Iraqi nationals kept in a "restricted" section of the sprawling, Kurdish-run camp where 75,000 people live in total.

Some 211 children were among at least 260 people who died of malnutrition or disease en route to the camp since December, the latest UN figures show.

Britain revoked the citizenship of a teenager who left at 15 to join Daesh in Syria, while Austria and Switzerland have said they will not help bring home adults who joined the terrorist group.

But Moutzis said states had a legal responsibility, especially for children, many of whom were born in Daesh camps. "Children should be treated first and foremost as victims" and "irrespective of family affiliation," he said.

The situation is further complicated because most states lack the capacity to offer consular services or access their nationals in the area. "There has to be a concerted effort, this is not about blaming or 'naming and shaming', but it's really about being practical and finding a way forward that would find a solution," the UN official said.





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Australia won't risk lives returning Daesh refugees from Syria
France to try Syrian President Assad's uncle on graft charges

[UN warns of 'widening conflagration' in Libya as southern Haftar base attacked](#)

Author:

Reuters

ID:

1555582066066522900

Thu, 2019-04-18 10:04

TRIPOLI: The UN's Libya envoy warned Thursday of "a widening conflagration" in the country as an armed group attacked a major air base in the south

controlled by military commander Khalifa Haftar.

Despite days of heaving fighting, Ghassan Salame told AFP there was a stalemate south of the capital between Haftar's Libyan National Army (LNA) and the government in Tripoli.

"After the very first successes of the Libyan National Army two weeks ago, we are witnessing a military deadlock," he said.

Fighting broke out on April 4 when Haftar and his LNA, based in the country's east, launched an offensive to take Tripoli, the western seat of the UN-recognized Government of National Accord (GNA).

The GNA on Thursday issued an arrest warrant against Haftar for allegedly ordering deadly air strikes against civilian areas, its press office said. A spokesman for the GNA said it was seeking an international arrest warrant against Haftar for "war crimes," as two UN experts were expected in Tripoli later Thursday to investigate the origin of rocket fire that killed six people the previous day.

Salame told AFP that "international divisions" prior to the assault on Tripoli had emboldened Haftar, who is backed by Russia and Egypt and seen as a bulwark against extremists.

"There are countries that have invested in Mr. Haftar as a champion of the fight against terrorism," Salame said.

"They will not drop him now even if they do not agree with his attack on Tripoli."

The Tripoli government's interior ministry on Thursday accused France of supporting Haftar and said it would halt cooperation with Paris.

France responded to the accusation by saying that it supported "the legitimate government of Prime Minister (Fayez Al-)Serraj and the mediation of the UN for an inclusive political solution in Libya."

Haftar's offensive forced the UN to postpone a national conference that was to draw up a roadmap to elections in a bid to turn the page on years of turmoil since the 2011 downfall of Muammar Qaddafi.

The renewed fighting has killed at least 205 people and left more than 900 wounded, the World Health Organization said Thursday, while more than 25,000 have been displaced, according to the International Organization for Migration.

Fighting continued Thursday on several fronts south of Tripoli, AFP journalists on the ground and security sources said.

Reuters reported that an armed group on Thursday attacked a major air base in southern Libya controlled by Haftar who has moved much of his forces north to try to take the capital Tripoli.

Fighting was continuing at the Tamanhint base near Sabha, the main city in southern Libya, Major Hamid Rafea Al-Khiyali and an eastern military official said. The base is Haftar's main air base in southern Libya, which he seized earlier this year, though tribesmen with flexible loyalties remain strong in the sparsely populated desert region.

With both sides dug in, Tripoli this week witnessed its heaviest fighting since Haftar launched his offensive, including what the UN described as

“indiscriminate rocket fire on a high-density neighborhood” of Tripoli. World powers have long been divided on how to stabilize Libya, wracked by violence since Qaddafi’s fall. Haftar’s offensive has again highlighted those divisions.

“There are interests in Libya. It’s a country rich in oil,” Salame said. This “makes companies – oil companies, construction companies, etc – salivate.” But he added that some countries had supported one camp or another for “reasons that are not necessarily economic.”

The UN Security Council has been split on how to address the latest crisis. Negotiations this week on a draft resolution demanding a cease-fire in Tripoli have failed to yield agreement.

Germany, which holds the council presidency, called for an urgent meeting Thursday, when the council was to hear a briefing on the situation on the ground and “consult on the way forward,” according to a note seen by AFP. Britain has put forward a draft resolution calling for an immediate cease-fire and de-escalation, but Russia objected to clauses that criticized Haftar’s offensive as a threat to Libya’s stability.

Britain put forward a slightly watered-down version on Wednesday but the three African countries on the council – Equatorial Guinea, Ivory Coast, South Africa – blocked it.

They have insisted on including a reference to an African Union statement on the need for all parties fighting in Tripoli to protect civilians, including migrants and refugees, according to documents seen by AFP.

Moscow said even the amended version was “still far away from accommodating our concerns,” according to a note from the Russian UN mission.

The revised text did not single out Haftar’s forces, but instead expressed “grave concern at military activity” near Tripoli, “including the launching of a military offensive by the LNA.”

Britain had hoped to hold a vote before Friday, but that now looks unlikely. Diplomats said the United States appeared to be dragging its feet rather than pushing for a quick adoption of the draft resolution.



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UN weighs measure demanding immediate cease-fire in Libya
Fighting over Libya's capital Tripoli has displaced 18,000: UN agency

Sudan's military rulers arrest ousted president's brothers

Author:

Associated Press

ID:

1555579546266315800

Thu, 2019-04-18 09:15

KHARTOUM: Sudan's new military rulers arrested ousted President Omar Al-Bashir's two brothers for corruption, part of a broad sweep against officials and supporters of the former government, the country's official news agency reported Thursday.

The spokesman of the military council, Gen. Shams Eddin Kabashi, was quoted by SUNA as saying that Abdullah and Abbas Al-Bashir were taken into custody, without providing more details or saying when it happened.

The Sudanese military ousted Omar Al-Bashir last week, after four months of street protests against his 30-year rule marred by conflict, civil war and corruption. Al-Bashir is also wanted for genocide and crimes against humanity by the International Criminal Court for atrocities committee in the western region of Darfur.

The brothers' detention was likely another concession by the military to the protesters, who have demanded that all key figures and ranking officials from the former president's circle be arrested. A number of Al-Bashir's close associates and former government officials have already been taken into custody since the military overthrew Al-Bashir last Thursday.

The military council, which is now running the country, said the former president was transferred on Tuesday to Koper Prison in the capital, Khartoum, a facility notorious for holding political prisoners under Al-Bashir.

Huge crowds joined a protest outside Sudan's defence ministry on Thursday to demand that the country's transitional military council hand power to civilians, a Reuters witness said.

The crowds were the largest since former President Omar Al-Bashir was ousted a week ago and the military council took over, with hundreds of thousands packing the streets in the centre of the capital by early evening.

Protesters chanted "Freedom and revolution are the choice of the people" and "Civilian rule, civilian rule", and waved national flags overhead.

Activists who have been holding a sit-in outside the defence ministry compound in Khartoum since before Bashir's ouster had called for a mass protest on Thursday to increase pressure on the council.

It comes after an opposition coalition called this week on the military to establish a civilian-led ruling council with military representation, as well as a civilian government.

The council has said it is ready to meet some of the protesters demands, including fighting corruption, but has indicated that it would not hand over

power to them.

The Khartoum sit-in was the culmination of 16 weeks of protests triggered by a worsening economic crisis in Sudan, leading to the ouster and arrest of Bashir after three decades in power.

The United States supports a democratic and peaceful transition in Sudan led by civilians who represent all Sudanese, the State Department said on Thursday, as protesters in Khartoum kept up demands that the country's military hand over power to civilians.

State Department spokeswoman Morgan Ortagus said Sudan remained labeled by the US as a state sponsor of terrorism, and emphasized that Washington's policies toward Sudan would be based on "our assessment of events on the ground and the actions of transitional authorities."

She said the US was "encouraged" by the release of political prisoners and the cancellation by the transitional military council of a curfew.

Meanwhile, South Sudan's President Salva Kiir offered to mediate in Sudan's political crisis. In a letter seen by The Associated Press, Kiir this week pledged his support for a transition where the rights of the Sudanese people are protected and offered to "mediate the on-going negotiations" among various groups.

Some in South Sudan are concerned that Al-Bashir's departure will hurt their country's fragile peace deal, which Al-Bashir helped broker. South Sudan declared independence from Sudan in 2011, following decades of civil war. But the new country subsequently sank into its own civil war, which ended with an agreement signed in September. The deal calls for opposition leader Riek Machar to return to South Sudan next month to once again become Kiir's deputy, though that looks increasingly unlikely as tensions continue.

One political analyst called Kiir's offer of mediation over Al-Bashir a "hypocritical public relations" stunt.

"It doesn't make sense. You cannot leave your house in a mess and claim to clean your neighbor's house," Jacob Chol, professor at the University of Juba, told the AP.



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US says Sudan new regime can exit terror list if progress made Saudi Cabinet vows support for Sudanese people