

Netanyahu looks to form right-wing government after victory

Author:

Thu, 2019-04-11 21:54

JERUSALEM: Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu sought to form a right-wing governing coalition on Thursday after securing victory in a high-stakes Israeli election despite a strong challenge from a centrist alliance.

The results from Tuesday's vote came despite corruption allegations against the 69-year-old premier and kept him on course to become Israel's longest-serving prime minister later this year.

The allegations are likely to play an important role in coalition negotiations as many analysts expect Netanyahu to demand pledges from potential partners to agree to remain in his government if he is indicted.

Nationalist bend

Netanyahu will rely in part on politicians of the nationalist right opposed to a Palestinian state to put together his government.

His current government is already seen as the most right-wing in Israel's history, and his next is expected to be similar if not even further to the right.

Netanyahu himself, in a campaign pledge just three days before polling day, pledged to begin annexing settlements in the occupied West Bank.

Applying sovereignty in the West Bank on a large scale could effectively end remaining hopes for a two-state solution with the Palestinians.

Netanyahu's pledge was widely seen as an appeal to the far right, and it appears to have worked: He boosted the number of parliamentary seats for his Likud, while smaller, far-right parties struggled.

The Likud said late on Wednesday that Netanyahu "will form a right-wing government and he is already in advanced negotiations with the national camp partners."

Throughout the campaign, Netanyahu highlighted his bond with US President Donald Trump, who has swung US policy sharply in Israel's favor and openly backed the prime minister.

On Wednesday, Trump said the incumbent's election to a fifth term gives the White House's long-awaited peace plan, expected to be released in the coming weeks, a "better chance."

It was not clear what he meant.

He also tweeted a picture of a Netanyahu supporter waving a Trump flag and telephoned the premier to offer congratulations.

The election was seen as a referendum on the veteran prime minister, who has built a reputation as guarantor of Israel's security and economic growth, but whose divisive right-wing populism and alleged corruption led to calls for change.

The results reflected his deft political skills, Israel's shift to the right and wide satisfaction with Netanyahu's achievements, but also the fact that many voters are fed up with him.

The new centrist Blue and White alliance put together by ex-military chief Benny Gantz will finish with a similar number of seats to the Likud even though it came together less than two months before the polls.

Gantz's alliance, which conceded defeat on Wednesday night, however could not peel away enough right-wing votes to unseat Netanyahu.

The results showed that the Likud together with other right-wing parties allied to the prime minister would hold around 65 seats in the 120-seat parliament.

Final official results are expected to be announced by Friday.

They leave President Reuven Rivlin, who must ask one of the candidates to form a government, with little choice but to pick Netanyahu.

Intensive coalition negotiations could drag on for days or even weeks.

Rivlin said he would begin consultations with party leaders next week ahead of making his decision.

His office said the consultations would be broadcast live in their entirety for the first time.

Gantz, a 59-year-old former paratrooper, mounted a strong challenge by brandishing his security credentials while pledging to undo damage he says Netanyahu has inflicted on the country with divisive politics.

"We respect the decision of the people," Gantz said on Wednesday night.

Former Finance Minister Yair Lapid, who co-led Blue and White, vowed to "make life bitter for the Netanyahu government."

The close race between the two main parties had led to uncertainty after polls closed Tuesday night and exit surveys were released.

Both Netanyahu and Gantz claimed victory after the initial exit polls, though even then it appeared Netanyahu was best placed to form a coalition.

Speaking in the early hours of Wednesday at the Likud's post-election party in Tel Aviv, Netanyahu called it a "magnificent victory."

The vote had been expected to be close as Netanyahu faced potential corruption charges.

Fighting for his political life, he spent the weeks ahead of the vote campaigning furiously to energise his right-wing base.

Netanyahu has been premier for a total of more than 13 years, but now faces the prospect of becoming the first sitting prime minister to be indicted.

The attorney general has announced he intends to charge Netanyahu with bribery, fraud and breach of trust pending an upcoming hearing.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Benjamin Netanyahu](#)

[Israel](#)

Netanyahu victory torpedoed two-state solution, say analysts
Netanyahu rival concedes defeat in Israeli election

[Historic water levels at Iraq reservoirs and dams](#)

Author:

Thu, 2019-04-11 21:42

SAMARRA, Iraq: Water levels in Iraq's reservoirs and dams have reached historic heights, officials have told AFP, with thousands of families facing possible displacement by more flooding.

Weeks of rain compounded by melting snowcaps in neighboring Turkey and Iran have almost filled Iraq's four main reservoirs and swelled the Tigris and Euphrates rivers.

In Samarra, north of Baghdad, water is being diverted into the natural reservoir at Tharthar Lake in amounts unseen in decades, said dam chief Kareem Hassan.

"Today, the Tharthar barrage is seeing the highest levels of water passing through in its history," Hassan told AFP.

"We haven't seen such levels pass through the structure since it was founded in 1956, so 63 years."

The Dukan dam in the northeast also "had not witnessed water levels this high since 1988," said manager Hama Taher, calling on people living nearby to leave.

Authorities have said the excess will be stored in reservoirs ahead of expected droughts during blistering summer months, and have pre-emptively restricted farmers from planting crops that need high amounts of water.

The water arriving at Tharthar is gushing south from Iraq's largest reservoir in Mosul, currently holding 9 billion cubic meters of water – some 2 billion short of capacity, the Water Ministry has said.

The high levels have put two bridges linking the banks of Mosul under water, leaving truck drivers stranded with goods on either side.

"We have officially told kiosk owners and residents to get away from the banks," said Hussem Al-Sumaidai, who heads civil defense operations in the broader Nineveh province.

Water levels in Mosul were also blamed by some for last month's ferry drowning that killed more than 100 people.

Further south, villages and surrounding fields have been flooded, sending farmers into a frenzy.

More than 8,000 hectares of agriculture have been flooded in the small village of Huweidi in Basra province alone, according to its mayor, Mohammad Nasseh.

Hundreds of families were displaced in the southern province of Missan, with another 2,000 possibly forced to flee soon, the UN has said.

The UN has had to deliver humanitarian aid by boat in some areas due to flooding, it said on Wednesday.

Despite reassurances by the Iraqi government, the high levels have sparked concern among observers including environmental scientist Azzam Alwash.

The Mosul dam was built atop a bedrock of gypsum, a mineral that dissolves in water. That foundation requires regular cement injections to prevent cracks in the gypsum from expanding.

“If the bedrock settles as a result of cavities, that settlement will translate into damage to the core of the dam which cannot be undone and can possibly lead to catastrophic consequences,” Alwash told AFP on Thursday.

“If the dam fails when it’s full, the area will be under five meters of water,” he said.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Iraq](#)

Several dead, thousands flee homes in Iraq floodsEmergency workers in Iraq struggle to help flood victims

[Trump's Golan Heights move](#)

causes concern in Lebanon for land owners

Author:

Thu, 2019-04-11 21:36

CHEBBA, Lebanon: Akram Kanaan looked toward an Israeli military position on a snow-capped mountain that overlooks the village of Chebaa in southern Lebanon, pointing toward the scenic area captured by Israel more than five decades ago.

No matter how long it takes, he says, it will eventually return to Lebanon's sovereignty.

Like many others in this area where the borders of Lebanon, Syria and Israel meet, Kanaan – a member of Chebaa's municipal council – is angry about President Donald Trump's decision to recognize Israel's sovereignty over the occupied Golan Heights, seized from Syria in 1967 and annexed in 1981. The American president has no right to give Israel lands that belong to Syria and Lebanon, he says.

"These are Arab territories that will be liberated sooner or later the way the south was liberated," said Kanaan standing near Chebaa's main school as its buses left the compound at the end of a school day.

Trump's move last month has caused concern among Lebanese officials that it would mean also recognizing the occupied Chebaa Farms and nearby Kfar Chouba hills, captured along with the Golan, as Israeli territory. Lebanese President Michel Aoun said the US recognition undermines Lebanon's claim to the territory.

The origin of the dispute over ownership of the Chebaa farms dates back to the French colonial period, when France drew maps of the area without officially demarcating the border.

Following an 18-year occupation, Israel withdrew from south Lebanon in 2000, but held on to the farms. Hezbollah claimed the withdrawal to be incomplete and demanded, along with the Lebanese government, that Israel withdraws.

Israel rejected the demands, saying the land was Syrian when it was captured in 1967. Syria has held an ambiguous position and generally refuses to demarcate the border before Israel withdraws from the Golan.

The UN, which does not recognize Israel's sovereignty over the Golan, has said Lebanon's claim is to be settled along with the Golan's fate.

The territory is controversial, even among Lebanese themselves.

Although most Lebanese agree that the Chebaa Farms and Kfar Chouba hills are part of their country, anti-Syrian politicians have suggested it serves as a pretext for Hezbollah to hang on to its weapons and have called for the demarcation of the Lebanon-Syria border, a demand repeated by Prime Minister Saad Hariri on Wednesday even as he said the territory is Lebanese.

Politicians allied with the Syrian government say there is no need for such demarcation.

The area this week looked more like a tourist attraction, albeit deserted, rather than a front line, with rivers and springs flowing, birds chirping and shepherds leading their herds in the mostly green area amid clear weather.

According to Kanaan, the total size of the Lebanese area still occupied by Israel since June 1967 is about 250 sq km or about 2.5 percent of Lebanon's total territories.

Kanaan says the occupied area is owned by Lebanese citizens and that many of them have documents proving their ownership registered in the Lebanese coastal city of Sidon, the provincial capital of south Lebanon.

Arab countries have unanimously rejected the US recognition of Israeli control over the Golan, calling the Trump administration's policies unfairly biased toward Israel.

On the edge of Chebaa, shepherds were seen taking their herds of sheep and goats near a fence built by Israel. About every 100 meters white and blue barrels marked the so-called blue line, or the border that the UN drew after Israel's withdrawal in 2000.

The area has been calm since August 2006 after a UN Security Council resolution ended a 34-day war between Israel and Lebanon's Hezbollah group.

Soldiers at Lebanese army checkpoints on roads leading to Chebaa and Kfar Chouba checked the identity cards of people visiting the area to make sure no strangers enter. White UN vehicles with light blue flags could be seen along the fence that marks the border.

Near Al-Naqar lake, three UN peacekeepers stood outside their armored personnel carrier keeping an eye on any suspicious move. Next to them stood a giant poster with a picture of late Egyptian President Gamal Abdul-Nasser and one of his famous quotes that reads: "What was taken by force can only be regained by force."

Andrea Tenenti, spokesperson for the UN force in southern Lebanon known as UNIFIL, said the issue of Chebaa is one that is "discussed in New York at UN headquarters and not part of our mandate. Nevertheless, the position of member states is not necessarily the position of the United Nations," Tenenti said when asked about Trump's decision.

"Nothing has changed, and we are continuing with our work in the south of Lebanon, to monitor the cessation of hostilities and to work closely with the Lebanese army," he said.

In nearby Kfar Chouba, shops were open in its main square where a group of people gathered at the main bakery, while others bought freshly picked vegetables and fruits.

“With deep regret, this guy who is called Trump who is the president of the United States of America, the most important country in the world, is acting like a thug,” said grocer Riad Khalifeh who was 23 when Israeli forces captured the hills overlooking his hometown of Kfar Chouba in 1967.

“Who gave you the right to give a land that belongs to me or to Palestine or to Syria to an enemy that is occupying it?” Khalifeh asked.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Golan Heights](#)

King Salman: We reject move to undermine Syrian sovereignty of Golan Heights
GCC speakers condemn US move on Golan Heights

[World reacts to the downfall of Omar Al-Bashir in Sudan](#)

Author:

Zaynab Khojji

ID:

1555004477930258500

Thu, 2019-04-11 20:43

KHARTOUM: Here are the reactions to the end of Omar Al-Bashir's 30-year rule:

United Nations:

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Thursday called for a transition in Sudan that will meet the "democratic aspirations" of the people, his spokesman said.

Guterres appealed for "calm and utmost restraint by all" after long-serving president Omar Al-Bashir was ousted by the army.

Bahrain:

Bahrain said that it is following the current developments in Sudan with great interest, and hopes that the country will overcome this critical stage. It also said that the country stands with Sudan.

Egypt:

Egypt said it backed the removal of longtime autocratic ruler Omar Al-Bashir in neighboring Sudan.

In a statement, Egypt's Foreign Ministry expressed support to the "Sudanese people's choice and will."

The statement called on the international community to help Sudan to have a peaceful transition.

African Union:

The African Union on Thursday criticised the military coup in Sudan and called for calm and restraint.

"The military take-over is not the appropriate response to the challenges facing Sudan and the aspirations of its people," said a statement from Moussa Faki, chairman of the AU Commission.

Britain:

British Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt says two years of potential military rule in Sudan "is not the answer" for "real change" in the country.

Hunt tweeted Thursday that Sudan needs "a swift move to an inclusive, representative, civilian leadership" and an end to violence.

Turkey:

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Thursday said he hoped Sudan would return to a "normal democratic process" after an uprising led to the army toppling President Omar Al-Bashir, a close ally of Turkey.

"I hope that Sudan overcomes this affair with fraternity and ease, and I believe the country should work towards a normal democratic process," Erdogan said during a press conference in Ankara with the president of Burkina Faso, Roch Marc Christian Kabore.

Russia:

Russia on Thursday called for calm in Sudan and expressed hope that close bilateral ties would not be threatened, irrespective of who was in power.

"We are monitoring this situation very carefully," Russian President Vladimir Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters.

"And we are hoping that first and foremost there won't be an escalation that could claim human lives," he said, calling the protests an "internal affair".

"We expect that whatever the outcome, Russian-Sudanese relations" will be a priority for Khartoum, Peskov said.

George Clooney:

Actor and activist George Clooney said Thursday that the fall of Sudan's veteran strongman Omar al-Bashir was not enough and called for the dismantling of the military-led system.

The Hollywood star, who has been arrested protesting against Sudan's campaign in Darfur that the United States described as genocide, called for Bashir to be extradited and prosecuted for war crimes by the International Criminal Court.

"The people of Sudan have been waiting for this day for a long time, but it is only a tentative first step towards real change," Clooney said in a joint statement with John Prendergast, the human rights campaigner with whom the actor founded The Sentry Project, which researches illicit money and war crimes in Africa.

(With AP, AFP and Reuters)









Main category:
[Middle-East](#)
Tags:

[Sudan](#)
[Omar Al-Bashir](#)

Sudan's military removes Omar Al-Bashir from power and declares state of emergency
Viral 'Nubian queen' rally leader says women key to Sudan protests

[US slaps sanctions on Lebanese 'money laundering' group](#)

Author:

AFP

ID:

1555005663180341200

Thu, 2019-04-11 16:34

WASHINGTON: US officials on Thursday announced it has sanctioned a Lebanese network accused of laundering millions of dollars for "drug kingpins" and helping finance Hezbollah, the Iran-backed Shiite movement that Washington labels a terrorist organization.

The US Treasury Department said it has added Lebanese national Kassem Chams to its blacklist, along with two related entities: the "Chams Money Laundering Organization" and Chams Exchange, a money service business in Lebanon.

"Kassem Chams and his international money laundering network move tens of millions of dollars a month in illicit narcotics proceeds on behalf of drug kingpins and facilitate money movements for Hezbollah," Treasury said in a statement.

Treasury sanctions Lebanese money launderer Kassem Chams who moves money on behalf of narcotics trafficking organizations and Hizballah: <https://t.co/JfgH5E6ABC> pic.twitter.com/v0kEOPSEHZ

– Treasury Department (@USTreasury) [April 11, 2019](#)

The Chams network moves money to and from multiple countries including Australia, Brazil, Colombia, France, Italy, Lebanon, the Netherlands, Spain, the United States and Venezuela, according to the department.

The sanctions are part of the administration's "unprecedented campaign to prevent Hezbollah and its global terror affiliates from profiting off violence, corruption, and the drug trade," Treasury under secretary Sigal Mandelker said.

The department's Office of Foreign Assets Control said Chams Exchange operates under license and supervision of the Central Bank of Lebanon (BdL)

“despite US authorities long suspecting it” of significant money laundering. Treasury said it remains committed to working with BdL “to eliminate access to the Lebanese financial system by narcotics traffickers, money launderers, and terrorist groups such as Hezbollah.”

President Donald Trump’s administration has accused Iran of taking provocative measures to destabilize the Middle East.

It has increased sanctions on the Islamic republic in order to undercut its revenues and to financially squeeze regional allies like the Lebanese Hezbollah.

Earlier this week Washington designated Iran’s elite Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps as a terrorist organization.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[US](#)

[Hezbollah](#)

[Lebanon](#)