

Tunisian president accuses PM of secret pact for power

Author:

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TUNIS: Tunisia's president on Tuesday accused the prime minister of seeking power through a secret deal with an Islamist party, the latest sign of tension at the top ahead of elections.

Prime Minister Youssef Chahed had gained the backing of the Ennahdha party to stand in the presidential polls, President Beji Caid Essebsi said, quoted by Al Arab newspaper.

"Chahed wants to stay in power... Ennahdha has understood his ambition... They have pushed him to create a new party which divides power between them after the 2019 elections," said Essebsi, whose comments were verified by the presidency.

Chahed was appointed by Essebsi in 2016 but relations between the pair have strained in recent months, fueling speculation the prime minister will run in this year's presidential election.

For his part, 92-year-old Essebsi indicated he would not seek a second term. "My ambition is not to stay president for life. I am not in favor of a president for life," he said.

Essebsi's claim of a private pact by Chahed comes as the premier prepares for elections with a progressive platform – the Tahia Tounes movement – described as being in opposition to Ennahdha.

Its political stance is similar to that of Essebsi's secularist Nidaa Tounes, which won the 2014 elections and formed a coalition with Ennahdha that lasted four years.

Nidaa Tounes has since split and its leader, Essebsi's son Hafedh, has been battling to oust the prime minister for months.



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[Kuwaiti MP sentenced to 7 years for 'tricking' wife](#)

Author:

Mon, 2019-01-28 22:34

KUWAIT CITY: A Kuwaiti court on Monday sentenced an opposition politician to seven years in jail for failing to tell his wife he divorced her and continuing to have sexual relations with her, her lawyer said.

Waleed Al-Tabtabai, an Islamist who is currently outside Kuwait, already faces a 42-month jail term handed down in July in another case for storming parliament and assaulting police.

The appeals court on Monday upheld a 2018 verdict finding him guilty of adultery, said the lawyer, Naser Al-Otaibi, adding the ruling was not political.

"My client received justice after she was taken advantage of and tricked into something that criminalizes her under sharia (Islamic) law," he told AFP.

The lawyer said his client had found out her husband divorced her in 2017 – a year later – after she sued him for failing to provide for her and their child.

“Evidence was brought forward that they continued a marital relationship during the time they were divorced, including an exchange of intimate pictures via WhatsApp,” he said.

Tabtabai is currently outside of Kuwait amid government discussions on whether or not to unseat him from parliament.



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Kuwait budget to boost spending to spur growth Saudi-Kuwaiti ties 'unprecedented' in social, political integration

[Scores of civilians, fighters depart Daesh stronghold in Syria](#)

Author:

Mon, 2019-01-28 22:12

SOUSA: Syrian opposition activists said on Monday scores of civilians and

fighters have evacuated the Daesh's last major stronghold in Syria.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said some 2,000 people, including 300 Daesh gunmen, have left the area in the eastern province of Deir Ezzor since Sunday.

The DeirEzzor 24, an activist collective, reported on Monday that dozens of civilians had left the area, which US-backed Syrian fighters have been trying to take since September.

It said that the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), a Kurdish-led group, captured a local Daesh commander and his bodyguard.

Meanwhile, a senior Kurdish commander said the Daesh's once-sprawling "caliphate" has been reduced to a four-square-kilometer pocket of territory.

With support from a US-led military coalition, the SDF are in the final stages of an assault launched more than four months ago against the militants' last bastion.

A dwindling number of Daesh fighters, led mostly by Iraqi commanders, are now defending only a handful of hamlets in the Euphrates Valley, SDF commander Heval Roni said.

"Geographically speaking, there are only 4 square kilometers left under Daesh control, stretching from Baghouz to the Iraqi border," he told AFP in the Baghouz area.

"There are some high-ranking Daesh leaders among them ... but we don't know who exactly," said Roni, who heads SDF operations in the area.

The SDF is a Kurdish-led force that also includes Arab fighters from the region and which has spearheaded the fight against Daesh in Syria since it was formed in 2015.

The commander said he had no information about Daesh leader Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, who is believed to still be alive and is the world's most wanted man.

In an interview with AFP last week, the top commander of the SDF said that the battle was winding up but that his forces would need about a month to assert full control over the area and declare victory.

According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, more than 1,200 militants and around half as many SDF fighters have been killed since the start of the offensive on Sept. 10.

The Britain-based monitoring group says more than 400 civilians have also perished, many of them killed by coalition airstrikes.



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Daesh in Syria boxed in to shrinking pocketKurd-led forces overrun last Daesh-held village in Syria: monitor

[Israel's Netanyahu to eject foreign observers in flashpoint Hebron](#)

Author:

Reuters

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Mon, 2019-01-28 18:57

HEBRON, West Bank: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Monday he would eject a foreign force set up to help safeguard Palestinians in a flashpoint city in the occupied West Bank, accusing the observers of anti-Israel activity.

"We will not allow the continued presence of an international force that acts against us," Netanyahu said in a statement announcing that the Temporary

International Presence in Hebron's (TIPH) mandate would not be renewed. The statement did not elaborate on the alleged misconduct of TIPH, which draws staff from Norway, Italy, Sweden, Switzerland and Turkey. The TIPH website says the force works on six-month mandates but did not specify when the current one expires.

A force spokesman declined comment. Palestinians denounced the move.

"The Israeli government's decision means it has abandoned the implementation of agreements signed under international auspices, and given up its obligations under these agreements," said Nabil Abu Rudeineh, spokesman for Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, whose peace talks with Netanyahu stalled in 2014. Conservative Israeli commentators had accused the TIPH of agitating against Jewish settlers who live under heavy Israeli army protection in Hebron, a biblical city with an overwhelmingly Palestinian populace.

The TIPH was set up after a settler killed 29 Palestinians at a Hebron shrine holy to both Muslims and Jews in 1994.

Since Israel partially withdrew from Hebron in 1998 under interim peace deals with the self-rule Palestinian Authority, the TIPH has "observe(d) and report(ed) on breaches of the agreements (and) violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law," the force's website says.

Most world powers consider Israel's settlements in the West Bank, where Palestinians want a state, to be illegal. Israel disputes this, and the rightist Netanyahu has played up his pro-settler credentials as he seeks reelection in an April 9 ballot.

"They want to uproot us from here. They will not," he said in separate remarks on Monday at another West Bank settlement.

"There's a line of thought that says that the way to achieve peace with the Arabs is to be extirpated from our land. That is the certain path to achieving the opposite of this dream."



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Netanyahu pledges 'lethal' response to Gaza violence after blocking aid
Israel, Chad renew diplomatic relations: Netanyahu

[Iran likely to step up cyber espionage](#)

Mon, 2019-01-28 21:28

BRUSSELS: Iran is likely to expand its cyber espionage activities as its relations with Western powers worsen, the EU digital security agency said on Monday.

Iranian hackers are behind several cyberattacks and online disinformation campaigns in recent years as the country tries to strengthen its clout in the Middle East and beyond, a Reuters Special Report published in November found.

This month the EU imposed its first sanctions on Iran since world powers agreed a 2015 nuclear deal with Tehran, in a reaction to Iran's ballistic

missile tests and assassination plots on European soil.

“Newly imposed sanctions on Iran are likely to push the country to intensify state-sponsored cyber threat activities in pursuit of its geopolitical and strategic objectives at a regional level,” the European Union Agency for Network and Information Security (ENISA) said in a report.

A senior Iranian official rejected the report, saying “these are all part of a psychological war launched by the United States and its allies against Iran.”

ENISA lists state-sponsored hackers as among the highest threats to the bloc’s digital security.

It said that China, Russia and Iran are “the three most capable and active cyber actors tied to economic espionage.”

Iran, Russia and China have denied the allegations that their governments conduct cyberattacks.

A malicious computer worm known as Stuxnet that was used to attack a uranium enrichment facility at Iran’s Natanz underground nuclear site a decade ago is widely believed to have been developed by the US and Israel.

When Washington imposed sanctions on several Iranians in March 2018 for hacking on behalf of the Iranian government, Iran’s Foreign Ministry denounced the move as “provocative, illegitimate, and without any justifiable reason.”

In November, the US indicted two Iranians for launching a major cyberattack using ransomware known as “SamSam” and sanctioned two others for helping exchange the ransom payments from Bitcoin digital currency into rials.

Cyber activities are expected to increase in coming months, particularly if Iran fails to keep the EU committed to a 2015 landmark nuclear deal, ENISA said.



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