

Tunisia PM Elyes Fakhfakh resigns

Wed, 2020-07-15 20:36

TUNIS: Tunisian Prime Minister Elyes Fakhfakh resigned on Wednesday, according to two official sources who did not want to be named, after a row with the Islamist-inspired Ennahdha party.

Fakhfakh, who is under investigation over allegations of conflict of interest, has had strained relations with Ennahdha, the biggest party in parliament, since October legislative elections.

Ennahdha had earlier Wednesday tabled a no-confidence motion against Fakhfakh, who took office in February after winning approval from lawmakers following four months of deadlock.

Ennahdha came top in the October polls but fell far short of a majority and eventually agreed to join a coalition government.

The party initially nominated an independent for premier but he failed to win the support of parliament, leading President Kais Saied to name former finance minister Fakhfakh for the post.

Fakhfakh is under investigation over alleged failure to hand over control of shares he owns in private companies that have won public contracts.



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[Egypt seeks clarification on word of Ethiopia filling dam](#)

Wed, 2020-07-15 19:17

CAIRO: Egypt has asked Ethiopia for urgent clarification on whether it had started filling its Grand Renaissance dam on the Blue Nile, the Foreign Ministry said on Wednesday.

It was Cairo's first official reaction after Ethiopia's water minister said earlier in the day that Addis Ababa had begun the filling, a day after talks with Sudan and Egypt, which both depend on Nile water, became deadlocked.

"The construction of the dam and the filling of the water go hand in hand," Ethiopian Water Minister Seleshi Bekele said in televised comments, a transcript of which was provided to Reuters by his office. "The filling of the dam doesn't need to wait until the completion of the dam."

The water level had increased from 525 metres to 560 metres, he said.

On Tuesday, talks between the three nations to regulate the flow of water from the dam failed to reach agreement.

UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric told reporters Secretary General Antonio Guterres had urged the three countries to "seize the opportunity in the coming days to bridge remaining differences and reach a mutually beneficial agreement for their peoples".

The dam, when finished, will have an installed capacity of 6,450 megawatts – more than doubling Ethiopia's existing capacity – and is the centrepiece of the country's bid to become Africa's biggest power exporter.

The dam is being built about 15 km (9 miles) from the border with Sudan. Sudan and Egypt have sought a legally binding agreement before the dam is filled.

Sudan's Ministry of Irrigation and Water Resources said it was prompted to investigate after satellite images appeared to show the reservoir filling. "It was evident from the flow meters in the Al-Deim border station with Ethiopia that there is a retreat in the water levels, equivalent to 90 million cubic meters per day, confirming the closure of the gates of the Renaissance Dam," it said in a statement.

Sudan rejects any unilateral actions taken by any party as negotiating efforts continue, it said.



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Satellite images show Ethiopian dam filling as talks failEgypt receives 48 international flights to Red Sea cities this month

[Time running out for Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe's hopes of adding to family, says husband](#)

Wed, 2020-07-15 17:58

LONDON: Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, the British-Iranian national imprisoned by Tehran on charges of espionage, is running out of time if she is to have another child, according to her husband Richard Ratcliffe, who has appealed to Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif to release her on compassionate grounds.

Zaghari-Ratcliffe, 41, has been incarcerated in Evin Prison, north of Tehran,

since her arrest at the city's airport in 2016, during which time she has allegedly been denied access to medical treatment.

She has one child, her 6-year-old daughter Gabriella, who was with her when she was arrested and was repatriated to the UK last year.

Zaghari-Ratcliffe was released on temporary furlough to stay with her parents in Tehran as part of wider efforts to halt the spread of COVID-19 in Iran's prisons earlier this year, where she has since undergone a series of private medical tests on the recommendation of a former cellmate who had worked as a doctor.

Ratcliffe said the results of his wife's tests showed she had a less than 15 percent chance of conceiving another child.

"The discovery left her devastated. She spent the day crying looking at pictures of Gabriella," Ratcliffe said. "She reflected, 'I always used to tell myself in Evin that they can't take my future away. But now they have'."

He appealed to Zarif for his wife's release, saying: "Her hostage experience risks having a permanent legacy for our whole family. It is one thing to recover from losing over four years of your life to someone else's fights, but it will be quite a different recovery journey for us all if it also means we can never have another baby."

Ratcliffe added: "It is time to end this. Quite literally every month counts. There remains a little girl growing up without her mother still. I hope not a little girl without a sibling. This has been cruel enough."

Zaghari-Ratcliffe supposedly qualifies for permanent release under the terms of an amnesty for 3,000 prisoners to mark the end of Ramadan in May, declared by Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei.

But her appeal for clemency has been postponed, with fears that it will only be raised when a hearing in a debt case between the UK and Iran over the canceled sale of tanks in the 1970s begins in November. Zaghari-Ratcliffe's imprisonment has been linked to the dispute.

Iranian prosecutors, meanwhile, have warned that a second case, linked to comments made by UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson when he was foreign secretary about her being in Iran to train journalists, could be brought against her in the future. Those allegations could see a further sentence of five years were she to be convicted.

The UK Foreign Office said in a statement: "We have consistently urged Iran to make Nazanin's furlough permanent so she can return to her family in the UK.

"We will continue to do everything we can to help secure the release of all UK dual nationals arbitrarily detained in Iran."



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[UK](#)

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British-Iranian woman Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe temporarily released from Tehran jail
UK summons Iran ambassador over case of British-Iranian aid worker Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe

[UK calls for dialogue over Israeli annexation plan](#)

Wed, 2020-07-15 17:41

LONDON: UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson has called for dialogue to resolve tensions over the proposed annexation by Israel of parts of the occupied Palestinian territories.

Johnson spoke with Mahmoud Abbas, president of the Palestinian Authority, over concerns about Israel's plan, a week after discussing it with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Johnson "urged President Abbas to engage in negotiations and offered the UK's support to foster dialogue," a Downing Street spokesman said. "The leaders

agreed to continue to work together on this issue and others.”

On July 1, Johnson published an article in Israel’s Yedioth Ahronoth newspaper urging Tel Aviv not to push ahead.

“It is with sadness that I have followed the proposals to annex Palestinian territory. As a life-long friend, admirer and supporter of Israel, I am fearful that these proposals will fail in their objective of securing Israel’s borders and will be contrary to Israel’s own long-term interests,” he wrote.

Meanwhile, 11 European foreign ministers have written to the EU to ask for possible actions that the bloc could take to prevent the proposed annexation.

Ministers from Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Portugal, Sweden and Finland asked EU Minister for Foreign Affairs Josep Borrell to set out the “legal consequences” of the move, following an initial request made at a meeting in May.

The letter suggested that doing so could help members “deter annexation” by laying out to Israel the consequences of such action.

“The possible annexation by Israel of parts of the occupied Palestinian territory remains a matter of grave concern for the EU and its member states,” it said.

“We understand that this is a sensitive issue and timing is important, but time is also short. We are concerned that the window to deter annexation is fast closing.”

Moves to formally incorporate what could amount to up to 30 percent of the West Bank into Israel began with the signing of a coalition government agreement earlier this year, after Netanyahu made the issue a central pledge in his re-election campaign.

The EU relies on consensus among members to take steps in any direction on issues of foreign policy, but though some states have called for sanctions against Israel, others oppose punitive measures.

In June, over 1,000 European politicians signed a letter that condemned Israel, saying: “Acquisition of territory by force has no place in 2020 and must have commensurate consequences.”

A similar letter signed by 47 UN experts called Israel’s plan “a vision of a 21st-century apartheid.”

In February, Borrell said Israeli annexation would not be allowed to go “unchallenged.” However, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has said annexation is a matter for Tel Aviv.



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[Middle-East](#)

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France asks Israel to drop West Bank annexation plans
UK PM Johnson tells Israel: do not annex parts of the occupied West Bank

[Internet access in Iran disrupted as anger at protesters' death sentences grows](#)

Wed, 2020-07-15 16:52

LONDON: Internet access was restricted across Iran on Tuesday after widespread anger on social media over death sentences handed to three protesters.

A Farsi hashtag translated as #DontExecute began trending globally on Tuesday evening according to Radio Farda, and Iranian activists – including the

exiled Prince Reza Pahlavi, the son of deposed Shah Mohammad – circulated its English equivalent #StopExecutionInIran.

The online rallying call was prompted by a decision from Iran's judiciary to uphold the death penalty of three men accused of taking part in anti-regime protests in November last year.

Saeed Tamjidi, 26, Mohammad Rajabi, 28, and Amirhossein Moradi, 26, were arrested in large-scale demonstrations that swept the country fueled by economic hardship and rising petrol prices.

After initially being released, they were convicted of a range of offenses including sabotage, armed robbery and illegally fleeing the country during a closed trial in January.

Tuesday's verdict sparked a sharp rise in people using the hashtag on social media, including prominent influencers, politicians and sportspeople. Former vice-president Mohammad Ali Abtahi and national team footballer Hossein Mahini were among those calling for the government to listen to the people's demands.

"An important part of this system, in case of protests, believe that measures should be toughened so they (protesters) don't get brazen," Abtahi wrote. "I have written many times that the system does not have the chance to be stubborn."

At the same time the hashtag was trending, internet monitoring group NetBlocks.org said service providers linked to Iran's security apparatus began slowing internet connection speeds.

The group also reported disruption to internet access across Iran, saying: "Significant disruption to multiple networks in #Iran" occurred at 9:30 p.m. local time and impacted "citizens' ability to communicate."

Confirmed: Significant disruption to multiple networks in [#Iran](#) after 5 p.m. UTC (9:30 p.m. local time); real-time network data show significant impact to subscriber internet lines limiting citizens' ability to communicate; incident ongoing pic.twitter.com/XZ1rNXgRHB

– NetBlocks.org (@netblocks) [July 14, 2020](#)

The Iranian government regularly and increasingly blocks access to the internet – a process called "throttling" – during episodes of unrest or during widespread demonstrations.

Iranian officials said Tuesday that appeals made by the three men against their death sentences had failed. Lawyers for the three men said they have

had no access to the case and that their clients' confessions were "extracted under aberrant conditions."

In an open letter published online, the lawyers called for a judicial review, citing fears the three men could be put to death in the immediate future.

"We have repeatedly stated that we have not been permitted to defend (our clients) and that they have no information about their trials," [the letter said](#).

Calls from the public for death sentences of those who took part in last year's protests to be dropped have grown in Iran since November, especially on social media.

An estimated 251 people were executed in Iran in 2019, according to Amnesty International, which is the second highest tally in the world after China. The regime has also issued a number of new death sentences in recent weeks.

Amnesty on Tuesday demanded Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei stop the execution of Tamjidi, Rajabi and Moradi.

Iran's [@khamenei_ir](#) must quash the death sentences of protesters—Amirhossein Moradi, Saeed Tamjidi & Mohammad Rajabi—immediately! Their trial was unfair & they said they were subjected to torture through beatings, electric shocks and being hung upside down. [#اعدام_نکنید](#)

– Amnesty International (@amnesty) [July 14, 2020](#)

Amirhossein Moradi
Saeed Tamjidi
Mohammad Rajabi [#اعدام_نکنید](#)

– Amnesty International (@amnesty) [July 15, 2020](#)



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