

Struggle over leadership deepens divisions in Tunisia president's party

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TUNIS: Tunisia's ruling party Nidaa Tounes on Saturday elected two leaders, one of them the president's son, in two parallel congresses, deepening the division that has hit the party in recent years.

The new crisis that hit Nidaa Tounes comes months ahead of parliamentary and presidential elections expected in October and November, which could complicate its competition against the rival Ennahda moderate Islamist party. Although the slogan of the first electoral congresses of Nidaa Tounes which started last week was "unity," it ended by dividing into two congresses. The first congress elected the lawmaker Sofian Toubel as head of the party's central committee. The second elected Hafedh Caid Essebsi, the son of the president Beji Caid Essebsi.

The divisions have shaken the party since 2015, as Essebsi's son has been criticized for seeking to control the party, prompting many of its leaders to resign.

The prime minister Youssef Chahed also entered into a row with Hafedh Caid Essebsi and accused him of exporting the party's problems to the state. "The congresses of Monastir (in which Essebsi's son was elected) is illegal and an attempt to deflect legitimacy," said party official Ons Hattab.

Essebsi's son denied the accusations and said he was surprised by the behavior of some leaders who went to a parallel conference, adding that this could affect the party.

The parliamentary race is expected to be fought closely by the moderate Islamist Ennahda party, the more secular Tahya Tounes party of Prime Minister Chahed, and the Nidaa Tounes.

The parties rule the North African country together but their coalition has been hit by infighting that has hampered decision-making and slowed economic reforms demanded by foreign donors.

No prominent figure has so far declared their candidacy for the presidency this year.

Tunisia has won widespread praise for its democratic transition since 2011, but nine Cabinets have failed to resolve economic problems that include high inflation and unemployment.



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Tunisia president Essebsi says he does not want to run for a second term

[Iraq unearths mass grave of Kurds killed by Saddam Hussein](#)

Author:

Reuters

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Sun, 2019-04-14 09:07

SAMAWA, Iraq: Iraq must never forget Saddam Hussein's crimes or allow his party to return, President Barham Salih said on Sunday after attending the unearthing of a mass grave of Kurds killed by the former leader's forces three decades ago.

The grave, found in the desert about 170 km west of the city of Samawa, contained the remains of dozens of Kurds made to “disappear” by Saddam’s forces, Salih’s office said.

They were among up to 180,000 people who may have been killed during Saddam’s “Anfal” campaign that targeted Iraqi Kurds in the late 1980s when chemical gas was used, villages were razed and thousands of Kurds were forced into camps.

“He killed them because they did not accept the continuation of this regime, because they wanted to live a free and dignified life,” Salih, a Kurd, told a news conference at the grave site.

“He brought them to Samawa to bury them but our people in Samawa embraced them,” Salih added. Iraq’s southern provinces are predominantly inhabited by Shiite Arabs, who also suffered oppression and mass killings under Saddam, a Sunni Arab.

“The new Iraq must never forget these crimes that were committed against Iraqi people from all groups,” he said.



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Syria Kurds return 25 Yazidis freed from IS to Iraq 31,000 Iraqis to return home under Syrian deal

[Israeli delegation cancels visit to Bahrain on security concerns](#)

Sun, 2019-04-14 12:34

DUBAI: An Israeli delegation of businessmen and government officials planning to take part in a business conference in Bahrain has canceled its visit on security concerns, a statement from the organizers said on Sunday.

The group had been planning to attend a congress organized by the Global Entrepreneurship Network from April 15.

“While we advised the Israeli delegation they would be welcome, they decided this morning not to come due to security concerns and a wish not to cause disruption for the other 180 nations participating,” the organization’s president Jonathan Ortman said in a statement sent to Reuters.

The cancelation came after the kingdom’s parliament issued a statement rejecting the visit, and some protests against it in the streets of the capital Manama.



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Israeli raid 'targets' military positions inside Syria
Palestinian teen killed by Israeli fire in border clashes: Gaza ministry

Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas swears in new government

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Sat, 2019-04-13 17:13

RAMALLAH, West Bank: Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas on Saturday swore in a new government headed by a loyalist from his dominant Fatah party, a move rejected by his rivals Hamas as a blow to unity efforts.

Mohammed Shtayyeh, an economist and longtime Abbas adviser, will serve as prime minister of the West Bank-based Palestinian Authority (PA). Foreign Minister Riyad al-Maliki and Finance Minister Shukri Bishara will continue in their positions.

Shtayyeh was named Palestinian prime minister on March 10, replacing the independent university president Rami Al-Hamdallah. He will run the ministries of interior and religious affairs until new appointees are named for the two posts.

The rival Hamas group that runs Gaza called the move a blow to unity efforts that faltered since the two groups signed a new reconciliation deal in Cairo in October 2017, but disputes over power-sharing had blocked the implementation of the agreement.

"This is a separatist government, it has no national legitimacy and it will reinforce the chances of severing the West Bank from Gaza," said a statement issued by Hamas as the swearing ceremony in Ramallah, in the Israeli-occupied West Bank ended.

Two factions of Abbas's Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) refused to take part in Shtayyeh's government.

Shtayyeh's immediate challenge is to shore up the cash-strapped PA, which exercises limited self-rule under interim peace accords with Israel.

The PA has been squeezed by steep US aid cuts, with the crisis exacerbated by a dispute with Israel over the withholding of some 5 percent of the monthly tax revenues it transfers to the Authority.

Israel said the sum it is holding back matches money used by the PA to pay stipends to families of militants in Israeli jails. The PA has refused to accept any tax transfers until those funds are restored. It scaled back wages paid to civil servants in February and March to weather the crisis.

Moreover, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who is heading toward a fifth term in office after an election on April 9, said he would annex Israeli settlements in the West Bank if he is re-elected.

If implemented, the move would be a grave a blow to Palestinian aspirations of a two-state solution based on the 1967 borders. The peace process has all but collapsed and Israel has expanded its settlements in East Jerusalem and the West bank despite international objections.

Palestinian leaders said Israel was being empowered by US President Donald

Trump to “violate national and human rights of the people of Palestine”. Nickolay Maldenov, the U.N. special Middle East peace envoy welcomed the announcement of a new government and promised to cooperate with it. “The United Nations remains fully committed to working with the Palestinian leadership and people in ending the occupation and advancing their legitimate national aspirations for statehood based on UN resolutions,” said Mladenov said.

Mahmoud El-Aloul, the second in command in Abbas’s Fatah movement, acknowledged the challenges facing Shtayyeh’s government including the deal Trump is expected to announce in coming months or weeks.

“We will be steadfast against these challenges and we will defy them,” Aloul told Reuters after the ceremony.

Shtayyeh, a former government minister, has been part of a number of Palestinian negotiating teams in the United States-brokered talks with Israel.



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‘I wish that everybody could just tell the truth.’ – Palestine’s youngest journalist
Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas will refuse Israeli tax transfers

Eastern Libya parliament head says LNA forces will push Tripoli campaign

Author:

Reuters

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Sat, 2019-04-13 15:24

BENGAZI: Eastern Libyan forces will pursue their advance on the capital Tripoli, the head of the eastern parliament in the divided country said on Saturday, despite international calls for a halt in an offensive that risks causing many civilian casualties.

His comments came as more clashes rocked the southern outskirts of Tripoli, where eastern forces have been confronted by groups allied to Prime Minister Fayez Al-Serraj's internationally recognized government.

The European Union last week urged the eastern Libya National Army (LNA) to stop its attacks, having agreed on a statement after France and Italy sparred over how to handle the conflict.

But the eastern parliament head said they would press an offensive launched a week ago under military commander Khalifa Haftar, the latest outbreak of a cycle of conflict since the 2011 overthrow of Muammar Qaddafi.

"We need to get rid of militias and terrorist groups," Aguila Saleh, head of the House of Representatives allied to Haftar, said using a reference eastern officials often make to describe forces allied to the Tripoli government, which relies on support from several armed groups.

"We assure the residents of Tripoli that the campaign to liberate Tripoli will be limited and not violate any freedoms but restore security and fight terrorism," Saleh told lawmakers in a session in the main eastern city of Benghazi.

Forces loyal to Al-Serraj's government have so far kept the eastern offensive at bay. Fierce fighting has broken out around a disused former airport about 11 km (7 miles) from the center and an eastern military source said a warplane belonging to the LNA had struck a military camp in an eastern Tripoli suburb.

Saleh also said the United Nations mission to Libya and Serraj's government had been controlled by armed groups and had failed to expel them from the capital, and promised Libya would hold long-delayed elections after the Tripoli operation ends.

Haftar's offensive had surprised the United Nations, which had been planning to hold a national conference on April 14 to prepare Libya for elections. The latest battle had by Friday killed 75 people, mainly fighters but including 17 civilians, and wounded another 323, according to UN tallies. Some 13,625 people have been forced out of their homes.

As well as the humanitarian cost, the conflict threatens to disrupt oil supplies, boost migration to Europe, scupper a UN peace plan, and allow militants to exploit the chaos.

Haftar, 75, a former general in Qaddafi's army who later joined the revolt against him, moved his troops out of their eastern stronghold to take the oil-rich desert south earlier this year, before sweeping up to Tripoli at the start of April.



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