

Macron calls for inter-religious dialogue at end of Egypt visit

Author:

Tue, 2019-01-29 21:39

CAIRO: French President Emmanuel Macron on Tuesday held a surprise second meeting with his Egyptian counterpart Abdel Fattah El-Sisi after talks with the country's top clerics, ending a three-day visit aimed at boosting ties while raising human rights concerns.

Before traveling on to Cyprus for a summit of southern EU countries, Macron and El-Sisi held an unscheduled 45-minute meeting at Cairo airport.

Earlier, Macron met with Pope Tawadros II at St. Mark's Cathedral, the seat of Egypt's ancient Coptic Orthodox Church. They both stressed the need for "dialogue between religions."

"I decided that a new conference will be held in Paris to see how to act more effectively," he said, without giving details.

A diplomatic source said the French capital would host a forum on religious minorities in the Middle East, but without giving a date.

Macron visited the church adjacent to the cathedral that was the site of a December 2016 jihadist attack, which killed 29 people.

He also met in Cairo with Ahmed Al-Tayeb, the grand imam of Al-Azhar, the most prestigious seat of Sunni Islamic learning in Egypt.

Their talks centered on "the training of imams (prayer leaders) in France and the fight against the misguided vision of religion," the French presidency said.

Also on Tuesday, Macron lunched with civil society members "active in the areas of judicial protection of detainees, press freedom, gender equality and children's defense," the presidency said.

During the visit, Macron and El-Sisi oversaw the signing of some 30 deals in various sectors. No arms deals were signed.



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France to provide Egypt with €1bn for development: Macron
French president heads to Egypt on mission to reinforce ties

[Sudan security chief orders release of detained protesters](#)

Author:

Tue, 2019-01-29 21:28

KHARTOUM: Sudan's security chief has ordered the release of people detained during weeks of anti-government protests, the Information Ministry said on Tuesday, as demonstrations continued in several cities.

The ministry was confirming reports by activists that Salah Abdallah Mohamed Saleh, the head of Sudan's National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS), visited a prison in the capital Khartoum and said arrested protesters would be freed.

No further details were available. Hundreds of protesters, activists and opposition figures have been arrested since protests began to spread across Sudan on Dec. 19.

The demonstrations, triggered by a worsening economic crisis, have called for an end to the rule of President Omar Bashir who has been in power since 1989.

Police used tear gas on Tuesday to disperse dozens of demonstrators in Khartoum's Burri neighborhood and hundreds who gathered in its twin city of Omdurman, witnesses said.

"It may take months, but I'm confident we will succeed," said Reem, a 25-year-old housewife facing off against clouds of tear gas in Omdurman. Hundreds also demonstrated in the Red Sea city of Port Sudan and chanted anti-government slogans.

Tuesday's demonstrations, called by unions and opposition activists, fell on the anniversary of the 2005 killing of protesters in Port Sudan during an earlier period of demonstrations against Bashir's long rule. Protests also took place there.

The latest rallies were the largest in several days, as Sudanese have taken to demonstrating in local squares and neighborhoods sometimes blocked off with cars or makeshift barricades.

The current wave of protests began on Dec. 19 in opposition to surging prices and a failing economy, but quickly shifted to calls for an end to Bashir's nearly three-decade rule.

A devaluation of the currency in October pushed up prices, but lifting state subsidies on bread last month proved to be the final stroke, sparking the unrest. A cash crunch also led to long lines at ATMs and limits on cash withdrawals. Similarly, a fuel shortage meant hours-long waits at gas stations.

Bashir, who seized power in a military coup in 1989, insists that only elections, which he intends to run in, could bring change.



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Al-Bashir vows to bring peace as demos called in Sudan's war zones
South Sudanese fear leaving UN protected camps despite peace

[Tunisian president accuses PM of secret pact for power](#)

Author:

AFP

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1548786884081630800

Tue, 2019-01-29 17:01

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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[Beji Caid Essebsi](#)

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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