

Outrage, shock among Fatah members over Birzeit University student election loss

Author:

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RAMALLAH: The crushing defeat of the Fatah-backed bloc in Birzeit University student council elections this week has caused shock and outrage among members and supporters of the movement, which is aligned with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas.

In the wake of the defeat, one of its heaviest, Fatah says it will form a committee to study the cause of the loss and draw lessons.

The Fatah bloc's rivals, a Hamas-linked activist group, won a landslide victory in the poll at the flagship West Bank university on Wednesday, a result that some observers believe signals a possible shift in Palestinian public opinion.

The loss is believed to be Fatah's biggest since its defeat by Hamas in the 2005 legislative elections.

Fatah has led the Palestinian struggle since its launch in 1965 and formed the ruling party of the Palestinian Authority since its establishment in 1994.

However, the Fatah bloc gained the lowest number of votes and seats since the start of the university elections in 1996, prompting the head of the Fatah movement in Ramallah and Al-Bireh, Muwafaq Suhwail, to resign.

Other members of the Fatah leadership in Ramallah are expected to quit in coming days amid demands for an inquiry into the defeat.

Suhwail called for an investigation into the election result, claiming the movement was filled with "mercenaries and intruders."

Hamas, meanwhile, said that its victory sends "a message to the Palestinian Authority that security coordination will not bring rights to the Palestinian people."

The group said that the "broad support confirms that it has become a leader of the national project, and resistance has become the choice of the Palestinian people."

The Fatah loss will discourage the PA from organizing legislative or presidential elections of any kind from now on. The last legislative elections were scheduled in early 2005.

Hamas' Al-Wafaa' Islamic bloc won the Birzeit University election by a large

margin, claiming 28 seats on the student council, the first time its candidates have gained control of the body. The Fatah movement won just 18 seats.

Fatah is reportedly trying to distance itself from the PA.

However, the movement's supporters blame the election loss on the authority's mistakes, as well as its policies regarding Israel and Palestinian citizens.

In an online post, former Hamas minister Mohammed Al-Barghouti wrote: "It is no longer convincing at all to try to convince people, especially university students, that the Palestinian Authority is one thing and the Fatah movement is another, especially since the head of the Fatah movement – the president of the Palestinian Authority – and the head of the Palestine Liberation Organization is the same president."

Al-Barghouti said that all the "negatives and misfortunes of the PA are borne and paid for by the Fatah movement."

In return, he said "all the privileges and benefits of the PA go to a few beneficiaries, most of whom are not from the Fatah movement and have never been among its cadres."

Fatah needs to take bold decisions and develop a well-thought-out structure if it wants to restore its image and build confidence, he said.

One of the leaders of the Fatah movement in the West Bank, Walid Assaf, a former head of the Wall and Settlement Resistance Commission, wrote: "When the successful are held accountable, and the failures are rewarded, the price will be heavy on Fatah and the national project."

Ahmed Ghuneim, a prominent Fatah leader in East Jerusalem, told Arab News: "Fatah cannot continue in this way. It is time for a decisive and courageous decision to be taken to stop this collapse and that the central committee bears responsibility for the weakness of Fatah."

He added: "We in Fatah are paying the price for the failed decisions in the political, governmental, organizational and economic performance of the Palestinian Authority and leadership. This leadership knows and realizes that it is a problem, but they insist that they remain in power and lead us from defeat to defeat."

However, Lt. Gen. Jibril Rajoub, Fatah central committee secretary-general, told Arab News that a committee meeting on Saturday will review the defeat and take necessary decisions.

"Our experience with this leadership is that they do not assess any loss, and if that happens, they do not take measures but blame the lower levels of the movement for their mistakes."

Nasser Al-Kidwa, the former Palestinian foreign minister dismissed from Fatah by Abbas after criticizing the PA leader's policies, told Arab News from his home in France: "The votes that went to Hamas do not necessarily mean that

they support its policy, but rather to punish Fatah, which deserves punishment because it has committed enough mistakes to turn Palestinian public opinion against it.”



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Hamas-backed bloc wins West Bank student elections
Palestinian local elections might give a small boost to Fatah

[Escalating cost-of-living crisis hits Lebanese hard just days after parliamentary elections](#)

Author:

Thu, 2022-05-19 22:22

BEIRUT: The cost-of-living crisis in Lebanon has escalated, less than 48 hours after the results of parliamentary elections held on May 15 were announced. The value of the local currency has fallen to 30,000 Lebanese

pounds to the dollar for the first time in the five months since the Central Bank intervened to regulate the market.

Some shops were forced close to avoid losing money while goods were repriced to reflect the shifting black market exchange rate. Queues for gas returned, even though the price of a 20-liter canister is almost equivalent to the minimum wage.

People are also once again queuing for bread, with some stores selling a bread bundle for 30,000 Lebanese pounds on the black market as bakeries run out of flour.

Doctors and health workers have again warned of medicine shortages amid a lack of subsidies, with cancer medication particularly badly affected.

Meanwhile, power company Electricite du Liban announced further rationing "to avoid falling into total darkness," pending the arrival of a shipment of fuel on Friday. It blamed the decision on "the rapid consumption of fuel stocks during the days leading up to and following the parliamentary elections."

It emerged that the main reason for the failure to deliver fuel was a delay by the Central Bank in providing dollar credit amid the likelihood that subsidies on fuel, and possibly wheat, could be lifted. As a result, importers stopped delivering fuel pending the transfer of dollars at the Central Bank's Sayrafa exchange rate of 23,700 Lebanese pounds to the dollar.

The crisis affected domestic gas-distribution companies, which waited for the Ministry of Energy's new price list on Thursday and then began selling gas cylinders for 400,000 Lebanese pounds each.

The Ministry of Economy has set the price of a large bundle of bread at 16,000 Lebanese pounds – though, as noted, some stores are charging much more – justifying the decision by highlighting "the significant rise in fuel prices, which directly affects the cost of flour production, bread production and transportation, in addition to the rise in the wheat prices worldwide amid the Ukrainian crisis."

Some predict that Lebanon will be hit by a wheat crisis in the coming weeks amid the lack of funds.

In response to the various crises, public transport drivers took to the streets and blocked roads leading to the ministries of interior and transport with waste containers in protest against the high price of gasoline and the worsening dollar exchange rate.

Hussein Wehbi Mogharbel, head of the Federation of Employees and Workers Union in Nabatiyeh Governorate in southern Lebanon, criticized authorities for their failure to listen to the cries of the poor.

"They manipulate the exchange rate and no one dares to stop them," he said. "Employees cannot attend their workplaces because their salaries are equal to two gasoline canisters."

Citizens' concerns "are increasing and the officials are idly watching," Mogharbel added.

As the financial noose continues tighten for citizens, elected MPs remain preoccupied by their political power games. Each faction is convening to discuss the election of a new parliamentary speaker, deputy speaker, cabinet and heads of committees.

The term of the current parliament ends on May 21 and the mandate of the newly elected authority is due to begin the following day. The current government of Prime Minister Najib Mikati's government will transition to caretaker mode as of May 22.

Samir Geagea, the head of the Lebanese Forces party, which is the largest Christian bloc in parliament following the election, said on Thursday: "The result of the elections was resounding, with Hezbollah and its ally the Free Patriotic Movement losing their parliament majority."

He said that the current speaker of the parliament, Nabih Berri, who leads the Amal Movement, "does not meet the requirements we seek in the new speaker."

Geagea added: "This position requires a serious candidate who pledges to implement the parliament's bylaws literally and adopts electronic voting; someone who would not paralyze parliament and would work on giving the strategic decision back to the government. This is why we will not vote for Berri."

Hassan Nasrallah, the secretary-general of Hezbollah, admitted on Wednesday evening that "no party has a majority in parliament."

He added: "The many economic and living crises in the country cannot be handled by one team, even if it obtains the majority. When no one has the majority, everyone is responsible and no one is allowed to abandon their responsibilities."

"The current composition of the parliament may delay electing a speaker and designating a prime minister to form the government."



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'Elections did not undermine Hezbollah but gives Lebanon chance to reorganize' says spokesman for the American Task Force on Lebanon
Hezbollah chief Nasrallah acknowledges loss of Lebanon parliamentary majority

[Second flight lands at Sanaa airport as Yemen parties pressured to extend truce](#)

Author:

Wed, 2022-05-18 23:50

AL-MUKALLA, Yemen: A second commercial flight carrying dozens of passengers landed at the Houthi-held Sanaa airport on Wednesday as international mediators and world powers continue to pressure Yemen's warring parties to extend the two-month truce.

The plane took off from Amman in the morning and landed at Sanaa airport at 2

p.m., further boosting hopes of the resumption of flights to other destinations, and the strengthening of the ceasefire.

Hans Grundberg, the UN's Yemen envoy who had helped to negotiate the peace pact, announced the departure of the second flight from Jordan's capital.

"A second commercial flight took off from Amman to Sanaa carrying Yemeni passengers at 10:30 a.m. today, as per the terms of the truce agreement and is scheduled to return back from Sanaa to Amman with Yemeni passengers at 4 p.m.," Grundberg tweeted.

The first commercial flight since 2016 took off from Sanaa airport on Monday after the Yemeni government allowed passengers with passports issued by the Houthis to leave the country.

The resumption of the flights from Sanaa is one of several terms of the truce that came into effect on April 2. Under the agreement, the Yemeni parties would stop fighting on all fronts, allow fuel ships to enter Hodeidah seaports, and work with the UN to open roads in Taiz and other provinces.

At the same time, the UN envoy said on Wednesday that he resumed his meetings with Yemeni economists, politicians and security figures in Amman to produce ideas for his peace plan.

"The UN envoy for #Yemen resumes today his consultations to identify economic, political & security priorities for the multi-track process. Today he meets with a diverse group of Yemeni public figures, experts & civil society actors," his office tweeted.

In his remarks to the press after his closed briefing to the UN Security Council on Tuesday, Grundberg said that he discussed extending the pact with various Yemeni parties. "Yemenis can't afford to go back to the pre-truce state of perpetual military escalation and political stalemate. I continue to engage the parties to overcome outstanding challenges and to ensure the extension of the truce," he said, adding that the Houthis have not nominated their representatives for a meeting with the Yemeni government that would discuss ending their siege on Taiz.

Tim Lenderking, the US' envoy to Yemen, also urged the warring factions to uphold and extend the truce, and to jointly work on opening roads in Taiz.

"We hope the resumption of flights to & from Sanaa brings relief to Yemenis. We must ensure the freedom of movement of people & goods, incl opening roads to Taiz. We call on the parties to adhere to & extend the @UN truce," Lenderking tweeted.

In the besieged Taiz, residents have intensified their campaigns on the ground and on social media to draw attention to their daily suffering.

"This siege has turned the city of Taiz into a large prison and caused a real human tragedy. They opened Sanaa airport and ports and ignored Taiz's suffering from the siege," Ahmed Al-Qaidhy, an activist from the area, told Arab News.



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First commercial flight in six years leaves Sanaa for AmmanUN envoy says talks to extend Yemen truce are ongoing

[Hamas-backed bloc wins West Bank student elections](#)

Wed, 2022-05-18 22:18

RAMALLAH: The Islamic bloc affiliated with Hamas won the student council elections at Birzeit University in the West Bank on Wednesday, defeating their Fatah rivals in the tightly contested vote.

The Hamas-backed bloc with 5,060 votes won 28 seats, while the Fatah-supported bloc with 3,379 votes bagged just 18 seats.

Five blocs contested 51 seats, while the voter turnout was 78.1 percent.

Students witnessed an intense debate between representatives of the rival blocs the previous day, with both parties' policies and programs coming in

for criticism.

The Islamic bloc has led the student council in recent years.

Their Fatah-backed rivals say they are paying the price for the mistakes of the Palestinian Authority in terms of corruption, nepotism and security coordination with Israel, and losing elections frequently.

A day before the vote, seven senior student members of the Islamic bloc were arrested by an Israeli undercover unit, which generated sympathy for the group and translated into votes, experts told Arab News.

Ghassan Al-Khatib, vice president of the university, said that the student council vote is an indicator of Palestinian public opinion and political balances in Palestinian society "because of the credibility, integrity and democracy at the Birzeit elections."

Mohammed Daraghmeh, a senior Palestinian writer, told Arab News that Birzeit students are not influenced by employment interests or work, so the electoral process takes place "in a democratic atmosphere and with great integrity."

He added: "If Hamas wins, the street is supportive and biased toward it. If Fatah wins, this means that the street is with it."

Daraghmeh said that both Fatah and Hamas make great efforts to win the students' backing.

The election "helps Hamas strengthen its political discourse, and show that Palestinian public opinion in the West Bank supports its path and political line," he said.

Meanwhile, Fatah "wants to defend the legitimacy of the Palestinian political system in light of its inability to organize Palestinian general elections."

Birzeit elections are held every two years, with about 15,000 students voting for 51 seats. There was no vote in 2021 owing to the coronavirus pandemic.

The secretariat of the administrative body of the council consists of 13 members.

Birzeit was established in 1973 as a public university, and is the only West Bank academic institution that allows Hamas to practice its activities and politics without interference from Israel or the PA.

A number of prominent Palestinian leaders have graduated from the university, which offers 36 bachelor's degree programs and 13 master's programs, and employs 500 teachers.

Students from the West Bank and a few hundred Palestinians living in Israel study there.

Basem Naim, a prominent Hamas leader in the Gaza Strip, told Arab News that the political group views the student vote as "an essential indicator"

because it highlights the direction of future generations.

“The Birzeit University elections constitute an essential platform for Hamas because most Palestinian leaders are university graduates. Therefore, their strength today indicates the type of future leaders of the Palestinian people in all sectors and fields,” he said.



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loss of Lebanon parliamentary majority

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Wed, 2022-05-18 22:23

BEIRUT: The leader of Lebanon's Iran-backed Hezbollah Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah acknowledged his party and its allies had lost their parliamentary majority in elections but said no single group had taken it, in his first televised speech since Sunday's elections.

"Unlike the situation in parliament in 2018, no political group can claim a majority," he said.

Hezbollah and its allies scored 62 seats during Sunday polls, according to a Reuters tally, losing a majority they secured in 2018, when they and their allies won 71 seats.

Hezbollah and its ally Amal held on to all of parliament's Shiite seats. But some of its oldest allies, including Sunni, Druze and Christian politicians, lost theirs.

The elections saw gains by the anti-Hezbollah Lebanese Forces party and more than a dozen reform-minded newcomers, as well as a smattering of independents.

The results mark a blow for Hezbollah, though Nasrallah declared the results "a very big victory."

Nasrallah called for "cooperation" between political groups including newcomers, saying the alternative would be "chaos and vacuum."

The results have left parliament split into several camps, none of which have a majority, raising the prospect of political paralysis and tensions that could delay badly needed reforms to steer Lebanon out of its economic collapse.



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UN chief calls for 'inclusive government' after Lebanon vote
Lebanon reformists weigh choices after election surge