

Morocco reshuffles cabinet, keeps foreign and finance ministers

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ID:

1570651538797964500

Wed, 2019-10-09 18:28

RABAT: Morocco announced a cabinet reshuffle on Wednesday, reducing the number of jobs to 23 but keeping the foreign, finance and interior ministers in their posts.

King Mohammed VI approved the list of new ministers submitted by Prime Minister Saad Dine El Otmani, state news agency MAP reported, after having asked him in the summer to arrange a reshuffle.

The tourism, housing, youth and culture, employment, justice and health ministers were changed, but the interior, religious affairs, agriculture, energy, trade and industry and education ministers stayed in place.

El Otmani's moderate Islamist PJD party has seven cabinet posts in the newly configured government, while the liberal RNI led by business tycoon Aziz Akhannouch has four, including his own appointment to agriculture.

The socialist PPS party withdrew last week from the coalition over what it described as political disagreements.

Many of the new ministers are technocrats without clear party affiliation, a development that some analysts say shows the influence of the palace in appointing strategic portfolios, while political parties are marginalized.

"In the constitution, Morocco is a constitutional monarchy, but in reality it is close to an executive monarchy," said Mohamed Masbah of the Independent Moroccan Institute for Policy Analysis (MIPA).

Morocco is seeking a new development model to fight poverty and curb regional and social disparities.

The north African country has largely been insulated from the turmoil that hit North Africa and the Middle East since the Arab Spring uprisings of 2011, although it regularly sees protests over economic and social problems.



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In Morocco, heroin addiction sweeps cannabis corridor

[Qatar's Al-Ghufran expulsions termed 'breach of human rights'](#)

Wed, 2019-10-09 01:26

JEDDAH: Qatar's regime is inhumanely targeting the Al-Ghufran clan, a member of the larger Al-Murra tribe, for its failure to support a coup staged by the current ruler's father more than two decades ago, a leading human rights and civil liberties lawyer has told Arab News. UK-based lawyer Amjad Salfiti said that serious breaches of human rights are taking place in Qatar despite promises that things would change under the new ruler.

"The state of Qatar is not run by the new ruler but by an old guard, representatives of the father, which is still keen on punishing people using decisions that do not comply with the constitution of Qatar," he said. Human rights violations carried out by the former emir include unfairly

depriving thousands of people of citizenship rights.

Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, father of current Qatari emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, “decided that they should be deprived of their nationality, and he tried to kick them out and exclude them from their home on the border between Qatar and Saudi Arabia,” Salfiti said. More than 10,000 people have been targeted by the regime.

“The first round of expulsions or deprivations was reported to be 5,000. But that is a conservative estimate,” he said.

“If you are referring just to this part of the tribe, to the Al-Ghufran clan, it is probable that the numbers are just over 10,000. They have all been subjected to draconian measures,” he said.

Asked whether there were legal grounds to justify revoking the citizenship of women and children and deporting them without any crime having been committed, Salfiti said that all citizens – young, elderly, male and female – are covered by international law, and their rights to citizenship should be protected.

“As soon as a state takes any action to deprive a person of his nationality, whether as a group or individually, that would be a contravention of international human rights and international rights in general,” Salfiti said.

In the case of Qatar, a collective form of deprivation that attracts what is commonly referred to as collective punishment is also prohibited under international law.

“An offense has been committed by the state against its own citizens. There would be some sort of recourse by these citizens to judicial forums, whether international, regional or local,” he said. Salfiti said that depriving a person of their nationality and leaving them stateless runs contrary to international conventions.



Sheikh Talib bin Mohammed bin Lahoum bin Sherim Al-Murra, head of the Al-Murra tribe, was expelled from Qatar and now lives in Saudi Arabia.

"States ought not to create states of statelessness, they ought to reduce any state of statelessness," he said. "So Qatar claiming to be a reformist and proactive regarding international law is contradicting itself in committing a serious crime. "It is not only denying people access to education, hospitalization and medical care, but also uprooting people and declaring them stateless, which is a fundamental crime that the international community is working extremely hard to stop."

Salfiti told Arab News that he had worked to help free a prominent Qatari prisoner jailed for seven years by the former emir.

"That prisoner took issue with certain electoral matters, which he believed were in breach of the constitution. He was imprisoned for seven years without trial," Salfiti said.

The lawyer managed to win the prisoner's release by lobbying on his behalf and preparing a summons to the Qatari government seeking his freedom.

Drewery Dyke, chairman of the UK-based Rights Realization Center (RRC) and a senior researcher specializing in international advocacy relating to human rights in GCC countries, Iran and Afghanistan, told Arab News that the Al-Murra tribe is one of the principal clans of Qatar. Members of the tribe also live in other Gulf countries.

"The Al-Murra tribe is found mainly in Saudi Arabia and Qatar. There is a small number in the UAE and some members also are found in Kuwait," he said.

"So they are found throughout the Gulf. A subset of the tribe, the Al-Ghufran clan is found principally in Qatar.

"Some Al-Ghufran activists have claimed that their clan numbers up to 10,000. Certainly, when the deprivation of citizenship process started in October, 2004, the numbers were precise – it was 927 heads of households. Therefore, all the dependants of those heads of households were also made stateless." Numbers at the time ranged up to 5,000. So, with the passage of time and given the natural growth of those communities, today's figure could be as high as 10,000, Dyke said.

"The Qatar government has told the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) that there are 1,500 stateless people in Qatar now," he said.

"Whether that includes this community is unknown. It's difficult to gain a reliable figure on the numbers of the Al-Ghufran clan who have been left stateless to this day."

Human Rights Watch has accused the Qatari regime of depriving individuals of their basic human rights. Dyke said that the "arbitrary" deprivation of citizenship was a contravention of accepted human rights practice. "It happened at a time, 2004, when knowledge about this particular issue and about Qatar was relatively poor. In recent years, members of the community, many based in Saudi Arabia, have started campaigning for their rights," he said.

"In 2004, there was an arbitrary deprivation of citizenship by decree and, shortly afterwards, the authorities began removing people from their jobs. They were deprived of education, people were taken out of schools, they were no longer able to access medical services, had their bank accounts closed and were no longer allowed to own property," Dyke recalls.

Dyke said that a special UN meeting held in Geneva on Oct. 7, 2019, was intended to investigate measures to end statelessness.

"The RRC, other human rights groups and members of Al-Ghufran community are calling on Qatar to allow all those people who were arbitrarily and unfairly

denationalized to be allowed back into the country and renationalized. We also want some kind of restitution and recognition of what they have been through,” he said.

“Members of the tribe have petitioned leading authorities and government figures in the Gulf, including the government of Saudi Arabia.”

However, Dyke said that “unfortunately, the trajectory seems to be pretty negative at the moment.” Doha has signed up to a number of human rights covenants and international human rights treaties, “so it is a good time for Qatar to take action and acknowledge the wrongs that have been committed,” he said.

Dyke highlighted some of the human-rights violations by the Qatari regime. “A travel ban was imposed on Najeeb Al-Nuami, the longstanding human rights lawyer who used to be attorney general. He is still facing restrictions, an arbitrarily imposed travel ban.

“A Qatari poet was imprisoned a few years ago. He was subsequently released and then left the country. “There is a considerable range of human rights challenges that Qatar needs to face.” Dyke said that the head of the Al-Murra tribe, Sheikh Talib bin Mohammed bin Lahoum bin Sherim Al-Murra, is now based in Saudi Arabia following his expulsion from Qatar last year. Al-Murra and 54 members of his family fled to the Kingdom after being stripped of their citizenship.

“I was struck by a statement that he made at the time. He said that his citizenship will return for him, his family and that of the Al-Ghufran members, whether the emir of Qatar likes it or not. It was a clear desire to be restored with his nation,” Dyke said.



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“The Unforgiven”: Qatar’s Al-Ghufran tribe members tell of loss and deportation
“The Unforgiven”: Qatar’s Al-Ghufran tribe fights for justice – and right to citizenship
“The Unforgiven”: Arab News investigates the plight of Qatar’s Al-Ghufran tribe
“The Unforgiven”: Al-Ghufran families ‘arbitrarily stripped of Qatari citizenship,’ HRW says

[Controversial Egyptian lawyer believes ‘no one is above the law’](#)

Author:

Wed, 2019-10-09 00:14

CAIRO: Egyptian lawyer Samir Sabry is constantly associated with high-profile court cases that have ignited public opinion. That he shares the same name as the famed Egyptian actor certainly helped the lawyer to reach celebrity status. Sabry specializes in going after politicians and celebrities with the aim, many Egyptians believe, of gaining more fame for himself. In many instances, Sabry is more famous than the cases he prosecutes.

In September, Sabri sent more than one case to the general prosecutor. He accused fugitive contractor Mohamed Aly of stealing 12 million Egyptian pounds (\$735,000) from a contracting company. Sabry also charged Hassan Nafaa, a political analyst and professor of political science at Cairo University, of high treason for conducting a phone call with Al-Jazeera TV channel. Egypt has strained relations with Qatar, which owns Al-Jazeera. Sabry has also trained his sights on celebrities. Perhaps his most famous celebrity case was against Jennifer Lopez. Sabry accused Jennifer Lopez of wearing provocative clothes inciting debauchery and immorality at her concert in the Mediterranean city of El-Alamein in August. The lawyer, known for his morality crusades, demanded that she be prevented from entering Egypt again. Sabry pointed out that Lopez appeared in transparent clothes, which sparked controversy all over social media.

Another famous celebrity case was named the “Rania Youssef dress.” In 2018, Sabry filed a case with the general prosecutor’s office against Egyptian actress Rania Youssef who attended that year’s Cairo International Film Festival wearing a body-hugging, see-through dress. Sabry said the actress’s dress was too revealing, violating the public morals of Egyptians.

FASTFACT

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- Sabry's most famous celebrity case was against Jennifer Lopez. Sabry accused Jennifer Lopez of wearing provocative clothes inciting debauchery and immorality at her concert in the Mediterranean city of El-Alamein in August.
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Sabry also took on singer Sherine Abdel-Wahab, accusing her of insulting Egypt while singing in a concert in Lebanon. During the concert, an audience member asked Abdel-Wahab to sing "Mashrebtsh Men Nelha" (Haven't You Drank from Its Nile) to which the singer replied: "You are going to get sick from bilharzia. You better drink Evian water."

In his report, Sabry said that Abdel-Wahab had "badly insulted her country, causing panic for those who want to visit Egypt and the Nile River, Egypt's most important touristic destination. Thus, she caused severe damage to the already suffering tourism business which had a negative impact on the Egyptian economy."

Sabry shuns interviews. He rarely shows up on talk shows. He gave a brief statement to Arab News saying that throughout his career, he has filed more than 3,000 lawsuits seeking the best interests of the country. He affirmed that he does not exclude anyone within his purview, whether politicians, celebrities, dancers, football players, or even clerics, because, he said, the law should not exclude anyone.

Sabry said he only cares about his religion, his country, and the morals of society. He said many lawyers do not shake hands with him because, as he described it, they hold a grudge against him.



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Egypt loosens security after thwarting calls for protests
Small but rare protests in Egypt after online call for dissent

[Lebanon skies a death trap for migratory birds: NGOs](#)

Author:

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1570563500298909000

Tue, 2019-10-08 15:20

AGHBEH: Bird protection groups called Tuesday for urgent action to save endangered migratory species that are being decimated by illegal hunters over Lebanon.

For the 41 species in Lebanon listed as particularly endangered, “the situation is really critical,” said Fouad Itani, president of the Association for Bird Conservation in Lebanon.

“If nothing is done, their numbers will continue to drop and some species will simply disappear,” he told AFP.

According to official figures, 2.6 million birds from close to 200 species

were killed illegally in the country in 2014. Itani believes the numbers killed have risen since then.

Lebanon lies on one of the world's most important migration routes and for many species – such as storks, lesser spotted eagles and pelicans – the most dangerous part of their journey is flying over the small Mediterranean country.

“Hundreds of thousands of white storks are killed in Lebanon every year,” Itani said.

Bird protection groups have successfully raised awareness in some regions but the situation in the north remains “out of control,” according to a joint statement by the Association for Bird Conservation in Lebanon and the Committee Against Bird Slaughter, based in Germany.

The statement was released after a field visit organized for Lebanese and foreign officials Tuesday.

Itani said poachers in the north “are shooting for fun, big numbers. They shoot even at night, using spotlights... They have WhatsApp groups to track the birds together.”

Countries such as Poland and others along migratory routes have pressured Lebanon to take action.

Killing of birds has been reduced in some areas this year through the awareness campaigns and in cooperation with authorities, the statement said, but improved bird protection laws have yet to be enforced by the security forces.

The joint statement called for the creation of a professional and dedicated wildlife crime unit to curb poaching during migration periods.





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'A hunter's hope': Snaring birds in warring Afghanistan
Thousands of birds die at California's Salton Sea

Israel's Gideon Saar challenges lengthy Netanyahu Likud rule

Author:

Tue, 2019-10-08 21:04

JERUSALEM: With a simple tweet, Gideon Saar did what no Israeli politician from the ruling conservative party has done in more than a decade – openly challenge its chief, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

The brazen move against the long-serving Israeli leader has solidly positioned the 52-year-old Saar as the Likud party's leading candidate to replace Netanyahu, who is fighting for his survival amid a pending corruption indictment and post-election political paralysis.

A former aide and senior Cabinet minister under Netanyahu, Saar has long been considered a rising star in Likud and one of the lone independent voices in a party that has, in general, blindly followed its leader.

But that has begun to change. Netanyahu failed in two elections this year to capture a parliamentary majority, and the possibility of a criminal indictment in the coming weeks has hindered his efforts to head a coalition government. Seeking to solidify his status, the premier last week floated the prospect of a snap internal leadership primary in which he expected Likud to endorse him. But he quickly backed down after a two-word Twitter response from Saar: "I'm ready."

It was a risky maneuver in a party that fiercely values loyalty and has had only had four leaders in its 70-plus-year history. Saar followed it up with a more detailed tweet clarifying that he was not out to topple the prime minister, as Netanyahu has long claimed. Still, Saar left no doubt about his ultimate objective.

"No one is denying the prime minister's role as chairman of the Likud," Saar wrote on Twitter. "When there is a race for leadership of the party – as the prime minister himself initiated a few days ago – I will run."

For Saar, it was a move long in the making. A former lawyer and journalist, he was first brought into politics 20 years ago by Netanyahu, who made him his Cabinet secretary during his first term in office.

Saar then established himself as a staunch nationalist who opposed Israel's 2005 withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and resisted the prospect of a Palestinian state. He quickly rose in the Likud ranks, twice finishing first in internal elections for its parliamentary list and enjoying successful stints as education minister and interior minister after Netanyahu returned to power in 2009.

But as with others in Likud who saw their popularity rise, he too began to be perceived by Netanyahu as a threat. Their falling out was capped by Saar's active role in getting Netanyahu's nemesis Reuven Rivlin elected president, over the prime minister's objections.

With his advancement stunted, Saar abruptly quit politics in 2014 to spend more time with his new wife, Israeli TV anchor Geula Even, and their young children.

He made his comeback this year, chosen by Likud members for a senior position on the party's list of candidates in parliamentary elections. While campaigning hard for Likud, Saar has been its only top official to occasionally flaunt Netanyahu – resisting calls to legislate immunity for the prime minister and attending a media conference Netanyahu had called to boycott.

“Gideon has no fear and he's straight as an arrow,” said Shimshon Shoshani, Saar's former director general in the Education Ministry.

Though he didn't share Saar's right-wing ideology, Shoshani said they worked in tandem on bold education initiatives and he saw a public servant fit to lead the country.

“He's a man who has a vision, and he knows how to translate that vision into concrete plans,” said Shoshani, an 82-year-old veteran of the Israeli bureaucracy.

Despite his hard-line positions, Saar enjoys good relations across the political spectrum and is perceived as a potentially more comfortable partner for a unity government with the rival Blue and White party, which emerged as the largest party in last month's election.

But neither it nor the Likud control a parliamentary majority. A coalition government between the two parties appears to be the best way out of the deadlock, but Blue and White's leader, former military chief Benny Gantz, refuses to sit with Netanyahu because of his expected indictment on corruption charges.

Saar's independent streak has drawn frequent fire from Netanyahu's lackeys, and Netanyahu himself last year accused Saar of orchestrating a “putsch” with Rivlin to unseat him.

Under Israeli law, if neither Netanyahu nor Gantz can form a coalition, a majority of lawmakers could theoretically choose an alternative as prime minister. Saar is widely seen as the politician most capable of winning such support.

With a primary election seemingly off the table for now, Netanyahu is talking about convening a Likud functionary body to stipulate he's the party's sole candidate for prime minister.

Netanyahu's office has refused to comment about his plans. However, Limor Livnat, a former Likud Cabinet minister and Netanyahu ally, decried the conduct against Saar as a show of weakness.

“Instead of cultivating potential successors, Netanyahu has neutralized every Likud member who has shown any independence and has surrounded himself with yes-men,” she wrote in the Yediot Ahronot daily. “Since when is announcing one's candidacy in a party primary construed as a plot against the incumbent party chairman?”

Eran Davidi, a long-time confidante of Saar's, said Saar and Netanyahu have not met in five years and the enmity was likely to cost Saar a Cabinet post if Netanyahu succeeds in forming another government. But if he fails again,

and the country heads to an unprecedented third election within a year, Davidi said he expected the long-hidden cracks to finally emerge within Likud.

While others have expressed interest in heading the party after Netanyahu voluntarily steps aside, Saar remains the only one who doesn't intend to wait till that happens.

"He has ambitions and he has said that he came back to politics to lead the country," Davidi said. "Eventually, the Likud members will appreciate that he had the courage to run. That's the qualities of a leader."



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Israeli officials wrap up Netanyahu's pre-indictment hearing
Israeli minister seeks 'non-aggression' pacts with Arab nations