

Fallen Tunisian autocrat Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali dies

Thu, 2019-09-19 17:51

TUNIS: Former Tunisian president Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali, the first leader to be toppled by the Arab Spring revolts, died on Thursday in Saudi Arabia.

"We had confirmation of his death 30 minutes ago," Tunisia's foreign ministry said, without giving further details.

The 83-year-old's lawyer, Mounir Ben Salha, confirmed the news, citing family members and Ben Ali's doctor.

Ben Ali, who ruled his North African country from 1987 until 2011, was viewed by some as a bulwark against extremism, but faced criticism for muzzling the opposition and his reluctance to embrace democracy.

Eventually, growing frustration over unemployment and high prices snapped.

In late 2010, after a young trader died when he set himself on fire, protests erupted across the country and sparked a deadly clampdown.

Ben Ali fled Tunisia on Jan. 14, 2011 and sought exile in Saudi Arabia.

His rapid departure sparked a string of similar uprisings across the region, toppling Egyptian and Libyan strongmen Hosni Mubarak and Moamer Qaddafi.

The turmoil triggered what was to become Syria's devastating eight-year war.

In mid-2012, Ben Ali was sentenced in absentia to life in jail for his role in the deaths of protesters during the uprising that ousted him.

Ben Ali is survived by six children; three daughters by a first marriage and two daughters and a son by Leila Trabelsi.

















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[Tunisia presidential candidate to stay in jail](#)

Author:

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1568839406829533200

Wed, 2019-09-18 19:24

TUNIS: A fresh appeal for the release of jailed media mogul Nabil Karoui who has reached a runoff in Tunisia's presidential polls was turned down on Wednesday, his lawyers said.

"The judge has refused to give a ruling, saying it was not in his jurisdiction," lawyer Kamel Ben Messoud said, after requesting his release the previous day.

"We will appeal," he told AFP.

The court did not immediately respond to a request for confirmation.

Karoui, a 56-year-old media magnate, is under investigation for alleged money laundering and has been in pretrial detention since August 23.

Lawyer Nazih Souii said it was the third time a judge had said the matter was beyond his jurisdiction.

The court of appeals refused to pass judgment on September 3, as did the court of cassation on September 13.

Tunisia's electoral commission, ISIE, has confirmed Karoui made it to the presidential runoff along with law professor Kais Saied following Sunday's first round vote.

Karoui remains eligible to run despite his imprisonment, as long as any conviction does not also specifically deprive him of his civil rights, according to ISIE.

He campaigned through the Nessma television channel he founded. ISIE has said it is investigating alleged electoral violations, including by Nessma TV.

Depending on potential appeals, the second round could be staged on October 6, the same day as legislative elections, or on October 13, ISIE said.

Observers from the European Union said the first round has been "transparent."

But it called for the candidates to have the "same opportunities" to campaign, in an apparent allusion to Karoui.



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Makkah, Karachi chambers to ink MoU boosting bilateral trade

[Prison becomes 'second home' for Turkish cartoonist](#)

Author:

Wed, 2019-09-18 22:35

ISTANBUL: Renowned Turkish cartoonist Musa Kart says he has spent as much time in prison and courthouses as he has at work since President Recep Tayyip Erdogan came to power.

His latest stint in jail started in April, after an appeals court upheld his sentence of three years and nine months for "helping terrorist organizations."

Released last week pending another appeal, Kart told AFP: "For 15 years, prisons and courthouses have become a second home to me."

Kart, who was recognized last year by the Swiss Foundation Cartooning for Peace, was among 14 journalists and staff from the renowned opposition paper Cumhuriyet convicted in the case.

He was initially arrested in 2016 after Erdogan launched a major crackdown on opponents in the wake of a failed coup.

"I have spent almost the same amount of time in court corridors as I spent in the paper. It is very unfortunate," he told AFP.

Unfailingly optimistic and modest, Kart refuses to be run down by his ordeals, and says he always made an effort to look his best for prison visitors.

"I never welcomed my visitors in a hopeless state," he said. "I would shave, pick my cleanest shirt from my modest wardrobe and welcome them with open arms. We would spend our time telling jokes." His morale was boosted by the knowledge he had done nothing wrong.

"If you believe that your position is right, if you have an inner peace about your past actions, then it is not that difficult to stand prison conditions," he said. Kart has been in and out of trouble since Erdogan took power in 2003.

His first lawsuit came in 2005 over a cartoon portraying Erdogan, then prime minister, as a cat entangled in a ball of wool.

"I have drawn cartoons for over 40 years ... I did it in the past with other political leaders, but I was never the subject of a court case," Kart said.

"The frame of tolerance has seriously narrowed today."

The current case against him claims he contacted members of the Gulen movement accused of orchestrating the failed coup in 2016.

It also says the 14 Cumhuriyet staffers had conspired to change the paper's editorial policy to support the Gulenists, as well as Kurdish rebels and the ultra-left Revolutionary People's Liberation Party-Front.

"Today the accusations of terrorism have gone well beyond a realistic point," Kart said.

"When you take a look at my cartoons, you see how much I am against any kind of terrorist organization and how seriously and strongly I criticize them."

Rights advocates including the Reporters Without Borders have called on Turkey to revise its anti-terrorism and defamation laws, which they claim are abused to silence opponents.

Cumhuriyet – Turkey's oldest daily founded in 1924 – is not owned by a

business tycoon but by an independent foundation, making it an easier target for authorities.

The paper's former editor-in-chief Can Dunder fled to Germany after being convicted in 2016 over an article alleging that Turkey had supplied weapons to Islamist groups in Syria.

It has its own internal problems, too – Kart and some of the others actually quit the paper last year over disagreements with the new management.

But the case has added to the chilling effect that has infected the whole of the media in Turkey, which has the highest number of imprisoned journalists in the world.

No date has been set for the next appeal, and Kart has no idea how the saga will end.

“Everyone knows that there has been a political shadow hanging over our case,” he said.

Whatever happens, he said his focus would remain on drawing.

“Cartoons are really a very strong language because you can find a way to express yourself under any circumstances, even under pressure.”



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Turkey accuses US of stalling on Syria 'safe zone' plans Turkey orders arrest

[Palestinians ready for dialogue with any future Israeli leader](#)

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1568834622178974000

Wed, 2019-09-18 18:56

OSLO: The Palestinians are prepared to engage in dialogue with any future Israeli leader, Foreign Minister Riyad Al-Maliki said Wednesday in Oslo, the day after general elections in Israel ended in deadlock.

"Whoever will be able to form a government, we are ready to sit with him or her in order to restart the negotiations," Al-Maliki told reporters after the elections ended in a tie between Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his main challenger Benny Gantz.

Al-Maliki is accompanying Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas on a two-day visit to Oslo.

Their trip comes ahead of a meeting next week in New York of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee of donors to the Palestinians, headed by Norway.

The tied vote in Israel raised the prospect of tough negotiations to build a unity government or even the end of Netanyahu's long rule.

Sources in Netanyahu's office told AFP he was canceling a planned trip next week to the UN General Assembly due to the "political context" in Israel.

Al-Maliki on Wednesday reiterated the Palestinian Authority's insistence on a two-state solution for peace, after Netanyahu's deeply controversial campaign pledge to annex the Jordan Valley in the occupied West Bank.

The plan, which would cover around a third of the territory, would not annex Palestinian cities such as Jericho, but they would effectively be surrounded.

UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres warned that the plan would violate international law, with his spokesman saying: "Such steps, if implemented... would be devastating to the potential of reviving negotiations and regional peace, while severely undermining the viability of the two-state solution."



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Palestinians would like to see Netanyahu lose in elections
Netanyahu, Gantz deadlocked with nearly all votes counted: Israel media

[US consular staffer to stay in Turkey jail on spy charges](#)

Author:

Wed, 2019-09-18 22:15

ISTANBUL: A Turkish court ruled on Wednesday that a US consular staffer would remain in jail while his espionage trial continued, in a case that has added to tensions with Washington.

Metin Topuz, a Turkish citizen and liaison for the US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), was arrested in 2017.

He was accused of ties to US-based preacher Fethullah Gulen, who Ankara says ordered an attempted coup in 2016.

In court on Wednesday, Topuz again begged the court for his release.

“What is my crime? Being an employee of the US Consulate?” he said.

But the court said he would stay in jail until the next hearing on Dec. 11, while they tried to locate a witness. Defense lawyers said he gave a fake address in Milan.

“I cannot understand the court extending the jail sentence to wait for an individual who is currently abroad,” lawyer Halit Akalp told reporters.

Topuz said he had 3,000 meetings in his 25 years with the DEA, and that prosecutors had simply cherry-picked those with members of Gulen’s movement.

Gulen had sympathizers across all branches of Turkish society and government until the coup triggered a massive purge.

“I had face-to-face meetings and telephone contact with individuals appointed by the Turkish republic as an assistant liaison officer and translator,” Topuz told the court.

“All the allegations against me are based on telephone contacts with individuals appointed by the Turkish republic.”

The case comes at a sensitive diplomatic moment between the NATO allies.

Washington’s refusal to extradite Gulen, differences over the Syrian conflict, and Turkey’s recent decision to buy a Russian missile defense system have all strained relations between the two countries.

Since the failed 2016 coup, tens of thousands of people have been arrested over suspected ties to Gulen and more than 100,000 people have been sacked or suspended from public sector jobs. Gulen rejects the coup accusations.



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Turkey jails 24 Istanbul airport workers pending trial after protests