

Palestinian PM briefs Arab youth delegation on life under occupation

Thu, 2018-12-27 21:57

AMMAN: The four-day “Towards Victory for Jerusalem” conference in Ramallah, featuring a delegation of youths from seven Islamic countries, concluded on Thursday.

The conference, co-sponsored by the Arab League, was held under the patronage of Jibril Rajoub, head of the Palestinian Football Association and Olympic Committee, and secretary-general of the Fatah Central Committee.

Participants – who came from Jordan, Oman, Bahrain, Libya, Kuwait, Qatar, and Mauritania – toured various areas of Palestine, and spent Dec. 25 in Bethlehem. Before the conference’s final session, they were guests of Palestinian Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah in Ramallah.

A government press release said that Hamdallah “gave a review of the political situation and the suffering under occupation and he spoke about efforts toward national reconciliation as well as international efforts to create a mini state in Gaza.”

Hamdallah called on Hamas “to respond positively to the reconciliation initiative of President Mahmoud Abbas so that Palestinians can face these efforts against the Palestinian cause in a united way,” the statement said.

FASTFACT

A youth delegation from seven Arab countries participated in a four-day conference in Ramallah titled ‘Towards victory for Jerusalem,’ which was concluded on Thursday.

Speaking about Jerusalem in the opening session, Rajoub said that Palestinians and Arabs are united over Jerusalem.

“There is consensus about the Arab context of Jerusalem, which Palestinians – both Christians and Muslims – continue to defend,” he said. He went on to praise “the heroes” who have defended the city over the years, and referred to Jerusalem as “a mosaic of Palestine where Muslims and Christians are living together and fighting for the city’s independence.”

The delegates also heard speeches from a number of leaders and experts from Jerusalem. Hanna Issa, secretary-general of the Islamic Christian Committee for Jerusalem and the Holy Sites, told Arab News that the delegates visited historic sites in Jerusalem and Nablus, Bethlehem and Hebron and witnessed firsthand the reality of life for Palestinians.

“I told the delegates that it is great to see active young people from Arab countries coming to visit their peers in Palestine and that (there should be) further visits that aim at strengthening relations with Jerusalem and Palestine.”

On the closing day, Rajoub expressed his deep appreciation to the delegation for their visit. “The Arab League clearly supports these visits which we hope will continue and increase,” he said, noting that Israel had prevented delegates from Tunisia and Morocco from attending the conference.



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Palestinian security forces block press conference by parliament speaker
After difficult year, Palestinians pessimistic about future prospects for peace

[Chadian group attacks forces loyal to Haftar in southern Libya](#)

Author:

Thu, 2018-12-27 21:32

BENGAZI: A Chadian armed group attacked a military camp of forces loyal to Gen. Khalifa Haftar in southern Libya on Thursday, killing one and injuring

13 others, a local official said.

After the toppling of dictator Muammar Qaddafi in the NATO-backed uprising in 2011, fighters from neighboring Chad and Sudan joined the ensuing turmoil. Competing Libyan armed factions frequently accuse each other of deploying mercenaries from sub-Saharan Africa.

The attack took place near Traghan, 902 km south of Tripoli and about 400 km north of the border with Chad. A spokesman for the Traghan municipality said the man killed was a fighter loyal to the Haftar-allied, eastern government in Libya.

Since disputed elections and an escalation of fighting in 2014 there have been two governments in Libya, the UN-backed Government of National Accord (GNA) based in Tripoli and a rival government in the east.

The attack on the military camp on Traghan's outskirts was thwarted by mid-day, the spokesman, Khalid Chataoui, said, noting that hospitals in the city are underequipped to treat the injured.

There was no comment from Haftar's Libya National Army (LNA) on the attack.

The east-west division has split key institutions and produced a deadlock between the rump parliaments aligned with rival, shifting military factions.

On Tuesday, three suicide bombers attacked Libya's Foreign Ministry building in Tripoli.

Apart from the attackers, three people were killed and at least 21 injured in the attack, according to the Health Ministry.

Foreign Minister Mohamed Taher Siala said security arrangements agreed between GNA and the UN after a month of clashes in the south of Tripoli are yet to be implemented.



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Libya's chaos continues to feed extremist threat Saudi Arabia condemns terrorist attacks in Libya, Afghanistan and Iraq

[Journalists join Sudan protests, announce three-day strike](#)

Author:

Thu, 2018-12-27 21:30

A network of Sudanese journalists went on strike on Thursday in the wake of deadly protests sparked by a hike in bread prices, while opposition groups called for further rallies.

Angry crowds have taken to the streets in the capital Khartoum and several other cities since Dec. 19, leading to a crackdown in which a number of protesters have been killed.

"We declare a three-day strike from Dec. 27 to protest against the violence unleashed by the government against demonstrators," said the Sudanese Journalists' Network which advocates free speech.

Sudanese authorities say eight protesters have been killed in clashes, but Amnesty International has put the death toll at 37.

The Popular Congress Party, which is part of President Omar Bashir's government, says that 17 people have been killed and 88 wounded in clashes.

Journalists in Sudan frequently complain of harassment from the authorities, and the African country has a dire rating on international press freedom rankings.

Entire print runs of newspapers are often confiscated over articles deemed offensive by the powerful National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS), which is spearheading the current crackdown on protesters.

Police and security officers remained deployed in several parts of the Sudanese capital on Wednesday, but for the first day in a week no new demonstrations were reported.

Activists and opposition groups have called on people to take to the streets again over the next few days. "We urge the Sudanese people to continue their demonstrations until success is achieved by overthrowing the regime," the

Sudanese Communist Party said in a statement.

Egypt minister visits

Egypt's foreign minister and intelligence chief visited Khartoum on Thursday for talks with Sudanese government officials in the midst of the ongoing deadly protests.

Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry and Gen. Abbas Kamel went into meetings with their Sudanese counterparts soon after arriving, officials said, adding the two were later expected to meet Bashir.

Egypt's Foreign Ministry said earlier that the talks were part of "directives by the leaders of both countries to develop bilateral relations."

The visit follows more than a week of demonstrations in Sudan that evolved into deadly clashes between riot police and protesters angered by increased bread prices.

Cairo and Khartoum have recently sought to iron out their differences in a bid to improve relations roiled by a longstanding border dispute and an impasse in talks over Ethiopia's Nile dam.

In October Sudan lifted a ban on agricultural imports from Egypt during a visit to Khartoum by Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi.

Several members of the party have been arrested by security agents since the protests started.

"We also call on all opposition parties to unite and work together to coordinate this movement."

Protests initially started in towns and villages and later spread to Khartoum, as people rallied against the government tripling the price of a loaf of bread from one Sudanese pound to three (from about 2 two 6 US cents).

Demonstrators have also been marching against Sudan's dire economic situation and some have called for the president to resign.

After the protests erupted Bashir, who has been in power since a 1989 coup, vowed to "take real reforms" to tackle the country's financial difficulties.

Sudan is facing an acute foreign currency crisis and soaring inflation, despite the lifting of an economic embargo by Washington in October 2017.

Inflation is running at 70 percent and the Sudanese pound has plunged in value, while shortages of bread and fuel have regularly hit several cities.



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Sudan Islamist party urges probe into killing of protesters
Egypt foreign minister, spy chief visit protest-hit Sudan

[France urges Israel to reconsider settler home approvals in West Bank](#)

Author:

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Thu, 2018-12-27 15:57

PARIS: France on Thursday called on Israel to reconsider recently issued approvals for more than 2,000 settler homes in the occupied West Bank, saying they would violate international law.

Israel's Higher Planning Committee approved 2,191 new housing units in Israeli settlements on Dec. 25 and 26, though no building permits have been issued yet.

"France condemns this decision, which expands settlement activity in the West Bank," the French foreign office said in a statement.

The settlements undermined the conditions for a two-state solution, "the only

way to ensure a just and lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians, and heightens tensions” it said, calling on the Israeli authorities to reconsider the decisions.

Some 500,000 Israelis live in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, areas captured by Israel in the 1967 Middle East War that are also home to more than 2.6 million Palestinians.

Settlements are one of the thorniest issues in efforts to restart Israeli-Palestinian peace talks, frozen since 2014.

Most countries consider all settlements that Israel has built in captured territory to be illegal. Israel disputes this and says their future should be determined in peace talks with the Palestinians.

While Israel’s settlement projects have regularly drawn condemnation from the Palestinians and in Europe, the US administration under President Donald Trump has taken a largely uncritical public stand.



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Israel army destroys Palestinian attacker’s West Bank home
Airbnb to remove listings in West Bank settlements

[Popular former military chief jumps](#)

into politics in Israel

Author:

By ARON HELLER | AP

ID:

1545924399741781700

Thu, 2018-12-27 (All day)

JERUSALEM: A popular former Israeli military chief jumped into the political fray Thursday, announcing he would run for office in the upcoming election and instantly injected perhaps the strongest challenge to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's lengthy rule.

Retired Lt. Gen. Benny Gantz has been polling favorably in recent weeks, emerging as a fresh, exciting face in Israel's staid political landscape. By officially registering his new party, "Israel Resilience," Gantz shakes up a snap three-month election campaign that has been widely seen as Netanyahu's to lose.

Even before officially entering the fray, several polls showed Gantz's hypothetical party coming in second only to Netanyahu's ruling Likud in the run-up to the April 9 vote.

Gantz has yet to comment publicly on the party and was not expected to make any statement Thursday.

Though Gantz has yet to lay out his worldview or political platform, he flaunts stellar military credentials – a must in security-centric Israel – and a squeaky-clean image to contrast Netanyahu's corruption-laden reputation.

While still short of the kind of widespread support likely needed to become prime minister, his candidacy captures a yearning in Israel for a viable alternative to emerge against the long-serving Netanyahu, seeking his fourth consecutive term in office.

With a commanding lead in the polls, and a potential indictment looming against him, Netanyahu called early elections this week, seeking to pre-empt corruption charges and return to office to become the longest serving premier in Israeli history.

Police have recommended charging Netanyahu with bribery and breach of trust in three different cases. Netanyahu has denied any wrongdoing, dismissing the allegations as a media-orchestrated witch hunt aimed at removing him from office.

Even with Netanyahu's legal woes, Israel's established opposition parties have remained splintered and have been unable to produce a viable challenger. Gantz seems to be taking votes away from all the major parties and may not tip the scales away from Netanyahu just yet. But the emergence of the tall, telegenic ex-general with salty hair makes things more interesting, as he could spark new alliances with other moderate parties to give the hard-line Likud a good fight.

"It's too early to tell, but he definitely strengthens the center-left camp," said Mina Tzemach, a leading Israeli pollster, whose most recent survey gave Gantz's new party as many as 16 seats in the 120-seat Parliament. "He projects security and integrity. And the fact that he looks good doesn't hurt either."

Gantz, 59, was a paratrooper who rose up the ranks to command special operations units and other various units before becoming Israel's 20th military chief between 2011-2015. His term was marked by two wars with Hamas militants in Gaza and a covert air campaign in Syria against Iranian arms shipments to Hezbollah guerrillas in Lebanon. Since his discharge, he's been highly coveted by several Israeli political parties.



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Israeli parliament approves early elections
Poll shows Israel's Netanyahu
cruising toward re-election