

Tunisian opposition announces alliance against president

Author:

Wed, 2022-04-27 00:10

TUNIS: A veteran Tunisian opposition figure announced on Tuesday the creation of a new alliance to “save” the country from deep crisis following President Kais Saied’s power grab last year.

Ahmed Nejib Chebbi, 78, a prominent left-wing politician who opposed Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali’s rule, said the new National Salvation Front aimed to unite political forces, re-establish constitutional and democratic processes and guarantee freedoms and rights in the country.

“We want a return to legitimacy and democracy,” he told a news conference in the capital Tunisia.

Saied – a former law professor elected in 2019 amid public anger against the political class – on July 25 last year sacked the government, suspended parliament and seized wide-ranging powers.

He later gave himself powers to rule and legislate by decree and seized control over the judiciary.

He dissolved parliament last month, dealing another blow to the political system put in place after the North African country’s 2011 revolution.

Chebbi opposes Saied’s moves and describes them as a “coup.”

The new alliance comprises five political parties including Saied’s nemesis the Islamist-inspired Ennahdha party, along with five civil society groups involving independent political figures.

The Front’s priority is to rescue an economy ruined by a “rotten” political system that puts off investors, Chebbi said.

It also aims to involve other political groups and “influential” figures before launching a national dialogue on reforms to “save the country,” he added. Chebbi called for a “salvation government” to lead the country during a “transition period” before new elections.

Last week Saied assigned himself the power to appoint the head of the electoral commission, a move critics say aims to create a tame electoral body ahead of a referendum slated for July on constitutional reforms, and legislative elections due in December.

Last month, Saied also inaugurated a “temporary” council of judges to replace an independent watchdog he abolished when seizing sweeping powers over the judiciary.

Saied's initial power grab last year was welcomed by many Tunisians sick of the often-stale-mated post-revolution political system.

But an increasing array of critics say he has moved the country down a dangerous path back toward autocracy.



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Death toll from migrant shipwrecks off Tunisia rises to 17
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[White House worried Iran could develop nuclear weapon in weeks](#)

Tue, 2022-04-26 22:59

WASHINGTON: The White House is worried Iran could develop a nuclear weapon in

weeks, press secretary Jen Psaki said on Tuesday, after Secretary of State Antony Blinken noted earlier in the day the country has accelerated its nuclear program.

"Yes it definitely worries us," Psaki said, adding the time needed for Iran to produce a nuclear weapon is down from about a year.

Earlier, Blinken said the US still believes a return to a nuclear deal is the best path with Iran, amid a prolonged standoff in talks.

Facing criticism of the deal during an appearance before Congress, Blinken called the 2015 agreement imperfect but better than the alternatives.

"We continue to believe that getting back into compliance with the agreement would be the best way to address the nuclear challenge posed by Iran and to make sure that an Iran that is already acting with incredible aggression doesn't have a nuclear weapon," Blinken told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

"We've tested the other proposition, which was pulling out of the agreement, trying to exert more pressure," he said.

The result, he said, is that the "breakout time" for Iran to develop a nuclear bomb if it so chooses is "down to a matter of weeks" after the deal pushed it beyond a year.

Former president Donald Trump pulled out of the agreement reached under his predecessor Barack Obama and instead imposed sweeping sanctions, including trying to stop other nations from buying Iranian oil.

President Joe Biden's administration has been engaged in more than a year of indirect talks in Vienna on reviving the agreement, which had promised Iran a relief from sanctions in return for major restrictions on its nuclear work.

Both US and Iranian officials say that most points have been settled.

Disputes appear to include Iran's demand that Biden undo Trump's designation of the clerical state's powerful Revolutionary Guards as a terrorist organization.

(With Reuters and AFP)



The Coptic miracle

How Egypt's historic Christian church survived and thrived

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Iran court sentences 2 students to 16-year prison terms each
US says Iran nuclear deal does not ensure sanctions relief

[Lebanese activist shown shoving energy minister turns himself in](#)

Tue, 2022-04-26 22:23

BEIRUT: A Lebanese activist who was filmed attacking the country's energy minister in Beirut has handed himself over to police.

A video of renowned protester Elie Haykal went viral on Sunday, causing social media uproar. The clip shows Haykal provoking and pushing minister Walid Fayyad outside a diner in the Lebanese capital.

Haykal, who is affiliated with the Christian political party Lebanese Forces, shoved Fayyad, a close ally of the Free Patriotic Movement party of President Michel Aoun.

The video garnered some support from social media users, but was mostly met with criticism, especially because Fayyad is believed to be one of the only politicians in Lebanon who travels without bodyguards or any security entourage.

[#WATCH](#): Renowned activist Elie Haykal confronting and pushing Lebanese energy minister Walid Fayyad outside a diner place in Beirut on Sunday <https://t.co/gAKe2N8xMT>
[pic.twitter.com/d1gqonR5K1](https://t.co/gAKe2N8xMT)

– Arab News (@arabnews) [April 26, 2022](#)

Following Tuesday's Cabinet meeting, Lebanon's information minister Ziad Al-Makary said fellow ministers condemned the assault and demanded legal action against the perpetrator.

"My client surrendered himself today," Haykal's lawyer Ralph Tannous told Arab News on Tuesday evening. "He surrendered himself to Zouk Mosbeh police station and will be transferred to Achrafieh police station for interrogation since the minister has complained in his personal capacity," the lawyer added.

Tannous told Arab News that his client was subpoenaed on Monday but did not receive a notice because he was away from home.

When asked about the nature of the crime, Tannous said that his client, if charged, will be tried before the misdemeanours court, but added that he had not ruled out the possibility of obtaining a waiver from the minister, with whom they are trying to contact.

In the 34-second video, the energy minister is seen chatting with demonstrators outside the restaurant before Haykal, who was behind Fayyad, grabbed his right shoulder, turned him around and then addressed him.

He said: "Today I have to deliver to you a message from all the Lebanese people. I want to deliver to you a clear message, so that you wake up and understand."

He then shoved Fayyad, who stumbled backwards on to a metal partition.

A Twitter user criticized Haykal's actions, posting: "The minister of energy has annoyed me with his behavior, and I disagree with his performance, but hitting him in that way is completely unacceptable."

Another user described Haykal as “debauched and uneducated” but added that she had no confidence that Fayyad could solve Lebanon’s power crisis. “Violence will not solve the electricity crisis or any of our crises. I am frustrated like the rest, but I personally cannot condone what happened,” another tweet said.



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Protests held in Beirut against draft capital control law
Anger in Beirut’s southern suburbs over increased thefts and shootings

[France condemns life sentence for Turkey’s Kavała](#)

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Tue, 2022-04-26 16:56

PARIS: France on Tuesday condemned the life sentence handed by a Turkish court to leading civil society activist Osman Kavala, saying his detention violated Turkey's international obligations.

"France strongly condemns the life sentence," the foreign ministry said, calling for Kavala's "immediate release" and the dropping of all charges against him.

He had been detained for more than four-and a-half years "in violation of Turkey's international obligations," the French ministry added.

France's statement echoes similar statements by Germany and the United States expressing dismay at the verdict issued by the Istanbul court on Monday.

The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) had in December 2019 ordered Turkey to release Kavala, but he has always remained behind bars.

In February, the committee of ministers of the Council of Europe (COE), of which the ECHR is part, launched infringement proceedings against Turkey for only the second time in its history.

In a first step of the proceedings, the case has now been referred back to the ECHR to rule if Turkey has failed to fulfil its obligations under the European Convention on Human Rights.

The proceedings could see Turkey suspended or – in the most severe sanction – even expelled from the COE. ECHR are rulings are binding for all COE member states.

The Istanbul court sentenced Kavala to life in prison on charges of trying to topple the government that have been rubbished by his supporters. It also jailed seven other defendants for 18 years each.

The president of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Tiny Kox, said he was "deeply disappointed" by the verdict by the Turkish court.

"The fact that he spent almost five years in pre-trial detention and has now been sentenced to life in prison as a result of legal proceedings that were found to be in violation of the European Convention on Human Rights, is shocking," he said.

"Mr Kavala should be released without any further delay," Kox said.



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[Trade picks up in Hebron during Ramadan until tensions resume](#)

Mon, 2022-04-25 23:00

HEBRON: In the Old City of Hebron there is jubilation and relief as closed shops lifted their shutters to welcome customers.

Abu Hatem Al-Jibreni is happy that the residents of Hebron can now go shopping in the narrow streets of the market.

“Ramadan has many benefits, in addition to the good deeds from God . . . it

has increased the movement of purchases in the streets of the Old City, which is benefitting all parties,” 87-year-old Al-Jibreni told Arab News.

Residents of the Old City of Hebron have suffered losses and harassment at the hands of the Israelis as their shops have been closed and streets blocked.

FASTFACT

Residents of the Old City of Hebron have suffered losses and harassment at the hands of the Israelis as their shops have been closed and streets blocked.

Al-Jibreni has been selling a variety of products at low prices compared to modern city shops at his father’s shop since childhood. “We have been suffering for many years. Many shops closed their doors due to Israeli restrictions and the lack of customers in the market,” he said.

The city’s residents feel comfortable seeing customers in the market alleys, and the month of Ramadan has made them feel “life is back.”

“I am very happy to see people here, regardless of buying and selling, every year during Ramadan the old town comes to life again,” said Muhammad Al-Fakhouri, 32, a resident of the Old City.

He added: “I feel sorry that throughout the year no one from outside the residents of the Old City come, but during Ramadan the scene is completely different, as if life is reborn during the month, especially in early days.”

The Palestinians describe the Israeli actions in the Old City as apartheid. Many streets are completely reserved for settlers, and Palestinians are prohibited from using them. Other streets are allowed for Palestinians to walk in, but they are not allowed to drive, and other streets are allowed for Palestinians to drive but they are not allowed to get out.

There are houses in the old town whose residents are prevented from using the doors of their homes, so they have turned their windows into doors or opened new doors for their homes, while others are unable to solve the problems of accessing their homes so walk on the roofs of neighboring houses to enter and exit.

There are neighborhoods that a Palestinian cannot enter unless he is a resident and therefore no one is allowed to visit, while other neighborhoods can only be entered through gates and physical checkpoints.

The Norwegian Refugee Council estimated in 2019 that the total direct and indirect losses resulting from the closure of shops under military orders were estimated at \$485 million during the past 25 years of closure – the equivalent of \$1.6 million a month incurred in the Old City.

The city of Hebron, especially in the Old City area, also witnessed tension in the wake of the events in Jerusalem during the past few days, which weakened commercial movement again in the Old City market.

“Customer numbers at the beginning of Ramadan were increasing, but with the recent tension the movement of people decreased here . . . we were hoping that calm (peace) would continue during the month (Ramadan) for recovery of trade, but unfortunately this did not last,” Abu Rami Sidar, 44, told Arab News.

The owner of a sweets shop, Sidar, believes that the month of Ramadan every year is a chance for all sides to benefit from buying from the Old City.

“Our prices here are lower than anywhere else in light of the high prices in Ramadan . . . here it does not increase, but rather decreases to encourage everyone to buy from and visit the Old City,” he said.



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Palestinians feeling the pinch as prices soar