

# Blinken encourages Tunisia reform in talks with leader

Author:

Mon, 2021-11-22 00:20

TUNIS: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken encouraged Tunisia's leader to make reforms to respond to Tunisians' hopes for "democratic progress," the US State Department said on Sunday, nearly four months after President Kais Saied seized political power.

Saied said last week he was working nonstop on a timetable for reforms to defuse growing criticism at home and abroad since he dismissed the Cabinet, suspended parliament and took personal power in July.

Last week, thousands of Tunisians protested near parliament in the capital, demanding he reinstate the assembly, while major foreign donors whose financial assistance is needed to unlock an International Monetary Fund rescue package for the economy have urged him to return to a normal constitutional order.

"The secretary encouraged a transparent and inclusive reform process to address Tunisia's significant political, economic, and social challenges and to respond to the Tunisian people's aspirations for continued democratic progress," the State Department said in a statement about a call between Blinken and Saied.

It added that Blinken and Saied discussed recent developments in Tunisia, including the formation of the new government and steps to alleviate the economic situation.

A Tunisia presidency statement said earlier that the US would offer support to Tunisia once it has announced dates for political reform. Saied seized nearly all powers in July in a move his critics called a coup, a decade after the Arab Spring's first and only successful pro-democracy uprising, before installing a new prime minister and announcing he would rule by decree.

Saied has defended his takeover as the only way to end governmental paralysis after years of political squabbling and economic stagnation, and he has promised to uphold rights and freedoms won in the 2011 revolution.



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## [New water protests hit Iran](#)

Author:

Mon, 2021-11-22 00:12

TEHRAN: More than 1,000 Iranians marched Sunday toward the governor's office in the western province of Chahar-Mahal Bakhtiari to demand a solution to water shortages, state media reported.

The march came two days after thousands of protesters converged on the central city of Isfahan to vent their anger after the lifeblood river dried up due to drought and diversion.

Footage broadcast by state television showed crowds of protesters marching in the streets of Shahr-e Kord, the provincial capital of Chahar-Mahal Bakhtiari.

They were heard chanting “it is forbidden to divert the water of Chahar-Mahal” and shouting slogans against “projects to transfer water to other regions.”

Iran has endured repeated droughts over the past decade, including in the south.

Iran has also experienced regular floods in recent years, a phenomenon made worse when torrential rain falls on sun-baked earth.

Scientists say climate change amplifies droughts, and their intensity and frequency in turn threaten food security.

State television said Sunday’s protest come as wells, aqueducts and rivers have been drying up, including the Zayadneh Rood River that runs from the Zagros mountains in Chahar-Mahal Bakhtiari province to south of Isfahan city.

Last week, hundreds of farmers also rallied to protest the drying up of the Zayadneh Rood that has been depleted of water since 2000.

Earlier this month President Ebrahim Raisi promised to resolve water issues and said a committee would be formed to rehabilitate the river.



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## [Abu Dhabi crown prince and US defense secretary discuss strategic bilateral relations](#)

Sun, 2021-11-21 23:16

DUBAI: Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed held talks with US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin on Sunday, state news agency WAM reported. During the meeting, which took place at the Al-Shati Palace in Abu Dhabi, the two sides discussed the existing strategic relations between the UAE and the US at various levels, especially in defense and military affairs, in addition to international and regional issues of common concern.

"The leaders discussed a range of shared security threats, including working together to increase regional defense and continuing to combat terrorism," Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said in a statement.

"Secretary Austin thanked the UAE for its long-standing hospitality in hosting US forces and conveyed his appreciation for the UAE's instrumental role as a transit location as the US military conducted the evacuation and retrograde mission from Afghanistan," the statement added.

The meeting was attended by UAE Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed.



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## [Intense battle as Lebanese lawyers choose new members of Bar Association](#)

Sun, 2021-11-21 22:57

BEIRUT: Lawyers in Lebanon conducted an election on Sunday to choose nine members of the Bar Association, and its new head.

The winning members of the association were Imad Martinos, Nader Kaspar, Elias Bazrelli, Abdo Lahoud, Iskandar Najjar, Fadi Al-Masry, Marwan Gabr, Wajih Massad and Maya Al-Zaghrini.

Former President Amin Gemayel said on Sunday: "We hope that the elections will come out with results that embody Lebanon's ambition, and that this Bar Association will be an example for all syndicates."

Gemayel, a lawyer like dozens of politicians, made the remarks as he exercised his electoral right.

Last year's elections were canceled due to the coronavirus disease pandemic.

The 2019 contest led to the election of a head from insurgent groups and the removal of the heads of the ruling parties who had run the Bar Association for decades.

About 7,600 lawyers voted, and 36 candidates stood, including nine for the position of the head of the association.

The election process continued throughout the day and witnessed attempts by the ruling parties to hide under the mantle of independent candidates.

This led to confusion for many voters and an additional effort by the uprising candidates to obtain the majority of votes.

The votes of lawyers loyal to the opposition were distributed among the Lebanese Opposition Front and the Our Bar list. Between the two lists, there were three joint candidates, most notably Najjar.

The parties, meanwhile, supported independent candidates having not named any themselves.

Lawyers affiliated with revolutionary groups kicked the former MP, lawyer Nicola Fattoush, out from the Our Bar tent in the courtyard of the Palace of Justice, after they criticized him in relation to a quarrying business owned by him and his brother in the Bekaa region.

The competition for the position of association chief centered between Najjar and Kaspar. Kaspar has been a member of the Beirut Bar Association for more than 3 sessions, and was considered the most likely candidate, after the difference in votes between him and Najjar in the results of the elections exceeded 300 votes in his favor.

Kaspar had competed against previous incumbent Melhem Khalaf in the elections in November 2019.

At that time, the parties of the system supported him to prevent Khalaf's election, but the latter, backed by the October 17 uprising, defeated those parties.

Election observers said "the veteran parties in the electoral process preferred not to announce their support for any candidate in the first round, and then to tell the winning head of the Bar Association that he won because of their votes and that they supported him."

Independents at several universities in Lebanon in 2019 contested student elections, breaking the grip of the traditional parties, which, observers added, might explain the hesitancy of traditional parties to back candidates overtly.

Observers said that the political parties "have become afraid of the younger generation and shied away from announcing the names of their candidates. This is what prompted them to resort to naming candidates under the name 'independent.'"



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## [Yemeni troops make more gains in Taiz, Hodeidah](#)

Author:

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Sun, 2021-11-21 22:41

AL-MUKALLAH: Yemeni troops on Sunday pushed deeper into Houthi-controlled territory in the provinces of Taiz and Hodeidah, seizing control of mountains, villages and roads, according to local officials and media.

The Joint Forces announced seizing control of Al-Maghareb and Mehwar Al-Abed mountains in the Jabal Ras district in Hodeidah, and the mountains of Al-Rouenah, Al-Souhrah, Tour and other mountainous terrains in the Maqbanah district in Taiz province.

They also took control of a number of valleys east of Hays district, a day after gaining control over the town of Hays and neighboring areas in Hodeidah province.

Troops were seen retrieving military equipment, vehicles and ammunition that had been abandoned by fleeing Houthi fighters.

Video footage broadcast by media showed the bodies of dead fighters on the battlefields, as engineers worked on defusing landmines planted by the militia.

Officials visited liberated locations in Hays, where they pledged support to the locals and vowed to press ahead until the Houthis were defeated.

Media reported that the Houthis had sent military reinforcements, including dozens of armed vehicles and hundreds of fighters, to push back the Joint Forces in Hodeidah and Taiz.

"We are ready for the Houthi counterattacks," a military official from the Joint Forces' Giants Brigades told Arab News.

On Sunday, the Houthis mourned Brig. Mohammed Abdullah Abu Taleb, the commander of Houthi Preventive Security in Hodeidah, who was among several fighters killed in an Arab coalition airstrike in Hays district on Saturday as they fought the advancing Joint Forces, Al-Masdar Online reported.

The Houthis arranged funeral processions in Sanaa and other Yemeni provinces under their control for 40 fighters killed in fighting with troops and in coalition airstrikes.

As part of a new military strategy sponsored by the Arab coalition in Yemen, the Joint Forces on Nov. 13 announced withdrawing from more than 80km of areas on the Red Sea in Hodeidah province, including part of Hodeidah city, that are included in a truce under the UN-brokered Stockholm Agreement.

On Friday, the Joint Forces launched a new offensive targeting the Houthis in strategic highlands between Hodeidah and Taiz.

Heavy fighting between troops and the Houthis was reported in different locations in the central province of Marib, where the militia is pushing to advance toward the province's capital, Marib city.

The fiercest battles occurred in Juba district, south of Marib, where troops scored limited advances after killing and wounding dozens of Houthis.

Foreign Minister Ahmed Awadh bin Mubarak on Sunday warned that the Houthi invasion of the city of Marib would herald the end of the political process in Yemen and efforts to end the war. It could also trigger a humanitarian crisis as severe as the collapse of Marib's dam in ancient times that wiped out the kingdom of Sheba, he said.

"The repercussions of the fall of Marib will not only represent the creation of a horrific humanitarian situation, but will also mark the end of the

political and peace process in Yemen,” the minister told the Manama Dialogue in Bahrain.



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