



## Libya Islamist chief won't concede election defeat

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By Hadeel Al Shalchi

TRIPOLI (Reuters) - The head of Libya's largest Islamist party refused on Wednesday to concede defeat in its first free election in almost half a century, accusing his main liberal rival of "tricking" voters with disingenuous commitments to Islam.

In an interview with Reuters, Mohammed Sawan, leader of the Muslim Brotherhood's political arm, branded wartime prime minister Mahmoud Jibril as a former ally of ousted dictator Muammar Gaddafi and said that Jibril's party could lose its lead once fuller results from Saturday's vote trickle in.

While the Brotherhood ran a slick campaign for Saturday's vote, like other Libyan parties it is new to democracy.

On a desk in an office in the party's headquarters sat a stack of English-language how-to books. The titles: Winning Elections, Campaigning Bootcamp 2.0 and the Campaign Manager. All looked new and barely opened.

"Jibril did not present himself to the Libyan people as a liberal. He presented himself as having an Islamic reference," Sawan said. "Secular currents benefited from the Arab Spring revolutions and raised the banner of Islamic reference... Libyans voted for Jibril as he was considered an Islamist too."

Jibril's National Forces Alliance (NFA) has extended an early lead in the landmark elections, according to incomplete tallies, benefiting from his prominence as one of the main figures in last year's uprising to end Gaddafi's 42-year rule.

But the Western-educated Jibril's early gains do not automatically translate into a majority in the 200-seat assembly as candidates on party lists are only allocated 80 spots.

Sawan said the Brotherhood's Justice and Construction Party (JCP) expected to come into its own once results for independent seats, which rely on connections and social standing, came in.

The main parties, including the JCP, have loyalists running on independent tickets but who will ultimately vote in a bloc with them once in the national assembly.

"Maybe the final result will show that Justice and Construction is the leading party," he said.

But despite such optimism, Sawan wore a look of disappointment. His party had widely been expected to perform strongly, boosted by the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood and moderate Islamist Ennahda in the first post-revolutionary elections in neighboring Egypt and Tunisia respectively.

The Brotherhood's campaign team was comprised of Libyans who were educated abroad and its huge banners bore the recognizable symbol of a golden stallion. Brotherhood candidates also drafted in their daughters to help with public relations.

Educated in Canada and the United States, they arranged interviews for media in perfect North American-accented English.

Sawan resigned as the head of the Brotherhood and was elected to head the nominally independent JCP ahead of the vote.

#### NO GRAND COALITION

Despite those efforts, the Brotherhood has struggled to convince Libyans wary of foreign interference that it has no financial or administrative links to its namesake in Egypt.

Another obstacle the Brotherhood has faced is that its leader and its candidates are not well known among Libyans.

Having been thoroughly crushed by Gaddafi, they did not benefit from the vast charitable networks that served their Egyptian counterparts so well at the ballot box.

At the same time, hundreds of mainly Islamist political prisoners, including Sawan himself, were freed from jail in the early 2000s as part of reforms led by Gaddafi's son, Saif al-Islam. The notion that the Brotherhood was willing to cut deals with the old regime to get out of jail damaged their image.

"Libyans don't know the reality of the Islamists and Muslim Brotherhood or the JCP because there is a phobia surrounding them. But the evidence that the Islamists have succeeded will show in the independent votes and everyone will discover that the 120 that won (as) independents are Islamists," he said.

Positioning himself as a potential unifying figure, Jibril earlier this week called on parties to join a grand alliance.

But Sawan showed little appetite for that. Bitterly branding Jibril, who served as a minister under Gaddafi, as the choice of old Gaddafi loyalists, Sawan said his party would clash with Jibril's on the role of religion in politics.

"To them Islamic reference means to establish Islamic rituals, that some personal status laws are sharia-based, but the other areas have nothing to do with Islam... Our view is that Islam is a complete way of life," he said.

(Editing by Lin Noueihed and [Mark Heinrich](#))