

Former premier back in familiar role in Haiti

Former Haitian Prime Minister Jacques Edouard Alexis was tapped by Haitian President René Préval to head the government.

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Haitian President René Préval Monday nominated Jacques Edouard Alexis, a trusted ally who served as prime minister during Préval's first term in the presidency, to help him govern the troubled country again as his new prime minister.

Préval ended weeks of speculation by sending letters to the presidents of the Senate and Chamber of Deputies nominating Alexis, 57, to run the day-to-day affairs of the government.

Alexis, who was one of the main architects of Préval's February election victory and has been coordinating his transition team -- the president was inaugurated May 14 -- said he expects his nomination will be approved by parliament.

"The president has been preparing the terrain," Alexis, who earlier served as chancellor of the private Quisqueya University in Port-au-Prince, told The Miami Herald in a telephone interview.

NO NEW FACE

Some Haitians, including supporters, had hoped Préval would bring in a fresh face as his prime minister. Alexis had been considered the front-runner all along.

"What it says is that, unfortunately, there has not been a lot of effort on the part of Préval to go wide and see who can be brought into the inner circle," said Jocelyn McCalla, head of the New York-based National Coalition for Haitian Rights.

Alexis told The Miami Herald that he shares Préval's hopes for rebuilding the economy, tackling government reforms and helping the poor.

"There is a majority in this country who feel they are excluded," Alexis said. ``They don't feel they are citizens . . . The first order is that we have to work to diminish the feeling of exclusion."

Alexis' confirmation, expected as early as Wednesday, would officially end Boca Raton resident Gerard Latortue's two-year stint as interim prime minister following the 2004 ouster of former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

Alexis first served as prime minister at the end of Préval's first term, May 26, 1999, to Feb. 7, 2001. Haiti was then in the midst of a political crisis following Préval's decision to dismiss parliament, and Alexis was installed by presidential decree.

This time, political observers are predicting that parliament will approve Alexis. Préval's Lespwa Party has the single largest blocks of seats in both chambers of parliament, though not majorities.

CANADA INCIDENT

Earlier this month, Alexis was barred from entering Canada because his name appeared on a list of those accused of "crimes against humanity." He was eventually given a visa, but not an explanation.

"That is a very serious accusation," he said. ``I am still waiting for an answer from the Canadian government."

Melanie Carkner, spokeswoman for Citizenship and Immigration in Canada, said she could not discuss an individual's case without their permission.