Deposed leader Moammar Gadhafi was shot and killed as Libyan forces overtook the city of his birth and last remaining stronghold, setting the stage for the nation to reinvent itself after a 42-year dictatorship. Margaret Coker details in The News Hub.

News of Gadhafi's death—the first leader killed in this season of uprisings across the Arab world—sparked jubilant celebrations across Libya, as citizens absorbed the news that the man who ruled over them for most of the nation's modern history was gone.

From midday into the night, streets in downtown Tripoli were mobbed with honking cars and families shouting for joy, while the city's mosques chanted celebratory prayers. In Misrata, crowds of men lined up to see the corpses of the former leader and his son.

In remote villages along Libya's main coastal highway west of Tripoli, dozens of people remained in the streets before dawn.
Friday morning, waving flags, pumping their fists in the air and chanting in celebration. Officials said commercial flights into and out of Tripoli were canceled because of the celebratory gunfire.

“This is the greatest moment for Libya. The criminal is dead to us and to history,” said Amis Asawiyeh, a 24-year-old resident of the Tripoli suburb of Tajoura.

There were conflicting reports about the events surrounding the death of the 69-year-old former leader, and initial reports were viewed with skepticism, after multiple previous false accounts of the demise of members of the Gadhafi family.

Late in the day, interim Prime Minister Mahmoud Jibril said a slightly wounded Gadhafi had been pulled from a hiding place in a sewage pipe, shot in the arm, and later killed by a shot in the head by crossfire.

He said it was unclear who fired the fatal shot but insisted that no rebel fighter had orders to kill Gadhafi.

Gruesome cellphone videos made by fighters from Misrata and transmitted around the world appeared to show a captive Gadhafi still alive, and then, his face and clothes bloodied, apparently dead.

As the day progressed, leaders around the world decided it was time to declare victory. "Today we can definitively say that the Gadhafi regime has come to an end," said President Barack Obama from the White House. "One of the world’s longest-serving dictators is no more.”

Mr. Obama called attention to the efforts of the U.S. and its North Atlantic Treaty Organization allies to stop Gadhafi’s forces —presenting Thursday’s events as the latest in a series of national security and foreign-policy successes that included the killing of al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden in May.

Later, in the Oval Office, Mr. Obama said the success in Libya vindicated his multilateral approach to the conflict. "We did exactly what we said we were going to do in Libya," he told reporters.

Among those marking the news of Gadhafi’s demise were those who lost loved ones to terrorist attacks believed to be the work of his regime.

Michelle Ciulla Lipkin, whose father was killed in the 1988 Lockerbie bombing, said she cried when she heard that Gadhafi was dead.

"I know the world is a better place without that man in it," she said.

NATO’s supreme commander, Adm. James Stavridis, is likely to make recommendations on Friday about when to end the air campaign, a NATO official said.

The Misrata council also confirmed the death of one of the former leader’s sons, Mutassim Gadhafi, and his longtime defense chief, Abu Baker Younis.

Officials from the National Transitional Council, the rebel-led national governing authority, said another son, Seif al-Islam, had
Residents celebrated in Tripoli Thursday after hearing a report that Col. Moammar Gadhafi had been killed in Sirte.

Associated Press

Mustafa Abdul Jalil, head of the National Transitional Council.

Regional Upheaval

Track events day by day in the region.

Col. Moammar Gadhafi died from wounds sustained during a final push to capture his hometown of Sirte, the last remaining stronghold of the former leader, according to Libyan military and political leaders.

Margaret Coker has details on Lunch Break.

been wounded Thursday, although his whereabouts couldn't be independently confirmed.

Thursday's dramatic developments are expected to kick-start what has already become a bare-knuckle political fight to fill the power vacuum in the oil-rich North African country.

Armed militias, religious leaders and regional luminaries face the challenge of setting aside the military tactics that toppled Gadhafi and donning unaccustomed political skills to join the NTC in the transition from tyranny to democracy.

In a sign of the uncertainty of the transition, Mr. Jibril spoke to journalists to confirm Gadhafi's death on Thursday, but didn't announce a formal end to the armed conflict or give any detail about a timeline for elections.

Over the summer, the NTC worked up a blueprint plan that envisioned a 20-month political transition of three stages. The first would see the interim council expanded to at least 65 representatives from all regions of the country, which would govern for eight months until elections could be held.

Those polls would elect an interim congress that would rule for less than a year and help to draft a new constitution for the country.

That period would be followed by a second election to choose a permanent government and head of state, according to the blueprint.

But NTC leaders have repeatedly delayed a promised shift to more equitably share power between the men who have been running the administrative functions from the eastern city of Benghazi since the start of the revolution and Libya's far-flung regions and cities that freed themselves from Gadhafi's rule more recently.

Mr. Jibril and NTC Chairman Mustafa Abdul Jalil face accusations of cronyism and widespread dissatisfaction with their tenure, and they have so far not grappled very well with the intensifying regional and tribal grievances.

With no working judicial institutions, armed militias that control the streets in Tripoli and elsewhere in the country are taking the law into their own hands, arresting suspected Gadhafi loyalists or local troublemakers, often without any semblance of due process.

Now, many fear that with Col. Gadhafi's death the one symbol unifying them could cause factionalism to break down into civil war.

"The one thing that held all the rebels together was the presence of Moammar Gadhafi," said Kamran Bokhari, an analyst with the Stratfor think tank. "The next question is whether these rebel forces will continue to be able to hold their unity and not descend into a situation of chaos and civil war."

Much of the political tensions focus on Mr. Jibril, a technocrat and former regime official. He helped to craft the NATO military
Col. Moammar Gadhafi died from wounds sustained during a final push to seize control of his hometown of Sirte, according to Libyan military and political leaders, John Bussey reports on Markets Hub. Photo: Reuters.

strategy and foster ties with Western governments, but has been criticized for a lack of domestic political skills.

One area where resentment against the NTC has grown is Misrata, Libya’s third-largest city, which has fostered a strong regional identity through heavy losses during the revolution.

That their fighters led the assault on Sirte and announced the capture and death of Gadhafi could increase their lobbying to make one of their hometown leaders a new interim prime minister.

—Charles Levinson in Sabratha, Libya, Julian E. Barnes, Sam Dagher and Jared A. Favole contributed to this article.

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