**Fatah, Hamas attempt to solve wage-payment issue**

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The Fatah-Hamas government on Tuesday formed a special committee to solve the crisis between the two parties concerning the salaries of thousands of Hamas employees in the Gaza Strip.

The crisis erupted when the employees discovered last week that the new government, headed by Rami Hamdallah, had failed to pay them their May salaries.

Enraged, the employees attacked several banks in the Gaza Strip, forcing them to shut down since last Thursday.

Also Tuesday, Hamas security forces confiscated credit-card registers from businesses in the Gaza Strip to prevent them from doing business with the banks.

The closure of the banks has also prevented tens of thousands of Palestinian Authority civil servants in the Gaza Strip from receiving their salaries.

The PA has more than 45,000 civil servants in the Gaza Strip on its payroll, although they haven’t been working since Hamas seized control over the area in 2007.

Hamas claims that its reconciliation agreement with Fatah, which was signed last April, stipulates that the unity government would be responsible for paying salaries to all civil servants, and not only those working for the PA.

The government said in a statement that a legal and administrative committee would work toward solving the crisis over the salaries. It also condemned the assaults on the banks in the Gaza Strip.

“The Hamas leadership should have looked its employees in the eye and told them frankly and truthfully that the national consensus government wouldn’t be able to pay them their salaries automatically,” the statement said, holding Hamas responsible for the assaults on the banks.

Azzam al-Ahmed, a senior Fatah leader who signed the reconciliation accord with Hamas, criticized the forced closure of the banks in the Gaza Strip, calling it a “mistake.”

“The reconciliation deal should not collapse over money,” Ahmed said. “We won’t allow any Palestinian to starve and we will find a solution through the committee that was established.”

He said he had made it clear to Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh that those who paid the salaries to the Hamas employees should continue to do so even after the signing of the reconciliation accord.