

Pandemic put Algeria's protests on pause – will they now resume?

Author:

Mon, 2020-09-07 02:07

ALGIERS: For over a year Algeria's defiant anti-government "Hirak" protesters seemed unstoppable, but weekly demonstrations skidded to a halt due to restrictions to end the coronavirus crisis.

With two months to go before a key referendum on constitutional reform – a vote the government hopes will meet their demands – many expect the protests to soon return.

"The will to change the mode of governance is still present," said political scientist Louisa Driss Ait Hamadouche.

While the mass demonstrations in the North African nation may be on hold, the anger remains and, many believe, could soon rekindle the street protests.

"Although both hypotheses are possible, the most likely is the resumption of demonstrations," Hamadouche said.

Anti-government protests led by Hirak – meaning in Arabic, "the movement" – last year swept ailing president Abdelaziz Bouteflika from power.

But the rallies continued afterwards, demanding the ouster of the entire state apparatus, which is reviled by many Algerians as inept and corrupt.

"By remaining peaceful and civic-minded, Algerians have shown surprising maturity," Hamadouche said.

"This spirit of civic protest means that, with or without popular demonstrations, Hirak is here to stay."

Mahrez Bouich, another political analyst, believes Hirak protests will continue "until the people's demands are met."

Not only do the original grievances driving protests remain, frustration has grown.

Anger has been compounded by a government crackdown against demonstrators, a rise in unemployment and a slumping economy.

"It is a popular phenomenon ... caused by a buildup of frustrations and attacks on freedom, by a political system that refuses to change," said Mansour Kedidir, a political science researcher.

SPEEDREAD

With two months to go before a key referendum on constitutional reform – a vote the government hopes will meet their demands – many expect the protests to soon return.

Yet while Hirak is a grassroots movement whose lack of a formal leadership structure gives it the resilience to continue, it is weakened by internal arguments.

Ideological splits between progressives and conservatives, as well as between secularists and Islamists, mean its divisions can be exploited by the

authorities.

"Twenty years of Bouteflika's rule have damaged society to the point that no party can claim to be an alternative force," Kedidir said.

A government crackdown on critics – including journalists, opposition politicians as well as Hirak members – has stifled some of those willing to speak out.

Last month, two journalists were jailed for 2 and 3 years respectively, including for covering Hirak protests as reporters, in sentences criticized by international rights groups.

On Sunday, Human Rights Watch condemned the treatment of detained activist Abdellah Benaoum, a 54-year Hirak protester in poor health held by police since December, on charges including "undermining national unity" and inciting an unauthorized "unarmed gathering."

He is one of some 45 Algerians held for their role in the movement, the New York-based group said.

"His imprisonment epitomises the authorities' determination to crush a nationwide, peaceful movement for democratic reform," HRW's Eric Goldstein said.

"Charges that criminalize criticism of government institutions violate the right to freedom of expression," HRW added.

While the six months suspension due to the coronavirus crisis stripped the momentum from the movement, the pandemic also fostered the creation of community and online solidarity networks.

President Abdelmadjid Tebboune, elected in December, has promised to break with the Bouteflika years, an era seen as synonymous with authoritarianism, corruption and nepotism.

Tebboune, formerly a prime minister under Bouteflika, has backed a constitutional referendum due on November 1, ostensibly as an answer to the popular protest movement.

But many groups linked to Hirak fear the referendum will simply be a means to paper over problems, without making the deep-rooted reforms they believe are needed.

It will keep the old system in place to "reproduce itself," said political analyst Mahrez Bouich.

For many Algerians struggling to pay rent and purchase daily food, the intricacies of constitutional reform might seem of little immediate interest. But protests against poor living conditions, especially among young people in the south of the country, may dovetail with Hirak demonstrations.

They just need a spark to light the flame, "like dry tinder," Kedidir warned.



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Thousands hit streets of Algiers on protest movement anniversary
Neighbours to meet in Algiers on Libya crisis

[UAE records 513 new coronavirus cases](#)

Author:

Sun, 2020-09-06 23:59

DUBAI: The UAE's health ministry on Sunday reported 513 new coronavirus cases, bringing the total number of registered cases to 73,984.

The ministry said different nationalities are infected, all of whom are in "stable (condition) and subjected to the necessary health care."

It also said no deaths have been recorded and 2,443 cases have recovered from the virus, bringing the total number to 66,095.

The number of cases detected is attributed to an intense campaign to increase the scope of examinations in the country to count and detect early Covid-19 cases, and isolate anyone who has been in contact with them, the ministry said.



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[TV network files lawsuit against Lebanon presidency](#)

Sun, 2020-09-06 22:23

BEIRUT: The TV channel MTV Lebanon has taken legal action against the Lebanese presidency after being banned from entering the parliament building to cover talks on the formation of a new government.

Urgent appeals court judge Carla Shawah told the presidency of the lawsuit – believed to be the first of its kind focusing on media freedom – which comes after a reporter and camera crew from the channel were refused entry to the Baabda Palace last week.

MTV attorney Mark Habaka told Arab News: "We look forward to a decision that is in the interest of press freedom because the decision to deny the MTV team entry to the Republican Palace is unfair and a violation of freedom of expression, which is guaranteed by the constitution."

The MTV team said it was shocked after being stopped from entering the Baabda Palace to cover binding parliamentary consultations that Lebanese President Michel Aoun held to appoint a prime minister for the next government.

Habaka denied claims that the channel undermined the presidency.

"We consider this move to be a dangerous precedent with regard to undermining the Fourth Estate," he said.

MTV, like many privately owned channels, has been highly critical of the Lebanese government and Aoun in the wake of the Beirut port explosion on Aug. 4.

Presidential spokesman Rafik Shalala confirmed a statement had been issued by the General Directorate of the Lebanese Presidency explaining the decision to deny MTV entry to the palace.

The statement said: "MTV attacked the president, stripped him of his official capacity, referred to him using his name alone without his title, and persisted in insulting and defaming him as well as describing him using inappropriate expressions. Numerous attempts to get the channel to reconsider yielded no results. All these violations are punishable by law."

FASTFACT

MTV, like many privately owned channels, has been highly critical of the Lebanese government and Aoun in the wake of the Beirut port explosion on Aug. 4.

Further infringements could result in the channel being shut down, the statement added.

Habaka said the Republican Palace failed to communicate with the channel before banning it from entry, and the decision came as a shock to the MTV team.

"There is no immunity in the law for the presidency. It is a public department like other public departments in Lebanon, and the law guarantees freedoms, including freedom of expression. We appeal to the judiciary and the law above everyone," he said.

Asked whether the lawsuit targeted the presidency as a whole or Aoun individually, Habaka said: "The presidency is represented by President Michel Aoun, and he is the one who made the decision."

The channel said in a news bulletin following the ban that "this is the headquarters of the Lebanese presidency, not the house of Michel Aoun."

Lebanon's Media Professionals for Freedom initiative criticized the presidency's ban on MTV, saying it was "the other face of the unparalleled bankruptcy, distress and piracy."

It added: "The Republican Palace violated a constitutional principle that guarantees public and media freedoms."

The lawsuit is one of many filed against the presidency. Lebanese lawyer Majd Harb issued a complaint against Aoun and outgoing Prime Minister Hassan Diab, alleging both were aware that ammonium nitrate was stored at the port but took no action.

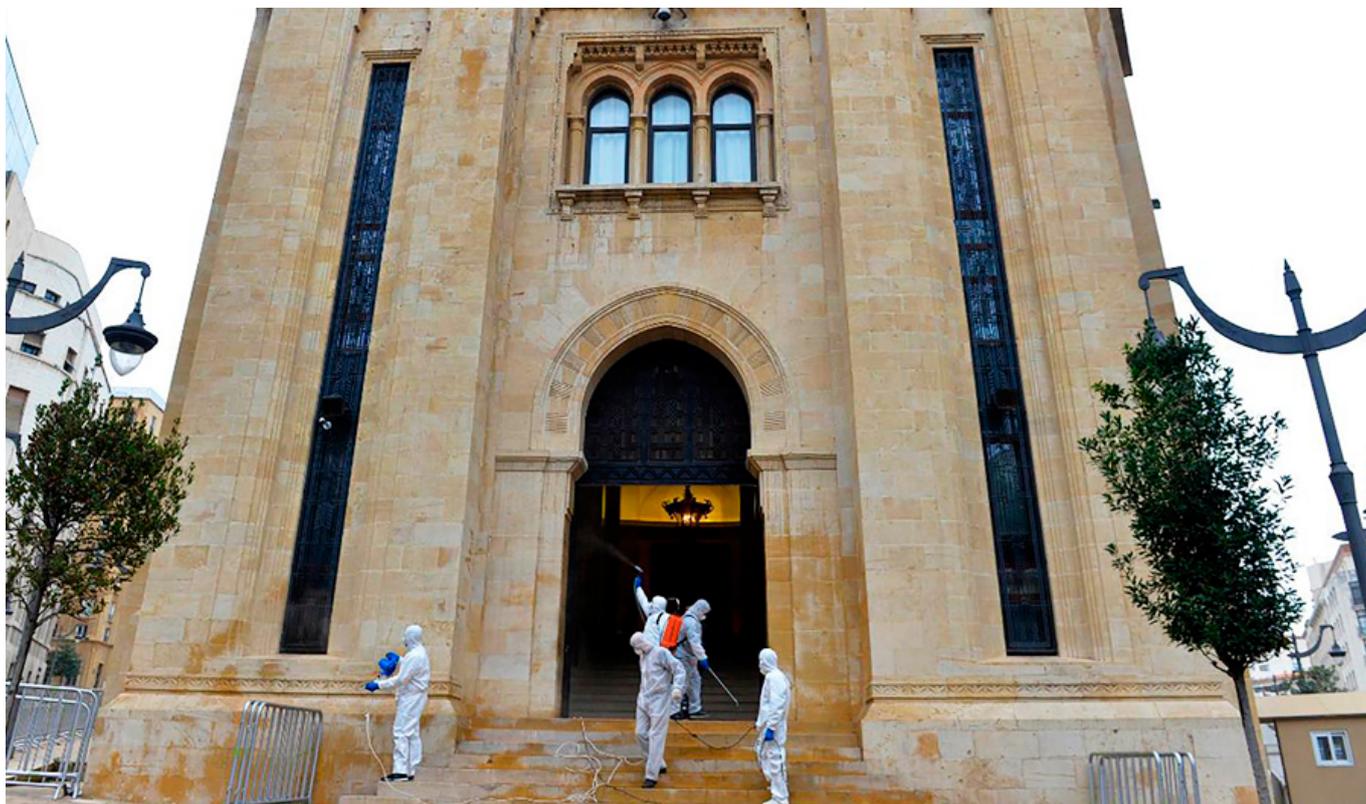
In a statement, the presidency said it hopes the judicial investigation will "clarify the full truth about the explosion, its circumstances and those responsible at all levels."

The massive blast killed 191 people, injured more than 6,000, left nearly 300,000 homeless and devastated large areas of the capital. Up to five people are still believed to be missing.

A total of 19 people, mainly customs and port officials, have been detained as part of the investigation.

The search for possible survivors in a residential building destroyed by the explosion in Mar Mikhael street was called off on Saturday after no bodies were found.

Engineer Riyad Al-Asaad, a contractor who joined the search, said: "The Chilean volunteer rescue team reached the same conclusion after three days of searching and removing debris by hand: There are no survivors or bodies."



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Lebanon's army finds 4 tonnes of explosive material near Beirut port

[Egypt's new administrative capital will be center of Middle East, says official](#)

Sun, 2020-09-06 22:12

CAIRO: The start of the second phase of Egypt's New Administrative Capital is underway, its chairman has said.

Maj. Gen. Ahmed Zaki Abdeen, chairman of the New Administrative Capital Company also said there are also plans to implement new proposals in an area of 47,000 feddans (48,778 acres).

Abdeen said the focus is now on attracting international brands in fields such as electronics, computing and electronic services. Different sectors in the capital will be divided into smaller "cities."

He said the capital is communicating with major international companies like Microsoft and Amazon for the project.

Abdeen said there will be fewer residential neighborhoods in this phase compared with the first phase. The third phase of the new capital will be built on an area of 90,000 feddans (93,405 acres).

He said that the new presidential district, government district and headquarters of the House of Representatives will be completed by the end of the year, and that the presidential neighborhood will be ready to receive the Egyptian leader.

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi has said he will exercise his duties from the new headquarters after June 2021. The government also plans to move to the government district at the same time.

FASTFACT

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi is likely to exercise his duties from the new headquarters after June 2021.

Abdeen added that the rest of the residential neighborhoods are between 70 and 80 percent complete. There are growing expectations that within three to four years, the capital will have seen a huge influx of new residents.

Abdeen said that total investment in the first phase of the project ranged from 700 to 800 billion Egyptian pounds (\$44.2 to \$50.2 billion) and did not cost the state any money.

“We are hoping to transform the New Administrative Capital into the capital of the Middle East,” he said.

This project is designed to boost Egypt’s economy. He said the New Administrative Capital is a smart city that will feature the latest technology.

Abdeen added that services in the capital will be accessible using a unified main card. Those who live in the capital can obtain services using the card, as well as buy products and transportation, removing the need for cash.

He said that services are controlled through a central control and operation center operated on a fiber network. The capital is secured by a camera system linked to satellites, the security control center and signaling systems. Accidents and fires can be dealt with rapidly through the system, Abdeen added.



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Egypt to announce major archaeological discovery in Saqqara
Egypt sends aid to 30 African countries

[Egypt to announce major archaeological discovery in Saqqara](#)

Author:

Sun, 2020-09-06 21:30

CAIRO: Egypt is preparing to announce its largest archaeological discovery in recent memory, which includes wooden and gold coffins, with much of their original colour preserved.

Sources at the Egyptian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities said that the Supreme Council of Antiquities working in the Saqqara archaeological area discovered a new major archaeological cache.

The discovery includes human and animal burials, a group of shabti statues and statues of the gods Isis, Nephthys and Horus, in addition to masks and canopic vessels that belong to the late age.

Sources told local websites that about 50 coffins had been discovered so far, but that number is expected to double during the excavations.

None of the coffins are thought to belong to important historical figures, and work continues on identifying who was buried in the coffins.

The sources said that the discovery would be announced during the next few days.

The archaeological area of Saqqara, an ancient burial ground in the governorate of Giza, has witnessed many archaeological discoveries in recent years. The most important of these was the discovery of the Tomb of Wahty and the sacred cache of animals and birds, in which a large number of animal mummies were found.

Sources revealed to Al-Watan, the local newspaper, that the discovery of the animal cemetery, which began in April 2018, continued till April 2020. It was on World Heritage Day, April 18 this year that a well measuring about 120 x 90 cm and a depth of about 11 meters was discovered.

Towards the end of 2019 the Egyptian archaeological mission working in the region discovered a cache of mummies of animals and sacred birds, including five mummies of large cats, which preliminary studies suggested could be small lions.

International news agencies circulated the discovery, saying that the animals resembled the Sphinx.



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