

# Algerian president, 75, self isolates as pandemic spreads

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ALGIERS: Algeria's 75-year-old President Abdelmadjid Tebboune is self isolating because some officials in "upper ranks of the government" are sick with COVID-19, he said in a Tweet on Saturday.

Tebboune took office in December in an election that came amidst months of mass protests which forced his predecessor Abdelaziz Bouteflika from power after 20 years.

"I assure you, my brothers and sisters, that I am well and healthy and that I continue my work," he said, saying his decision was taken on the advice of medical staff.

The global pandemic struck Algeria's economy as it faced long-term challenges posed by the decline of the oil and gas revenues that finance its historically lavish state spending.

So far, Algeria has officially confirmed more than 55,000 cases of the coronavirus with nearly 2,000 deaths.

Though the pandemic forced an end to the weekly mass protest marches through Algiers and other cities that lasted for more than a year, the political challenges remain.

Tebboune has pushed for changes to Algeria's referendum to limit presidential terms while expanding the powers of the parliament and judiciary.

However, many people in the leaderless protest movement believe their core goals of replacing the old ruling elite and forcing the army to stay out of politics remain unmet.

Algerians will vote in a referendum on the new constitution on Nov. 1, with Tebboune and the country's powerful army generals seeking a high turnout in order to turn a page on the protests.



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Algerian actresses call foul on femicide Algeria confirms Tebboune as new president, despite protests

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## [Algerian actresses call on femicide](#)

Sat, 2020-10-24 01:34

TUNIS: Algerian actresses angered by murders and violence targeting women have launched a campaign to fight the phenomenon – but not everyone has welcomed their initiative.

After the gruesome rape, torture and murder of a 19-year-old woman sparked angry demonstrations earlier this month and calls for a return to capital punishment, 22 actresses published a photo of themselves dressed in black. “We, Algerian actresses, unite today to say enough to violence and killings of women. We are calling for more awareness and a general mobilization to stop this violence,” said a statement by the women, many of them household names in Algeria.

The North African country, like its neighbors Tunisia and Morocco, does not

publish official nationwide figures on murders of women. But campaign group Femicides Algeria recorded 75 such killings in 2019, with a further 41 so far this year. The group says the actual figure is much higher. And while the government last year registered some 7,000 complaints of violence against women, activists say it has done little in response – prompting the actresses to launch their own initiative. “This campaign is aimed at everyone, men and women. It’s not to accuse Algerian men but to make everyone responsible,” said Salima Abada, a popular actress in the North African country who is among those involved. She said it was already having an impact.

## **NUMBER**

**75 women were murdered in 2019 with a further 41 so far this year, according to the campaign group Femicides Algeria.**

“There’s debate, anger, people are fed up – but it’s already a beginning,” she said. But a video of one of the actresses has already triggered a bitter backlash on social media.

Mounia Benfeghoul published a video on Instagram early this month following the news of the grim killing of the 19-year-old, identified as Chaima. In an angry monologue, Benfeghoul slammed people who had made excuses for the killer: “There are no excuses for rapists! It was a rape! She didn’t consent!”

Well-known as a TV presenter, Benfeghoul said she was against the death penalty – but favored castrating sex offenders. She also criticized a culture of street harassment and called for children to be provided with “a good example.”

Her outburst set loose a wave of insults on social media, with men mocking her dress, calling her a “whore” and one man publishing a video in which he threatened her with physical violence.

Those reactions were simply “because she’s a woman,” said Abdellah Benadouda, founder of the US-based Radio Corona Internationale.

“She said nothing new. She confirmed what we already know: That taboos in Algerian society are at the source of the silence around rape, incest and paedophilia,” he wrote on Facebook. “The truth hurts.”



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US drone strike kills 14 militants in NW Syria Two-decade court battle over West Bank area nears end

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## [US drone strike kills 14 militants in NW Syria](#)

Sat, 2020-10-24 01:18

BEIRUT: The US Army said Thursday it carried out a drone strike against Al-Qaeda leaders in northwest Syria near the border, killing 14 militants, according to a war monitor.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) said the casualties included five foreigners and six commanders.

“US Forces conducted a strike against a group of Al-Qaeda in (AQ-S) senior leaders meeting near Idlib, Syria,” said Major Beth Riordan, the spokeswoman for United States Central Command (CENTCOM).

“The removal of these AQ-S leaders will disrupt the terrorist organization’s ability to further plot and carry out global attacks threatening US citizens, our partners and innocent civilians,” Riordan said in a statement.

She did not specify the number of deaths from the strike.

According to the SOHR, a British-based NGO, the strike targeted a dinner

meeting of militants in the village of Jakara in the area of Salqin. The strike hit in Syria's last major rebel bastion of Idlib, which is dominated by the Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS) group led a former Al-Qaeda affiliate, but other jihadist groups are also present in the area. Observatory chief Rami Abdel Rahman said that five non-Syrian jihadists were among those killed, but their nationalities were not immediately known. Among the six Syrian leaders killed, two were from HTS, he said.

## **SPEEDREAD**

**The strike hit in Syria's last major rebel bastion of Idlib, which is dominated by the Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS) group led a former Al-Qaeda affiliate.**

Ebaa, the media mouthpiece of HTS, said a strike targeted a "tent belonging to one of the dignitaries" in Jakara, killing several people.

A US-led coalition is present in the east of the country, where its airstrikes have backed Kurdish-led forces battling the Daesh group.

Thursday's strike came after it emerged that the 18-year-old who killed a school teacher in France last week for showing cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad in class had been in contact with a Russian-speaking jihadist in Syria.

But the source close to the case said the identity of the Russian-speaking jihadist was not yet known.

After a string of military victories backed by key ally Russia, the Syrian government has regained control of around 70 percent of the country, the Observatory says.

Syria's war has killed more than 380,000 people and displaced millions from their homes since starting in 2011 with the repression of anti-government protests.

Israel has carried out hundreds of strikes in the war-torn country, but these tend to target Iranian and Lebanese Hezbollah forces as well as government troops.



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Two-decade court battle over West Bank area nears end Organization of Islamic Cooperation body urges to end Israeli prison violations

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## [Two-decade court battle over West Bank area nears end](#)

Author:

Sat, 2020-10-24 01:12

KHIRBET AL-MAJAZ, PALESTINE: Khirbet Al-Majaz, a patch of desert at the end of a long, dusty trail in the West Bank, may not look like an area at the center of a two-decade court battle.

But after years of legal wrangling, the Palestinian Bedouins perched there on a rocky hill may be facing final expulsion if Israel's High Court accepts army efforts to declare the area a training site.

Israel's army, which has occupied the West Bank since the 1967 Six-Day War, has no base in Khirbet Al-Majaz, but herds of goats were seen grazing there during a visit by diplomats earlier this week.

In the early 1980s, the army declared the 3,000-hectare territory known as Masafer Yatta at the southern end of the West Bank a restricted military area

– calling it “Firing Zone 918” – and claiming it was uninhabited. The roughly 1,000 Bedouins who live there say Masafer Yatta was their people’s home long before Israeli soldiers set foot in the West Bank. The head of the Israeli anti-occupation NGO B’Tselem, Hagai El-Ad, said: “Declaring the area a firing zone was the excuse. Cleansing the territory of Palestinians is the goal.”

The Bedouin residents of Masafer Yatta, who live across 12 isolated hamlets including Khirbet Al-Majaz, were first kicked out in 1999. The following year, the Association for Civil Rights in Israel helped some 200 families challenge their expulsion in court. They secured a temporary reprieve that remains in force, which allowed the Palestinians to stay on the land until a final resolution of the case. Israel’s High Court is set to make a final ruling in the coming months. The Bedouins, barred from building permanent structures in the area, live in makeshift shelters and are in “constant fear of being uprooted,” said Nidal Younes, head of the local community council.

## **HIGHLIGHT**

**The roughly 1,000 Bedouins who live there say Masafer Yatta was their people’s home long before Israeli soldiers set foot in the West Bank.**

Since the last court hearing in August, “the army has come more often, threatening to tear down our shelters and remove the residents,” he said. Across much of the occupied West Bank, Palestinians are prevented from building structures without Israeli military permits. Permits are typically refused and structures without authorization are often demolished.

On a hill opposite Khirbet Al-Majaz lies the community’s school, a four-building campus made mostly of corrugated iron. The head of the school, Jad Nawajah, said it was “facing serious difficulties.”

He said the Israeli army had blocked the installation of “electricity and water networks and the maintenance of the road” that leads to the school. The army has issued demolition orders for its cistern and toilets. The EU representative in Jerusalem, Sven Kuhn Von Burgsdorff, who led the diplomatic visit, said the bloc “will continue to help this community, out of moral responsibility and humanitarian imperative.”

Israel’s army told AFP that Firing Zone 918 is a “central training area.” Live fire drills are prevented so long as the High Court’s temporary injunction of 2000 remains in force, but the army said other exercises take place.

“Over the years, the closure order was violated by Palestinian residents, who began building illegally in this area, which significantly impaired the IDF’s ability to conduct training,” an army spokesman further said. But the Israeli organization Kerem Navot, which researches West Bank land seizures, said 18 percent of the occupied territory has been classified as a “shooting zone,” but only 20 percent of that designated land is actually used for military training.

Earlier this year, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict research institute Akevot unveiled a document from 1981 in which then agriculture minister and future prime minister, Ariel Sharon, proposed to set up the firing zone. Sharon, in the document, is quoted as saying he wanted to give the army "extra training zones," describing these sectors as "vital" to Israel. Resident Oum Awad, who wore a parchment skin and walked with a hobble, insisted to visitors that Masafer Yatta was her home, regardless of Israeli army classifications. Even if Israel deprives her of "the most basic things ... we don't want to leave our land," she said.



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Organization of Islamic Cooperation body urges to end Israeli prison violations  
Israel 'will not oppose' advanced US arms sales to UAE

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**[UNWTO's Basmah Al-Mayman is helping open up the Middle East to the world](#)**

Fri, 2020-10-23 23:13

RIYADH: With almost 19 years' experience in the tourism industry, Basmah Al-Mayman is a pioneer in her field. The first Gulf Arab national to represent the UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) at a regional level looks to the sector's future in the Middle East with optimism.

The UNWTO's plan to open a regional office in Riyadh – the first outside its global headquarters in Spain – shows there is growing recognition of the MENA region's potential in this lucrative sector, Al-Mayman told Arab News in an exclusive interview.

“Choosing Saudi Arabia for the regional office was a good decision – right beside the largest tourism projects in the world, which are coming up in Saudi Arabia,” she said, referring no doubt to AlUla, Diriyah, Qiddiya, Amaala, the Red Sea Project and NEOM smart city among other developments.

“This is definitely an indicator of how high Saudi Arabia's profile has risen in the UNWTO, besides reflecting the development of tourism as part of the Kingdom's economic diversification plan.

“Tourism's presence in the Vision 2030 agenda and the economic transformation plans reflects the Kingdom's growing presence in world tourism.”

Investments worth \$810 billion are expected to transform Saudi Arabia over the next decade into one of the biggest leisure tourism markets in the world, with the Kingdom's Public Investment Fund and Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage (SCTH) leading the charge.



Basmah Al-Mayman with the Saudi ambassador to Spain in Madrid on Saudi National Day in 2019. (Supplied)

Religious tourism will also continue to attract millions of pilgrims to Saudi Arabia each year for the Hajj and Umrah – which together add an estimated \$12 billion to the Kingdom's GDP per year.

The sector's potential was aptly demonstrated by a surge in domestic tourism during the summer months of 2020, when coronavirus measures caused a steep decline in foreign travel. Domestic travel increased 31 percent this year compared with the previous 12 months, and local flights had to be augmented to cope with the demand.

As a result, the Kingdom's hidden gems, like the island-dotted Umluj coast, the southern mountains of Abha and the scenic province of Asir, known for its breathtaking scenery and its year-round cool climate, are now squarely back on the tourist map.



Basmah Al-Mayman with the UNWTO Secretary General during his last visit to Aseer. (Supplied)

From her base in the Spanish capital Madrid, where she has served as Middle East regional director since 2018, Al-Mayman has devoted her entire career to developing the tourism industry – long before Saudi Arabia began opening up to the world.

“Saudi tourism and I both started out together,” she said. “I was very young when I joined the Saudi Commission for Tourism (SCTH) when it first started. There wasn’t an official structure for the organization nor was there an industry.” Given that there were very few women in the Saudi tourism industry back then (“actually less than five”), Al-Mayman says she is pleased with the turn it has since taken.

During her time at the SCTH, where she served on the board of directors, Al-Mayman fought hard to get Saudi Arabia’s precious historical architecture, including the awe-inspiring ruins of AlUla and Diriyah, registered as UNESCO World Heritage sites. She recalled these early struggles during a recent meeting of the G20 tourism ministers.

“Having these sites on the G20 table, for me personally, made me realize how far we have come and what we have been through in this industry,” she said.

Al-Mayman embodies much of the spirit that is driving the social changes sweeping Saudi society, including the empowerment of women. She is especially grateful to her mother for supporting her education and helping her realize her full potential.

## **THENUMBER**

### **\$12 billion**

Religious tourism's contribution to KSA GDP per year.

"Ever since I was a child my mom encouraged me to read and she was – God bless her soul – a very good reader and she encouraged me to be my best," she said. "I am the only daughter in the family, but I was not raised as a girl. I was raised the same way my brothers were."

Alluding to the oft-quoted words of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman at the Future Investment Initiative conference in Oct. 2018. – "The Middle East will be the new Europe" – Al-Mayman said: "This is a regional ambition. I am just quoting the leader behind it. It is true. We can see it happening. Even now, during the COVID-19 pandemic, our region is less affected and vulnerable for many reasons."

Al-Mayman's success saw her ranked 13th in Forbes Middle East's 2020 "power list" of 100 businesswomen who are at the top of their game. She was also the only woman included representing tourism in the Arab world. But, as she pointed out, strong women are nothing new in the region.

"If we are speaking of this land, which is today known as Saudi Arabia, in Makkah we have Sayidah Khadijah (the prophet's wife), who had a major role in her society and local economy in Makkah," she said.

"If we go to modern history, when the Kingdom started, Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman, the founder's sister, played a major role in national relations. She represented the founder in many situations, where she would receive international women's delegations coming for Hajj or other reasons.

"Also, we have so many great women in the fields of education and medicine. Saudi women never stopped working, never stopped contributing to their society, and never stopped contributing to their economy. I am just wondering why some countries think the role of Saudi women only started now."



Basmah Al-Mayman with the King of Spain during the last edition of FITUR in Madrid in January 2020. (Supplied)

As for the Middle East's tourism industry, Al-Mayman is confident even better days lie ahead. "I am very optimistic about the region," she said. "Many of its countries are moving forward in tourism, moving forward in creating more decent job opportunities for both men and women and for the youth in general."

Saudi Arabia introduced its new e-visa program in Sept. 2019 to help attract foreign tourists, but was forced to suspend the service with the onset of the pandemic. It will resume issuing tourist visas as early as Jan. 2021, Ahmed Al-Khateeb, the Saudi tourism minister, told Bloomberg last month – maybe

even sooner if a vaccine for COVID-19 is found.

Al-Mayman is convinced tourism will bounce back much faster from the blow of coronavirus in the Gulf than in European and other advanced economies. “We are taking this pandemic seriously,” she said. “Therefore, the damage and loss are lower compared to bigger regions because we have much smaller populations and most of the countries in the region also have strong economies.”

Al-Mayman believes it is the responsibility of these wealthier Gulf nations to contribute their skills and knowhow to promote international development. “I am very ambitious and want to see more Arabs and GCC officials have more leading positions within the UN specialized agencies. We are one world, and we serve and help each other,” she said.

“It’s not enough to be a financial contributor. We also have people with talents and good skills who can also help the other regions in this world to make the planet a better place.”

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UNWTO honors Prince Sultan for developing Saudi tourism, national heritage  
UNWTO praises KSA for attaining tourism gains