

Algeria to go the polls on December 12, says interim president

Author:

Sun, 2019-09-15 22:40

ALGIERS: Algeria – whose president Abdelaziz Bouteflika resigned in April following mass protests – is to hold a presidential election on December 12, his interim successor announced Sunday.

“I have decided... that the date of the presidential election will be Thursday, December 12,” said Abdelkader Bensalah, who is precluded from standing himself, in a televised address.

The announcement comes after army chief General Ahmed Gaid Salah, seen as the strongman in Algeria since the fall of Bouteflika, insisted that polls be held by the end of this year, despite ongoing protests demanding the creation of new institutions ahead of any elections.



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Algerian PM to resign, paving way for vote after protracted protests
Algeria army chief wants presidential election in December

Egypt says no 'breakthrough' with Ethiopia over Nile dam

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Sun, 2019-09-15 16:41

CAIRO: Egypt says negotiations over an upstream Nile dam being built by Ethiopia have not led to any "breakthrough."

Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry told reporters that talks over the \$5 billion Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam have stopped for more than a year before restarting in Cairo on Sunday.

The long-running dispute centers on the filling and operation of what will be Africa's largest hydroelectric dam.

Shoukry says he hopes that Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia can agree a timetable to reach a deal over the soon-to-be-completed dam.

Egypt fears the dam could reduce its share of the Nile River which serves as a lifeline for the country's 100 million people. Ethiopian maintains that the dam will help its development.

Shoukry says his country "respects Ethiopia's right to development" but "without affecting Egypt."



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[Pressure grows in US for firm response to Iran after Aramco attacks](#)

Sun, 2019-09-15 19:21

WASHINGTON: An American senator has called for Washington to consider an attack on Iranian oil facilities as pressure grows in the US for a firm response to the Saudi Aramco strikes.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo blamed Iran for the drone attacks on Saturday against the Abqaiq oil processing plant and the Khurais oil field. He also suggested that unlike previous drone and missile attacks on the Kingdom, this one may not have been launched from Yemen by the Iran-backed Houthis. Reports have said that the attack may have originated in Iraq where Iran also holds sway over a large number of powerful militias.

"It is now time for the US to put on the table an attack on Iranian oil refineries if they continue their provocations or increase nuclear enrichment," Lindsey Graham, a Republican senator close to Donald Trump, said on Twitter.

Iran will not stop their misbehavior until the consequences become more real, like attacking their refineries, which will break the regime's back.

– Lindsey Graham (@LindseyGrahamSC) [September 14, 2019](#)

"Iran will not stop their misbehavior until the consequences become more real, like attacking their refineries, which will break the regime's back."

Iran on Sunday denied it was behind the attack, but the Yemeni Houthi militia backed by Tehran, claimed they had launched them.

The White House on Sunday did not rule out a potential meeting between President Donald Trump and Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, even after Washington accused Iran of being behind drone attacks on Saudi oil facilities.



White House adviser Kellyanne Conway said the attacks “did not help” prospects for a meeting between Trump and Iranian President Hassan Rouhani during the United Nations General Assembly this month but she left open the possibility it could happen.

“You’re not helping your case much,” by attacking Saudi Arabia, civilian areas and critical infrastructure that affects global energy markets.” Conway told the Fox News Sunday program.

The Trump administration’s sanctions and “maximum pressure” campaign on Iran over its nuclear and ballistic missile program will continue whether or not the two leaders meet, she added.

The US ramped up pressure on Iran last year after trump withdrew from an international pact to curb Iran’s nuclear program.

Washington has reimposed a tough sanctions regime on Tehran, which it accuses of hiding behind the nuclear deal to advance its missiles program and aggressive foreign policy in the Middle East.

Just spoke to [@SecPompeo](#) about this egregious attack on the security of Saudi Arabia. This was a reckless attempt to damage regional security and disrupt global oil supplies. The UK condemns such behaviour unreservedly.

– Dominic Raab (@DominicRaab) [September 15, 2019](#)

Meanwhile, condemnation of the attacks continued from around the world.

Kuwait’s emir telephoned King Salman on Sunday to express his condemnation of the attack.

Secretary General Antonio Guterres condemned the attack and called upon all parties to exercise maximum restraint to prevent any escalation.

King Salman also received a telephone call from Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas expressing his deep condemnation.

Abbas affirmed that the Palestinian government and people stand with the Kingdom to confront these terrorist acts of aggression.

UK foreign minister Dominic Raab said the attack was a “reckless attempt to damage regional security and disrupt global oil supplies.”

The European Union warned of a “real threat to regional security” in the Middle East.

*With Reuters



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Trump calls Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman after drones attack Saudi Aramco plants
Iraq denies links to drone attack on Saudi oil facilities

[Ethiopia releases Lebanese businessman held since last week](#)

Author:

Sun, 2019-09-15 18:59

BEIRUT: The Lebanese Foreign Ministry says Ethiopia has released a Lebanese businessman who had been detained in the African nation since last week. The ministry said Sunday that Hassan Jaber will head from Ethiopia to the

African nation of Gabon and later will return to Lebanon.

On Friday, the ministry had summoned Ethiopia's charge d'affaires demanding information about Jaber, whom it said was detained in Addis Ababa on Sept. 7. It informed the Ethiopian diplomat that Beirut wants "clear answers" by Monday, otherwise Lebanon would take countermeasures.

Some Lebanese media outlets have speculated that Israel or the United States might have been behind Jaber's arrest.

The ministry did not give any explanation why Jaber was held in Ethiopia.



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Return of Israeli agent to Lebanon angers former Khiam prisonersUS conveys support for Lebanon's stability

Coalition says 'good progress' in north Syria buffer zone, thousands return to government-seized areas

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Sun, 2019-09-15 10:45

TAL ABYAD, Syria: The US-led coalition said Sunday that "good progress" was being made in implementing a buffer zone in northern Syria along the Turkish border.

Turkey and the United States last month agreed on the so-called "security mechanism" to create a buffer between the Turkish border and Syrian areas controlled by the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG).

The YPG led the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in battle against Daesh in Syria, but Ankara views the Kurdish fighters as "terrorists."

The United States and Turkey launched their first joint patrol of the border areas on September 8, but Ankara has accused Washington of stalling in the week since.

A coalition delegation on Sunday met with members of a military council in Tal Abyad, a northern town from which Kurdish forces started withdrawing late last month.

"We are seeing good progress for the initial phase of security mechanism activities," the coalition said in a statement handed out to journalists.

"The coalition and SDF have conducted multiple patrols to identify and remove fortifications to address concerns from Turkey," the statement said.

"Four joint US and Turkish military overflights" by helicopter were also carried out, it said.

Little is known about the buffer zone's size or how it will work, although Ankara has said there would be observation posts and joint patrols.

"We will continue the removal of certain fortifications in the security mechanism area of concern to Turkey," the coalition statement said.

Riad Al-Khamis, a joint head of the Tal Abyad military council, said the SDF had withdrawn from the area, to be replaced by the local forces.

He announced US-Turkish "joint patrols in the coming days to ensure the security of the border and the area."

"They will be joint patrols between the coalition or United States and Turkey in coordination with us, the Tal Abyad military council," he said.

"The coalition has promised to train the military personnel (of the council) – who are from this area – and support them logistically," he told reporters. Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has threatened to go his "own way" if the buffer zone was not set up by the end of September "with our own soldiers."

Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu on Tuesday belittled efforts to create the safe zone as largely "cosmetic."

Syria's Kurds have established a semi-autonomous region in northeastern Syria

during the country's eight-year war.

Erdogan has repeatedly threatened to attack Kurdish-held areas in northern Syria, and the prospect of a US withdrawal after the territorial defeat of Daesh in March again stoked fears of an incursion.

Damascus labelled the first patrol last week as a flagrant "aggression" that seeks to prolong Syria's war.

Turkey has already carried out two cross-border incursions into Syria, the latest of which saw Turkish troops and Ankara's Syrian rebel proxies seize the northwestern enclave of Afrin last year.

Meanwhile, state media reported on Sunday that thousands have returned to their hometowns in northwest Syria after military advances by government loyalist against militants and allied rebels, .

"Thousands of citizens return to their villages and towns of the northern Hama countryside and the southern Idlib countryside," state news agency SANA said.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based monitor, reported "around 3,000 people" going home from other areas under regime control.

Since August 31, a cease-fire announced by regime backer Russia has largely held in northwestern Syria, though the Observatory has reported sporadic bombardment.

SANA said the returns came amid "government efforts to return the displaced to their towns and villages."

The Idlib region of around three million people, many of them displaced by fighting in other areas, is one of the last holdouts of opposition to forces backing Syrian President Bashar Assad.

Moscow announced the cease-fire late last month after four months of deadly violence that displaced 400,000 people, most of whom fled north within the militant-run bastion, according to the United Nations.

Regime forces had chipped away at the southern edges of the militant-run stronghold throughout August, retaking towns and villages in the north of Hama province and the south of Idlib province.

Syria's civil war has killed more than 370,000 people since it started in 2011 with the repression of anti-government protests.

Assad's regime now controls more than 60 percent of the country after notching up a series of victories against rebels and militants with key Russian backing since 2015.

But a large chunk of Idlib, fully administered by Syria's former Al-Qaeda affiliate since January, as well as a Kurdish-held swathe of the oil-rich northeast, remain beyond its reach.





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