

Brother of Algeria's ex-President Bouteflika placed in custody by military judge

Sun, 2019-05-05 19:10

ALGIERS: An Algerian military judge has placed the youngest brother of former President Abdelaziz Bouteflika and two former intelligence chiefs in custody, state TV reported, joining a string of businessmen and officials under investigation over corruption ahead of a presidential election.

Said Bouteflika and the two generals, Athmane Tartag and Mohamed Mediene, were arrested on Saturday, state TV said on Sunday.

The three are under investigation over "harming the army's authority and plotting against state authority," it said, quoting a statement from the prosecutor at the military court of Blida, south of Algiers.

It did not elaborate on the allegations but the news that the three have been detained may go some way to satisfying protesters in Algeria who have demanded a broad overhaul of the political system since President Bouteflika stepped down last month.

TV footage showed the defendants entering the court near a military base, 40 km from Algiers.

Said Bouteflika, who served as a top adviser to the presidency, acted as Algeria's de facto ruler after his brother suffered a stroke in 2013 that left him in a wheelchair.

Mediene had been intelligence chief for 25 years until his dismissal by Bouteflika in 2015.

An Algerian military judge placed in custody the youngest brother of former President Abdelaziz [#Bouteflika](#), Said Bouteflika, and two former intelligence chiefs, state TV reported <https://t.co/UegcuynNd> pic.twitter.com/k7IYmK8GxA

– Arab News (@arabnews) [May 5, 2019](#)

Massive protests calling for a radical change to Bouteflika's government pushed the ailing president to resign on April 2. Demonstrators continue to demand the removal of all those linked to the former administration.

Army chief of staff Ahmed Gaed Salah has promised to rid the country of corrupt politicians, oligarchs and military officials to restore confidence among the people.

Last month he accused Mediene of trying to undermine the transition that is due to end with the presidential election on July 4.

Several businessmen, including the country's richest man, Issad Rebrab, have been placed in custody pending completion of investigations of corruption allegations.

Finance Minister Mohamed Loukal and former Prime Minister Ahmed Ouyhia also

appeared in an Algiers court last week on charges related to “dissipation of public funds.”

Protesters are also seeking the resignation of Prime Minister Nouredine Bedoui and interim president Abdelkader Bensalah, who replaced Bouteflika for 90 days to oversee the election, Bensalah, head of the upper house of parliament, is considered by Algerians as part of the ruling elite that has run the country since independence from France in 1962.



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Said Bouteflika, brother of former Algerian president, two former intelligence chiefs arrested
Bouteflika seeks forgiveness from Algerians

[Warplanes strike hospital in Syria's rebel-held Idlib](#)

Sun, 2019-05-05 18:12

BEIRUT: Warplanes struck a hospital in Syria's northwestern Idlib province on Sunday, knocking it out of service, as government forces continued to bombard the rebel-held region following insurgent attacks last week.

The latest fighting has killed dozens of people and displaced tens of thousands in Idlib and nearby rebel-held areas, who fled to safer regions further north. It's the heaviest fighting in months, and has raised fears the government may launch a wider offensive to retake the country's last major

rebel stronghold.

Attacks on hospitals and clinics in the past have preceded major government offensives on rebel-held areas, including the 2016 attack on rebel-held parts of the northern city of Aleppo and last year's offensive on eastern suburbs of the capital, Damascus.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said Russian warplanes were behind the attack on the main hospital in the rebel-held village of Hass. The opposition-run activist collective Baladi News also reported the airstrike on the hospital, adding that it was not clear if there were casualties.

The Observatory said that since the early hours of Sunday, Russian warplanes carried out more than 50 airstrikes on Idlib and nearby Hama province. It said government and Russia bombardment killed at least six people on Sunday in different rebel-held areas.

Turkey's Defense Ministry meanwhile said that two Turkish soldiers were wounded on Saturday when mortar shells fell near one of their positions in Hama province.

Turkey and Russia, who back opposite sides in Syria's eight-year conflict, brokered a truce in September that averted a government offensive on Idlib. But the truce has been repeatedly violated, and parts of it have yet to be implemented, including the withdrawal of Al-Qaeda-linked militants from the front lines. Two major highways that cut through rebel-held areas were supposed to be reopened before the end of 2018 but remain closed.

The latest fighting erupted on April 30, three days after Al-Qaeda-linked militants launched attacks on the positions of government forces in northern Syria, killing 22 soldiers and pro-government gunmen.

"Any action taken by the Syrian Arab Army is legitimate since there has been no commitment to agreements reached," a Syrian security official was quoted as saying by the government-run Syrian Central Military Media.

Pro-government media said insurgents shelled villages near the front lines, killing one civilian.

State news agency SANA quoted an unnamed Syrian military official as saying that insurgents are preparing to launch an offensive on government-held areas, warning that such an attack "would mark the beginning of their end." Government troops and insurgents have been reinforcing their positions in recent days in a sign that violence is expected to continue as Muslims mark the holy month of Ramadan beginning Monday.



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Turkey, Russia reviewing deployment in Syria's Tel Rifaat region: Turkish VP
Deadly escalation in northwest Syria threatens truce

[Foreign domestic workers in Lebanon protest abuses](#)

Author:

AFP

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Sun, 2019-05-05 13:45

BEIRUT: Hundreds of foreign domestic workers demonstrated in the Lebanese capital Sunday to demand the scrapping of a sponsorship system that they complain leaves them open to abuse from employers. Lebanon hosts more than 250,000 registered domestic workers, the vast majority of them women, from countries including Ethiopia, the Philippines and Sri Lanka.

They are excluded from the labor law, and instead obtain legal residency through their employers' sponsorship under the so-called "kafala" system. The protesters marching in Beirut held up placards reading "No to slavery and yes to justice" and "Stop kafala."

"We want the cancelation of this system. There are employees imprisoned in houses and they need to have days off," Dozossissane, a 29-year-old Ethiopian, told AFP.

Lebanon's labor ministry introduced a standard contract for domestic workers in 2009, but the forms are often written in Arabic, a language many cannot read.

Activists regularly accuse the authorities of failing to take claims of abuse seriously, with maids, nannies and carers left at the mercy of employers. Amnesty International last month urged Lebanon to end what it called the "inherently abusive" migration sponsorship system and change the labor law to offer domestic workers more protection.

A report from the rights group that surveyed 32 domestic workers revealed "alarming patterns of abuse," including physical punishments, humiliating treatment and food deprivation.



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Amnesty urges Lebanon to help end domestic worker abuse
Hong Kong domestic worker fired for cancer awarded damages

Jordanian mayor apologizes for helping Israeli tourists

Sat, 2019-05-04 22:11

A Jordanian mayor apologized on Saturday for his interaction with a group of Israeli tourists, after his hospitality toward them triggered a protest, angry meetings, a social media backlash and a resignation.

Ibrahim Karim Karaki, who is mayor of Karak, organized a day-long tour for the visitors during the Jewish Passover holiday.

He was seen on Israeli media helping them to cross a valley that is closed to tourists. He also fed the group, which included children, and presented them with plaques of appreciation from the city.

His attentiveness angered Karak residents, who viewed it as an act of normalization.

Karaki's apology video, which was posted on the city council's Facebook page, followed social media attacks, the resignation of a council member, angry town hall meetings at the headquarters of professional unions, and a protest after Friday prayers.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Ibrahim Karim Karaki fed tourists and gave them plaques.
- Karaki's apology video followed social media attacks, the resignation of a council member, angry town hall meetings and a protest after Friday prayers.

The mayor can be seen in the apology video denouncing Israeli occupation, calling for the liberation of all of Palestine "from the sea to the river" and a rejection of normalization in all its forms.

The video is also full of praise for Jordan, including strong support for King Abdullah and the Hashemite custodianship of Jerusalem. It was filmed in front of a model of Al-Aqsa mosque.

Dr. Khaled Baqaen, the council member who resigned in protest at Karaki's actions, said the apology was not enough and that he would not change his mind. He even called for the mayor to be pushed out.

"The tourists were on a mistaken path," he told Arab News. "Fine, have the proper authorities help them and send them back. Why give them the public plaque to honor what they did? Those who elected him should remove him.

The plaques cost money. How did he decide on giving the plaques to the

Israelis? What are the criteria that were considered before agreeing to order and give the plaques using city money? I did what I believe is correct. I took my position after the Zionist media celebrated the event. I will not withdraw my resignation even if the people of Karak accepted his apology, which they have.”

The resignation and protests may have prompted the mayor to rethink what he did, but the social media onslaught would have been a little harder to stomach for a mayor who courted the youth vote.

Zaid Nabulsi, a lawyer and social media commentator, said the mayor had crossed a line. “There is no problem in helping the tourists whatever their nationality was,” he told Arab News. “But the mayor went way beyond the humanitarian part and into the political sphere. Unilaterally presenting plaques in the name of the city of Karak to the tourists who had entered an area that they are not even supposed to have entered makes no sense. The mayor thinks he can whitewash what he did with a few words. People today are well aware of things and you can’t simply fool them with words that he most likely doesn’t even believe in.”

Arab News attempted to contact Karaki but he did not return the calls.

Karak is home to one of the region’s biggest Crusader castles. It is home to around 170,000 people.



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Jordan condemns Israeli trespassing at Al-Aqsa Mosque Israel farmers fear for future as Jordan claims back lands

[3 Turkish soldiers killed in mortar attack from Iraq](#)

Author:

Sat, 2019-05-04 21:58

ISTANBUL, ANKARA : Three Turkish soldiers died on Saturday in a mortar attack by Kurdish militants launched from Iraqi territory, the Turkish Defense Ministry said.

“Three of our brothers in arms died as martyrs after mortar fire from northern Iraq by terrorists,” the ministry said, in reference to the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK).

A fourth soldier was wounded, it said in a statement. The attack took place in a region where Turkey carried out a cross-border operation dubbed Euphrates Shield in 2016, aiming to drive Daesh militants and the People’s Protection Units (YPG) from its border with Syria, the ministry said.

The army had retaliated with artillery fire but gave no further details on the whereabouts of the attack, it said.

Fighting insurgency

The attack targeted a military base in the border province of Hakkari, according to the ministry.

The Turkish Army had responded with aerial bombardments and artillery fire. The PKK, branded a terrorist group by Turkey, the US and the EU, has waged an insurgency against the Turkish state since 1984. The conflict has claimed more than 40,000 lives, the ministry added.

The PKK’s deployment in northern Iraq has been a constant source of tension between Baghdad and Ankara, with Turkey pressing Iraq to play a bigger role in fighting the group.

The Defense Ministry also said that another Turkish soldier had been killed on Saturday in northern Syria by the YPG, a Kurdish militia closely allied with the PKK.

Unlike the PKK, however, the YPG has the backing of Western powers in its fight against Daesh.

Turkish forces shelled YPG positions in the Tel Rifaat region earlier this year, saying this was in response to YPG fire.

Tel Rifaat is controlled by Kurdish-led forces and is located some 20 km east of Afrin, which has been under the control of Turkey and its Free Syrian Army (FSA) allies since an operation last year to drive out the YPG.

Turkey, which has long been one of the main backers of opposition groups fighting against Syria's Bashar Assad, has conducted patrols with Russia, one of Assad's main allies, in northern areas under agreements reached last year.

In March, the Defense Ministry said Turkish and Russian forces carried out the first "independent and coordinated" patrols in Tel Rifaat.



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Turkish operation on Kurdish rebels in Iraq is matter of timing: ministerIran denies joint raid with Turkey against Kurd rebels