

Palestinians see little hope in Israeli elections

Author:

Mon, 2019-04-01 21:51

RAMALLAH: Tayseer Barakat is like many Palestinians when asked about the upcoming Israeli elections. He doesn't see much hope.

"We have learned from past experience that we are always the victims of Israeli elections, and it doesn't seem there will be anything new," said 58-year-old Barakat.

"It is more than likely there will be no meaningful changes, despite our hopes that there will be something new to change the situation," he added as he walked with bags of groceries in Ramallah in the occupied West Bank.

Israel's upcoming elections could have a direct effect on the Palestinians, but many have little interest in who wins, having lost hope its more than 50-year occupation will end no matter which party is in charge.

Some who do express concern say they are worried the campaign could lead to an uptick in incitement against Palestinians.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's current coalition is considered the most right-wing in Israel's history and includes prominent members who rule out a Palestinian state while seeking aggressive settlement expansion. Some call for annexing large parts of the West Bank. Peace talks have been frozen since 2014.

The Ramallah-based Palestinian Authority has previously made a freeze on settlement building a prerequisite to re-entering peace talks. At the beginning of the election campaign it was widely assumed Netanyahu would win, despite being dogged by corruption allegations.

But former military chief Benny Gantz has emerged as a serious challenger, with polls showing his centrist Blue and White alliance slightly ahead of Netanyahu's Likud.

Under those polls, Gantz would still fall far short of an outright majority and it is unclear whether he could assemble enough parties to form a coalition.

Early in the campaign, Gantz signalled openness to withdrawing settlers from parts of the West Bank. His alliance's platform favors "separation from the Palestinians" but does not mention a two-state solution.

Palestinians initially saw encouraging signs, but Saleh Rafat, a member of the Palestine Liberation Organization's executive committee, said he now believes the policies of Gantz and Netanyahu are similar.

“So far we haven’t seen fundamental differences between the right-wing and the center party,” he said.

“They are proposing a unified Jerusalem and to continue settlement and control over the Jordan Valley.”

Israel seized mainly Palestinian East Jerusalem in the 1967 Six-Day War and considers the entire city its capital. The Palestinians see the city’s eastern sector as the capital of their future state.

Israel occupied the West Bank, including parts of the Jordan Valley, in 1967.

More than 600,000 Israelis live in settlements in East Jerusalem and the West Bank, communities considered illegal under international law.

The international community sees them as one of the largest obstacles to peace, though Israel disputes this while pointing to Palestinian attacks and what it calls incitement to violence.

Hafed Barghouti, a former Palestinian newspaper editor, said relative calm in the West Bank has led to less attention to the conflict in Israeli elections.

Israeli politics have also shifted firmly to the right in recent years.

“There is no Israeli party talking about the Palestinian issue. Those that do talk, do so in the language of a brutal occupation,” he said.

“The right, center and left agree to ignore the Palestinian issue and focus more on the legalization of marijuana.”

Whether to legalize recreational-use marijuana has received unexpected attention in the Israeli campaign.



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Israeli forces kill two Palestinians in Gaza border clashes

[Israeli watchdog finds online manipulation favoring Netanyahu ahead of vote](#)

Author:

AFP

ID:

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Mon, 2019-04-01 16:26

JERUSALEM: An Israeli cyber watchdog said Monday it has uncovered a network of fake online accounts backing Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and

slandering opponents ahead of next week's general election.

In a new report the Big Bots Protect, which describes itself as a campaigner against social media abuse, said posts used "lies, libel and rumormongering" to attack Netanyahu's challengers.

It found over 130,000 tweets from "hundreds of fake or anonymous accounts" without names or profile pictures, which did not identify themselves as linked to Netanyahu's Likud party.

It acknowledged that there were also "hundreds of genuine accounts" backing the premier's bid for re-election.

Among the targets were journalists and public figures considered hostile to Netanyahu including his main challenger, Benny Gantz, leader of the centrist Blue and White party.

The report said they included accusations that Gantz was a "rapist" and others questioning his mental health.

A spokeswoman for Blue and White told AFP that party leaders had filed a complaint against the posts with police.

"There is an attempt to steal the elections, there is a system of lies here," Gantz wrote on Twitter.

"Netanyahu's house of cards is collapsing."

The prime minister went live on Facebook and YouTube to dismiss the report, flanked by what he said was a genuine Likud online supporter.

"A million Likud voters are not 'bots'," he said, adding that Likud was also filing a police complaint against Blue and White for accusing him.

"Not one of them is fake," he said of the messages cited by the Big Bots Protect.

"They have names, they have families," he added. "They have their own opinions, independent people!"

Netanyahu, 69, is seeking a fifth term in office in the April 9 election, despite also facing potential corruption charges.

Blue and White has consistently been scoring better than Likud in opinion polls, although Netanyahu is seen as standing a better chance of putting together a coalition government under Israel's proportional representation electoral system.



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[Algeria's president Bouteflika says he will step down before April 28](#)

Author:

Associated Press

ID:

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Mon, 2019-04-01 17:25

ALGIERS: Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika will step down before his fourth term ends on April 28, a statement issued by his office said on Monday.

The short statement said Bouteflika would take "important steps to ensure the continuity of the functioning of state institutions" after he leaves the

office he'd held since 1999.

Massive weekly protests demanding Bouteflika's departure along with his cadre of loyalists have challenged the political status quo of his two-decade rule. The 82-year-old president has been in public rarely since he suffered a stroke in 2013.

It's unclear if Monday's announcement will satisfy anti-government protesters, who have said they don't just want Bouteflika out, but Algeria's entire power structure overhauled.

The Algerian Constitution calls for the head of the upper house of parliament to act as interim leader for a maximum of 90 days while an election is organized.

Algerian national television reported Sunday night that Bouteflika and Prime Minister Nouredine Bedoui had named a new government after weeks of the mass protests and political tensions in this gas-rich North African country. The new government must stay in place during the transition period.

Ending his presidency amid the protests was a stunning decision for Bouteflika.

His declaration that he was running for a fifth term in a presidential election originally scheduled for April 18 initially fueled the protests. He withdrew and postponed the election in response to growing demonstrations.

The protests have been driven mostly by young Algerians, who make up a growing part of the population. Demonstrators say they think Bouteflika and his generation are out of touch with the contemporary problems of the country's people. Many Algerian youth struggle to find jobs, and desperation has driven some to attempt to migrate to Europe on rickety boats.

Bouteflika has been known as a wily political survivor ever since he fought during the 1950s and 1960s for Algeria's independence from France.

He became foreign minister at the age of 25, and stood up to the likes of Henry Kissinger at the height of the Cold War, when Algeria was tethered to the former Soviet Union.

Bouteflika famously negotiated with the Venezuelan terrorist known as Carlos the Jackal to free oil ministers who were taken hostage in a 1975 attack on OPEC headquarters in Vienna and flown to Algiers.

Most crucially, he helped reconcile Algeria's citizens after a decade of civil war between radical Muslim militants and Algerian security forces left some 200,000 people dead in the 1990s and nearly tore Algeria apart.

During his 20 years in office, age and illness took its toll on the once-charismatic figure. Corruption scandals over infrastructure and hydrocarbon projects have also dogged him for years and tarnished many of his closest associates.

Algeria is Africa's biggest country by land mass and a major natural gas producer, but its energy riches have not trickled down to reach the pockets of its people.

Algeria is also a key partner to the United States and Europe in fighting Islamic extremism. The recent political crisis has caused concern among Western allies.



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A million protesters urge Bouteflika to quit as presidentAlgeria announces new government with 27 members: official

[Brazil opens Israel trade mission in Jerusalem, short of full embassy move](#)

Author:

Reuters

ID:

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Sun, 2019-03-31 15:54

JERUSALEM: Brazil opened a new trade mission to Israel in Jerusalem on Sunday, appearing to edge back from earlier signals it would follow the United States by moving its full embassy to the contested city.

The announcement came during a visit by Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro – an outspoken admirer of President Donald Trump who broke global consensus by recognizing Jerusalem as Israel’s capital in late 2017 and moving the US embassy there last May.

Bolsonaro had suggested in January he would follow suit with the embassy. That could have been a boost for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who hopes to win a fifth term in an election next week.

But Brazilian senior officials later backed away from the idea, for fear of damaging trade ties with Arab countries.

“Brazil decided to create an office in Jerusalem to promote trade, investment, technology and innovation as a part of its embassy in Israel,” the Foreign Ministry in Brasilia said in a statement.

As with most other countries, the Brazilian embassy is in Tel Aviv.

“Obrigado (thanks) for opening a diplomatic office in Jerusalem!” acting Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz tweeted.

Netanyahu has sought to burnish his statecraft and security credentials during the election campaign in the face of a popular centrist challenger, former armed forces chief Benny Gantz.

BOLSONARO: “I LOVE ISRAEL”

Greeting Bolsonaro at Tel Aviv’s Ben Gurion airport, Netanyahu said he and the Brazilian leader would visit Judaism’s Western Wall in Jerusalem.

“I love Israel,” Bolsonaro said in Hebrew at the ceremony.

Brazil has not officially recognized Jerusalem’s as Israel’s capital. Most world powers say the status of the city should only be decided as part of a peace process with the Palestinians.

Israel captured East Jerusalem along with the West Bank and Gaza in the 1967 Middle East war. Palestinians seek to establish a state in the two territories, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Visiting Brazil for the Jan. 1 presidential inauguration, Netanyahu said Bolsonaro had told him that moving the Brazilian embassy in Israel to Jerusalem was a matter of “when, not if.”

But Bolsonaro’s economic team and the country’s powerful farm lobby have advised against relocating the embassy.

In an interview in February, Brazilian Vice President Hamilton Mourao, a retired army general, told Reuters that moving the embassy was a bad idea because it would hurt Brazil’s exports to Arab countries, including an estimated \$5 billion in sales of halal food that comply with Muslim dietary laws.

Separately on Sunday, Israeli Energy Minister Yuval Steinitz said Brazilian state-run oil firm Petrobras would take part in Israel’s latest tender for offshore oil and gas exploration.



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Israel reopens Gaza crossing as mediators push for deal
Rockets from Gaza Strip hit Israel; 4 die at border protest

[Algeria announces new government with 27 members: official](#)

Author:

Reuters

ID:

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Sat, 2019-03-30 18:59

CAIRO: Algeria has announced a new government with 27 members, an official said Sunday.

Algeria's new cabinet will be a caretaker government with Nouredine Bedoui remaining as prime minister, private Ennahar TV reported.

Bedoui was appointed premier on March 11 after his predecessor Ahmed Ouyahia resigned following President Abdelaziz Bouteflika's decision not to run for a fifth term in the face of mass demonstrations.

Algeria's presidency has relieved many ministers of their duties, private Ennahar TV reported on Sunday.

Sabri Boukadoum was appointed as foreign minister, replacing Ramtane Lamamra in the caretaker government, state TV reported.

Tens of thousands have taken to the streets of Algiers for more than a month, saying they have had enough of the allegations of corruption, nepotism and economic mismanagement that have tarnished Bouteflika's 20-year rule.

On Saturday, Algeria's army chief of staff, Lieutenant General Ahmed Gaed Salah, renewed a call for the Constitutional Council to rule whether the ailing 82-year-old Bouteflika is fit to rule, opening up the possibility of a managed exit.

But his attempt to break the political impasse has failed to placate demonstrators, who reject military intervention in civilian matters and want to dismantle the entire ruling elite, which includes veterans of the war of independence against France, army officers, the ruling party and business tycoons.

Several close allies, including some members of the ruling FLN and union leaders, have abandoned Bouteflika, who has rarely appeared in public since suffering a stroke in 2013.

All private Algerian aircrafts are prohibited from departing from and landing in Algeria, a source close to the civil aviation authority and the private Ennahar television station said. It was not clear why the ban had been imposed.

Leading Algerian businessman Ali Haddad, who was part of Bouteflika's inner circle, was arrested at the Tunisian border early on Sunday, a close associate said.

"Yes, Haddad has been arrested," his associate told Reuters on condition of anonymity, without elaborating. Several Algerian television stations broadcast news on the detention of Haddad, a media magnate who helped fund Bouteflika's election campaigns over the years.

Bouteflika announced on March 11 he was dropping plans for a fifth term but stopped short of stepping down immediately and said he would wait for a national conference on political change. That only further enraged protesters.

Two opposition leaders supported the army initiative.

"The merit of this approach is that it responds to a pressing popular demand," Ali Benflis, a former head of the ruling FLN party, said in a party statement. "We are facing a political, constitutional and institutional crisis."

Abderazak Makri, head of an Islamist party, said he was against anything that threatened the stability and unity of the country or undermined the military.



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