

Thousands of Algerians protest against Bouteflika's re-election bid

Author:

Fri, 2019-02-22 19:44

ALGIERS: Thousands of young Algerians took to the streets of the capital on Friday to protest against President Abdelaziz Bouteflika's plans to seek a fifth term and police fired tear gas to disperse the crowds.

The 81-year old, in office since 1999, has said he will contest the April 18 presidential election, despite concerns over his health. He has been seen in public only a handful of times since suffering a stroke in 2013.

"No to Bouteflika and no to Said," a crowd chanted while marching through the center of Algiers. The president's youngest brother Said Bouteflika is a presidential adviser.

Reuters journalists filmed tear gas being fired over a crowd that ran to escape.

"We and the security are brothers," some protesters chanted.

The protest came after mosque preachers had warned in Friday prayers against demonstrating, warning of violence.

Bouteflika's re-election bid comes after the ruling FLN party picked him as its official presidential candidate. Several political parties, trade unions and business organizations have already said they would support his re-election.

He is expected to easily win the vote as the opposition remains weak and divided.

But many young people feel disconnected from an elite made up of veteran fighters from Algeria's 1954-1962 independence war with France.

His re-election would provide short-term stability for the FLN, the army and business tycoons, and postpone a potentially difficult succession.

Bouteflika remains popular with many Algerians, who credit him with ending a long civil war by offering an amnesty to former extremist fighters.

Algeria is a key gas supplier to Europe and an ally of the United States in the fight against Islamist militants in the Sahel region of North Africa.



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Algeria's president Bouteflika says running in April's presidential elections
Algeria's ruling FLN picks Bouteflika as presidential candidate

[UN Yemen envoy: Next negotiation stage depends on success of redeployment in Hodeidah](#)

Fri, 2019-02-22 19:18

LONDON: The next round of negotiations on the Yemen crisis depends on the success of redeployment in Hodeidah, the UN envoy to Yemen Martin Griffiths said Friday.

Griffiths added that he was working hard to overcome all obstacles to releasing Yemeni prisoners, and that slow but steady progress is being made to stop the conflict in Yemen.

The UN envoy added during his appearance on Al Arabiya TV that he was confident that direct negotiations between parties involved in the conflict

would take place, and that it is very important that the first stage of redeployment in Hodeidah is implemented successfully.

He explained that redeployment in Hodeidah includes the withdrawal of Houthi militias from the ports of Ras Issa and Salif, noting that “Yemeni parties want to implement the (Stockholm) agreement, but they need a scheme from the monitoring committee.”

Meanwhile, the coordinator of the panel of experts on Yemen Ahmed Himmiche said that smugglers and fictitious companies are working with the Houthis to transport oil from Iran.

Martin Griffiths told the UN Security Council on Tuesday that Yemen’s government and the Houthi militias have demonstrated that they are able to deliver on commitments they made in December in Stockholm by agreeing on the first phase of redeployment from three key ports.

He said forces will initially be withdrawn from the smaller ports of Salif and Ras Issa, beginning “possibly” on Tuesday or Wednesday. This will be followed by a pullout from the major port of Hodeidah and critical parts of the city that will allow access to the Red Sea Mills, a major UN storage facility holding enough grain to feed 3.7 million people for a month, he said.



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Ports deal is chance for Yemen peace talks, says UN envoy

[Ethnic Tubus fear southern Libya offensive](#)

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Fri, 2019-02-22 03:20

OUBARI: In the southern Libyan city of Oubari, shops are shuttered and tension is palpable, as residents fear an imminent incursion by forces loyal to strongman Khalifa Haftar.

We "dread the repercussions of military operations that are unfolding on the edge of town," said 22-year-old hospital administrator Ali Senoussi, speaking on behalf of his Tubu community.

Many residents in Oubari – some 900 kilometers (560 miles) south of Tripoli – are Tubu.

The ethnic group fears vengeance by Arab communities that have joined an offensive by Haftar's self-styled Libyan National Army (LNA), which is on the outskirts of the city.

Long marginalized, Tubus live in the Tibesti region, which straddles Libya, Chad and Niger, an area long at the mercy of roaming rebel groups, traffickers and extremists.

"We are residents of this region. Our support and love for it is immense," said 22-year-old Senoussi, clothed in a traditional head robe to screen desert sun and wind.

"We cannot accept being involved in wars with Arab tribes that fight alongside Haftar," he insisted, sipping tea in the courtyard of a hospital where he works as an administrator.



Tubus live in the Tibesti region, which straddles Libya, Chad and Niger.

The LNA says it is seeking to purge "terrorist and criminal groups," and some accuse the Tubus of supporting Chadian rebels.

But Senoussi dismisses the offensive as “a threat to the social peace of the whole region.”

Tubu lawmakers even allege that ethnic cleansing is under way.

The community was among the first to join the 2011 uprising that ousted and killed Muammar Qaddafi.

But the former dictator’s downfall by no means improved Tubus’ standing in Libya.

Despite being home to some of the country’s biggest oilfields, the region is regularly hit by shortages of all kinds – petrol, electricity, gas cylinders and even bread.

Prices have rocketed on the black market.

Senoussi said the lack of fuel had forced him to leave his car at home and walk to work.

“Most public sector workers prefer to walk” to avoid long queues that have become a fixture of daily life at gas stations, he said.

The intensified chaos of recent years means that the southern border areas are more than ever a haven for extremists, traffickers and rebels.

These groups exploit a security vacuum that is exacerbated by an ongoing power struggle between a UN-backed Government of National Accord in Tripoli and a rival administration loyal to Haftar in northeastern Libya.

Tribal and ethnic quarrels between the Tubus, Tuaregs and Arab groups over trafficking have added fuel to the fire.

“We are Muslims, but we have a culture and language that we share with our cousins from Chad, Niger and Sudan,” explained Ali Yahyia, a Tubu expert on his community.

But this does not undermine “our support for the Libyan homeland,” he insisted.

The LNA launched its ongoing military campaign in mid-January and on Wednesday night entered Murzuk, another southern Libyan city home to many Tubus.

Renowned for a fortress that dates back more than seven centuries, much of the historic settlement now resembles a ghost town.

Murzuk’s windswept streets are littered with garbage.

Like Oubari, shops are closed and people are scared to circulate.

Even bakers – hit by a lack of flour – cannot raise their blinds.

“The city faces numerous problems at the service level, particularly at the

hospital where we have only one doctor,” deplored municipal councillor Ibrahim Omar.

“With the military operations that are ongoing, the doctors refuse to come, fearing for their lives,” he said.

If the situation persists, “food stocks will in the end be exhausted.”



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Security chief in south Libya town assassinated: ministry

[Palestinians to cut civil servant salaries after Israeli tax freeze](#)

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Thu, 2019-02-21 18:39

RAMALLAH: The Palestinian finance minister on Thursday announced salary cuts for civil servants, days after Israel said it would withhold tens of millions of dollars in tax transfers to the Palestinian Authority.

Israel's security cabinet on Sunday approved the freezing of \$138 million (122 million euros) over the PA's payments to the families of prisoners, or prisoners themselves, jailed for attacks on Israelis.

Israel, which collects taxes on behalf of the PA, says the payments encourage further violence.

The PA claims they are a form of welfare to families who have lost their main breadwinner.

Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas said Wednesday he would not accept anything but full payment of the tax transfers owed by Israel.

The PA, which is already running a deficit, will "pay the salaries of civil servants in time, but they will be reduced", said PA finance minister Shukri Bishara after a meeting with EU representatives in Ramallah.

The cuts will not apply to salaries "paid to pensioners and families of martyrs, wounded or prisoners", he added, adding that wages below 2,000 shekels (\$550) would also not be affected.

Many Palestinians view prisoners and those killed while carrying out attacks as heroes in their conflict with Israel. Palestinian leaders often venerate them as martyrs.

Under a 1994 agreement, Israel collects around \$190 million each month in customs duties levied on goods destined for Palestinian markets that transit through Israeli ports.

The money it then transfers to the PA is the authority's most important source of revenue.

The Palestinians want EU countries to pressure the Israeli government to rescind its decision, said Mahmoud al-Aloul, deputy of Abbas's Fatah party. Palestinian leaders will take steps to "boycott Israeli goods", he said, adding they had already prepared "a list of Israeli products that have local (Palestinian) equivalents".



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[Security chief in south Libya town assassinated: ministry](#)

Author:

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Thu, 2019-02-21 18:08

TRIPOLI: Armed men have murdered a security official in southern Libya, the UN-backed government said Thursday, a day after forces opposed to it said they had entered his town.

The interior ministry of the internationally-recognized unity government branded the murder of General Ibrahim Mohamad Kari, security head in the town of Murzuk, a “cowardly crime” and vowed to bring the culprits to justice.

In a brief statement, it said Kari was killed on Wednesday by “an outlawed armed group,” without giving further details. Authorities “will pursue his murderers and bring them to justice” and “will not remain idle in the face of crimes that threaten the security and stability of the country,” it added.

Libyan media said Kari, a member of the minority Tubu community, was killed when armed men raided his home in Murzuk.

On Wednesday night, forces loyal to Libyan strongman Khalifa Haftar said they had entered and taken control of Murzuk as part of an offensive launched in January.

Haftar’s self-styled Libyan National Army has said the operation is intended to “purge the south of terrorists and criminal groups” including rebels from Chad.

Haftar’s forces have accused Tubu of supporting the Chadian rebels. Murzuk is a stronghold of the Tubus, many of whom are opposed to Haftar’s offensive, and lies in a region where tensions run high between them and Arab tribes, who have largely joined LNA ranks.

Kari’s murder also reflects the many divisions that have divided Libya since the 2011 NATO-backed uprising that toppled and killed longtime dictator Muammar Qaddafi.

The Tripoli-based GNA is locked in a bitter and protracted power struggle with a parallel administration based in the country’s east and backed by Haftar’s LNA.



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