

More than 80 detained in Algiers protest, says rights group

Author:

Sat, 2019-11-23 00:04

ALGIERS: Authorities arrested more than 80 people during a night-time protest in the Algerian capital, a prisoners' rights group said on Friday.

Demonstrators have been protesting against next month's presidential election which they allege aims to cement in power a political elite linked to former President Abdelaziz Bouteflika.

Bouteflika quit in April after popular pressure.

The CNLD prisoners' rights committee said most of those detained in Thursday night's protest were taken to police stations in the suburbs of Algiers.

Hundreds of Algerians had turned out for the second night in a row to voice their anger over the presidential poll set for Dec. 12.

They did so hours after an examining magistrate charged 29 people arrested during a similar protest on Wednesday night with holding an "unauthorized gathering."

Five candidates are to contest next month's election after the ailing Bouteflika, 82, was forced to step down after mass demonstrations in February against his bid for a fifth term.

Algeria has since seen weekly protests demanding major reforms to a political system that has been in place since independence from France in 1962.

On Friday, several hundred people had already gathered in central Algiers hours before the start of the 40th weekly protests, journalists posted on social networks.

Dozens of people have been arrested since the election campaign began last Sunday. Four were sentenced on Monday to 18 months in jail and 14 received suspended terms for disrupting a meeting.

"This is a campaign of repression, not an election campaign," chanted protesters seen in video footage released online by the independent news site TSA.



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Algeria to cap wheat imports in bid to save foreign currency
Algerian court detains former minister over corruption allegations

[Israel faces the uncertainty of post-Netanyahu era](#)

Author:

Fri, 2019-11-22 23:48

AMMAN: It is unclear whether we are witnessing the final chapter of the era of Israel's longest-standing prime minister but his days of glory appear to be over.

Dian Butto, a Palestinian American lawyer and former member of the Palestinian negotiating team, said that the era of Netanyahu as the sole ruler of Israeli politics is certainly over.

Butto, who is teaching international law at Harvard University, said that for the last few years the general thinking in Israel was that "there is no alternative to Netanyahu."

Butto also expected that the demise of Netanyahu would be felt within his Likud party.

"Until recently elections slogans said that Netanyahu and the Likud is good for Israel and that Netanyahu and Trump are in a different league. But with Netanyahu gone politically the Likud party will be shaken to its core."

International war

Mohammed Wattad, a senior analyst working on the Arabs 48 news site in Haifa, said that the days of calling Netanyahu the king of Israel are over, but his disappearance will not be immediate.

"True, the corruption indictment against Netanyahu ends the rule of the King of Israel, but he will continue to hold on to the seat of the prime minister as long as possible."

Wattad said Netanyahu had created an international war within Israeli society by putting into question the very basis of the government's social religious and political existence.

"Some analysts believe that the corruption that Netanyahu represents is much more threatening to Israeli society than the Iranian nuclear threat."

However, Haifa University political science professor Michel Oun believed that it is too early to count Netanyahu out.

Immunity

"He has said he will continue in his position as long as he can and that he is the victim of a coup. I think the legal case will continue for three to four years and unless his immunity is lifted it will be impossible to remove him from his position as a member of Knesset until a judgment is made and enforced."

Johnny Mansour, a Haifa-based historian and political science lecturer at Beit Berl College in Israel, said that Netanyahu will stay in the job and he listed five different scenarios for the future:

- * he resigns and continues as head of a caretaker government
- * 2/3 of the Knesset asks that his immunity be lifted, which is very difficult since he heads a coalition of 55 out of 120 members
- * a coup takes place in the Likud and the party will collapse.
- * a new war breaks possibly in the north and he will stay in power.
- * in the absence of a coalition agreement a third election takes place.



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Israel braces for political fight after Netanyahu indictment
Israel PM Benjamin Netanyahu charged in corruption cases but vows to carry on

[Turkish leaders' war of words over 'secret meetings' claim](#)

Author:

Fri, 2019-11-22 23:38

ANKARA: Claims that a high-ranking member of Turkey's main opposition had been encouraged by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to seek leadership of the party have sparked a war of words between the rival political forces.

A column in Turkey's leading daily Sozcu claimed that the politician from the Republican People's Party (CHP), Turkey's main secular opposition, visited Erdogan in his palace on Nov. 9.

The columnist claimed that Erdogan urged the CHP official to stand for party leadership and promised help if his proposal was accepted.

Despite mounting political gossip, the name of the politician remains a secret.

However, the claims triggered a heated row between the opposition and government with CHP leader Kemal Kilicdaroglu accusing Turkey's president of seeking to splinter the CHP, which remains the government's main electoral rival.

"Erdogan, who speaks about everything, keeps silent on this matter. I'm asking him loud and clearly: Is this story true or false?" Kilicdaroglu said.

But Fahrettin Altun, the president's communications director, denied the claims of a secret meeting, saying that "Erdogan, in his 43 years in politics, has never intervened in the internal affairs of another party."

Gursel Tekin, a leading CHP parliamentarian, believes that no such meeting was held.

"The presidential palace is trying to change the agenda through such artificial allegations. It is baseless," he told Arab News.

"If Kilicdaroglu is aware of such a meeting, he should fire that person. We will never let anyone break up our party."

Tekin described the allegations as a "gossip mechanism" to cover the economic challenges facing the government.

There are 8.5 million unemployed people in Turkey. About 500,000 people in Istanbul could not pay their water bill. These problems are never talked about.

Gursel Tekin, CHP parliamentarian

"There are 8.5 million unemployed people in Turkey. About 500,000 people in Istanbul couldn't pay their water bill. These problems are never talked about. Instead the attention of people is diverted to gossip about who entered the palace," he said.

Many observers believe Turkey's next general election will take place well before the scheduled 2023 date, and such debates are often seen as maneuvers in advance of a poll.

According to a recent survey by Socio-Political Field Research Center, if a general election was held now, only three political parties would pass the electoral threshold: The ruling AKP with 34.6 percent of the vote, CHP with 25 percent, and the pro-Kurdish HDP with 9.2 percent.

In a public address on Friday, Erdogan rejected claims of the meeting and called on Kilicdaroglu to offer proof or resign as CHP leader.

Seren Selvin Korkmaz, co-founder and executive director of the independent

IstanPol Institute in Istanbul, said the dispute of the alleged palace meeting shows the limited capacity of the opposition to set the policy agenda.

“The CHP is notorious for its internal power struggles, so is more prone to this counter-attack by the government or any other opponent,” she told Arab News.

Korkmaz believes the debate is a part of a government tactic that began with the military incursion into northern Syria.

“The government began to gain a psychological advantage that they lost with the municipal elections. The AKP and Erdogan have worked hard to build and sustain a nationalist coalition around the party since 2015,” she said.

She said that the opposition has failed to establish a credible strategic stance against AKP policies.

The decision by Turkey’s previously fragmented opposition parties to join forces behind the CHP was a major factor in AKP’s defeat in key cities such as Istanbul and Ankara in the March local elections.

Meanwhile, the opposition front is expanding with new political parties on the horizon.

Former prime minister Ahmet Davutoglu and one-time economy chief Ali Babacan are expected to form parties by the end of the year in a bid to capture constituencies from the AKP’s electoral base.



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About 100,000 Syrians left Istanbul since early July

Kazakhstan to host Syria talks next month

Author:

Fri, 2019-11-22 23:30

NUR-SULTAN: Kazakhstan will host a fresh round of Syria peace talks sponsored by Russia, Turkey and Iran on Dec. 10-11, Kazakh Foreign Minister Mukhtar Tleuberdi said.

Tleuberdi provided no details about the agenda or participants in the talks.

The war in Syria has killed more than 370,000 people and displaced millions since it erupted in 2011.

The Syrian regime's television reported that opposition rocket fire on the regime-controlled northern Syrian city of Aleppo killed seven civilians and wounded 30.

"Seven civilians were killed and 30 more were wounded by a rocket attack carried out by terrorist groups," the regime broadcaster said, referring to opposition factions in the west of Aleppo province.

A salvo of rockets slammed into five districts of the city including Salaheddin, the regime's media said.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitoring group said that "one rocket fired from western Aleppo hit a car in Salaheddin, killing four occupants."

Extremists of the Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham group (HTS), formerly the Syrian affiliate of Al-Qaeda, operate in western Aleppo province bordering Idlib province to the north where smaller rebel groups are present.

Observatory chief Rami Abdel Rahman said the toll from Thursday's attack could rise because several people were critically wounded.

Government forces retook Aleppo at the end of 2016, but the city still sees sporadic attacks by radical factions.



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Syria talks on fragile Idlib truce begin in Kazakhstan
UN invites US and allies for Syria talks next month

[US sanctions Iran minister over Internet censorship](#)

Fri, 2019-11-22 18:38

WASHINGTON: The US Treasury slapped punitive sanctions on Iran's communications minister, Mohammad Javad Azari Jahromi, Friday after the Tehran regime blocked Internet communications amid violent protests triggered by a petrol price hike.

"We are sanctioning Iran's Minister of Information and Communications Technology for restricting Internet access, including to popular messaging applications that help tens of millions of Iranians stay connected to each other and the outside world," said Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin in a statement.

"Iran's leaders know that a free and open Internet exposes their illegitimacy, so they seek to censor Internet access to quell anti-regime protests," Mnuchin said.

The protests erupted across the country on November 15, after the price of petrol was raised by as much as 200 percent.

Officials have confirmed five deaths, while Amnesty International said that more than 100 demonstrators were believed to have been killed after authorities reportedly used live ammunition to quell the protests, which brought attacks on police stations and petrol stations and some looting of shops.

The Treasury said Azari Jahomi is a former official of the Ministry of Intelligence who has advanced Internet censorship since becoming minister two years ago.

He has "also been involved in surveillance against opposition activists," the Treasury said.

Internet service remained mostly blocked on Friday for a sixth day, with officials and news agencies saying the blackout was gradually being rolled back.

The sanctions would freeze financial assets and property Azari Jahomi has in US jurisdictions and forbid Americans or US businesses, especially banks, from dealing with him.

On Thursday, President Donald Trump accused Iran of blocking the Internet to cover up "death and tragedy" resulting from the protests.

"Iran has become so unstable that the regime has shut down their entire Internet System so that the Great Iranian people cannot talk about the tremendous violence taking place within the country," Trump tweeted.

"They want ZERO transparency, thinking the world will not find out the death and tragedy that the Iranian Regime is causing!" he wrote.



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