

Algeria's FLN narrowly wins local polls

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ALGIERS: Algeria's long-dominant National Liberation Front has narrowly won local elections, preliminary results showed Tuesday, in a vote seen as key in efforts to turn the page on late president Abdelaziz Bouteflika's rule.

The FNL, which led the country's war of independence from France and was for decades its only party, won 5,978 seats nationwide, followed by its traditional ally the Democratic National Rally (RND) with 4,584, electoral board chief Mohamed Charfi said.

Independents came third with 4,430 seats, Charfi told journalists.

Saturday's vote was an important test for President Abdelmadjid Tebboune, elected in a contentious, widely boycotted 2019 ballot months after Bouteflika stepped down under pressure from the army and the Hirak pro-democracy protest movement.

Bouteflika died in September, aged 84.

In November last year, less than 24 percent of the electorate approved amendments to the constitution, while at parliamentary elections in June, voter participation hit a record low of 23 percent.

Saturday saw 36.6 percent turnout for the local elections and 34.8 percent for regional polls, Charfi said.

He had previously rejected any comparison with local ballots under Bouteflika, which were marked by widespread fraud.

The FLN won absolute majorities in 124 out of the country's 1,541 municipalities, but lost majorities in 479 of the 603 it had controlled.

In 552 municipalities it will have to govern alongside its allies, including the RND, which won absolute majorities in 58 city councils.

Opposition veterans the Front of Socialist forces (FFS) won an absolute majority in 47 municipalities, many of them in the restive Kabylie region.



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President faces another test as Algerians vote
Algeria's economy is gradually recovering from COVID-19 and oil shocks, says IMF

[Turkish opposition politician arrested for alleged espionage](#)

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Tue, 2021-11-30 23:23

ANKARA: Turkish authorities have arrested a prominent member of an opposition party over accusations that he engaged in "political and military espionage," Turkey's state-run news agency reported.

Anadolu Agency said late Monday that a court in Ankara ordered Metin Gurcan, a retired army officer and founding member of the opposition Democracy and Progress Party, or DEVA, jailed pending the outcome of a trial.

Gurcan, who wrote articles on Turkish foreign policy and defense issues, last year founded the DEVA party together with its leader, Ali Babacan – a former deputy prime minister who broke away from President Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s ruling party.

The politician and defense analyst is accused of selling alleged secret information to foreign diplomats, according to Hurriyet newspaper and other media reports. Gurcan rejected the accusations during his questioning, the reports said.

A trial date is expected to be set after the court approves a prosecutors’ indictment against Gurcan.

Babacan defended Gurcan in a late night television interview saying the analyst had “no means of accessing confidential information considered to be a state secret because he does not work for the state.”

“(Gurcan’s) studies consist of information compiled from open sources,” Babacan said.



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UAE, Turkey deepen economic ties with investment deals UAE announces \$10 billion fund for investments in Turkey

Macron urges Raisi to respect nuclear obligations 'without delay'

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Tue, 2021-11-30 23:25

PARIS: French President Emmanuel Macron called on his Iranian counterpart, Ebrahim Raisi, to return to fulfilling Tehran's obligations under the 2015 nuclear deal "without delay," Macron's office said, as negotiators seek to revive the accord through talks in Vienna.

During telephone conversations on Monday, Macron urged Raisi to engage in a "constructive manner" with the talks, which resumed this week after a suspension of almost half a year following the election of the hardliner to the Iranian presidency.

European powers are seeking to revive the nuclear deal, more formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. It has been moribund since the US withdrew from the agreement in 2018, prompting Tehran to ramp up nuclear activities as Washington reimposed sanctions.

France's objective is "to see Iran return to full respect for all of its commitments under the JCPOA and that the United States returns to the agreement," the French presidency said.

Macron also "underscored the need for Iran to engage constructively in this direction so that the exchanges allow a swift return to the agreement," it added.

"Iran must return without delay to compliance with all its commitments and obligations ... and quickly resume cooperation that allows the (UN atomic energy) agency to fully carry out its mission," it said.

Iran's top nuclear negotiator, Ali Bagheri, adopted a hard-line approach after just one day of the resumed talks, suggesting that everything discussed during previous rounds of diplomacy could be renegotiated.

Speaking to Iranian state television, he described all that has been discussed so far as merely a "draft."

He added: "Drafts are subject to negotiation. Therefore nothing is agreed on unless everything has been agreed on.

"On that basis, all discussions that took place in the (previous) six rounds (of talks) are summarized and are subject to negotiations. This was admitted by all parties in today's meeting as well."

Bagheri's remarks directly contradicted comments on Monday by EU diplomat

Enrique Mora, who is leading the talks.

“The Iranian delegation represents a new administration in Tehran with new, understandable political sensibilities, but they have accepted that the work done over the six first rounds is a good basis to build our work ahead, so no point in going back,” he said.

Another state TV report highlighted Bagheri in Vienna saying that Iran demands a “guarantee by America not to impose new sanctions” or reimpose previously lifted sanctions.

Mohammed Eslami, Iran’s civilian nuclear chief, reiterated this demand in comments to Iran’s official IRNA news agency.

“The talks (in Vienna) are about the return of the US to the deal and they have to lift all sanctions and this should be in practice and verifiable,” he said.

Raisi’s office said that he urged Macron “to strive with other parties in Vienna to conclude the negotiations and lift the sanctions against Iran.”

Raisi said: “Sending a full team to the talks shows Iran’s serious will in these talks.”

Referring to the US, he added: “Those who have started to violate the nuclear deal must gain the confidence of the other party for the negotiations to proceed in a real and fruitful manner.”



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Iran makes maximalist demands as Vienna nuclear talks open Arab coalition targets Iran Revolutionary Guard experts in Sanaa

[UN agency for Palestinian refugees faces funding crisis](#)

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Tue, 2021-11-30 23:12

AMMAN: The head of the UN agency for Palestinian refugees said Tuesday it was unable to pay its 28,000 employees on time this month because of a major funding crisis, warning of potential cuts in vital services to millions of people amid a global pandemic.

UNRWA runs schools, clinics and food distribution programs for millions of registered Palestinian refugees across the Middle East, mainly the descendants of Palestinians who fled or were driven out of what is now Israel during the 1948 war surrounding its creation.

The 5.7 million refugees mostly live in camps that have been transformed into built-up but often impoverished residential areas in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, east Jerusalem and Gaza, as well as Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. UNRWA head Philippe Lazzarini told reporters in Jordan that the resumption of US support for the agency this year – which had been halted by the Trump administration – was offset by a reduction in funding by other donors.

The agency also went through a management crisis in 2019, when its previous head resigned amid allegations of sexual misconduct, nepotism and other abuses of authority at the agency.

Staff went on strike Monday after being informed last week that salaries would be delayed, but halted the action following mediation, Lazzarini said. “If UNRWA health services are compromised in the middle of a global pandemic, COVID-19 vaccination rollout will come to an end. Maternal and childcare will stop, half a million girls and boys not knowing if they can continue learning, and over two million of the poorest Palestinian refugees will not get cash and food assistance,” he said.

“The humanitarian needs of Palestinian refugees keep increasing while funding to the agency has stagnated since 2013.”

Lazzarini said the agency raised enough donations at a recent conference in Brussels to cover up to 48 percent of its budget in 2022 and 2023. It also generated \$60 million toward a \$100 million shortfall until the end of the

year to keep services running.

"I'm still not yet in a position to say when the November salaries will be paid," he said.

Critics of UNRWA, including Israel, accuse it of perpetuating the 73-year refugee crisis and say host nations should shoulder the burden of absorbing them.

The Palestinians say the refugees and their descendants have a "right of return" to their homes in what is now Israel, a position supported by host countries. Israel rejects that, noting that if such a right were fully implemented it would leave the country with a Palestinian majority.



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Human rights commission calls for end to Israeli occupation of Palestine
UK funding cuts push UN Palestine aid agency 'close to collapse'

[Give Lebanon a break, politicians told](#)

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Tue, 2021-11-30 23:10

BEIRUT: The President of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Charles Arbid launched a campaign entitled "Give Lebanon a Break" on Tuesday to stop political clashes during the month of December.

In a press conference attended by Nayla Tueni, CEO of An-Nahar media group, and prominent figures from the worlds of economics, commerce and tourism, Arbid said: "The Lebanese today are facing a dead end. The political parties are not negotiating with each other, which is an expression of how bad the situation is."

He said that politics was not the art of incitement, accusations of treason, or mobilizing one street against another. "Politics is meant to serve the people."

"ECOSOC is the natural place to express the mood of the people," he said. "Lebanon has really become the republic of perpetual crises and political clashes due to ill practices, and our ambition is to transform it into the republic of solutions."

The press conference was prompted by the governmental paralysis that has prevailed since last October.

"How can we invite expatriates to come and spend the holiday season in this country with their families while political clashes continue?" he asked. "How can we negotiate with the International Monetary Fund while political clashes continue? How can we confront the new strain of the new coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and cooperate to reduce the price of medicines and hospitalization bills while the political clashes continue? How can we reboot the economy, increase wages, combat poverty, curb unemployment and emigration, while the political clashes continue?"

Arbid called for a pause to political clashes during December, so that the Lebanese have chance to catch their breath and political parties can calm down and start searching for solutions away from confrontations.

Arbid addressed the politicians, saying: "Give us just one month."

Tueni said: "We cannot ask anyone about their situation because we already know the answer which is not positive. We fear sending our children to school or going to work. We live in uncertainty."

"This is not the image of Lebanon that we like, the image of loving life and smiling. Let us stick together as Lebanese, so that this month can pass without clashes in the streets, burning tires, nor confessional or sectarian tension. Give Lebanon the break it needs to continue."

Tueni said: "We, the media, will shed light on all positive news, and we might cover a clash or a speech but in a new way. We will shed the light on any violator."

Pierre Ashkar, the head of the Federation of Tourist Syndicates and the head of the Syndicate of Hotel Owners in Lebanon, said that the tourism sector is facing a great depression. "Everybody is working against tourism in Lebanon, which is confirmed by the declarations by politicians and the hostility they showed to the Arabs."

He said: "The sector has been left prey to wolves after a relatively good period during the summer when internal tourism was active. Yet the current situation exhibited a huge decline and 2,000 rooms have been vacant in Beirut hotels since the explosion of Aug. 4."

"Until now no tourism enterprise declared its program for the holiday season, for there is nothing encouraging as the dollar exchange rate is still increasing, there is no electricity, water, nor diesel, and the costs have

become huge for the owners of enterprises, with no political nor economic solution in horizon. So, there are no indications that we will be celebrating this year.”

Ashkar said: “There are 650,000 people who used to travel to Turkey every year but who substituted this with internal tourism due to the high travel costs and health risks.”

While there are no indicators of a possible political silence during holiday season, activists on social media have launched a campaign “#Khallouh Indcom” (Keep him with you), calling on Qatar to keep President Michel Aoun, who was visiting Doha, and not let him back to Lebanon.

Some of them called for “stopping all flights between Lebanon and Qatar,” while an activist tweeted that he is ready to pay for the President’s expenses, and another tweeted “Thank You Qatar.”



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Geagea says delaying vote would condemn Lebanon to ‘slow death’ Lebanon judiciary stands firm despite Hezbollah allegations