

Huge protest in Algeria against December polls

AFP, Algiers

Algerians flooded the streets of the capital Friday to demand the overhaul of the political establishment and reject army-backed calls for presidential polls in December.

The protest came on the eve of a deadline for presidential candidates to register.

Veteran leader Abdelaziz Bouteflika resigned in April under pressure from the street.

Having now entered its ninth month, the mass protest movement "is growing as we near the presidential election," said Said Salhi of the Algerian League for the Defence of Human Rights.

"There are many people on the streets today" who remain steadfast in their demand for regime change, he told AFP.

"It is a real showdown," he added. Activists are demanding sweeping reforms in the oil-rich country before any vote takes place, and say Bouteflika-era figures still in power must not use the presidential poll as an opportunity to appoint his successor.

The Hirak protest movement was formed in February to demand that Bouteflika resign instead of running for a fifth term.

It has demanded transitional institutions to replace Algeria's entire system of government, in place since independence from France in 1962.

Authorities have rejected these demands, but protests continue.

"There will be no vote," read a sign carried by one of the protesters in Algiers.

That message was accompanied by a drawing showing powerful army chief Ahmed Gaid Salah and interim president Abdelkader Bensalah being booted into "the dustbin of history".

Initially polls had been planned for July 4 but they were postponed due to a lack of viable candidates, plunging the country into a constitutional crisis, since Bensalah's mandate expired that month.

So far two presidential hopefuls -- both considered close to the regime -- have registered to run in the race.

They include Azzedine Mihoubi, leader of the Democratic National Rally party (RND), and a minister of culture in three governments under Bouteflika.

Five other candidates have made appointments to register before Saturday's midnight deadline (2300 GMT), according to the National Independent Elections Authority, formed recently to oversee the vote.

Local media reports indicate that they include two Bouteflika era prime ministers, Ali Benflis and Abdelmadjid Tebboune.

Algerians have meanwhile been angered by remarks made by Bensalah and broadcast by the RT television network, in which he "reassured" Russian President Vladimir Putin that the situation in Algeria "is under control".

Footage of the comments has gone viral on social networks with Algerians saying they felt "humiliated" by Bensalah's comments.

It "is shameful and an insult to the intelligence of the Algerian people," one user tweeted.

"When you are president, you do not 'reassure' a foreign country on internal politics... (while) ignoring the millions of Algerians who are protesting for democracy," said another on Twitter.

According to RT, Bensalah met Putin on Thursday on the sidelines of a Russia-Africa summit in Sochi.

"I asked to meet you to reassure you that the situation in Algeria is under control," Bensalah was quoted as telling Putin.

"The media has exaggerated the reality of what is happening in Algeria... although it is true that some elements are out on the streets each week" protesting, he added.

200 more return

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migration programme.

Like earlier instances, officials of the migration programme, with help of Prabashi Kalyan Desk set under the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment, provided the deported workers with immediate assistance like food and drinking water. They also assisted the workers to return home safely, Shariful said.

He said a number of Friday's deportees alleged they were sent back despite having an Iqama (residential permit) in Saudi Arabia.

Such allegations are concerning, Shariful said, adding that the authorities concerned should look into this matter so that migrant workers do not have to face similar uncertainties overseas in the future.

According to Brac Migration Programme, Saudi Arabia deported over 16,000 Bangladeshi migrant workers this year. The number of workers sent back on Friday was the highest in a single day in October.

On October 4, some 120 Bangladeshi workers were deported by Saudi Arabia. Another 130 were sent back the day before.



Members of the UK's Lebanese diaspora community and supporters protest in solidarity with ongoing demonstrations in Lebanon calling for political change in the country, near the Lebanese Embassy, in London, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Judge validates Democrats' bid

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resolution to a vote.

The judge gave the Justice Department until next Wednesday to provide the blacked out material from the Mueller report that was subpoenaed by the House Judiciary Committee.

"The reality is that DOJ and the White House have been openly stonewalling the House's efforts to get information by subpoena and by agreement, and the White House has flatly stated that the Administration will not cooperate with congressional requests for information," the judge wrote, using an acronym for the Justice Department.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi called the ruling "another blow to President Trump's attempt to put himself above the law."

"This critical court ruling affirms Congress's authority to expose the truth for the American people," Pelosi, the top elected Democratic official, said in a statement, adding, "The

President will be held accountable -- because no one is above the law."

The Justice Department had argued that the redacted information could not be disclosed because it contained material from grand jury proceedings that was required to be kept secret, but the judge strongly disagreed.

"DOJ is wrong," Howell said, adding that the committee's need for disclosure of the materials "is greater than the need for continued secrecy."

"Impeachment based on anything less than all relevant evidence would compromise the public's faith in the process," added Howell, a former federal prosecutor appointed to the bench by Trump's Democratic predecessor Barack Obama.

Howell also ruled that the House has undertaken a legal and legitimate impeachment inquiry and criticized efforts by the Justice Department and the committee's ranking Republican Doug Collins to argue that Democrats had not met the legal threshold.

"Blocking access to evidence collected by a grand jury relevant to an impeachment inquiry, as DOJ urges, undermines the House's ability to carry out its constitutional responsibility with due diligence," the judge added.

The Democrats sought access to the redacted materials as part of their effort to build a case for removing Trump from office.

The committee, Howell ruled, "has presented sufficient evidence that its investigation has the preliminary purpose of determining whether to recommend articles (of) impeachment," referring to formal charges that the House could approve that would trigger a trial in the Senate on whether to remove Trump from office.

A Republican resolution introduced in the Senate on Thursday criticized the process that House Democrats are using in the impeachment inquiry. It argued that a resolution is needed to initiate such

an inquiry. The judge disagreed.

"Even in cases of presidential impeachment, a House resolution has never, in fact, been required to begin an impeachment inquiry," the judge wrote.

Kerri Kupec, a Justice Department spokeswoman, said the department is reviewing the decision.

A spokesman for Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell sought to minimize the importance of the judge's comments on an impeachment resolution, saying Republicans had argued that it was "unfair and wrong" but "not unconstitutional" for the House to have failed to pass such a measure.

Mueller submitted his report to US Attorney General William Barr in March after completing a 22-month investigation that detailed Russia's campaign of hacking and propaganda to boost Trump's candidacy in the 2016 election as well as extensive contacts between the Trump campaign and Moscow.

Tensions high after 42 killed

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The storming of provincial headquarters, parliamentarians' workspaces or Hashed offices marks a new phase in the southern rallies but there have been no such incidents so far in the capital.

In Baghdad, a few hundred protesters dug in around the emblematic Tahrir (Liberation) Square yesterday morning despite efforts by riot police to clear them with tear gas.

"It's enough -- theft, looting, gangs, mafias, deep state, whatever. Get out! Let us see a (functioning) state," said one protester, referring to perceived cronyism and corruption in the country.

"We don't want anything, just let us live," he added as puffs of smoke from tear gas rose behind him.

Oil-rich Iraq is OPEC's second-highest producer -- but one in five people live below the poverty line and youth unemployment sits at 25

percent, according to the World Bank.

The staggering rates of joblessness and allegations of corruption sparked the widespread protests on October 1 and the government has struggled to quell public anger by proposing reforms.

Prime Minister Adel Abdel Mahdi has suggested a laundry list of measures, including hiring drives, increased pensions and a cabinet reshuffle.

New education and health ministers were approved by parliament in a session earlier this month, the only time it was able to reach a quorum since protests began.

But protesters seemed unimpressed. "They told young people: 'go home, we'll give you pensions and come up with a solution'. They tricked us," said one of the rare woman protesters on Saturday, her young son at her side.

About 60 percent of Iraq's 40-million-strong population is under

the age of 25.

Protesters have directed some of their anger at the country's top Shia religious authority, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, who is deeply revered among most Iraqis.

Others have been waiting for signal from influential populist cleric Moqtada al-Sadr, who has thrown his weight behind protesters.

On Friday, Sistani urged protesters and security forces to show "restraint", warning of "chaos" if violence resumed.

"Sadr, Sistani -- this is a shame," a protester in Tahrir said yesterday. "We were hit! It's enough," he said, waving a tear gas canister fired earlier by security forces.

Riot police had been trying to keep protesters around Tahrir from reaching the high-security Green Zone across the river, which hosts government offices including parliament.

Speaker Mohammed al-Halbusi

said he had visited Tahrir overnight, but many demonstrators have shunned the participation of mainstream politicians whom they see as trying to co-opt their movement.

A few dozen people in Babylon, south of Baghdad, gathered for a sit-in yesterday despite a curfew.

But in the southern port city of Basra, protesters failed to come out in large numbers after security forces imposed a strict curfew.

In Diwaniyah, too, security forces sealed off roads ahead of planned protests later on Saturday afternoon.

Late Friday, 12 protesters died in Diwaniyah alone while setting fire to the headquarters of the powerful Badr organisation.

"Public anger is directed at them in addition to governorate councils, for they were the obvious face of 'the regime'," wrote Harith Hasan, a senior fellow at the Carnegie Middle East Center.

Rover to hunt for water on Moon

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about 100 days that will be used to create the first global water resource maps of the Moon, the space agency said on Friday.

Scientists consider the lunar poles as promising places to search for water ice, which could be used to provide oxygen for humans to breathe, and hydrogen and oxygen for rocket fuel.

Nasa directly detected the presence of water ice in 2009, when it crashed a rocket into a large crater near the planet's South Pole, and believes that

the Moon has reservoirs that could amount to millions of tons of water ice.

Using scientific instruments including a one-meter drill and a neutron spectrometer system -- apparatus that can detect the presence of hydrogen -- the VIPER will help scientists to understand the location of the water and other resources on the lunar surface and aid in plans to extract it.

"The key to living on the Moon is water -- the same as here on Earth,"

said Daniel Andrews, the project manager of the VIPER mission and director of engineering at Nasa's Ames Research Center in Silicon Valley said in a statement. "Since the confirmation of lunar water-ice ten years ago, the question now is if the Moon could really contain the amount of resources we need to live off-world. This rover will help us answer the many questions we have about where the water is, and how much there is for us to use."

The vehicle, which is due to land

on the lunar surface in December 2022, will collect data on different soil environments on the Moon and map out where else water could be found.

"It's incredibly exciting to have a rover going to the new and unique environment of the South Pole to discover where exactly we can harvest that water," Anthony Colaprete, VIPER's project scientist, said in a statement.

"VIPER will tell us which locations have the highest concentrations and how deep below the surface to go to get access to water," he said.

Let goodness, love prevail

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"Goodness and love must prevail if we are to bring change to the society."

Addressing the event as the chief guest, Prime Minister's International Affairs Adviser Cowher Rizvi said it was the responsibility of the country's majority community to protect the minorities.

He urged all to work under a common umbrella and address common problems together.

Those involved in crimes and unlawful activities want to take the country backwards, he said.

Bishop Paul Sishir Sarker, former moderator of the Church

of Bangladesh, said an individual "enlightened by the message of religion" could bring peace, while one who misunderstood religion could cause destruction.

He said the message people got from religion was important and stressed the need for conveying messages of inter-religious harmony to people of all ages.

The message of religion is to know one's "self" and to not create "communes", said Jinabodhi Bhikku, former general secretary of Bangladesh Bouddha Bhikku Mahasangha.

Lauding the forum's initiative, he said its members had to work from the

grassroots level to reach people who were being misled and misguided, and to help them understand the "true message of religion."

"There is no alternative to harmony if we are to save Bangladesh," he added.

Rana Dasgupta, general secretary of Bangladesh Hindu Buddha Christian Oikya Parishad, said a vested quarter was involved in misinterpreting religion and creating divisions among people.

The countrymen have to stand against those who want to demean religions, he said, adding that only then the country's development

would be sustainable and meaningful.

He demanded that the governing party, as per its election pledge, formulate a law to protect the country's religious minorities and form a separate commission to this end.

Condemning recent mayhem over religious hatred in Bhola, Bangladesh Tarikat Federation Chairman and lawmaker Syed Nazibul Bashar Maizvandy said the government must identify the culprits and ensure their punishment.

Brac University Associate Professor Samia Huq and BIRFPH Co-coordinator Nirmol Rozario, among others, spoke at the event.

UK trucker

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the 2005 London suicide bombings.

A Northern Irish man was also arrested in Dublin on Saturday.

Police initially said the victims -- believed to have arrived on a ferry from the Belgian port of Zeebrugge -- were Chinese, but retracted this and now many are feared to be Vietnamese.

Vietnam's ambassador, Tran Ngoc An, visited police investigating the case on Saturday and also spoke on the phone to British interior minister Priti Patel, the embassy said.

In Vietnam, several families told AFP Saturday that their relatives had gone missing on route to Britain, a prime destination for migrants seeking better lives abroad.

All the families come from impoverished and remote corners of central Vietnam, a hotspot for people willing to embark on dangerous journeys in the hope of striking it rich abroad.

Many are smuggled illegally through Russia or China, often owing tens of thousands of dollars to their traffickers and carrying falsified documents, and end up working off the books on cannabis farms or in nail salons.

"Fell to the ground" - In central Ha Tinh province, the father of 20-year-old Nguyen Dinh Luong said he received a call from a Vietnamese man in the UK this week saying his son had died en route to Britain.

"I fell to the ground when I heard that," Nguyen Dinh Gia said. "It seemed that he was in the truck with the accident, all of them dead." Britain-based community group VietHome said it had received "photos of nearly 20 people reported missing, age 15-45" from Vietnam.

Families of missing Vietnamese migrants on Saturday held vigil and set up makeshift altars in their homes in central Nghe An province, where many of the suspected victims came from, praying for news from missing relatives.

The family of a 26-year-old Vietnamese woman, Pham Thi Tra My, said on Friday they received a chilling text message from her in the hours before she is believed to have died.

"I'm sorry Mom. My path to abroad doesn't succeed. Mom, I love you so much! I'm dying because I can't breathe," she said in the message confirmed by her brother Pham Manh Cuong.

Their home province of Ha Tinh was devastated by a massive fish kill in 2016 when a Taiwanese steel firm dumped toxic waste into the ocean.

Migrants can pay smugglers up to \$40,000 for the dangerous journey, an enormous sum in Vietnam, where the annual per capita income is around \$2,400, according to the World Bank.

"Vulnerable people" - The truck's driver is due in court on Monday.

Among the suspects still in custody is a 38-year-old woman reported to be the registered owner of the truck, and her husband, also 38. They denied any involvement, according to media reports.

"We've got to be realistic. We know that... we have people coming into the country, either being trafficked or as asylum seekers," British police Detective Chief Inspector Martin Pasmore told reporters earlier Saturday.

"It must be clear that criminals -- and that's what we're dealing with, criminals, murderers -- are taking more and more chances with these vulnerable people," he added.

He appealed to the Vietnamese community in Britain for information, saying his force would take no action against anyone here illegally who came forward to claim a friend or relative.

Pasmore said he had discussed with Vietnam's ambassador how to fast-track the process of fingerprint identification and DNA testing, but said identification would take time.

Joy questions

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Buet student Abrar Fahad despite immediate arrest of the suspected killers.

The intention of those who are making it an issue is not to seek justice, but to take an advantage out of it, he added.

Joy said some foreign missions issued statements saying that there was a violation of freedom of expression. "What is the motive?"

The event was organised by Centre for Research and Information, the ruling Awami League's research wing, at a Dhaka hotel recently.

The adviser asked the youths, "Do we want such a submissive government that would work at the whim of the US embassy?... Do we want to lose our independence? Do we want to lose our Joy Bangla?"

He urged young Bangladeshis to become entrepreneurs after completing their studies and create jobs for others.

Earlier in July, Joy in a Facebook post said, "It's no secret that the US Embassy is decidedly anti-Awami League..."

He made the comment after Priya Saha commented on the condition of the religious minority communities in Bangladesh.

Priya Saha had spoken to US President Donald Trump on alleged persecution of religious minorities in Bangladesh.