

International

Head of Algeria's Constitutional Council quits as students protest

Belaiz bows to weeks of anger from protesters

ALGIERS: In yet more upheaval for Algeria since the ousting of long-time leader Abdelaziz Bouteflika, the controversial head of the country's Constitutional Council quit yesterday bowing to weeks of anger from protesters. Tayeb Belaiz's resignation was announced by state television and comes as the council prepares to oversee a presidential election. The 70-year-old is one of the "3B" top figures targeted by demonstrators in mass rallies which prompted the departure of Bouteflika this month.

Prime Minister Noureddine Bedoui and Abdelkader Bensalah - who served as upper house speaker until being appointed interim president after Bouteflika quit - have also faced calls to step down. "We will continue what we have started," said university student Linda, one of thousands taking part in a protest yesterday in central Algiers. Police were massively deployed around the capital's post office building, the focal point of anti-government rallies which first erupted in February. "Free Algeria," chanted protesters, who rallied outside the iconic building.

Despite Bensalah calling a presidential election on July 4, demonstrations have continued as Algerians call for a broader overhaul of the political system. The interim president has defended his appointment, but protesters are demanding regime stalwarts be entirely excluded from any political transition. "We will continue to march until a transitional (authority) led by clean politicians is set up," medical student Mira

Laifa told AFP. "The people want them all to leave," chanted the crowds, in reference to the interim authorities.

Bouteflika adviser

Demonstrators fear that the election will not be free and fair if they are held under the same judicial framework and institutions as those of the Bouteflika regime. The interim president said his appointment was in line with constitutional rules, and pledged to hold a transparent vote.

The constitutional council which Belaiz resigned from plays a key role in elections, vetting candidates and ensuring the regularity of the polls. The outgoing council chief was close to Bouteflika, who was shown handing his resignation letter to Belaiz in footage broadcast by state media last week. The ailing president had on February 10 appointed his adviser Belaiz - who has also served as justice minister - to head the constitutional council for the second time.

The same day Bouteflika announced he would seek a fifth term in polls initially scheduled for April, despite rarely being seen in public since a 2013 stroke. His bid to cling to power sparked mass demonstrations which spread nationwide and ultimately prompted the president to resign on April 2 after two decades in power. Despite Bouteflika's resignation, Algerians have kept up their demonstrations to call for a broad overhaul of the political system. — AFP



ALGIERS: Algerian students take part in a demonstration in the capital Algiers. Thousands of Algerian students chanting 'peaceful' rallied yesterday in the capital as they defiantly faced police officers who barred them from reaching the focal point of weeks of protests. — AFP

News in brief

Sixteen massacred at party

KANO: Sixteen people were killed and 14 were wounded when gunmen opened fire at a party to name a newborn baby, police said yesterday, in the latest violence between farmers and herders in central Nigeria. Those murdered included the parents and the infant, residents said. The attack on Sunday night happened in Nasarawa, a state wracked by long-running violence between settled farmers and semi-nomadic pastoralists who move with their herds. The gunmen opened fire on guests as they celebrated with the family and their newborn baby in Numa village, in the Akwanga area of the state. — AFP

Migrants in refrigerated truck

STRASBOURG: Officials in France have found 21 migrants from Iran and Iraq hiding in a refrigerated truck driving in the east of the country, regional authorities said yesterday. The 10 men, six women and five children were taken in for treatment by medical services, the authorities in the Meuse region said, confirming a report first given by the local newspaper l'Est Républicain. Some of the migrants had previously been given police orders to leave French territory. Such notifications are often issued when asylum applications are rejected, either because conditions were not met or because the migrants entered the European Union via another country that is responsible for determining their status. — AFP

Black man shot by police

MIAMI: Video released on Monday showed the moment a US policeman shot dead a black man who appeared to be following instructions to drop his gun. Officers in the city of Charlotte, North Carolina were ordered by a court to release the bodycam images captured by Wende Kerl, who killed Danquirs Franklin in a Burger King parking lot on March 25. Franklin is seen in the footage squatting in front of an open car door while Kerl and another officer shout: "Drop the gun. Drop it. Drop it now." Franklin's firearm is not visible at first. Then, he moves his right hand to his pocket and appears to take out a gun in order to put it down. — AFP

4 killed in 'targeted' shootings

MONTREAL: Four people were shot dead Monday in three areas of the western Canadian town of Penticton, federal police said, describing the shootings as a "targeted incident." "We have determined four people are deceased at three locations within a four kilometer radius," Superintendent Ted De Jager said in a press conference. A 60-year-old man handed himself in and was detained after police were called over the first two killings late on Monday morning, De Jager said. Investigators then discovered the bodies of two more victims during a search of the suburbs of the city, population around 30,000. — AFP

At least 174 killed in Libya

TRIPOLI: At least 174 people have been killed and 758 wounded in the battle for control over the Libyan capital Tripoli, the World Health Organization said yesterday. Fighting broke out on April 4 when military strongman Khalifa Haftar launched an offensive to take Tripoli, the seat of the UN-backed Government of National Accord (GNA). At least 14 civilians are among those killed and 36 have been wounded, WHO spokesman Tarik Jasarevic told journalists citing local health facilities. "WHO has deployed additional surgical staff to support hospitals receiving trauma cases," the United Nations agency wrote on Twitter. Both pro-government forces and Haftar's self-styled Libyan National Army (LNA) accuse each other of targeting civilians, with each launching daily air raids in addition to clashes on the ground. — AFP

Baltimore: US city stalked by poverty, violence, scandal

BALTIMORE: Baltimore is known as Charm City, but these days, life here is anything but charming. Violence, drugs and corruption have haunted the port city for decades, despite seemingly endless efforts at renewal. Now, an investigation of the possible misdeeds of Democratic Mayor Catherine Pugh has added another layer of despair to the already grimy reputation of this city of 620,000 people. A stroll through the streets of Baltimore reveals both the promise of possibility and the legacy of crime: in some neighborhoods, only a few streets separate condemned buildings from hip hotspots.

For many residents, exasperated by the city's murder rate, hope is fading. Dave Harris, president of the McElderry Park Community Association in East Baltimore, has encouraged his two sons, aged 18 and 25, to leave. Just a few years ago, "the money poured in, we tried to invest and get things done, but the plan did not last," Harris, 48 said. "Change did not happen because things were not built to be sustainable. It is now almost back to the way it was."

His youngest wants to attend university elsewhere - "not too far away but outside," Harris says. Pugh, who has led Baltimore since 2016, is suspected of being paid about \$800,000 for her self-published Healthy Holly books by companies and organizations with close ties to state and local government. The veteran politician has gone on medical leave, but is standing her ground for now even as calls for her to resign have mounted. Last week, the entire city council asked her to step down in a one-paragraph memo.

A tale of two cities

Baltimore-the backdrop for many a television show and film, including the critically acclaimed HBO series "The Wire"-is proud of its picturesque Inner Harbor and its extensive aquarium. But nearly a quarter of its residents live under the poverty line. Once a major steel and manufacturing center, the city lost more than 100,000 industrial jobs from 1950 to 1995.

Baltimore is laboring to bounce back from the 2015 death of Freddie Gray, a 20-something black man who fell into a coma while in police custody and later died. The anger that swept through the African-American

Germany plane crash lands, disrupts traffic

BERLIN: A German government plane crash-landed yesterday, briefly disrupting traffic at Berlin's Schoenefeld airport, in the latest of a series of technical faults to plague the official fleet. No passengers were onboard the Luftwaffe's Global 5000 jet, but the crew was being examined by doctors for injuries, a spokesman for the airforce said.

The aircraft experienced technical problems soon after takeoff and then had serious trouble landing at the Berlin airport. "The aircraft took off from Schoenefeld for a so-called functional flight, which takes place regularly after maintenance work, and during the flight, there was a malfunction, forcing the aircraft to turn back," said the spokesman. "The jet touched the ground with both wings and a controlled landing was no longer possible."

The runway was briefly closed while the plane was towed away, leading to the disruption of dozens of flights. After the incident, Schoenefeld announced at 0730 GMT that flight schedules had been suspended and approaching planes were diverted to Berlin's other airport, Tegel, northwest of the city centre. The airport was open again by 1000 GMT, but Berlin Airport Services tweeted "delays may still occur". The incident is the latest in a string of mishaps suffered by the government's fleet of aircraft in the last months.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel missed the beginning of a G20 summit in Buenos Aires last November as the plane carrying her from Berlin



BALTIMORE: A 'Keep the Dream Alive' mural painting is seen in an alley on a rainy day in the McElderry Park area in Baltimore. — AFP

community, which accounts for two-thirds of Baltimore's population, towards a police force seen as racist and corrupt sparked protests and a night of riots. Since Gray's death, the city has become one of the most deadly in America, with an average of more than 300 murders a year. So far in 2019, The Baltimore Sun has recorded 76 homicides.

'Disgusted'

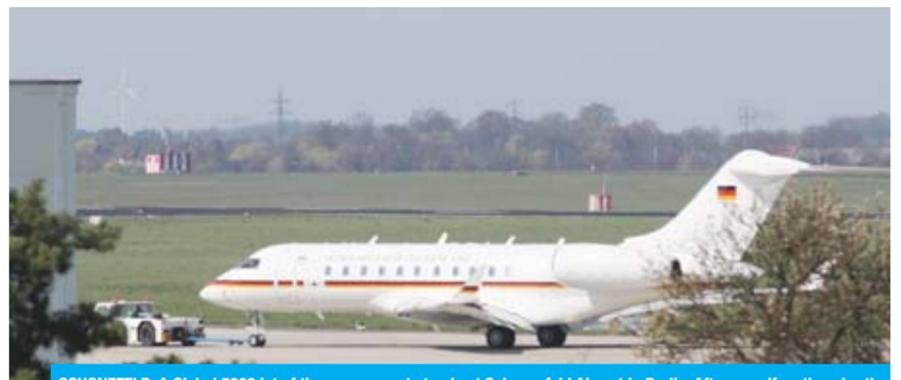
Monique Washington, president of the Edmondson Village Community Association in West Baltimore, can barely contain her anger. "This has to stop. You can't solve your problems through a gun," Washington said. "I'm disgusted. I was once ready to sell my house, but I said no, because if the ones that really care leave, then we will really be through."

Back in East Baltimore, Harris says after Gray's death, "we tried to galvanize the youth, because their needs were not being met-lack of education, jobs, future, lack of everything." But the jobs did not come, and drug dealers reclaimed the streets. Efforts to build police-community ties also faltered, he said, in large part due to the arrival of "officers from different cities who don't understand how the city works." Last year, scandal rocked the city's police force once again when corruption was unearthed in an elite task force that

robbed residents, set up illegal searches and other abuses. In March, the city's former police commissioner was sentenced to nearly a year in federal prison for tax fraud. Seema Iyer, a professor for the Jacob France Institute at the University of Baltimore's Merrick School of Business, says there are "systems in our city that are not working harmoniously." She highlights the torpedoing of a major light rail line and other projects that would have given the city new life. The east-west rail line "would have created jobs, development, increase in population, excitement!" she said. "It was a huge death blow."

Glimmers of hope

Iyer says some community programs begun in McElderry Park in 2014 - street cleaning, after-school tutoring, and workforce training among them-had borne fruit: the area was homicide-free for 500 days in 2015 and 2016, despite the post-Freddie Gray effect. And downtown, the Lexington Market-an institution since 1782 - is a foodie's paradise. "City people are not millionaires-they are poor people," says Fanny Houvardas, who has owned the Market Bakery for 45 years. Her husband Mike adds: "Young people now want two-dollar cookies instead of a pound (of them), a slice of cake and not the whole cake." — AFP



SCHONEFELD: A Global 5000 jet of the government stands at Schoenefeld Airport in Berlin. After a malfunction shortly after take-off, the aircraft was reversed and landed at Berlin-Schoenefeld Airport with major problems. — AFP

encountered electrical problems and was forced to land in Cologne. The "Konrad Adenauer" Airbus A340 was given a complete overhaul following the incident but on its first outing since, on April 1, it blew a tyre on landing in New York with Foreign Minister Heiko Maas on board.

The plane eventually had to be towed to its parking space, but the delay meant that Maas missed his first appointments at the UN. In March, the foreign minister was stranded in Mali due to a hydraulic problem with his Airbus A319's landing gear. The plane woes have also hit other top German officials. At the end of January, President Frank-Walter

Steinmeier was stuck in Ethiopia for similar reasons while Development Minister Gerd Mueller had to cancel a trip to Namibia at the start of the year owing to problems with his plane.

With the Konrad Adenauer back in the repair workshop, Finance Minister Olaf Scholz recently had to fly on a smaller plane, the A321, which required mid-route refueling in Iceland to complete its journey to the United States. In response to the defects, the German government announced last week they are paying 1.2 billion euros (\$1.3 billion) to buy three new Airbus A350s planes, the first of which will be delivered in 2020. — AFP