

Thousands of protesters back in Algeria's streets, demand radical reform

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Former president Abdelaziz Bouteflika's April 2 exit failed to placate many Algerians who want to topple the entire, largely elderly elite that have dominated the country since independence from France in 1962.

Police confront students as they take part in a protest seeking the departure of the ruling elite in Algiers, Algeria April 16, 2019. (Reuters)

Algiers: Thousands of demonstrators returned to Algeria's streets on Friday to press demands for wholesale democratic change well beyond former president Abdelaziz Bouteflika's resignation after six weeks of mass protests, witnesses said.

Parliament named an interim president and a July 4 election date was set in a transition the powerful military endorsed. But Bouteflika's April 2 exit failed to placate many Algerians who want to topple the entire, largely elderly elite that have dominated the country since independence from France in 1962.

Students take part in a protest seeking the departure of the ruling elite in Algiers, Algeria April 16, 2019. (Reuters)

Thousands of protesters gathered anew in city centres around Algeria demanding root-and-branch reforms – including political pluralism and crackdowns on corruption and cronyism, witnesses said, and more were expected after Friday prayers.

On Tuesday, army chief said Lieutenant-General Ahmed Gaed Salah said the military was considering all options to resolve the national political crisis and warned “time is running out”.

It was a hint that the military was losing patience with the popular upheaval shaking Algeria, a major oil and natural-gas exporter and a key security partner for the West against Islamist militants in north and west Africa.

Students carry banners and chant slogans during a demonstration in Algiers, Algeria, Tuesday, April 16, 2019. (AP Photo/Fateh Guidoum)

Salah did not specify what measures the army could take but added: “We have no ambition but to protect our nation.”

The army has so far patiently monitored the mostly peaceful protests that at times swelled to hundreds of thousands of people. It remains the most powerful institution in Algeria, having swayed politics from the shadows for decades.

Protesters want a clean break with “the pouvoir”, or secretive establishment “veterans of the war of independence against France, the ruling National Liberation Front (FLN) party and associated oligarchs” and

sweeping reforms.

- Reuters