

Thousands took to the streets to protest the country's ailing and aging leader, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, who wants a fifth term.

## By The Editorial Board

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You can say this much as President Abdelaziz Bouteflika of Algeria runs for a fifth term next month — he's alive. At least that's what his nation's ambassador to France felt the need to make clear on Monday while the 82-year-old Mr. Bouteflika, who has been essentially out of sight since suffering a stroke in 2013, is being treated in a Geneva hospital.

Unlike old soldiers, he refuses to fade away, but that has plunged his oil- and gas-rich North African state into crisis.

The announcement that the president would run in elections scheduled for April 18 set off weeks of mass protests across Algeria, a relatively rare phenomenon in a country that eluded the wave of Arab Spring protests in 2011. Many people have said the crowds were larger than any antigovernment demonstrations since the 1980s. They grew in size as the days went on.

Mr. Bouteflika's campaign director nonetheless went ahead on Sunday and delivered a truckload of petitions required of candidates. Under Algerian rules, the candidate is supposed to hand the petitions over to the Constitutional Council in person, which Mr. Bouteflika couldn't do from a hospital room in Geneva. That sort of technicality has not bothered his government for some time now. The president is known as "the frame" because he is usually visible to the public only in framed portraits.

ALONG WITH THE PETITIONS, A LETTER TO THE ALGERIAN PEOPLE PURPORTEDLY FROM THE PRESIDENT WAS READ ALOUD ON STATE TELEVISION, PROMISING THAT SHOULD HE BE RE-ELECTED, MR. BOUTEFLIKA WOULD HOLD AN "INCLUSIVE NATIONAL CONFERENCE" TO WRITE A NEW CONSTITUTION FOLLOWED BY A VOTE TO ELECT THE NEXT PRESIDENT, IN WHICH HE WOULD NOT RUN. "I LISTENED AND HEARD THE HEARTFELT CRY OF PROTESTERS AND IN PARTICULAR OF THE THOUSANDS OF YOUTH WHO ASKED ME ABOUT THE FUTURE OF OUR COUNTRY," THE LETTER SAID.

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