
ARMENIA PLANS LEADER ELECTIONS AFTER SHOCK RESIGNATION OF PM

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Armenias opposition secured another victory on Thursday as the countrys parliament said it would hold a special session and new leader elections after weeks of protests and the resignation of its prime minster.

The elections, set for 1 May, are part of a three-step opposition plan for a transition of power that includes electing a peoples prime minister and then holding snap parliamentary elections.

Nikol Pashinyan, the charismatic leader of the opposition who has called for the country to root out corruption and voter fraud, appeared the favourite to be elected prime minister.

Yet allies of Pashinyans said negotiations and vote-whipping were still ongoing within the countrys parliament, where the ruling Republican party holds a majority of seats under the current acting prime minister, Karen Karapetyan.

Pashinyan said he would accept the role of PM if it came without restrictions on his plans to enact elections and a programme of reform.

Some forces are trying to engage us into political bargaining and propose me to become prime minister but ensure and guarantee the continuation of the existing system, he told the Guardian. And for me, my goal isnt to become prime minister. My goal is bring real changes to Armenia.

The Republican party has rapidly been losing support, with a nationalist minority party declaring its support for the street protests in recent days.

Russia, which has deep military and economic ties with Armenia, has engaged in a flurry of diplomacy to deescalate the standoff between the government and the Pashinyan-led opposition, which had shut down large parts of Yerevan, Armenias capital, by holding mass marches through the city.

Moscow has two military bases in the ex-Soviet republic, and the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, spoke to the Armenian president, Armen Sarkissian, by phone on Wednesday.

They agreed that political forces must show restraint and solve the crisis through dialogue, the Kremlin said.

Sergei Lavrov, the Russian foreign minister, held talks in Moscow on Thursday with his Armenian

counterpart, Eduard Nalbandian, Russias foreign ministry said.

Armenias acting vice-premier, Armen Gevorkyan, also met Russian presidential administration officials to discuss the situation, relations between the two countries and preparations for the upcoming summit of the Russia-led economic union.

Pashinyan said on Wednesday he had received assurances from Russian officials that Moscow would not intervene in the crisis, ruling out a scenario similar to Russias intervention in eastern Ukraine. Armenias foreign minister, Edward Nalbandian, was in Moscow on Thursday for talks.

Pashinyan has said the movement has no geopolitical context, and that the revolution that booted out the countrys government was neither pro-western, nor pro-Russian.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/apr/26/armenia-plans-leader-elections-after-shock-resignation-of-pm>

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