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Ivory Coast PM Amadou Gon Coulibaly dies after cabinet meeting

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AFP

| Amadou Gon Coulibaly had just returned from heart treatment in France

Ivory Coast's PM Amadou Gon Coulibaly has died after falling ill at a ministerial meeting.

The 61-year-old had been chosen as the ruling party's candidate for October's presidential election, after Alassane Ouattara said he would not seek a third term in office.

Mr Gon Coulibaly had only just returned from France where he had received two-months' heart treatment.

President Ouattara said the country was in mourning.

He said Mr Gon Coulibaly had become unwell during a weekly cabinet meeting and was taken to hospital where he later died.

"I pay tribute to my younger brother, my son, Amadou Gon Coulibaly, who was for 30 years my closest partner," the president said. "I salute the memory of a statesman of great loyalty, devotion and love for the homeland."

Mr Gon Coulibaly's death creates huge uncertainty over the election.

He had received a heart transplant in 2012 and had travelled to Paris on 2 May for the insertion of a stent.

He returned last Thursday saying: "I am back to take my place by the side of the president, to continue the task of developing and building our country."

Mr Gon Coulibaly was among the favourites to win the presidential election.

An article in Le Monde on Monday quoted one foreign observer as saying: "If Gon Coulibaly were unfit, Ouattara would have no choice but to run as a candidate because there is no plan B.

"This matter has so far remained taboo because the president has clearly shown his willingness to leave and indicated who his choice was to succeed him."

Mr Ouattara's decision in March not to run stunned the country.

At the time, the BBC's James Copnall wrote from the main city, Abidjan, that there was praise from politicians as Mr Ouattara broke the normal mould for the region of trying to remain in power.

- **How Ivory Coast's president stunned West Africa**

Even then it was clear that Mr Gon Coulibaly would be backed as the successor candidate.



Key facts: Alassane Ouattara

Born on New Year's Day in 1948

Member of the Islamic faith

Married French businesswoman

Dominique Folloroux in 1991



PhD in economics and worked for IMF

Sworn in as president on 6 May 2011 after years in opposition

Source: BBC

Mr Ouattara's supporters say he has brought economic growth, stability and a renewed standing for Ivory Coast on the international stage.

But opposition politicians - and many Ivorians - say that the president has not done enough to bring the nation together, and heal the wounds of the bitter conflict that divided Ivory Coast and then brought him to power.

Around 3,000 people are thought to have died in the war sparked by candidate Laurent Gbagbo's refusal to accept he had lost the 2010 elections to Mr Ouattara, before troops loyal to the current president arrested Mr Gbagbo in April 2011.

The long-running political disputes between him, Mr Ouattara and another former president, Henri Konan Bédié, have been disastrous for Ivory Coast.

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