

Women's key role in the Sudan protests that toppled Omar Al-Bashir

Sun, 2019-04-21 20:47

DUBAI: It began with protests over the price of bread. But it was an image of Alaa Salah, a young woman dressed in white, standing on a car with her hand pointing up to the sky, that captured the world's attention as the protests led to the toppling of Omar Al-Bashir.

For some women, the revolution was not just about bread – it was about regaining a feeling of safety inside their homes and fighting a regime that oppressed women.

Ihsan Abdulaziz, speaking from her Khartoum home, remembered the knock at her door. It was members of the security forces. They had come to arrest her.

"They didn't even give me time to pack. I put on my abaya and veil and left with them," she told Arab News, recalling the moment she was snatched away from her family.

Abdulaziz, a leader of the new Sudanese women's movement, was arrested on Jan. 5, 2019. She was held for 58 days without charge or explanation.

She described the conditions of Omdurman women's prison.

"The rooms were overcrowded. One of the cells, meant for solitary confinement, had 5 people inside it."

Abdulaziz said they tried to fit two other women into the room, one of whom was believed to be over 75.

The female guards singled out detainees, treating them disrespectfully and delaying the delivery of medicine.

"Our prison was still better than others," Abdulaziz added.

Abdulaziz, who had been detained on three previous occasions, learned that security forces beat up her son so severely that both his hands were in casts. "Even our kids, those of activists, are targeted."

The associate director of Human Rights Watch's Africa division, Jehanne Henry, said that thousands had been arrested and that women were among those being kept in custody without being charged

But the participation of Sudanese women in demonstrations is not new.

"Sudanese women have always been willing and strong to protest," Henry told Arab News.

Salah's white garment and golden earrings are inspired by the outfits that

Sudanese women wore during revolutions in the 1960s and 1980s.

Women were active in other revolutions too, such as those in 2011 and 2013.

But there are more women taking to Sudan's streets now.

"These protests have a much wider base, the Sudanese Professionals Association has mobilized so many professions," Henry explained.

Women from all classes, interests, occupations and ages took to the streets this time.

"It is no longer limited to politically active women, all the women were out in the street," Abdulaziz said.

Some would even estimate that almost 60 percent of the protesters were women, she added.

A Sudanese architecture graduate, who is living in the UAE, said most of her female friends and relatives participated in the demonstrations and sit-ins.

"Even my older aunts and grandmother took part in the protests, even those who were not politically engaged," Ebaa Elghali told Arab News.

Women were the most disadvantaged group under Bashir's regime which is why they were actively protesting against it, Elghali added.

Human Rights Watch said that public morality laws, implemented by Bashir, targeted women and curtailed their basic freedoms.

In 2009 Sudanese women started a movement as a protest against these laws.

"They are (the laws) dedicated to control the clothes of Sudanese women, many faced unjust treatment because of it," Sudanese activist Tahani Abbas told Arab News.

"Sometimes they say the clothes are indecent, but they never specify how. You could be fully covered and they still won't like it," Abdulaziz explained.

Although the regime claimed to follow Sharia, several Sudanese women said the government was as far removed from Islam as it could be.

Women faced various violations during the protests, such as "beatings and harassment by national security during arrests," Henry said.

Some women were starting to report incidents of sexual harassment and assault, she added.



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[Khamenei appoints new chief commander for Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps – state TV](#)

Sun, 2019-04-21 18:49

DUBAI: Iran's top authority Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has replaced the chief commander of the elite Revolutionary Guards, state TV reported on Sunday, days after the United States designated the group a foreign terrorist organization.

The TV station did not give a reason for the change when it announced the appointment of Brig. Gen. Hossein Salami to the position.

"The Supreme Leader has appointed Salami as the new commander-in-chief of the Guards, who will replace Mohammad Ali Jafari," it said. Jafari had held the

post since September 2007.

President Donald Trump on April 8 designated the Guards a terrorist organization, in an unprecedented step that drew Iranian condemnation and raised concerns about retaliatory attacks on US forces. The designation took effect on April 15.

The Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) is in charge of Iran's ballistic missile and nuclear programs. Tehran has warned that it has missiles with a range of up to 2,000 km (1,242 miles), putting Israel and US military bases in the region within reach.



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Moroccans protest prison sentences of anti-poverty activists

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Sun, 2019-04-21 14:18

RABAT: Thousands of demonstrators in Morocco are condemning prison sentences given to the leader of the Hirak Rif anti-poverty movement and dozens of other activists.

The demonstration brought one of the main avenues of the Moroccan capital, Rabat, to a standstill on Sunday. Security forces kept watch as participants sang, "The people want the detainees released" and "Long live Rif."

Hirak leader Nasser Zefzafi was sentenced to the maximum prison term of 20 years for threatening state security. An appeals court upheld his sentence and those of other activists this month.

Rif is the struggling region in northern Morocco where the Hirak movement was born in 2016. The movement demands development and job creation for the region.

Families, human rights organizations and left-wing parties are demanding the imprisoned activists' immediate release.



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Bahrain's King Hamad orders reinstatement of citizenship of 551 convicts

Sun, 2019-04-21 16:06

JEDDAH: Bahrain's King Hamad issued an order on Sunday to reinstate the citizenship of 551 convicts whose nationality had been revoked as per court rulings, reported the state news agency.

The royal decree is in line with the provisions of Article 24 of Law 58/2006 with respect to the Protection of the Community against Terrorist Acts, stipulating that rulings related to citizenship withdrawal will not be effective unless they are approved by the king.

King Hamad had already given directives to the competent authorities to evaluate the situation of convicts whose citizenship was revoked and take into account "the nature of crimes committed" before the final implementation of the court judgment.

"The study and evaluation of the situation of convicts should be based on criteria pertaining to the seriousness, impact and consequences of the crimes, as well as on the danger the convict may pose on national security," Bahrain News Agency said in announcing the king's decision.

King Hamad also instructed the minister of interior to study and evaluate the citizenship revocation rulings and to prepare a list of reinstatement beneficiaries.

Authorities later will announce the names of those having their citizenship restored.

Last week, 138 people lost their citizenship in a mass trial.



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[Saudi Arabia, UAE to give Sudan \\$3 billion, including \\$500 million in Central Bank](#)

Sun, 2019-04-21 15:36

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have granted Sudan \$3 billion in support, Saudi Press Agency said on Sunday.

The grant includes a \$500 million deposit into Sudan's central bank, in a bid to strengthen its financial position, ease pressure on the Sudanese pound and achieve greater stability in the exchange rate, SPA reported

The rest will be in the form of food, medicine, and petroleum products, the report said.

In recent years Sudan has been hit by an acute lack of dollars, a key factor behind the nationwide protests that led to the toppling of Al-Bashir by the army this month.

The Kingdom and the UAE called for “stability” and a “peaceful transition” in the days following the removal of Al-Bashir.

The aid from Saudi Arabia and the Emirates is the first major publicly announced assistance to Sudan from Gulf states in several years.

“This is to strengthen its financial position, ease the pressure on the Sudanese pound and increase stability in the exchange rate,” the Saudi Press Agency said.

Since Al-Bashir’s ousting, the Sudanese pound has steadily strengthened on the black market, and on Sunday it jumped to 45 to the dollar, after trading at 72 at one stage last week.

The official exchange rate is 47.5 pounds to the dollar.



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