

# Sudan's Bashir forms panel to probe protest violence

Author:

AFP

ID:

1546358484209562000

Tue, 2019-01-01 15:16

KHARTOUM: Sudan's President Omar Al-Bashir ordered authorities Tuesday to set up a committee to investigate violence during anti-government protests, even as a range of political groups called for a "new regime" in the country. At least 19 people have been killed and hundreds wounded in protests that erupted in cities including the capital Khartoum on December 19, after a government decision to hike the price of bread.

Human rights group Amnesty International has put the death toll at 37.

"President Omar Al-Bashir has ordered the setting up of a fact-finding committee headed by the justice minister to look into the incidents of the past few days," state news agency SUNA reported, quoting a presidential decree.

The government raised the price of a loaf of bread from one Sudanese pound to three (about two to six US cents).

The ensuing protests quickly evolved into anti-government rallies in Khartoum and several other cities.

In the initial days of the protests, several buildings and offices of Bashir's ruling National Congress Party were torched by protesters.

Riot police have managed to disperse the rallies so far, while security agents have arrested several opposition leaders and activists in a crackdown on suspected organizers.

Sudan is facing an acute foreign exchange crisis and soaring inflation despite Washington lifting an economic embargo in October 2017.

The foreign exchange crisis has steadily escalated since Sudan's partition in 2011, when South Sudan broke away, taking with it the bulk of oil revenues.

Inflation has hit 70 percent while shortages of bread and fuel have hit several cities.

On Tuesday, 22 political groups, including some close to the government, called for a "new regime" in the country.

"The current Bashir regime due to its political, economic, regional and international isolation cannot overcome the crisis," the group said in a joint statement issued in English at a press conference in Khartoum.

"It can only be revised by establishing a new regime in the country that can regain the confidence of the Sudanese people."

The groups, who had participated in a national dialogue process that Bashir launched in 2014 to tackle the country's social and economic problems, called for a new "transitional government... that would hold elections for restoring democracy and public freedoms."

Sudan Central Bank governor Mohamed Khair Al-Zubair said at a separate press conference that the bank aimed to rein in inflation to 27 percent in 2019 by

raising production of key commodities like wheat, oil and sugar.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Sudan](#)

[bashir](#)

---

## [Attorney says Egyptian activist to return to jail any time](#)

Author:

By SAMY MAGDY | AP

ID:

1546346443048718000

Tue, 2019-01-01 (All day)

CAIRO: An Egyptian activist expects to return to prison “at any time” after an appeals court upheld a two-year sentence against her for posting a video online in which she criticized the government and decried sexual harassment, her attorney said Tuesday.

Lawyer Doaa Moustafa said the Misdemeanor Court of Appeals in Cairo’s Maadi suburb, on Sunday upheld Amal Fathy’s sentence for insulting employees in a bank and using abusive language to criticize state institutions and decry

sexual harassment against women.

Fathy had been sentenced in September, but her sentence was suspended on appeal after she paid 10,000 Egyptian pounds (\$560).

However, she was not released on house arrest until Dec. 27 pending an investigation into separate charges.

Now, she expects to be taken into custody "at any time," following the court's Sunday ruling, Moustafa said.

Moustafa said Fathy can still appeal her original two-year sentence before the Court of Cassation, Egypt's final recourse for appeals in criminal cases. Rights group Amnesty International decried Sunday's court ruling, saying it was an "outrageous case of injustice."

"The fact that a survivor of sexual harassment is being punished with a two-year prison sentence simply for speaking out about her experience is utterly disgraceful. This verdict makes a mockery of justice and should be a stain on the conscience of the Egyptian authorities," said Najia Bounaim, Amnesty International's North Africa director, in a statement Sunday.

Bounaim added: "The timing of the verdict is particularly cruel, coming only days after Amal was reunited with her loved ones."

Fathy was released last week pending an investigation into charges including disseminating false news, misuse of social media networks to spread material that could hurt security and the public interest and joining an outlawed group.

"Membership in an outlawed group" is Egyptian government parlance for having ties to a range of groups that it has outlawed, including the Muslim Brotherhood, an Islamist organization authorities have banned, labeling it a terrorist group.

Under terms of her house arrest, Fathy must report to a nearby police station weekly and is allowed to leave only to pick up medication or visit a police station or court.

Police arrested Fathy in May after she posted a 12-minute video online criticizing the state for deteriorating public services and not taking measures against sexual harassment. She said she was harassed at a local branch of a state-owned bank. The video also shows her using profanities to describe her experience at the bank and repeatedly insulting the state.

Fathy is a former activist in the pro-democracy April 6 Movement, which was at the forefront of the 2011 uprising that toppled longtime ruler Hosni Mubarak.

Egyptian authorities have waged a campaign against activists who speak out against the government.

Since leading the military's 2013 overthrow of an elected but divisive president – the Muslim Brotherhood's Muhammad Mursi – President Abdel-Fattah El-Sisi has overseen a crackdown on dissent. Authorities have jailed thousands of Islamists along with secular, pro-democracy advocates, imposing tight controls over the media and rolling back freedoms won in a popular 2011 uprising.

El-Sisi says his government's top priorities are security and overhauling the battered economy.



Main category:  
[Middle-East](#)

---

## [Omani claims for damage caused by Cyclone Mekunu exceed \\$400 million](#)

Tue, 2019-01-01 14:47

**DUBAI:** Oman's Cyclone Mekunu left a trail of destruction and a multimillion-dollar insurance bill, national daily, Times of Oman reported.

Insurance claims against the damage caused by the devastating cyclone that ripped through southern Oman in May, 2018, have exceeded \$400 million.

Dozens of people were killed when Cyclone Mekuna ripped through southern Yemen and Oman in May, leaving a path of destruction.

It hit Oman late on May 25, bringing with it, torrential rain, gusts of up to 180 kph, eight-foot tall waves, and flash floods.

Now insurance companies say they have received 1,123 claims up to the end of

September worth \$403.7 million, the report added, citing data from the Capital Market Authority (CMA).

There was also extensive damage caused to properties, the road networks and coastal defenses.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Cyclone Mekunu](#)

[extreme weather](#)

[Oman](#)

[natural disasters](#)

Death toll in Oman, Yemen from Cyclone Mekunu rises to 30Cyclone Mekunu subsides after leaving 10 dead, 40 missing in Oman and Yemen

---

## [Former Israeli foreign minister Livni left out in political cold](#)

Author:

Reuters

ID:

1546340595258446200

Tue, 2019-01-01 10:50

JERUSALEM: Israel's main left-wing alliance split apart on Tuesday, leaving one of the country's most prominent politicians, former foreign minister Tzipi Livni, out in the cold ahead of an April general election.

The Zionist Union, which was the main opposition party, had been a partnership between the Labour Party led by Avi Gabbay and the smaller Hatnua party headed by Livni. With a stone-faced Livni sitting next to him at a meeting of Zionist Union lawmakers, Gabbay unceremoniously dumped her.

"I hoped and believed this alliance would bring about our blossoming, a real connection and we would complement each other. But the public is smart, saw this is not the situation and distanced itself from us," Gabbay said in a nod to the Zionist Union's weak showing in recent opinion polls.

"Tzipi, I wish you success in the election – in any party you're in," he said, announcing the split on live television.

The move appeared to catch Livni, a former peace negotiator with the Palestinians and current leader of the opposition in parliament, by surprise. "I'm not responding. I will make my decisions. Thank you," she said, and then left the room.

Opinion polls have predicted Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will easily win the snap election he called for April 9, taking between 27 to 31 of parliament's 120 seats – enough to lead a right-wing coalition government, despite three corruption investigations against him.

Zionist Union trails far behind Netanyahu's Likud and centrist parties in the polls, which predict it will capture only eight to nine seats compared with the 24 it took in its second-place finish in the previous election in 2015. Livni, who became a leading advocate of a two-state solution with the Palestinians, entered politics in 1999 as a member of the right-wing Likud party, serving in several cabinet posts and eventually moving to the center-left as head of the now-defunct Kadima party.

She was foreign minister from 2006 to 2009 and founded Hatnua in 2012, joining up with Labour to establish the Zionist Union for the 2015 ballot won by Netanyahu, now in his fourth term.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

---

## [Egypt mulls changing constitution to keep El-Sisi in power](#)

Author:

AFP

ID:

1546334576168246900

Tue, 2019-01-01 09:20

CAIRO: Supporters of Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi are calling for constitutional changes that would allow him to stay in power once his second term ends in 2022.

Backers of the former military chief, re-elected in March with over 97 percent of the vote, want parliament to discuss repealing an article limiting presidents to two consecutive four-year terms.

In an editorial published on Sunday, the pro-government state-run daily newspaper Al-Akhbar voiced hope that 2019 would see “the start of a belated political reform” to secure El-Sisi’s future in power.

The column by the newspaper’s director Yasser Rizk said this would “preserve all the people’s gains in terms of security, stability and economic recovery” since El-Sisi came to power five years ago,

He said the change could be approved by late summer 2019.

El-Sisi, who led the army's overthrow of Islamist president Mohamed Morsi in 2013 following mass protests against his rule, won his first term as president the following year.

His government has been widely criticized by rights groups over the repression of dissidents.

As well as a crackdown on dissent, El-Sisi has overseen a military campaign against Daesh group-linked extremists in the Sinai Peninsula.

Egypt is slowly recovering from a deep economic crisis that has seen the value of its currency plummet and state subsidies slashed.

In November 2017, even before he was re-elected, El-Sisi told American news network CNBC he would not seek a third term in office.

But after his victory in the March 2018 polls, the question has gradually returned to public debate.

Mohammad Fuad, an MP with the Wafd party close to the government, told AFP that "the whole of Egypt was talking about (Rizk's) article last night."

"This issue has been under discussion everywhere in Egypt, not just in parliament, for some time," he said, adding that a potential parliamentary debate on the issue had not been initiated by the government.

In the current context of Egyptian politics, there was little surprise that the debate was taking place, Fuad said.

"People have been expecting a constitutional amendment on extending presidential terms, because every time the debate turns to the end of (El-Sisi's) second term, the question is: who is the alternative? That causes panic," he said.

Mustafa Kamal Al-Sayed, a political science professor at Cairo University, said Rizk "did not express a personal point of view, but revealed trends within government institutions."

He said El-Sisi "does not want to step down from power while he is alive ... he fears that he could be held to account if he leaves his post."

H.A. Hellyer, a senior fellow at the Atlantic Council and the Royal United Services Institute in London, said that "every indication from the last few years indicates that amending the constitution is of foremost importance."

"Otherwise we would not have seen all these trial balloons in the media, and we would have seen indications of successors that are being groomed," he said.

On social media, opposition figures deplored talk of allowing El-Sisi to stand for a third term.

"There are constitutions and laws in authoritarian regimes and constitutions and laws in democratic regimes," wrote Mohamed ElBaradei, a respected former UN nuclear watchdog chief and Egyptian politician on Twitter.

"The former are a tool for entrenching authoritarian rule based on repression and fear, while the second are a tool for establishing good governance based on freedom and justice."





Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Egypt](#)

[Abdel Fattah El-Sisi](#)

[politics](#)

Sisi denies fat-shaming Egyptians after weight-loss call  
Egypt's El-Sisi says army will defend Gulf Arabs in case of direct threat