

Algeria activists fear tougher police tactics after Friday clashes

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ALGIERS: Algerian civil society groups voiced concern Saturday about toughening police tactics, a day after officers in riot gear clashed with protesters, and reaffirmed their commitment to peaceful pro-democracy rallies.

Friday's initially peaceful rally in central Algiers deteriorated into the worst street violence seen so far since marches began in mid-February demanding an end to the 20-year-rule of president Abdelaziz Bouteflika, who finally resigned on April 2, and his regime.

Police used tear gas and water cannon and scuffled with demonstrators, who in turn hurled stones and bottles, set alight at least one police car and turned large dumpsters into barricades.

Injuries were reported on both sides, and activists raised fears that the standoff has entered a new phase.

"Friday's mobilization was different because of the scale of the repression," according to Said Salhi, vice president of the Algerian League for the Defense of Human Rights.

Demonstrators have vowed to push on with rallies against the interim government of Abdelkader Bensalah and its plan for July 4 elections, arguing that leaders who emerged from the Bouteflika "system" cannot guarantee free and fair polls.

Salhi noted that the mood was different from early Friday outside the main post office in central Algiers that has become an emblematic protest site.

"It usually starts joyfully at the post office, but there was a desire on the part of the authorities to clear the area," he said.

Salhi said a turning point had come three days earlier when police had for the first time tried to disperse a student demonstration in Algiers with tear gas and water cannon.

Political scientist Cherif Driss said that, while the demonstrations have continued unabated, "the police are trying to refocus, and are beginning to reduce the public space for expression."

Driss added however that "the response remains moderate and professional, with mostly water cannons and tear gas. There is no brutal repression."

Police put Friday's violence down to "delinquents" infiltrating the crowds, and said 108 people had been arrested, while some protesters also blamed "troublemakers" for the clashes.

Driss said it was too early to tell whether Friday's clashes were the result of "a strategy to limit demonstrations or a reaction to groups infiltrating" the protests.

The General Directorate of National Security reported that 83 police had suffered injuries. It denied having resorted to repressive tactics and said

it was merely maintaining public order.

Several protesters were also injured, and at least one was hit in the chest by what appeared to be a rubber bullet, said an AFP photographer.

Activist groups stressed their commitment to non-violence.

"The protesters are very committed to the continuation of the movement in its peaceful form," said Abdelwahab Ferfaoui of civic group the Youth Action Rally (RAJ-Algeria). "It's the key to success."

At Friday's clashes, some demonstrators had placed themselves between rioters and police, raising their hands and chanting "silmiya" (peaceful) until the situation calmed, AFP journalists witnessed.

"People did not respond despite the repression, we saw citizens defending police officers," said Salhi.

"But we want to move toward a political solution quickly to avoid desperation. Letting the situation deteriorate until the elections in three months is not a solution."







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Algerian military to support transition period: army chief
Algeria protests keep up pressure on regime

[Syria Kurds return 25 Yazidis freed from IS to Iraq](#)

Sat, 2019-04-13 16:24

QAZLAJOKH, Syria: Syrian Kurds on Saturday repatriated 25 women and children from Iraq's Yazidi minority after freeing them during the final push against Daesh, a local official said.

The US-backed fighters say they rescued some 300 Yazidi women and children during the fight to take the militants' last scrap of territory in eastern Syria.

"Today, we will hand over 25 people – 10 women and 15 children – to the Yazidi council in Sinjar," said Ziyad Rustam, an official with the Kurdish-run group Yazidi House, which reunites rescued Yazidi children with surviving

relatives.

"They will be sent to their families," he told AFP.

At the Yazidi House headquarters in a village near the northeastern Syrian city of Qamishli, women wearing colorful robes collected children scampering around the compound before boarding busses bound for Sinjar, the Yazidi heartland in Iraq.

"The fate of my three sisters remains unknown... I don't know anything about them," said 17-year-old Jamila Haidar.

"I hope we will be reunited soon."

Iraq's Yazidis are a symbol of the suffering caused by Daesh during its rein over vast swathes of Syria and Iraq.

The militants stormed through Iraq's northwest in 2014 slaughtering thousands of men and boys and abducting women and girls to be abused as sex slaves.

But they have since lost all of the once-sprawling cross-border "caliphate" to multiple offensive.

The Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces last month announced the defeat of the Daesh proto-state after tens of thousands of people streamed out of the militants' last patch of territory, around the village of Baghouz near the Iraqi border.

Rustam said SDF had in total liberated 850 Yazidi women and children during its battles against Daesh since 2015.

But 3,040 Yazidis are still missing, he said, adding that the search for them was ongoing.

Rustam said the militants had "sold many of them to people inside Syria, in places like Idlib," most of which is held by a former Al-Qaeda affiliate.

Some of the Yazidis extracted from Daesh's last sliver of territory are being held at the Kurdish-run Al-Hol camp, which also houses militant family members.



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Iraq begins exhuming mass Yazidi grave left by Daesh Hopes for missing Yazidis dim as extremists' defeat looms

[Lebanon seizes 800,000 stimulant pills in major drug bust with help from Saudi authorities](#)

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Sat, 2019-04-13 12:54

BEIRUT: Lebanon's police said Saturday it has seized more than 800,000 pills of the amphetamine-type stimulant captagon worth around \$12 million in a bust

coordinated with Saudi authorities.

Police stopped a refrigerated truck containing 142 kilogrammes (312 pounds) of the illicit drug on April 9, according to a statement.

Captagon is one of the most commonly used drugs in the Syrian war, where fighters who take it say it helps them stay awake for days and that it numbs their senses, allowing them to kill with abandon.

The bust came after Saudi Arabia's Directorate of Narcotics Control tipped off Lebanese authorities on a plan to smuggle a large captagon shipment to an unidentified "Arab country" by land, it said.

Captagon is classified by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime as an "amphetamine-type stimulant" and usually blends amphetamines, caffeine and other substances.

Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria are usually assumed to be transit or production territories for illicit captagon, according to the European Monitoring Center for Drugs and Drug Addiction.

Lebanese authorities have been clamping down on exports of the psycho-stimulant, which is produced in swathes of Syrian and Lebanese territory where government oversight is lax or non-existent.



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Attempt to smuggle more than 560K Captagon pills into Saudi Arabia thwarted
US-backed Syria rebels seize Captagon in Daesh drug bust: coalition

Profile: How Ibn Auf went from regime insider to new Sudan ruler

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Fri, 2019-04-12 15:20

CAIRO: Sudanese General Ahmed Awad Ibn Auf, who led the overthrow of veteran leader Omar Al-Bashir and has emerged as the country's new ruler, is already under US sanctions for his alleged role in the brutal Darfur conflict.

In a somber televised statement on Thursday, Ibn Auf announced the ouster of Bashir, who ruled the northeast African country with an iron-fist for 30 years before angry protesters brought him down.

"I announce as minister of defense the toppling of the regime and detaining its chief in a secure place," Ibn Auf said.

"We have replaced him by a transitional military council for two years and have suspended Sudan's 2005 constitution."

Later on Thursday state television announced that Ibn Auf had been sworn in as head of the military council triggering anger among the protesters.

"The regime has conducted a military coup by bringing back the same faces and the same institutions which our people rose up against," the Alliance for Freedom and Change, the group that is leading the protests said in a statement.

"We call on our people to continue their sit-in in front of army headquarters and across all regions and in the streets."

Protesters remained camped at the army headquarters in the capital for seventh straight day, vowing not to leave until the new military rulers quit. Born in 1950, Ibn Auf, a career soldier has been a regime insider and a close aide of Al-Bashir since the former leader came to power in a coup in 1989. Ibn Auf held several top ranking positions in the army as well as in the foreign ministry.

He rose through the ranks first to become a commander of the military's artillery division and then to head the army intelligence wing.

In 2010 he retired but was brought back five years later as the country's defense minister. In February Al-Bashir made him his first vice president "Awad Ibn Auf is not only a high-ranking officer of Bashir's old guard, but one of the few in the army to be able to maintain the cohesion between the rival branches of the regime's security apparatus," said Paris-based Sudan analyst, Jerome Tubiana.

Between 2010 and 2015, Ibn Auf served as a counsel in Khartoum's embassy in Cairo and later as ambassador to Muscat.

But it is his alleged role in the conflict in Darfur that analysts say might make Western powers wary of dealing with him directly.

Analysts say Ibn Auf, a close aide of Bashir, played a key role in managing militias like the feared Janjaweed, who have been accused of

committing genocide during the initial years of the conflict.

The United States put his name on its backlist of Sudanese officers sanctioned for their role in the conflict that has seen his assets blocked by the US treasury since 2007.

In May 2007, Washington said Ibn Auf has been "linked to violence, atrocities and human rights abuses" in Darfur.

Bashir himself has been indicted for alleged war crimes and genocide in the Darfur conflict, in which according to the United Nations about 300,000 people have been killed and millions displaced.

Hundreds of thousands of people still live in sprawling camps across the region.

The conflict erupted in 2003 when ethnic black rebels took up arms against Khartoum's Arab-dominated government, accusing it of economic and political marginalization.

Ibn Auf was as "deeply involved" in the conflict as Bashir himself, said Hollywood actor George Clooney on Thursday.

"Removing the leader of a violent, corrupt system without dismantling that system is inadequate," said Clooney, founder of The Sentry Project, which researches illicit money and war crimes in Africa.

But analyst Tubiana said the fact that Bashir agreed to go and Ibn Auf had replaced him showed that it was "a palace revolution, aimed at protecting the regime and preventing the opposition, civilians and non-Islamists ... from taking power."

Some analysts say however that Ibn Auf might not remain for long time as head of the military council.

"He's been taking decisions for a long time when it comes to the armed forces, but the task ahead is not going to be easy," said an analyst.

"The anger among protesters will be a continuous challenge. For all you know he might not be there for a long time."

Protesters vow to do exactly that.

"Ibn Auf is weak, we will ensure he quits," said a protester without revealing his name for security reasons as he prepared for Friday prayers at the army complex.



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World reacts to the downfall of Omar Al-Bashir in Sudan
Demanding civilian government, thousands defy military curfew in Sudan

[Palestinian teen killed by Israeli fire in border clashes: Gaza ministry](#)

Fri, 2019-04-12 18:27

GAZA CITY: A Palestinian teenager was shot dead by the Israeli army Friday during renewed clashes on the Gaza border, the health ministry in the Palestinian enclave said.

A ministry spokesman said Maysara Abu Shaloof, 15, was “shot in the stomach by the (Israeli) occupation east of Jabalia,” referring to a demonstration site in northern Gaza.

At least 48 others were taken to hospital with a variety of injuries from clashes at several spots along the border, the ministry said without elaborating.

An Israeli army spokesman told AFP that around “approximately 4,700 rioters

and demonstrators” took part in various incidents along the frontier. “The rioters were hurling rocks and there were several attempts to breach the security fence,” he said.

“Troops responded with riot dispersal means and fired in accordance with standard operating procedures.”

He had no comment on any Palestinian casualties.

Palestinians in Gaza have for more than a year gathered at least weekly along the border for protests, calling on Israel to end its blockade of the enclave.

Israel says it is protecting its borders and accuses Hamas which runs Gaza of orchestrating the protests.

An AFP correspondent said Friday’s protests were smaller than in the past. At least 264 Palestinians in Gaza have been killed by Israeli forces since the protests began.

The majority were killed during clashes, though others were hit by tank fire or air strikes.

Two Israeli soldiers have been killed over the same period.



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