

Sudan's military junta launches brutal crackdown on protests

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Sudan's security forces fired tear gas and live bullets on protesters Thursday, killing at least 10 people. According to the Central Committee of Sudanese Doctors (CCSD), seven of those killed, including a minor, were shot in the chest or the head.

A further 500 were injured in and around the capital Khartoum where tens of thousands have taken to the streets calling for democracy and a return to civilian rule amid soaring poverty and hunger. Protests and rallies took place in 26 towns and cities in the largest turnout in the last eight months of protests against the military.

It was the deadliest violence since near weekly mass protests began last October over the military's ouster of the interim government of Dr. Abdulla Hamdok. It brings the total number killed since the coup to 114, including 18 children.

The interior ministry routinely denies that the police use live fire, despite evidence from activists and pro-democracy groups showing the use of lethal force. A video clip circulated online shows security forces prodding and kicking a badly injured protester in the street. The protester later died.

The protests were called by the Resistance Committees, run by scores of local neighbourhoods, billed as the June 30 Marches of the Millions. It was timed to mark the 33rd anniversary of the 1989 coup that, with the backing of the Islamists and the military, toppled Sudan's last elected government and brought the dictator Omar al-Bashir to power for 30 years.

Thursday's police violence provoked large funeral marches in Khartoum, a general strike and mass rallies across the country on Friday that were met with tear gas and a shutdown of the internet and telecommunications. Hundreds of activists massed near the presidential palace in Khartoum, occupied by the military chief General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, where the security forces set up roadblocks.

Protests and rallies have continued over the weekend. They take place as the economy faces collapse under the

impact of the secession in 2011 of South Sudan, the main oil-producing region, international sanctions, the pandemic and the economic disruption caused by the lockdown following decades of criminal looting by the ruling elite. Sudan also faces rebel movements and conflicts in Darfur and the southern states of South Kordofan and the Blue Nile, even as it sends troops to fight Ethiopia over a longstanding border conflict in al-Fashaga and is escalating tensions over the Grand Renaissance Dam that could restrict flows of the River Nile during a drought.

Unemployment is running at around 30 percent, while inflation is believed to be about 260 percent. The military junta, now without the \$1.4 billion aid and assistance pledged by the US, World Bank and International Monetary Fund following the October coup, has cut subsidies on wheat and fuel, exacerbating the plight of the masses.

Terrible economic conditions have led to strikes and protests by public sector workers, after the junta failed to implement the promised 2022 pay deal linking wages to inflation. Halfway through the year, many workers are still being paid at the old rates instead of the higher 2022 wage, with a teacher in Omdurman, Khartoum's twin city on the Nile telling *Noon Post* that she has had to work a second job in a library during the last four years. Her salary is just \$33.50 a month after 10 years of service and although her husband also works as a teacher, they do not earn enough to make ends meet. *Radio Dabanga* reported earlier this year that teachers are leaving their jobs as they can earn more working as rickshaw drivers.

Figures produced by the Sudanese Social Security Commission in 2020 showed that 77 percent of the population lived below the poverty line set at \$1.25 per day, although others believe the poverty rate is far higher. Those most in need of aid are in the conflict-ridden Darfur and southern region, as well as Sudan's many internally displaced people and refugees.

Last year, Sudan sourced about 80 percent of its wheat imports from Russia and Ukraine that have now virtually ground to a halt due to war and US/NATO sanctions on

Russia's banks, shipping and airlines, leaving Khartoum to find alternative supplies at far higher prices. The local price of wheat has risen to more than \$550 a ton, up nearly 180 percent on a year ago. Sudan's lack of foreign currency reserves and the drought that has hit the Horn of Africa, including parts of Sudan, have deepened poverty and hunger.

Last month, the United Nations World Food Programme warned that 'a record 15 million people in Sudan—one-third of the country's 44 million population—are currently facing acute food insecurity.' This could reach 40 percent by September, nearly double the 7.9 million assisted by the World Food Programme in 2021.

These latest demonstrations are a continuation of the mass protests that erupted at the end of 2018 and precipitated the April 2019 pre-emptive military coup, led by military chief and de facto ruler al-Burhan with the support of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia, that overthrew President Omar al-Bashir and his Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated military dictatorship. The aim of the military was to prevent the overthrow of the entire state apparatus and the expropriation of their substantial financial and corporate institutions that control much of the Sudanese economy.

Al-Burhan opened negotiations with leaders of the protests, the Forces of Freedom and Change (FFC), an umbrella group of 22 bourgeois and petty bourgeois groups, including the professional trade unions and the Sudanese Communist Party, over the formation of a joint military-civilian government that would provide a cover for the military, while carrying out the economic measures needed to remove US sanctions and access international loans. Just weeks later, soldiers and paramilitaries massacred more than 1,000 unarmed protesters, chasing them through Khartoum, tying concrete blocks to their feet and throwing them into the Nile.

In August 2019, the FFC agreed to serve under Hamdok, a British-trained economist and former member of the Sudanese Communist Party, in a transitional "technocratic" government, made up of "leftists," that served as a front for the Sovereign Council headed by al-Burhan.

Hamdok's free market and political reforms, including the abolition of fuel subsidies, the privatisation of hundreds of state companies and the crackdown on corruption and the looting of state revenues by companies linked to al-Bashir and the military, threatened the military's substantial commercial, political and diplomatic interests.

Hamdok signed the Abraham Accords, joining Washington's Gulf allies and Israel in an anti-Iran bloc, and handed al-Bashir, now in prison, to the International Criminal Court for war crimes in Darfur, where 300,000 people were killed and millions displaced in fighting

between 2003 and 2008, to get Sudan removed from the US State Department Sponsor of Terrorism List.

Al-Burhan sacked Hamdok's "technocratic" government in October, resumed military rule, stacked governing and state-owned bodies with generals, Islamists and other reliable allies of the al-Bashir regime and stepped up repression. Leading figures from Sudan's main opposition parties including former Sudan Communist Party leaders—with the backing of the Biden administration—then signed another treacherous deal with the military that reinstated Hamdok. But the unpopular deal soon fell apart as the generals reneged on their commitments and continued their crackdown on protests, prompting Hamdok to resign.

In the absence of an independent political leadership committed to the unification of Sudan's protest movement with those of its class brothers and sisters throughout the Middle East and North Africa against capitalism and for the socialist reorganisation of society, the mass protests face the prospect of brutal suppression by the military and betrayal by various "technocratic" and "progressive" middle-class forces backed by US imperialism.

The Horn of Africa, which includes Sudan, has become a key battleground of competing interests. Sudan's military has close relations with Russia, which is trying to establish a base at Port Sudan, on the Red Sea, selling much of its gold that accounts for 40 percent of the country's exports to Russia via the UAE and abstaining on the UN resolution condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine. This has infuriated the Biden administration, whose special envoys to the country each quit after just months in office.



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