Protesters Face Whippings and Tear Gas in Sudanese Crackdown

February 27, 2019

By [Mohammed Alamin](https://www.bloomberg.com/authors/ATksn8qaV2o/mohammed-alamin)

Bloomberg News

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-02-27/protesters-face-whippings-and-tear-gas-in-sudanese-crackdown>

When the security forces’ trucks smashed through the gates of her Sudanese university campus, the student and friends fled dozens of stick-wielding men racing to crush the latest protest against President Omar al-Bashir’s government.

“They started lashing everyone, they didn’t differentiate,” the 21-year-old said of Monday’s events at the University of Medical Sciences and Technology in Sudan’s capital, Khartoum. “Students ran everywhere -- some of them hid in a lecture hall, but the police and security personnel tracked them down.” She asked not to be identified for safety reasons.

Days after Sudan’s embattled government [announced a state of emergency](https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-02-22/sudan-s-al-bashir-declares-state-of-emergency-for-one-year), authorities are intensifying their crackdown against protests that pose the biggest threat to al-Bashir’s rule since he seized power in a 1989 coup. In Khartoum, freshly deployed security forces are raiding homes in protest hotspots, storming universities and making a new wave of arrests.

“The state of emergency is being used by the Sudanese authorities as a justification to flagrantly increase the use of live ammunition and tear gas against protesters, and to torture detainees without any restraint,” said Joan Nyanyuki, East Africa director at London-based Amnesty International.

Sudan, Africa’s third-largest country, has been rocked since mid-December by nationwide protests over soaring living costs that have developed into calls for al-Bashir to resign. His supporters are preparing legal amendments that would allow the 75-year-old, in his final term and wanted by the International Criminal Court for alleged war crimes in Darfur, to seek re-election in 2020.

### Far-Reaching Clampdown

Amnesty says more than 45 people have been killed over two months in a far-reaching clampdown that’s included targeting of medical and educational facilities. The government puts the toll at 30. It acknowledges some economic grievances but [insists change can only come via the ballot box](https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-01-31/facebook-no-substitute-for-a-vote-sudan-s-embattled-leader-says).

While al-Bashir could have used his Feb. 22 national address to try and defuse the crisis, his declaration of a year-long emergency has “steered the confrontation, pitting the regime against a diffuse, still-peaceful protest movement into a new, more dangerous phase,” the International Crisis Group [said this week](https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/sudan/bashir-moves-sudan-dangerous-new-ground). The announcement “placed more obstacles” to dialogue that al-Bashir asked the opposition to embrace, it said.

By dissolving the federal and provincial governments and appointing security chiefs for all 18 regional states, the president “has in effect allowed the armed forces to run the country for a year,” according to the Brussels-based group.

### Prison for Protesting

[Further decrees](https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-02-26/sudan-s-al-bashir-issues-decrees-to-curb-protests-black-market) from al-Bashir on Monday introduced 10-year prison terms for taking part in unauthorized protests and emergency courts to try suspected offenders.

Sudanese First Vice President Awad Ibn Auf on Wednesday denied the state of emergency is being used against protesters. “It is targeted at achieving security and stability of the markets and the economy” by preventing “sabotage,” he told reporters in Khartoum.

Protesters again took to the streets in parts of the capital and its twin city, Omdurman, on Thursday, in the largest demonstrations since al-Bashir’s speech.

The student at UMST described security officers lining up her male colleagues and beating them with sticks, as well as destroying university property. The institution’s chancellor, Mamoun Humaida, has suspended all classes, condemned the attack and urged authorities to investigate.

The violence was mirrored at Ahfad University for Women in Omdurman, which security forces have raided twice this week, according to an employee who asked to be identified by one of her family names, Mohamed.

### Tear Gas, Stampedes

As almost 1,000 students chanted on the university grounds on Monday, armed police surrounded the gates and jeered at and intimidated the protesters, she recalled. The men then stormed the buildings, firing tear gas that caused stampedes and left some students in need of medical attention, Mohamed said.

Amnesty reported that security forces broke into a medical doctors’ residence on Saturday, beating up doctors and arresting more than 40 on suspicion of organizing demonstrations. A day later, security officers forced their way into homes in the Khartoum district of Burri, tear-gassing and beating up people and seizing their mobile phones, it said.

“The police were ready to use any kind of violence they could,” Mohamed said of the university attack.