

Sudanese protests: Death toll in military crackdown at 60

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Khartoum: The death toll in Sudan amid a violent crackdown on pro-democracy protesters and the dispersal of their peaceful sit-in earlier this week in the capital, Khartoum, reached 60 on Wednesday, protest organizers said.

The mounting casualties are the latest challenge to the protest movement, which now aims to show it can keep up pressure in the streets after its central rallying point â€” the weeks-long sit-in outside the military headquarters in Khartoum â€” was wiped out on Monday.

In April, the movement succeeded in forcing the military to remove Sudanâ€™s longtime strongman, Omar al-Bashir. It then kept its sit-in going, demanding that the generals who took power hand over authority to civilians.

The last previously reported death toll stood at 40 but the Sudan Doctors Committee said security forces killed at least 10 people on Wednesday in Khartoum and its twin city of Omdurman. That came after another 10 people were killed on Tuesday, including five in the White Nile state, three in Omdurman and two in Khartoumâ€™s Bahri neighborhood.

The doctorsâ€™ committee is the medical arm of the Sudanese Professionals Association, which has been spearheading protests against army rule. The medical group also said hundreds were wounded in clashes in the past two days.

Activists Mohammed Najib and Hashim al-Sudani said there were street battles late Tuesday and early Wednesday in Khartoumâ€™s Bahri and Buri districts between protesters and security forces mainly from the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces, or F.

â€œIn Buri, there were lots of shootings and tear gas,â€• al-Sudani said. â€œThey tried to force people into narrow streetsâ€• to beat them.

On Monday, members of the F, which human rights groups say carried out rapes, torture and killings of civilians in Sudanâ€™s Darfur region, and other troops waded into the protest camp outside the militaryâ€™s headquarters in Khartoum, opening fire and burning down tents. Other troops crushed two smaller sit-ins organized by the protesters elsewhere.

The crackdown put an end to the relative peace that surrounded the talks and signaled the military had lost patience with activistsâ€™ demands. The result puts the two sides on the path of a potentially longer confrontation with increasing violence.

In a televised speech early Tuesday, the military councilâ€™s head, Gen. Abdel-Fattah Burhan, blamed protest leaders for the volatile situation, accusing them of drawing out negotiations and trying to exclude some â€œpolitical and security forcesâ€• from taking part in any transitional government.

He announced the military would unilaterally form an interim government and hold elections sooner, within seven to nine months, under international supervision. He said any agreements reached earlier in the negotiations with the demonstrators were canceled.

Protesters rejected the move because it would put the military in charge of running the election.

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Madani Abbas Madani, a leading activist, said the protesters would continue an open-ended civil disobedience campaign until the overthrow of the ruling military council.

“What happened on Monday was a systematic and planned attempt to impose repression on the Sudanese people,” he said in televised comments late Tuesday.

- AP