

Boy killed in Senegal protests as opposition steps up pressure

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A demonstrator holds up a Senegalese flag during protests against the arrest of opposition leader and former presidential candidate Ousmane Sonko in Dakar, Senegal, Friday, March 5, 2021. (AP Photo/Leo Correa)

Dakar: A 17-year-old boy was killed by gunfire in southern Senegal on Saturday, a government official said, and several police stations were ransacked as opponents of President Macky Sall called for more protests next week.

The boy was killed during clashes in the southern town of Diaobe, said the official, who asked not to be named. Protesters also burned down a military police station and ransacked several government buildings, the official said.

At least five people have died in protests sparked by Wednesday's arrest of Ousmane Sonko, Senegal's most prominent opposition leader. It is the worst political unrest in years for a country widely seen as one of West Africa's most stable.

A spokesman for Senegal's military police confirmed one person had died during clashes in Diaobe but did not say under what circumstances. He said protesters ransacked six police stations across the country on Saturday.

Sonko, who finished third in the 2019 presidential election, was arrested after an employee of a beauty salon accused him of raping her. Sonko denies the allegation and says it is an attempt by Sall to kneecap a political rival. The government denies this.

The mostly young protesters cited a range of other grievances too, including high unemployment and strict measures to control the coronavirus that have inflicted economic pain, especially on informal workers.

Many are especially dubious about the accusation against Sonko because two other top rivals of Sall were previously targeted by criminal charges that prevented them from running for president in 2019.

In a statement, the opposition Movement to Defend Democracy (M2D) coalition called for three days of nationwide protests beginning on Monday. "M2D calls on the Senegalese people to pursue its mobilisation and peaceful struggle by using all of its constitutional rights to reject the dictatorship of Macky Sall," it said.

- Reuters