

Sudan university cuts classes after demos

KHARTOUM, SUDAN: Administrators at Sudan's main university have partially shut down the campus, sources at the institution said on Sunday, 15 July 2012, after several Arab Spring-style student protests sparked by high inflation.

"Now there is no teaching from today up to the end of Ramadan," one University of Khartoum source said.

He said the decision came after intensified demonstrations at the institution near the Blue Nile River in central Khartoum.

"Even people from outside the university started to participate," he said, asking not to be identified because of the sensitive situation. "So they decided the only solution is to close the university."

The decision affects most colleges on the main campus but satellite facilities elsewhere in Khartoum are still in session, another campus source said.

"It is not a closure but they just made the programme (finish) quicker... instead of allowing some disturbance," a second source said, adding that students have been told to return after the holy month of Ramadan to sit for examinations. Ramadan begins on Friday.

The decision to cancel many classes came after students on the main campus last Wednesday staged perhaps their biggest protest since unrest began on June 16.

A witness said security forces fired tear gas at the students, estimated at more than 100, who were shouting and throwing stones. That followed a demonstration on 8 July which was also met with tear gas.

There have been other periodic protests on campus since students first voiced their opposition to high food prices one month ago.

Two pickup trucks carrying riot police were seen driving through the campus area on Sunday, an AFP reporter said.

After president Omar al-Bashir announced austerity measures, including tax hikes and an end to cheap fuel, the scattered protests spread to include a cross-section of people around the capital and in other parts of Sudan.

During their rallies the activists have repeated a call made by crowds at Arab Spring protests around the region: "The people want the fall of the regime."

Students are also upset at the detention of a large number of their colleagues whose academic year could be at risk,

another university source has said.

Public protests have in recent weeks focused on Fridays at a mosque linked to the opposition Umma Party in Khartoum's twin city of Omdurman. More than 30 people were arrested there on 13 July when police fired tear gas and beat people, a senior opposition figure said.

Although lasting for an unprecedented month the demonstrations have not attracted the mass following, in which students played a key role, which toppled military regimes in 1964 and 1985.

Sudanese proudly point to this history which occurred long before the Arab Spring revolts began in December 2010 against authoritarian rulers in North Africa and the Middle East.

Bashir has played down the demonstrations as small-scale and not comparable to the Arab Spring. He has suggested that someone was behind the protests against his National Congress Party (NCP) government.

Classes had already been suspended at the University of Khartoum for more than two months early this year following a student sit-in and exam boycott after a clash with police on campus in December.

Source: AFP

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