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Arab world witnesses more protests

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Several countries across the Arab world have witnessed fresh anti-government protests, although "Day of Rage" demonstrations planned in Saudi Arabia failed to materialise in the wake of a security clampdown.

Demonstrations in Saudi Arabia were supposed to start in after Friday prayers at noon but as the mosques emptied there were no signs of rallies, with security forces manning checkpoints in key locations across several cities.

Online activists using Facebook and Twitter had called for the "Day of Rage" and a "Saudi March 11 revolution" demanding a fully elected parliament and ruler.

In the strategic Olaya commercial centre of the capital Riyadh, where protesters were urged to congregate, hundreds of security personnel surrounded the mosque and inspected motorists' identification documents.

Clerics sermonised against demonstrations, saying public agitation was unjustified under Islamic teachings and would only spread chaos.

The Red Sea port city of Jeddah, the second biggest Saudi city, was also calm with a significant numbers of police on the streets.

Tensions were high in the eastern province city of Qatif, where three Shia protesters were shot and wounded by police dispersing a demonstration late on Thursday.

The shooting happened when several hundred protesters, all Shia and including women, took to the streets of the city to demand the release of nine Shia prisoners, said a witness, requesting anonymity.

A small demonstration calling for reforms and the release of Shia prisoners also took place Friday, a witness told the AFP news agency, but there were no reports of unrest.

Two activists said more than 200 protesters had rallied in the city of Hofuf, which is close to the eastern Ghawar oil field and major refinery installations.

The city has seen scattered protests in the last two weeks by minority Shias, who complain of discrimination in the face of the country's dominant Sunni majority.

Kuwait demonstration

In Kuwait, elite anti-riot police used tear gas to disperse hundreds of stateless Arab protesters who were demanding citizenship and other rights.

About 500 demonstrators took to the streets in Jahra, west of Kuwait City, the capital, following Friday prayers, despite a stern warning against protests from the new interior minister.

"Stateless since 50 years, we demand citizenship," read a huge banner in English as protesters chanted "we will not leave without a solution".

There were other protests in Sulaibiya, southwest of Kuwait City, and in the oil-rich city of Al-Ahmadi, south of the capital.

Stateless Arabs, known locally as bidoons and estimated at more than 100,000, protested last month for three consecutive days until officials gave them assurances that their grievances would be addressed.

But parliament on Tuesday refused to debate a draft bill that would give them civil rights.

Bahrain march

Thousands of opposition activists heading towards Bahrain's royal court have been prevented from marching on the king's palace.

Carrying Bahraini flags and flowers, the mainly Shia protesters began walking from the Aly area to Riffa, a district of Manama, the capital, where Sunnis and members of the royal family live.

Near a clocktower in Riffa, about 1,000 residents armed with clubs gathered to block the protesters' advance.

More than 200 riot police armed with batons blocked off the road with barbed wire, persuading most protesters to go home.

Police pushed back a group of rock-throwing Sunnis who approached police lines and fired tear gas to disperse Shias trying to get around the roadblock.

Medical sources said one person was seriously injured.

"The royal family has lots of palaces and houses here. We're peaceful. We want to go to their house and ask for our rights," said Ahmed Jaafar, as he set off from Aly. "Power should not be with one family, it should be with the people."

Bahrain, home to the US Navy's Fifth Fleet, has been gripped by the worst unrest since the 1990s when protesters took to the streets last month, inspired by uprisings that unseated entrenched autocratic rulers in Egypt and Tunisia.

Seven people have been killed in clashes with security forces and thousands of the February 14 youth movement still occupy Pearl roundabout, a busy intersection in the capital.

Sectarian violence has begun to increase in the Gulf island where the majority of people are Shia Muslim but the ruling family is Sunni.

Yemen deaths

Tens of thousands of protesters marched in Yemen on Friday, drawing record crowds in Sanaa, the capital, to show Ali Abdullah Saleh, the president, his reform offers would not soften their demand for his immediate departure.

Yemenis flooded streets and alleys around Sanaa University in the biggest protest to hit the capital since demonstrations began in January.

Thousands of Saleh loyalists also crammed the capital's Tahrir Square, carrying pictures of the veteran leader.

Hashem Ahelbarra, Al Jazeera's correspondent in Sanaa, said there were reports that at least four people had been injured in clashes between the protesters and government loyalists.

Protests turned violent in the southern port city of Aden, where three people were wounded by gunfire and six overcome by tear gas as police tried to disperse thousands of marchers.

Unidentified armed men killed four soldiers on patrol east of Mukalla city in Hadhramaut province, in southeast Yemen.

Security source accused al-Qaeda operatives of being behind the attack.

A wave of unrest has weakened Saleh's 32-year grip on his impoverished nation, with about 30 people killed since January.

Iraq protests

In Iraq, hundreds of protesters are demanding jobs and better basic services, in the latest challenge to the government.

About 500 protesters turned up in Baghdad's Tahrir Square on Friday, with a similar amount in the city of Fallujah west of the capital.

Deomonstrations were also reported in several other cities, including Sulaymaniyah in the north and Basra in the south.

Iraq's government has been shaken by a string of rallies across the country since the beginning of February.