

Security Update - Chad

Security forces on Tuesday 20 April announced the death of President Idriss Deby Itno, 68. The Chadian army has disclosed that President Deby has died from injuries sustained in fighting at the frontline. The country's army is currently combating rebel forces who have launched an assault north of the capital N'Djamena. The announcement of his death comes just a day after officials confirmed that he had won a sixth term in office after a presidential election was held on 11 April.

In a shock announcement on Tuesday, army spokesman General Azem Bermandoa Agouna said in a statement read out on state television that President Deby "breathed his last breath defending the sovereign nation on the battlefield." The army has reported that the Chadian leader had gone to the front line at the weekend to visit troops battling rebels based across the border in Libya. Unconfirmed reports have emerged that President Deby was wounded fighting rebels in Kanem region, located 400 km (248 miles) from the capital N'Djamena. The rebels, from a group calling itself the Front for Change and Concord in Chad (FACT), attacked a border post on election day, 11 April. While initially, the rebel activity had been reported further north, in the Sahara and near the border with Libya, reports have indicated that in recent days the instability has moved much further south. The clashes with the army began on 17 April, with an army general reporting that 300 insurgents were killed and 150 were captured. He further indicated that five government soldiers had been killed and 36 were injured, though these figures have not been verified.

What Next?

The army has announced that the government and parliament have been dissolved. A military council is now expected to govern the country for the next 18 months. The army spokesman has also disclosed that General Mahamat Deby, a four-star general and the slain president's son, has been appointed as the leader of the transitional council. A nightly curfew has been imposed by the army in Chad with immediate effect. The curfew will be in place between the hours of 18:00 - 05:00 for an indefinite period. Air borders have also been closed until further notice.

The shock announcement comes just a day after Deby won a sixth term in office, as per provisional results which were released on Monday. Results showed that Deby took 79.3% of the vote in the 11 April presidential election. His campaign manager disclosed that he was visiting soldiers battling rebels in the north of the capital on Monday and had postponed his victory speech to supporters.

President Deby, who has been a key figure in the fight against jihadists in West Africa's Sahel region, had as part of his re-election campaign promised to bring peace. His pledges were however undermined by the rebel incursion. After three decades in power, and amidst growing tensions across the country in the wake of the recent presidential election and the rebel incursion, questions have arisen on the country's stability.

On Monday, the Chadian government sought to assure concerned residents that the offensive was over. There had been some initial panic in some areas of the capital city on Monday after tanks were deployed along the city's main roads. However, the tanks were later withdrawn, apart from a perimeter around the president's office, which typically remains under heavy security during normal times. Government spokesman Cherif Mahamat Zene said on Twitter on Monday that "the establishment of a security deployment in certain areas of the capital seems to have been misunderstood," adding that "there is no particular threat to fear."

While internally, Deby's regime appears to remain in place, with his son being announced as his successor, the long-term outlook remains uncertain. Deby had just been re-elected in a poll that many of his opponents felt was far from democratic. It currently remains unclear whether his successor will be able to sustain this authoritarian system. The country's future will also depend on how his son's new military regime will manage to prepare the next political steps, and whether it will seek to develop a dialogue and consensus.

Advisory

Heightened security is likely across N'Djamena in the coming days and authorities are likely to bolster security force presence on access points to the capital city. Heightened security is also likely at strategic points across the capital, including in major government buildings, and N'Djamena International Airport. Should the security situation in the capital deteriorate, officials may implement additional restrictions. A nightly curfew between 18:00 - 05:00 has been imposed and air borders have been closed until further notice. Telecommunication suspensions could also be enforced. Opponents of the current regime, either aligned or unaligned with the rebels, could seek to initiate protests in the capital and elsewhere. In the event of any protests taking place, the threat of violence is likely to be elevated. Business and state office operations may be disrupted.

Anyone currently in Chad, including the capital city, is advised to maintain contact with their diplomatic representation and should update and review contingency plans. You should reconfirm the status of public transport before departure and you should prepare for possible transportation and communications disruptions. Avoid all concentrations of security personnel and avoid all travel at night. Heed the instructions of the local authorities and travel with identity documents at all times to facilitate passage through checkpoints. Avoid all protests and large public gatherings as they may turn violent with little notice.

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