



## 80 arrested in anti-Electoral Commission demos



Police arrest demonstrators at Railway Grounds in Kampala yesterday.

Posted By Musa

### Kampala

At least 80 opposition demonstrators were by last evening still in police custody after they tried to stage country-wide demonstration for a credible ballot next year.

The demonstrations were organized by the National Alliance for Free and Fair Elections (NAFFE) and the main opposition party, the Forum for Democratic Change (FDC). They were targeted at the African Union delegates, who have been attending the just-ended summit in Munyonyo, seeking to draw their attention to the challenges of democracy in Uganda.

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NAFFE National Coordinator Margaret Wokuri told Daily Monitor yesterday that her organization dispatched a team of lawyers to trace all the members who had been arrested by the police. “These protests were meant to draw attention to the electoral challenges in this country. Many of our members have been arrested. We are still compiling the list of those arrested but we think about 80 of them have been detained countrywide,” Ms Wokuri said.

While the police successfully contained the demonstration in Kampala, the activists battled police in at least 12 other towns, Ms Wokuri said. The biggest battle between the police and the protesters took

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place in Rukungiri District, where live bullets; teargas and paper spray were used to disperse angry demonstrators who had pinned, in the town, pictures denouncing the Eng. Kiggundu-led Electoral Commission.

Panic engulfed the business community in Rukungiri, as the police struggled to arrest 21 suspected ringleaders. Some traders closed their shops while others ducked under tables for safety. The demonstration started at about 9am and by midday, many people had fled to safety.

It was the first time the opposition group was mobilizing a nationwide protest against electoral commissioners who were reappointed last year despite widespread complaints about their alleged lack of impartiality and their method of appointment.

In Kampala, the demonstrators attempted to march from the FDC youth office at City House to the Electoral Commission office but met stiff resistance from the police. The police immediately sealed off Burton Street disrupting traffic flow.

Facing intensive fire from the police, the group tactfully disbanded but later converged at the Railway Grounds where they engaged in running battles with the anti-riot police. Five of them were arrested and taken to Kampala Metropolitan Police headquarters.

Kampala metropolitan police commander Andrew Sorowen, who commanded the operation, said the police was forced to use “reasonable force” because the protestors had engaged the police in a fight. Mr Sorowen later said the police had put a ban on all political gatherings in the city until the perpetrators of the July 11 bomb attacks that killed at least 76 people in Kampala are arrested. “We got information that this group wanted to stage a demonstration in the city. They wrote to us but we refused, and as far as I am concerned they are here illegally,” Mr Sorowen said. “We can’t allow them to cause confusion.”

In Arua District, about 10 members of FDC, including the district woman MP, Ms Christine Abia Bako, were arrested during the protest in the municipality. Ms Abia’s group engaged the police in running battle on a number of Arua streets. The central battle point was between Rhino Camp Road and Avenue Street. The majority of demonstrators were arrested at Arua Referral Hospital, where they had sought refuge. Patients and workers at the hospital fled as the battle intensified. Ms Abia and her group were later released on police bond after being charged with holding an unlawful assembly.

In Mbale town, the police backed by the military used guns to hit demonstrators who dispersed in disarray to abandon the planned demonstration. Ms Diana Nandaula, the police spokesperson for Eastern region, told Daily Monitor yesterday that they got information about the planned demonstration late, and that the Force decided to deny the protestors permission. “We have arrested many of them, beaten some although not to the magnitude portrayed by FDC supporters,” Ms Nandaula said. In Soroti Municipality, eight FDC members were arrested and detained at Soroti Central Police Station after they tried unsuccessfully to organize a rally in the town.

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Bundled on truck

Similar running battles between the police and demonstrators were witnessed in Hoima town for about two hours. Town chairman Francis Atugonza led a group of opposition supporters through the streets. The group was carrying placards that read; “Disband the EC which is partisan” and “Step down Eng. Kiggundu.”

Mr Ismail Kasule, the district FDC youth mobilize, was arrested and bundled onto a police truck. Excitement grew among the protestors after a team of FDC officials led by party president, Dr Kizza Besigye, his deputy Salaam Musumba and spokesperson Wafula Oguttu joined the demonstration.

Dr Besigye then ordered for the immediate release of Kasule and the police complied. “Do not beat up people who have committed no offence,” Dr Besigye told the police. “This is evidence to prove that the country is heading for a traumatic period.”

In Busia District, the police are said to have mistakenly impounded a lorry that was carrying secondary school students going for a football match. The Force, acting on wrong information, suspected the students to be disguised FDC supporters who were being ferried to stage a demonstration in Busia town. By press time, the students had been released.

In Bushenyi, the police moved swiftly to block the demonstration and arrested one opposition supporter, Julius Nuwagaba. In Jinja District, at least three people, including the FDC Jinja Division boss were arrested for spearheading the failed demonstration in the town.

***Reported by Gerald Bareebe, Francis Mugerwa, Jansen Asiima, Paul Aruho, David Mafabi, Mudangha Kolyanga and Richard Otim & Felix Warom***

Denying Ugandan citizens the right to free assembly cannot go on forever. Uganda is currently dealing with a desperate regime that is determined to hang on to power at all cost

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