

France deploys 45,000 troops to quell police brutality protests, arresting over 1,000

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Police officers arrest a man during protests in Lille, northern France, on June 29th, two days after a teenager was shot dead during a police traffic stop in the Paris suburb of Nanterre.

(Photo by AFP)?

Paris, July 1 (RHC)-- France has deployed 45,000 police and several armored vehicles to quell protests across the country over the police killing of a teenager for a traffic violation and arrested nearly 1,000 protesters.

Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin claimed "a much lower intensity" on Saturday on the fourth straight night of protest rallies compared to earlier days, but declared the detention of 994 more protesters overnight.

Darmanin ordered the deployment of 45,000 police officers to the streets to suppress the raging unrest, saying "the next hours will be decisive" as he called on local authorities to halt bus and tram traffic from 9 p.m. local time.

He said more than 200 police officers were injured during clashes with protesters, noting that his forces took into custody mostly young people taking part in the rallies, estimating their average age at 17.

The French minister censured the "unacceptable violence" in the cities of Lyon and Marseille," saying more than 80 arrests were made in Marseille alone, and that "significant reinforcements" were deployed after the city's Mayor Benoit Payan called on the national government to immediately send additional troops to put down the protests.

This came as French authorities claimed that conditions in the capital Paris were slightly calmer than on previous nights. However, 120 people were arrested in the capital city, with reports of burnt garbage and violent scuffles in the Les Halles district, despite a massive deployment of riot police forces.

Asked whether the government could declare a state of emergency, Darmanin vowed: "Quite simply, we're not ruling out any hypothesis and we'll see after tonight what the president of the republic chooses."

Unrest and clashes have erupted in France as protests rage on over the fatal shooting of Nahel M, a 17-year-old boy of North African decent, who was killed by police at a traffic stop in the Parisian suburb town of Nanterre on Tuesday.

The tragic incident has fed into a deep-rooted perception of police violence and systemic racism within the ranks of law enforcement agencies from rights groups and within the low-income, racially-mixed suburbs that formed around major cities in the European country.

French President Emmanuel Macron was forced to rush back from an EU summit to take part in a second emergency crisis meeting in Paris as nationwide violent protests, triggered by the police killing of Nahel, continued for a third night.

The mother of the killed teenager, whose unwarranted death has triggered the unrest, has accused the police officer who shot her son of racial bias. She said that the 38-year-old officer, now facing a voluntary homicide charge, was blinded by racism when he "saw an Arab face" and chose to use lethal force instead of other methods to deal with her son over his traffic violation.

Nahel was buried in a ceremony on Saturday, according to the mayor of Nanterre, the Paris suburb where he lived and was killed. The family's lawyers have asked journalists to stay away, saying it was "a day of reflection" for Nahel's relatives.

The latest unrest has revived memories of riots in 2005 which convulsed France for three weeks and forced then-president Jacques Chirac to declare a state of emergency.

The United Nations has already warned France against French police brutality, saying Paris needs to address deep issues of racial discrimination among French law enforcement officers.

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