

Internet back in Gabon but post-poll tensions rife

LIBREVILLE, Gabon - Internet services in Gabon partially resumed Monday after a five-day blackout following days of violence and chaos sparked by President Ali Bongo's disputed re-election.



Image by 123RF

Post-election unrest has claimed at least seven lives in the oil-rich central African nation, ruled by the Bongo family since 1967. Ali Bongo's rival Jean Ping, a veteran diplomat who has held a top African Union job and served as foreign minister, has already vowed to challenge the result.

Bongo was declared victorious by a razor-thin margin of just under 6,000 votes, but Ping has insisted the vote was rigged and on Friday claimed victory for himself. He is calling for a recount - something the Gabonese authorities have so far refused to do.

On Monday, the internet was accessible but social media networks remained blocked, according to AFP journalists in the capital Libreville. Banks and shops re-opened in the seaside city and taxis returned to the streets. But many shops offered only limited provisions as the unrest stalled deliveries.

The violence after the announcement of the results on Wednesday has sparked international concern with top diplomats calling for restraint as rights groups raised alarm over the use of excessive force.

At least seven people have died, according to an AFP count, and some 800 people have been arrested in the capital. UN chief Ban Ki-moon spoke to both Bongo and Ping on Sunday and "deplored the loss of life", a UN statement said.

"He expressed concern about the continuing inflammatory messages being disseminated and called for an immediate end to all acts of violence in the country," it said.

Tensions remained high in the economic capital Port-Gentil and Total workers turned up for the first since Tuesday, a management source in the French oil giant told AFP. A Total worker said there had been gunshots heard in the city overnight.

"The refinery remains closed. The teams working round-the-clock are only there to ensure security," said an official at Sogara, Gabon's sole refinery jointly owned by the government and a clutch of major international firms. The troubles have also caused prices to rocket.

"Four chillies now cost 1,000 CFA francs (1.5 euros, \$1.6) against 200 to 300 CFA francs earlier," said Andre, a resident from Lalala-a-gauche, a working class area in Libreville. "Things will really start heating up," he said, echoing a widespread fear in the capital.

The country had previously enjoyed relative political stability, mainly because former colonial power France helped Omar Bongo rule for 41 years. After he died in June 2009, his son Ali won an election but opposition media claimed he had essentially been installed by France.

Source: [AFP](#).

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