

Head of Bahrain's opposition group hurt in clashes

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Ibrahim Shareef, general secretary of Bahrain's second-largest opposition group, the National Democratic Action Society, or Waad (Promise), was injured Saturday night during clashes with police.

Shareef was treated at a local hospital for knee and shoulder injuries after police stormed a solidarity ceremony for two opposition figures. The gathering was held at a site in Nuwaidrat, east of the capital, Manama.

Shareef told the Arabic daily Al Waqt that the injuries he suffered were the result of rubber bullets and that he was planning to file a complaint Sunday with the public prosecutor against the Interior Ministry.

The daily also quoted the assistant deputy of legal affairs at the Interior Ministry that authorities received information indicating the intention of a group of individuals to assemble in the area to hold a symposium without obtaining proper permits.

The deputy pointed out that the organizers failed to notify authorities and obtain permission from the ministry.

'The public security forces had issued an order for the participants to disperse, but they did not comply, which led the forces to deal with them as necessary to disperse them within the law,' he was quoted saying.

Shareef was on a stage flanked by a number of opposition figures and an opposition member of Parliament addressing a crowd of some 200 people, when police intervened to break up the illegal ceremony.

Organizers rushed to the stage to shield Shareef and the other participants from police.

The clashes left several participants injured, while at least one police officer sustained an injury after being attacked by a protester.

A local bakery shop caught fire during the clashes, which lasted for more than two hours. Two more shops nearby were also damaged.

The clashes quickly spread to the nearby Shia village of Sitra, where rioters exploded a gas cylinder under a high-voltage electricity tower.

The ceremony was originally planned to be a solidarity campaign to show support for Haq Movement General Secretary Hassan Mushaima and the of the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights Executive Director Abdulhadi Al Khawaja, who were to face trial Monday on security charges including calling for the overthrow of the regime.

Their arrests on February 2 sparked widespread riots. Authorities released them on bail the same day pending the trial, which they said earlier this week that they would boycott, describing the case against them as politically motivated and claiming that the court was biased.

Bahrain King Shaikh Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa had pardoned the two on Saturday and ordered the public prosecution to withdraw the court case against them, following a meeting with the head of the largest Shia opposition grouping Al Wefaq and Shaikh Ali Salman, a member of Parliament.

The king expressed hope that such violations would not be repeated.

Al Mushaima and several other activists withdrew from Al Wefaq in 2005 after the group announced that it would end its boycott of the elections and take part in the 2006 vote.

The splintered group formed Haq, the only movement to boycott the elections in 2006.