

Violence rocks French overseas territories as resistance grows to colonialism

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France is struggling with increasing demands for independence from its overseas collectivities -- a legacy of the country's colonial period. The colonies make up 18% of French territory and are home to 2.6 million people

Paris, September 20 (RHC)-- France's territories in the Caribbean and the Pacific are facing a new wave of unrest with security forces killing two men in New Caledonia and a curfew imposed after rioting in

Martinique.

The uptick in violence poses a challenge for new centre-right Prime Minister Michel Barnier, who has struggled to form a government following snap parliamentary elections in June, when no party won an absolute majority.

Barnier, the European Union's former Brexit negotiator, submitted a proposed new cabinet to President Emmanuel Macron late on Thursday, with the list to be officially announced as soon as Friday, the AFP news agency reported.

In the Pacific territory of New Caledonia, police killed two men during an overnight operation, the Noumea prosecutor's office said on Thursday. The incident took place in Saint Louis, a stronghold of the independence movement south of Noumea, as police searched for about a dozen people suspected of involvement in armed robbery and attacks on security forces, the prosecutor's statement said.

The killings raise to 13 the death toll on the Pacific island since the start of a crisis triggered by a controversial voting reform that was suspended in June.

In June, Macron suspended the reform plan but violence has persisted in the territory, a major nickel producer. France sent thousands of soldiers and police forces to the archipelago, which is home to about 270,000 people and located nearly 17,000 km (10,600 miles) from Paris. Damage from the violence was estimated at \$2.4 billion.

Separately, the prefect of France's overseas territory of Martinique imposed a nighttime curfew to limit movement in certain districts of Fort-de-France and Le Lamentin due to violence that has rocked the Caribbean island.

The curfew, which was imposed on Wednesday, will stay in place until at least September 23 from 9 pm to 5 am and comes amid protests against the high cost of living on the island of 350,000, the government statement said.

On Friday, some damaged cars were seen blocking the streets of the island. In other areas, burned rubbish was seen strewn in the middle of traffic. Taxi drivers also joined the demonstrations.

Rodrigue Petitot, an activist, told Al Jazeera that residents of Martinique are protesting soaring costs, which are for example 30 percent higher for food compared with prices in France.

Gladys Roger, another activist and protester, said that a portion of the island's population "find themselves in extreme poverty," with parents struggling to properly feed their children. "The problem has been there for a long time, and it is time for a concrete solution," Roger said.

The riots follow protests that began in early September over rising prices. The prefect of Martinique, Jean-Christophe Bouvier, said authorities have made 15 arrests. Eleven police officers were injured by gunfire, he said, adding that three rioters also suffered injuries.

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