

•
•
•
•
Atar

Issue

19

Sudan in Perspective

Monday, January 13, 2025

War-torn Cities: Solidarity Amid Ruins



Artwork by: Obada Gabir

Marhaba!

This is the 19th issue of “Atar” English magazine, from Sudan Facts Center for Journalism. It will be coming to you on Monday, after every two weeks.

As always, we strive to deliver a deep and reflective exploration of issues that shape the lives, identities, and futures of Sudanese communities. This issue is a special edition that ventures into the concept and reality of “war-torn cities.”

In this feature, we embark on a journey through the intricate layers of cities profoundly affected by conflict. These cities were chosen not only for their historical significance and unique patterns of social formation but also for their unyielding courage and solidarity amidst the most harrowing adversities. Their resistance to the ravages of war—both its physical and psychological tolls—represents a singular narrative of resilience, survival, and humanity.

To craft this issue, we have drawn on an array of sources, including books, studies, and historical accounts that delve into the social, political, and economic underpinnings of these cities. Complementing this scholarly groundwork, our dedicated team of correspondents at Atar has worked tirelessly to bring you firsthand, live reports from the heart of

these urban landscapes. These accounts illuminate not only the struggles of enduring harsh living conditions but also the foundational stories of these cities—their birth, growth, and transformations through time.

From its inception, Atar has been committed to chronicling the structural and cultural transformations reshaping Sudanese cities. With roads obstructed by conflict and new pathways emerging—some tracing back to the echoes of ancient civilizations—the very fabric of trade and commerce has shifted. Where once-thriving markets have vanished, new economic hubs have risen, reflecting both loss and adaptation. These transformations are not mere reactions to conflict; they are manifestations of the enduring spirit of communities determined to survive and thrive.

Amid these challenges, grassroots initiatives like Emergency Response Rooms (ERRs) and collective kitchens known as “Takays or Dhara” have become lifelines for survival. These initiatives are not abstract programs; they are people-driven, fueled by compassion and the will to endure. ERRs are the tireless hands that show up during crises, ensuring that those affected by war have access

to emergency aid. Takays, on the other hand, embody the warmth of shared humanity, where neighbors cook together to provide hot meals to families who would otherwise go hungry. In the face of unimaginable hardships, these grassroots efforts remind us of the incredible resilience and solidarity that define our communities. They are the heartbeat of survival, proving that even in the darkest moments, humanity's collective spirit can light the way forward.

War, as Ibn Khaldun insightfully observed, is the ultimate manifestation of social conflict, one that inexorably leads to new urban processes. It challenges the core of social cohesion while simultaneously birthing new forms of solidarity and resistance. This issue examines the unique urban dynamics shaped by conflict, offering a window into the interplay of destruction and reconstruction, despair and hope.

Through the stories featured in this issue, we ask critical questions: What lies ahead for these cities? How will their social and economic frameworks evolve in the aftermath of war? What shifts will occur in the balance of power and wealth within these communities? And on what

foundations will these cities rebuild and redefine themselves for the future?

Our exploration does not end here. We are committed to continuing this research in future issues, broadening the scope to include other cities across Sudan. Through these efforts, we aim to paint a comprehensive portrait that connects the past and present to the possibilities of the future. As we progress, we will also interrogate the applicability of the term “war-torn cities” to Sudanese urban centers. Are all cities equally shaped by war, or do some demand an entirely different conceptualisation to understand their experiences and trajectories?

This editorial serves not only as an introduction to the current issue but also as an invitation. We invite you, our readers, to join us in this journey of inquiry, reflection, and discovery. Together, let us explore the resilience of our cities and the spirit of their people, and let us imagine the futures they might carve out for themselves—futures where the scars of conflict might one day give way to the enduring marks of hope and renewal.

Atar Editorial Team 



Atar

Sudan in Perspective

From

FACTSD
FACTS CENTER FOR JOURNALISM

Editor in Chief:

Arif Elsawi

Co-Managing Editors:

Amar Jamal

Muhammad Alsadiq

Hatim Alkinani

Senior Editor:

Mahmoud Dagash

Editor:

Michael Mugwang'a

Mohammed Elkamel

Wafa M. A. Ali

Mohamed Hussen

Editorial Secretary:

Maysa Hanafi

Visual Editors:

Obada Gabir

Tartil Ameir

Fadia Salih

Amna Murtada


Aya Sinada



With more than 30 correspondents in and outside Sudan

In this issue:

- ◇ **Editorial**
2 - 3
- ◇ **As SAF regains control in Omdurman's Karari, life is getting harder**
5 - 11
Atar Team
- ◇ **Al-Fashir groans: A bustling refuge city now rendered lifeless**
12 - 17
Nemat Al-Haj and Malaz Imad
- ◇ **Sennar: A rebound from RSF induced turmoil and cautious optimism for the future**
18 - 22
Maab Al-Mirghani
- ◇ **El-Obeid: Bond of the people to their joint destiny and their land mitigates perils of war**
23 - 28
Gurashi Awad and Mohammed Al-Tijani
- ◇ **Nyala: A study into the power of a people's resilience to beat odds of war**
29 - 35
Mohammed Abbakar Musa

 www.atarnetwork.com

 atar@sudanfacts.org

  +254 115 438212

    [@atarnetwork](https://www.youtube.com/@atarnetwork)

As SAF regains control in Omdurman's Karari, life is getting harder

 **Atar Team**



Artwork by: Obada Gabir

Karari, the northernmost locality of Omdurman, narrowly escaped control of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF).

At the onset of the conflict, the RSF seized the localities of Ombadda and Omdurman before retreating from parts of Old Omdurman as the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) launched offensives from Wadi Sayyidna Base to Engineer Corps Headquarters, which had endured a prolonged siege lasting several months.

Due to comparatively fewer military clashes between the warring factions in Karari than in other parts of Khartoum State, the locality became a haven for thousands of displaced residents fleeing violence in neighbouring areas and regions engulfed by the conflict. It also transformed into a hub for diverse commercial activities.

As battles intensified and civilian casualties rose, Karari's neighbourhoods received an influx of people forced out of their homes in Ombadda and Omdurman by aerial bombings and artillery shelling. Six displaced women from Ombadda told *Atar* that airstrikes and the military's artillery targeting RSF positions in residential areas had driven them to seek refuge in Karari.

The displacement was not limited to people alone; their businesses followed them to Karari, leading to the emergence of new commercial activities.

Atar correspondent in Omdurman documented over 19 new gold shops on Al-Wadi Street, 21 on Al-Nuss Street, and



Karari locality, situated in northern Omdurman, spans approximately 3,900 square kilometres and is home to about 700,000 people. It has become a temporary capital from which the state government conducts its affairs. Despite a year and a half of war, it remains one of the few areas still densely populated.

The locality comprises administrative units, including Al-Thawra, Karari, and Northern Rural Unit, along with several historic villages in its rural outskirts, such as Wad Al-Bakheet, Al-Jarrafah, As-Surourab, and Sheikh Al-Tayyib. It also encompasses Al-Thawra neighbourhoods and their extensions. Karari is home to the Wadi Sayyidna Military Base, the Sudanese Military Academy, and several army camps.

Historically, Karari is known as the site of the 1898 Battle of Karari (Battle of Omdurman), where Mahdist forces clashed with invading British troops, supported by Egyptian forces. The British subsequently captured Omdurman, and Mahdist forces retreated westward to Umm Dibikarat. ♦

four on Al- Shingeiti Street. Employees of these newly established gold shops revealed that many of them had previously worked in Khartoum's Gold Tower, Omdurman Market, or Libya Market. None had originally operated in Karari, whose urban zones are intersected by five major streets running south to north before opening up to expansive rural areas that stretch to the borders of River Nile State.

Between March and September last year, rental prices in Karari skyrocketed. A two-bedroom apartment got to 400,000 Sudanese pounds per month, while half of a ground-floor house cost 500,000 pounds. Before the war, property owners actively sought tenants to safeguard their homes from theft, often committed by armed gangs and individuals in military uniforms. By December, securing a rental property in Karari became nearly impossible as some residents returned from Egypt, Ethiopia, and Libya, while others fled from Al-Jazirah, White Nile, and Kordofan.

At the outbreak of the war, residents devised innovative methods to prevent the entry of armed forces and military vehicles into their neighbourhoods. Some blocked paved roads, others sealed interior streets with debris and electric poles, while some even dug up the ground to deter motorcycles and rickshaws. Even after military operations subsided in certain areas, the roads remained closed,

By December, securing a rental property in Karari became nearly impossible as some residents returned from Egypt, Ethiopia, and Libya, while others fled from Al-Jazirah, White Nile, and Kordofan.

leaving neighbourhoods with limited, hard-to-navigate access points unfamiliar to outsiders.

According to Al-Amin Abdel Rahman, a resident of Karari's Tenth District, thousands of displaced individuals from Sinnar State arrived in the locality after the RSF seized control of Singa City in late June.

Al-Tom Abdalla, who fled from Ad-Dinder in Sinnar State, recounted his 13-day journey to Omdurman with his family. He rented half a house in Karari's Ninth District for 470,000 pounds per month, believing Omdurman to be safer than other areas and better equipped with basic services, based on media reports. However, he was dismayed to discover that the city itself was embroiled in the war, which had spread to numerous states.

Abdalla said civilians were being killed by stray bullets, indiscriminate artillery fire, and shelling by RSF forces, which directed their light and heavy weapons toward residential areas. The SAF, he noted, used these neighbourhoods as shields for launching attacks on RSF strongholds.

Despite the RSF retreating southward to Al-Salha, south of Omdurman, and leaving Al-Fiteehab, south of the Military Medical Corps deserted, displaced residents from Omdurman have not returned to their areas due to the lack of services and ongoing security instability. A resident of Block One in Al-Fiteehab, south of Al-Fiteehab Bridge roundabout, stated that although she returned to her home following the RSF's retreat, she still commutes to Al-Romi Medical Centre on Al-Shingeiti Street in Karari for diabetes and osteoporosis treatment, given the absence of medical clinics in her neighbourhood.

Like property rental prices, the residents of Omdurman and Karari face soaring costs for food and medicine. A trader in Sabreen Market attributed the increase to the government's currency replacement decision, explaining that many merchants converted their cash holdings into stockpiles of goods to mitigate the risks of devaluation.

Conversely, some residents who had sought refuge in neighbouring countries have returned to their homes in Karari following a relative lull in fighting. Among them is Adam Suleiman, who returned to his residence in District 14, Karari, after spending seven months in refugee camps in Ethiopia. Adam told *Atar* that he had traded the horrors of refugee camps for the relentless shelling,

power outages, disease outbreaks, and mosquito infestations at home.

Adam, who fled from Al-Jazirah State to Ethiopia after the RSF seized control there in December last year, reported several civilian deaths in his neighbourhood due to RSF shelling from the direction of Ombadda locality. Stray bullets from both warring factions have also caused numerous civilian injuries.

From the outset of the war, official rhetoric framed Karari locality as a frag-

A trader in Sabreen Market attributed the increase to the government's currency replacement decision, explaining that many merchants converted their cash holdings into stockpiles of goods to mitigate the risks of devaluation.

ile but essential alternative to the rest of Khartoum, portraying it as the capital's lifeline amidst the turmoil. Over time, Karari, with its vast rural expanses overshadowing its urban areas, emerged as the de facto substitute for Greater Omdurman.

However, this official narrative diverges starkly from the lived realities in Karari. The locality has transformed into a militarized zone, with neighbourhoods turning into army garrisons and hundreds of security checkpoints established along main roads. The ongoing shelling and broad

daylight armed robberies, often carried out under the guise of military operations, exacerbate the residents' plight.

Meanwhile, residents grapple with pervasive mosquito infestations, rising healthcare costs, and overcrowded hospitals teeming with patients and war casualties.

Several hospitals in Karari have resumed operations after partial or total shutdowns. These include government facilities like Al-Naw Hospital, which houses an emergency department and a maternity ward and treats both military and civilian casualties. Additionally, Al-Bulk Children's Hospital remains a critical point of care, alongside private medical centres like the ever-operational Al-Romi Centre. In the northern rural area of Karari, As-Suro-urab Hospital has reopened its doors, offering emergency care and specialised departments for kidney treatment, maternity, and paediatrics.

The Khartoum state government has also worked to revive Omdurman Emergency Hospital. However, according to medical personnel who spoke to *Atar*, the services there remain severely inadequate, and many patients are transferred by ambulance to Al-Naw Hospital.

A doctor running a small clinic in Karari, who requested anonymity for security reasons, told *Atar* that daily patient visits skyrocketed from nine in the January–July period to over 60 in August and

September. Most cases are linked to malnutrition and deteriorating environmental conditions. He also noted a rise in mortality rates due to weakened immune systems caused by malnutrition and anemia.

A woman in District 23, Al-Thawra, recounted being struck by a stray bullet while at home. Doctors, instead of surgically removing the bullet lodged in her shoulder, advised her to wait for several months until the wound healed, citing the possibility of living with the foreign object.

A doctor running a small clinic in Karari, who requested anonymity for security reasons, told Atar that daily patient visits skyrocketed from nine in the January–July period to over 60 in August and September.

By June, six communal kitchens (takaya) in Districts 23, 13, and 14 of Karari's Al-Thawra neighbourhood were providing essential meals to an unquantifiable number of residents and displaced persons from Omdurman and Khartoum. However, as of now, only three takaya continue to operate, serving small portions of rice and lentils that barely suffice for a fraction of the growing number of displaced people. With rising food prices and dwindling financial resources, the need for food aid has become more pressing.

Speaking to *Atar*, Samia Yagoub,

a mother of five who fled her home in Al-Fetimab village north of Libya Market to District 23, Al-Thawra, revealed that she once relied on three meals a day from multiple communal kitchens in neighbouring districts. Now, with many takaya ceasing operations, she struggles to secure even a single meal for her children daily.

As for Ibrahim Hamad, a pseudonym as per his request, an engineer who used to work for an oil production company, he now walks daily between District 13 and District 10 to get a meal from a takaya kitchen there. Ibrahim, who once received a handsome salary, owned a two-story house in the upscale Al-Muhandis-in neighbourhood in southern Omdurman, and lived a stable life before the war, told *Atar*:

“I now prefer death to the pain we endure due to poverty and having to stand in line for free meals, which we were unaccustomed to eating before the war.”

Ibrahim is one of thousands of employees and merchants who were once well-off but have since lost their jobs and businesses, making soup kitchens their last resort for food. He has received no aid, even after 18 months of war, despite the abundance of goods sent by relief organizations and benefactors to war victims like him, as much of it ends up being sold in markets.

Residents of Omdurman and Karari face an acute food crisis, exacerbated by

soaring prices, lack of job opportunities, and the erosion of salaries due to the depreciation of the Sudanese pound, which fell from 500 pounds per dollar at the start of the war to 2,700 pounds in October of last year. The worsening economic conditions have been accompanied by widespread outbreaks of malaria, dengue fever, and typhoid.

A nutrition expert at Al-Naw Hospital in Omdurman revealed that six out of every 10 patients admitted suffer from acute malnutrition, and seven out of 10 patients have not consumed milk for at least six months.

Samia, whose children now get only one meal after the takaya stopped their operations, said some of her relatives used to support her with irregular monthly contributions. However, even this sporadic support has ceased due to the prolonged war and the growing number of dependents among family and relatives.

A nutrition expert at Al-Naw Hospital in Omdurman revealed that six out of every 10 patients admitted suffer from acute malnutrition, and seven out of 10 patients have not consumed milk for at least six months.

With the outbreak of the war and the suspension of official procedures for recharging electricity meters, residents resorted to a method called Al-Jabbada,

where individuals connect a direct wire from the power line into their homes.

Residents praised the electricity administration for allowing them to use this workaround, which alleviated the difficulty of obtaining gas, as its supply was interrupted for months. When gas became available in distribution centres, its cost was beyond the purchasing power of most people, with a 12-kilogramme cylinder priced at more than 50,000 pounds.

Last week, the National Electricity Authority began removing the makeshift wires residents had used and started inspecting metres in homes in preparation for reactivating the official system.

For the second time, the Khartoum State Water Authority announced its intention to resume billing residents for water usage. Before the war, this fee was collected as part of the pre-paid electricity system. This means that residents will soon have to bear the costs of both electricity and water.

With the suspension of gas supplies to bakeries in Omdurman and Karari, bakery owners turned to using firewood, putting ornamental and shade trees in abandoned homes at risk of being cut down. According to *Atar* correspondent

in Karari, armed individuals have been cutting trees in unoccupied homes, government and private facilities, and along public streets to sell the wood to bakeries.

A bakery owner on Al-Shingeiti Street told *Atar* correspondent that the price of a quintal of acacia or *Balanites aegyptiaca* (desert date) firewood ranges between 30,000 and 50,000 pounds, compelling them to buy wood from the felled trees in neighbourhoods at lower prices.

The correspondent observed that bakery owners purchase a full tuk-tuk load of firewood for about 40,000 pounds, while a cartload costs between 20,000 and 30,000 pounds.

Despite the resumption of several police stations across Greater Omdurman, including Kabjab, Doha Abu Saad, Southern Central, the market, Northern Omdurman, Al-Sina'at, and Al-Muhandisin, as well as the presence of military checkpoints staffed by mobilised forces in police uniforms, security forces, and the army, the city remains severely tense. Killings and robberies have become increasingly widespread.



First published in Arabic, *Atar* weekly magazine, issue 60, January 9, 2025.

Atar

Sudan in Perspective

Issue 19, Monday, January 13, 2025

Al-Fashir groans: *A bustling refuge city now rendered lifeless*

■ Nemat Al-Haj and Malaz Imad



Artwork by: Obada Gabir

“Aman Alki Dongli,” a widely recognised phrase in the Fur language, roughly translates to the welcoming expression: “You are most welcome... Sultan’s Al-Fashir greets you warmly.”

This sentiment greets visitors as they arrive at Al-Fashir International Airport, west of the city, and continues as they travel into the heart of the city. Along the way, they pass landmarks such as the historic University of Al-Fashir, public institutions, and Miram Taga Theatre (named after Princess Taga, the daughter of Sultan Ali Dinar). The theatre hosted the 21st School Competition in 2013, where students from across Sudan gathered under the slogan ‘Darfur, Our Homeland’. The Sultan’s Palace stands as a relic of the past, and one might imagine hearing the echo of ceremonial drums signaling urgent matters.

Today, however, even this once-vivid journey feels like a distant memory. Life in Sultan’s Al-Fashir has turned upside down. What was once bustling and dynamic has now devolved into eerie silence, punctuated only by gunfire and artillery. The lively city has become a battlefield scarred by destruction, an economic collapse, and paralyzing fear and anxiety. These harrowing conditions have rendered life almost unbearable, turning daily existence into an ongoing struggle for survival.

Rayyan, who fled the ravages of war in Al-Fashir to a southern displacement camp before returning due to homesick-



Al-Fashir, the capital of North Darfur State, carries a name whose meaning has sparked various interpretations, the most common being a reference to the sultan’s council in earlier times. Historically the capital of the Sultanate of Fur (1445–1916), the city lies in western Sudan in the southern part of North Darfur State. Al-Fashir comprises four administrative units: Al-Fashir, Rural Al-Fashir, Dar Al-Salam, and Karuma, spanning approximately 24,000 square kilometres. Following the Juba Peace Agreement in October 2020, it was named the capital of the entire Darfur Region, encompassing five states.

ness, recounted the city's transformation.

"In the past, descending toward the Grand Market through Dabbat Al-Cinema, we would hear announcements for the new film screening through loudspeakers. We would see the Ferris wheel spinning in Morwj Almadina Park along the shore of Lake Al-Fashir, where Wadi Swaylenga flows from the Jogo Jogo peaks east of Al-Fashir, winding its way through northern neighbourhoods to the lake." Rayyan said as he also recalled the picturesque scene of acacia trees casting their thick shadows on Al-Fashir Bridge, which links the city's north and south, creating an unforgettable sight.

"That view vanished years ago when the trees were cut down to expand the bridge," she lamented.

Today, the streets bear no resemblance to their former self.

"Instead of safe passageways, the roads are now riddled with trenches, barricades, craters, and cracks from shelling and falling projectiles, making movement both challenging and perilous," Rayyan said.

Religious life has also suffered immensely.

"Worshippers now approach mosques with great caution, fearing shelling and clashes. People are forced to combine congregational prayers to ensure their safety," Rayan told *Atar*

It once stood at the heart of the city, serving as a vital connection between all its neighbourhoods; the transportation

Al-Fashir has long enjoyed economic prominence, historically serving as a key hub for trade caravans traversing the Darb al-Arba'in route to various parts of Sudan, the region, and even as far as Hejaz and the Levant in Asia. Over time, it evolved into a marketplace for agricultural goods sourced from across Darfur, with its most famous markets being the Grand Market, Livestock Market, and Um Dafasu Market. Its economy relies on millet, groundnut, and sesame farming, in addition to trading agricultural goods, livestock, and herding sheep, cattle and camels.

Socially and culturally, Al-Fashir has acted as a melting pot of diverse African and Arab ethnicities. The residents speak local languages (Fur, Zaghawa, Masalit, etc.) alongside colloquial Arabic, and the city experienced a cultural golden age during Sultan Ali Dinar's reign (1865–1916). Ali Dinar, the last sultan of the Fur Sultanate, ruled from 1898 until the fall of the Mahdist State in 1916 and made Al-Fashir his capital. He invested in its development by building his palace, now a museum, and mosques and even contributed to the Kiswa, the ceremonial cloth of the Kaaba in Mecca. Notable landmarks include the Old Al-Fashir Mosque, Lake Al-Fashir, Hajir Gaddu Wells, and Al-Fashir Airport. Once home to Libya's consulate, the city lost this institution following the 2013 Libyan revolution.

hub near the Al-Fashir local administration building. Upon disembarking from a vehicle, your first step would likely land near the Hajir Gaddu well to the east. This well holds a special place in the hearts of Al-Fashir's residents, inspiring the saying about the allure of its water: "Those who drink it shall surely return."

Here, water tankers and jerrycans intermingle with street vendors and meat sellers. From afar, the aroma of fresh milk fills the air, leading you to large milk containers, while the sizzling sound of frying zalabiya (donuts) beckons like a call:

"Come closer."

Vendors selling lupin beans and roasted groundnuts brighten the market, forming a vivid tableau. Strolling further, you pass by grain mills, butchers, and finally reach the "Jili" market, where people from Mellit, Maba, Sarfaya, Baraka, and Shagra display fresh vegetables along the roadsides.

Describing life in the city today, Mohammed Al-Mustafa, a resident of Al-Fashir, called it an unrelenting nightmare: "The streets have become narrow corridors, hemmed in by fear and barricades."

Mohammed told *Atar* that movement is now limited to a few hours in the morning, and riding public transportation has turned into a hazardous endeavour. The few available vehicles traverse rugged and unsafe roads, posing significant risks, particularly for the elderly and pregnant women.

Despite its rich history, culture, and economy, Al-Fashir has often been marred by its militaristic history in modern Sudan. The current siege, ongoing since May 2024, is the third in its history. During the Turco-Egyptian invasion in 1874, following the Battle of Manawashi, the city fell under colonial rule until the Mahdist forces besieged it in 1884 and incorporated it into the Mahdist State. Later, Sultan Ali Dinar reclaimed it, asserting Darfur's independence from Anglo-Egyptian colonial rule until 1916. In May of that year, Reginald Wingate led a 2,000-strong colonial force to capture Al-Fashir, defeating Sultan Dinar's forces in Brinija (a present-day Al-Fashir neighbourhood). Sultan Dinar retreated to Jebel Marra, where he was killed in November 1916 after months of resistance.

Al-Fashir's role as a conflict zone continued into the modern era, housing three camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs), Abuja, Zamzam, and Abu Shouk, since the Darfur conflict in 2003. These camps remain a haven for those fleeing the current war's horrors. Militarily, Al-Fashir has gained renewed significance, serving as the last stronghold of Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) in the Darfur region. It is home to the Sixth Infantry Division and was also the final base of joint forces from the armed movements, which abandoned neutrality to align with the SAF in September and November 2023. ♦

Currently, the city's markets operate at minimal capacity due to acute shortages of essential goods. Residents rely on small shops that discreetly open to meet basic needs, often in deserted areas such as unfinished structures south of the livestock market or in the Neivasha market to the north.

"Safe areas have all but disappeared, and fear has replaced security. Many families, especially women and children, have been forced to flee in search of refuge. The sounds of gunfire and shelling have become a daily part of our lives, to the extent that we brace ourselves for the first explosion each day. We have even named it the 'Martyr's Shell,' as it frequently claims innocent lives," Al-Mustafa lamented, adding:

"The homes in Al-Fashir have lost their former elegance. Instead of being spaces for rest and comfort, they have become labyrinths of trenches and pits. Their walls bear deep scars, their floors transformed into eerie stages for fear and the marks of war. Each home now stands as a grim testament to the devastation that spares nothing."

Merchant Esam spoke about the local branches of companies like Siga, Weta, and Morouj, explaining how they once adhered to corporate conditions with a six per cent sales commission. Before the conflict, their vehicles would remain in the main market, the livestock market, and the Neivasha market for days, dis-

playing abundant goods. However, when the war erupted, the [closure](#) of the Western Salvation Highway, which connects Darfur to the capital and other production areas through Kordofan, prevented agents from delivering supplies. Treacherous roads and skyrocketing transit fees compounded the problem. To offset losses, merchants doubled their profit margins, pushing prices to unaffordable levels for the average citizen.

Residents rely on small shops that discreetly open to meet basic needs, often in deserted areas such as unfinished structures south of the livestock market or in the Neivasha market to the north.

Esam said merchants then turned to the open market, sourcing goods through Chad and Libya via Mellit. However, when the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) [closed](#) the Mellit route, they were forced to use a southern route through South Sudan and Ad-Deain. The armed militias imposed heavy taxes on transport vehicles, further raising prices for basic commodities. With the increase in roadblocks, escalating transport costs, and the city's siege, Esam told *Atar* he had no choice but to abandon trade entirely.

Expressing his sorrow, Esam recalled how the city's bustling markets have drastically transformed. Merchants now nav-

igate side streets within neighbourhoods to connect the central market to the livestock market, avoiding the main livestock road, where snipers target anything that moves. The central market itself has ceased operations due to repeated RSF attacks, transforming into a ghost town. Markets like Hajir Gaddu, once teeming with life, and the alleyways of the Arab Market, Saad Ghishra, and the Mawaseer Market have emptied entirely. Even the southern leather market is devoid of life.

Accompanied by SAF soldiers, Esam ventured through these areas some time ago. He described scenes of devastation: Shattered storefronts, goods scattered across the ground, broken doors, dilapidated shelves, and pervasive darkness that required artificial lighting to traverse.

When clashes between the SAF and the RSF first broke out, the central market became a frontline battleground. Orphaned children sought shelter to the south, taking refuge in storage facilities near the Taimanat cemetery. By early May, as RSF forces advanced into neighbourhoods like Al-Salam and Al-Wahda southeast of Al-Fashir, even these children fled into the unknown alongside other displaced residents.

The humanitarian situation in Al-Fashir has worsened dramatically due to the ongoing siege and relentless fighting. Volunteer Abu Dhar recounted the dire conditions at the Saudi Hospital, the

Treacherous roads and sky-rocketing transit fees compounded the problem. To offset losses, merchants doubled their profit margins, pushing prices to unaffordable levels for the average citizen.

only functioning medical facility in the city. While the hospital provides a limited medical staff and some equipment, families must purchase all necessary medical supplies, from gauze and gloves to IV fluids and medications, on their own. Air-dropped supplies, often reserved for the military hospital, are insufficient for civilian needs, forcing many residents to rely on painkillers without proper diagnoses.

Al-Fashir once served as a vital link connecting western Sudan to its central and northern regions. However, the war that erupted on April 15, 2023 has left a trail of devastation, with cities in the region falling one by one to RSF forces. Al-Fashir became a sanctuary for Darfur's displaced populations until intensifying military operations and targeted attacks on civilians and residential areas forced over two-thirds of its residents to flee to surrounding farms and rural villages.

Today, the city's streets bear the haunting silence of a place abandoned by humanity, as if no one had ever lived there.



First published in Arabic, **Atar** weekly magazine, issue 60, January 9, 2025.

Sennar.

A rebound from RSF induced turmoil and cautious optimism for the future

■ **Maab Al-Mirghani**



On [June 29](#), the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) seized Sennar's state capital, Sinjah, plunging it into darkness. Electricity, internet, and water were cut off, leaving the city paralyzed and nearly lifeless. Access to main roads was severed, and alternative dirt routes became impassable due to heavy rainfall during the autumn season.

The RSF attack triggered dire humanitarian conditions and mass displacement, forcing over [62,000 people](#) to flee Sennar State. Many sought refuge in safer states, heading east to Al-Gadaref and Kassala, or south to the Blue Nile, with some displaced for the second or third time since the conflict began.

Months later, Sennar State, once at the centre of the conflict, began its journey toward recovery. In October and November, the SAF regained control of [Jebel Moya](#) and [Sinjah](#) City. Significant transformations across economic, political, social, health, and environmental dimensions have since marked the region, most notably in Sennar City itself.

Structural and Humanitarian Damage

In October 2024, [the Sennar Youth Alliance](#) reported several statements that the fall of Sinjah to the RSF had profoundly disrupted daily life. The region witnessed human rights violations, infrastructural destruction, and economic collapse. Local sources revealed widespread looting, rape, killings, forced displacement, and the confiscation of agri-



A Region Steeped in History

Sennar State, located in southeastern Sudan along the Blue Nile, spans approximately 40,680 square kilometres. With its rich history and strategic location. It serves as a bridge between central and eastern Sudan, bordered by Al-Jazirah State to the north, the Blue Nile State to the south, Al-Gadaref State to the east and White Nile State to the west. The fertile, expansive lands support agriculture and livestock, but the recent conflict posed significant challenges.

In the early 16th century, Sennar became the capital of the Funj Sultanate, also known as the Blue Sultanate or Sennar Kingdom. Founded by King Amara Dunqas around 1504–1505, it flourished as a centre for Islamic culture and trade, shaping the region's political and social dynamics.

Today, Sennar mirrors Sudan's broader struggles, reflecting the deep humanitarian crisis inflicted by the April 2023 war, which left cities and villages across the nation grappling with varying levels of devastation and recovery. ♦

cultural harvests. Armed groups in the region allied with the RSF exacerbated longstanding land disputes.

The town of Umm Shouka was particularly affected, enduring repeated attacks involving murder, looting, and displacement. Reports of sexual violence emerged from nearby areas, although cultural sensitivities and communication challenges hindered documentation.

“Infrastructure has been severely damaged. Electrical transformers, power grids, and fuel stations were destroyed, and water stations were looted and rendered inoperable,” a spokesperson for the alliance told *Atar Magazine*:

The agricultural sector also suffered, with production halting across most localities. Livestock herds were plundered, as RSF forces used them to feed their troops. Residents emphasized the dire need for comprehensive repairs to restore power and services, as many areas remain without electricity to this day.

Life Saving Connections

Mobile phones have become lifelines, not only for communication but also for receiving financial aid through bank transfers from relatives locally and abroad. However, charging phones presents a challenge amid power outages.

“I search bakeries every morning at 5am for a place to charge my phone,” said Israa Al-Aalim, a resident of Sennar City.

Armed groups in the region allied with the RSF exacerbated longstanding land disputes.

“Sometimes, I wait up to seven hours because bakeries only operate mixers for 15 minutes every two hours. During this time, I also queue for 10 loaves of bread due to fuel and flour shortages,” Israa says.

Fuel scarcity forced residents to revert to primitive methods of transport, relying on donkey carts (karros). Cooking gas shortages led to a resurgence of traditional grinding stones and charcoal irons. Women faced harsh conditions fetching water and preparing meals.

“Life was grueling for five months. Markets were closed, basic goods were scarce, and people had few food options. About 70 per cent of residents relied on collective kitchens, Takaya, that were managed by the Emergency Response Rooms that served simple meals like dark balilah for breakfast and okra stew for lunch,” Israa added.

Health Sector in Crisis

After RSF forces seized Jebel Moya in June, Sennar’s health sector faced catastrophic setbacks. A medical source from Sennar Hospital reported widespread closures of public and private health facilities, the exodus of medical staff and severe shortages of life-saving medicines. Cholera outbreaks and malnutrition among children compounded the crisis.

“Pregnant women, especially those in their final trimester, faced immense risks. With only one nearby maternity hospital in Dim Al-Mashaykha accessible, transportation was scarce, leaving many women to deliver in midwives’ homes. Others suffered miscarriages or required emergency surgeries they couldn’t access,” the source said.

Diabetic patients endured amputations due to the lack of daily wound care. Despite recent signs of recovery, the health sector remains under strain. Hospitals operate in emergency mode with insufficient resources, and many healthcare workers have left after enduring over a year without salaries.

The Sudan Doctors Network [reported](#) that 356 out of 450 medical facilities in Sennar are no longer functional due to RSF attacks, including 20 public hospitals, seven private centres and over 300 health units.

“The destruction of medical facilities and looting of supplies have left civilians vulnerable to disease outbreaks, necessitating urgent intervention,” the network warned.

Economic Impact

The conflict also devastated Sennar’s economy. Residential and commercial property rents soared due to an influx of displaced people from Khartoum and Madani. Meanwhile, trade stagnated as

roads were blocked and essential services disrupted.

Sennar, however, transformed into a commercial hub due to the influx of displaced people, including merchants and business owners from Khartoum and Madani. This influx led to the establishment of new markets that accommodated both traders and displaced individuals. These markets became bustling centres of activity, filled with street vendors and small-scale sellers offering goods obtained through various means from the main market.

The Sudan Doctors Network reported that 356 out of 450 medical facilities in Sennar are no longer functional due to RSF attacks, including 20 public hospitals, seven private centres and over 300 health units.

The industrial and handicrafts sectors also suffered due to road closures and the damage to electricity and water infrastructure. Many investors and small business owners across different sectors lost their projects or inventory. Some migrated to safer areas within the country, while others sought opportunities abroad.

Commercial activity did not remain stable for long, however. When the RSF advanced and declared control over Sennar, many merchants, both locals and displaced, relocated their businesses to eastern Sudan.

Nevertheless, following the SAF's recapture of Jebel Moya and Sennar City in October and November, economic life in Sennar state resumed. The reopening of roads significantly reduced food prices and encouraged merchants to return and restart their businesses.

"Economic activity has rebounded to about 90 per cent. Despite financial losses, businesses have returned stronger, with competition driving down prices," said Mohamed Ismail, local trader.

The Journey Home

As stability gradually returns after months of turmoil, displaced residents have begun making their way back to Sennar, a hopeful step toward reviving the region's social and economic vitality.

One such returnee is Walaa Hashim. The RSF control of Sennar city forced the Walaa family to flee to Al-Gadaref, where they spent four challenging months marred by poor health conditions. Walaa and her family suffered from cholera and dengue fever, with medical treatment hard to come by. Adding to their hardships, outbreaks of illnesses such as Kanakesha fever and hemorrhagic fever posed further threats.

Following the SAF's recapture of Jebel Moya and Sennar City, economic life in Sennar state resumed. The reopening of roads significantly reduced food prices and encouraged merchants to return and restart their businesses.

The harsh conditions in Al-Gadaref prompted Walaa and her family to make the difficult decision to return to Sennar.

"The reasons were clear, the economic conditions in Sennar are far better than in Al-Gadaref," Walaa told *Atar*.

Upon their return, Walaa found a city undergoing transformation. The economy appeared more stable, with open markets, available goods, and improved access to daily necessities. However, challenges persist. Health services remain inadequate, and recurring internet outages disrupt banking services and other vital operations.

Despite these ongoing difficulties, Walaa expressed cautious optimism about the future. Her feelings echo those of many others returning to the area: "We are hopeful. It feels like the beginning of a new chapter for the region."



First published in Arabic, **Atar** weekly magazine, issue 60, January 9, 2025.

El-Obeid:

*Bond of the people to
their joint destiny and their land
mitigates perils of war*

■ Gurashi Awad and Mohammed Al-Tijani



On April 15, 2023, Khalid Mohamed was at his home in the city of El-Obeid when he first heard news of the war breaking out in Khartoum. He recalls how people were gripped by shock and disbelief that day, struggling to comprehend what was happening.

Initially, residents in El-Obeid perceived the conflict as a mere political dispute between two adversaries, expecting it to be swiftly resolved through traditional Sudanese dialogue. In this imagined scenario, Sudan's wise leaders, along with representatives from the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), would sit together and settle their differences.

Khalid Mohamed, an alias, is a retired police officer in his seventies. Currently residing in one of El-Obeid's neighbourhoods, Khalid retired in the early 2000s after serving in various states across Sudan, including Khartoum and the greater Kordofan region.

Five days into the war, the conflict reached El-Obeid. RSF forces spread through neighbourhoods, attacked police stations, and killed several unarmed traffic police officers. This was a turning point for Khalid, and many others in El-Obeid who realised that the situation extended far beyond a political dispute between SAF and RSF.

"These attacks were on unarmed traffic police officers, people who had no involvement in any of this," Khalid told *Atar*.



El-Obeid, the capital of North Kordofan State, is not just a bustling city with a population of approximately 390,340 (as per the last census in 2009). It also holds significant historical and geographical importance. The city's strategic location at the crossroads of trade routes linking western and central Sudan has made it a key player in the ongoing conflict.

The origins of Al-Obeid [date back](#) to the 15th century, beginning as a cluster of small villages. It grew into a vital desert port during the height of caravan trade with Egypt, particularly under the Kingdom of Sinnar. The city became a hub for goods moving between Sudan's southern, central, and northern regions. Its early development was closely tied to the discovery of water, a discovery attributed, according to local legend, to a white donkey belonging to an elderly woman. This tale, passed down through generations, gave the city its name, as people would say: "We are going to live by the white donkey's water source," using the local dialect (El Obeid means white in the local tongue).

In the months that followed, fierce battles broke out between SAF's Fifth Infantry Division, known as Al-Haggana, and RSF forces. The SAF managed to expel the RSF from El-Obeid, but by [June 2023](#), the RSF had encircled the city, placing it under siege, a situation that persists to this day.

Throughout the war, El-Obeid's residents have felt abandoned by the central government. For many, Al-Haggana are the last visible symbol of the Sudanese state. According to Khalid, Al-Haggana's deep ties to the people and the land set them apart from other military units. [Formed](#) before the establishment of the modern Sudanese army, Al-Haggana were later integrated into its structure.

According to Khalid, Al-Haggana gained admiration for their immediate deployment to protect neighbourhoods rather than focusing solely on military installations. He noted that they have provided continuous support to civilians throughout the war, reinforcing their place as protectors of both the land and its people.

Eighteen months into the siege of El-Obeid, the rule of law has disintegrated, and insecurity prevails on the city's fringes in western Sudan. A prominently displayed map at the North Kordofan courthouse, prepared by the city's police, illustrates the areas where officers are still deployed to apprehend suspects and detain them. Yet, the same map makes clear that police personnel are restricted

The people of El-Obeid are no strangers to sieges. In 1882, during the Mahdist Revolution, the city endured a five-month blockade by Mahdist forces, which led to widespread hunger and hardship. However, the current siege, which has lasted over 18 months, has brought an unprecedented level of suffering.

El-Obeid's neighbourhoods are a melting pot of Sudan's diverse ethnic and tribal groups, with residents hailing from greater Kordofan, western Sudan, and various regions in the north and centre. The city is a commercial hub, boasting numerous markets such as Abu Jahl Market, Fur Market, As-Saliheen Market, Ab-Shara'a Market, An-Naggaa Market, Kareema North Market, and the grand market at its centre. It is also home to oil depots and a refinery established in 1996.

Al-Haggana, whose name derives from camel-mounted fighters used in earlier military campaigns, have a storied history in Sudan's military tradition. Their reputation and respect among El-Obeid's residents stem not only from their historical contributions but also from their role in the current conflict. ♦

to this limited zone. Police forces have been withdrawn from all localities across North Kordofan State and consolidated at the central police headquarters. The remaining areas, including administrative posts and access routes, are now entirely under the control of the RSF.

This situation has exacerbated complexities in every aspect of economic and social life, fundamentally impacting the administration of justice, even within the city's relatively safe confines. Sources close to the matter told *Atar* that many criminals have taken refuge in the outskirts beyond the reach of law enforcement, including suspects wanted for murder. Meanwhile, crime rates have risen compared to the war's first year.

Efforts by *Atar's* correspondent to access the police-issued crime bulletin proved futile. However, the restricted operations of law enforcement within their limited zone lend credence to concerns about the escalating crime rate.

"In the early months of the war, law and order disappeared entirely, replaced by chaos. A new law emerged: If someone was accused of theft, anyone could kill them without consequence. This happened multiple times, and no charges were filed because the perpetrators were unknown," a legal expert, who spoke on condition of anonymity, told *Atar*. He added that, as a legal advisor for an insurance company, he could not even file

a routine traffic incident report with the authorities.

Another legal source, who also requested anonymity, told *Atar* that between 300 and 500 prisoners are being held on war-related charges in the SAF prisons. These detainees are denied visits, including from their lawyers, who must obtain special clearance from the prosecution. Most of these individuals have been imprisoned for over a year without investigation or trial. The source further explained that the judiciary in El-Obeid is understaffed due to mass emigration, with no specialised judges available for murder cases. The current climate of insecurity also discourages judges from delivering rulings in such high-stake cases. In the war's initial phase, arrest warrants were rarely issued for premeditated or involuntary manslaughter cases.

The RSF imposes numerous obstacles on transportation routes, from exorbitant levies to outright confiscation of trucks and their cargo, often putting drivers' lives at risk.

The siege has cast a shadow over economic activity, with essential goods becoming increasingly scarce and expensive. The RSF imposes numerous obstacles on transportation routes, from exorbitant levies to outright confiscation of trucks and their cargo, often putting drivers' lives at risk. Traveling from El-

Obeid to Kadugli used to take four hours, but now it requires a week. During the journey, vehicles pass through multiple checkpoints, some controlled by Abdelaziz Al-Hilu's movement. Additionally, travelers must pay a fee of 25 billion Sudanese pounds.

Consequently, transport companies have ceased operations, replaced by small, privately owned trucks whose drivers navigate obscure backroads to evade the armed gangs that proliferate around the city.

These alternative routes have somewhat alleviated supply shortages, leading to marginal reductions in staple grain prices. However, armed groups have discovered these new routes, leading to incidents of theft. One such case involved an attack on a "Buffalo" truck carrying oxygen cylinders to the Alawiya Yousif Clinic, one of the largest private healthcare facilities in El-Obeid. The SAF eventually curtailed some of this activity, particularly in the eastern outskirts of the city.

A pharmaceutical source, speaking on condition of anonymity, shared details of a covert operation to deliver medical supplies from Kosti. The shipment, comprising nine trucks escorted by security forces, resembled a smuggling mission. Among these, three trucks carried supplies for the public medical system, while six served private pharmaceutical companies. The operation improved availability by 25 to 30 per cent for the city's 20 agen-

cies, though only three actively participated in importing medicines.

Almost all basic governmental services inside the besieged city have stopped, including other services like healthcare. Electricity is only available through solar energy, while food prices have risen significantly. The residents of El-Obeid have only two main items on their tables: lentils and rice. Bread, however, is not accessible to everyone due to its high cost. Communication services in El-Obeid have been cut off since last October, leaving the "StarLink" satellite internet as the only option for connectivity.

The residents of El-Obeid have only two main items on their tables: lentils and rice.

In early June, before the siege tightened, local sources reported that the RSF were behind the [looting](#) of the World Food Programme's warehouses in El-Obeid. These warehouses had enough supplies to feed 4.4 million people in desperate need of food assistance. The looted goods were sold in markets dubbed Dagalo's markets.

Retired officer Khalid recounted that RSF forces have, on several occasions, deliberately destroyed food shipments.

"They crushed tomatoes on the ground," Khalid says.

According to him, residents of El-Obeid view such acts as a war against civilians themselves, as they exacerbate

the already dire struggle to obtain food. Meanwhile, the SAF has its own channels to secure its essential supplies.

The siege has also caused severe drinking water shortages. The northern water sources, consisting of 38 wells, have stopped pumping water to the city, which used to supply between 15 and 25 cubic meters daily. Similarly, the southern sources, which provided 20 to 30 cubic meters daily, ceased operation after the RSF entered the areas of Bannu, Wad Al-Baqa, Al-Ayn, and Hafir Barbar. Consequently, residents now rely on wells within the city.

According to a source who spoke to *Atar*, El-Obeid's old station, which collected rainwater and supplied the city with 6 to 7 cubic meters daily, has broken down due to power outages caused by fighting in the Al-Awag area of White Nile State. Within the city, some wells belong to the Drinking Water Authority, while others are owned by the Sanitation Project or individuals. However, most of this water is salty.

At the start of the war, Khalid said, large numbers of displaced people fled to El-Obeid, mostly escaping the fighting in Khartoum. To this day, many of these displaced individuals live with the city's residents under the siege.

Despite this, Khalid hasn't observed any signs of attempts to flee the city. He remarked: "How can we flee when we are already hosting the displaced?"

Although leaving El-Obeid is ex-

"How can we flee when we are already hosting the displaced?"

remely difficult due to security complications, Khalid highlighted the strong human bonds that tie people to their land and to each other, encouraging them to endure together.

After months of siege, civilians in El-Obeid face numerous challenges in meeting their basic needs. With salaries suspended and job opportunities severely diminished, most residents depend on financial aid from outside Sudan or sometimes from relatives from other cities.

While Khalid acknowledges that the war and siege have changed the nature of life in El-Obeid, he also pointed out that the community's deep connection to their land and to each other has helped them remain steadfast. He emphasizes the solidarity among residents, their neighbours, and Al-Haggana Forces, stating that this multifaceted bond has enabled El-Obeid to withstand the siege.



First published in Arabic, **Atar** weekly magazine, issue 60, January 9, 2025.

Atar

Sudan in Perspective

Issue 19, Monday, January 13, 2025



Artwork by: Obada Gabir

Nyala:

*A study into the power of
a people's resilience to beat odds of war*

■ Mohammed Abbakar Musa

On April 15, 2023, mere hours after the outbreak of war in Khartoum, clashes erupted in the city of Nyala between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF).

The fighting began in the Ibad-Al-Rahman neighbourhood, home to an RSF camp near the airport in the eastern part of the city. Due to the camp's proximity to the airport, the RSF launched an attack to capture it. They succeeded only on the following day after intense and prolonged combat. On the same day, the conflict spread to the headquarters of the 16th Infantry Division, located west of the city's market.

The Division's headquarters lies close to the RSF's Seventh Battalion camp in Al-Jeer neighbourhood, approximately 700 meters away. Clashes became a daily occurrence, claiming hundreds of civilian lives.

In August 2023, artillery shelling on the Tayba Bridge, which connects the banks of Wadi Berli, killed over [40](#) civilians and caused numerous injuries, in addition to significant property damage. For over six months, direct military confrontations between the two sides persisted. The fighting ceased in late [October](#) 2023 when the SAF withdrew from its main base, leaving the city under RSF control.

Nyala, having held out for six months, finally fell to the RSF after they captured the 16th Infantry Division's headquarters. However, this fall was unlike others in



Nyala, located in Darfur in western Sudan, serves as the capital of South Darfur State. It lies approximately 900 kilometres from Khartoum. The city is a critical transportation hub, connecting routes from eastern to western Sudan and from north to south. Nyala marks the terminus of the eastern railway line and the starting point for the line extending toward Wau in South Sudan. The city is also a major centre for various commercial activities.

The name Nyala originates from the language of the Daju people, who inhabit the region. Pronounced Ña-la in their tongue, the word translates to “place of conviviality” or “gathering place.” Locally, residents affectionately refer to it as Nyala Al-Bihir. Nyala’s prominence dates back to the 15th century, when it served as the seat of the Daju Kingdom, which ruled the area around Mount Um Kardous until its decline at the end of that century.

In 1929, under the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium (1899–1951), Nyala was designated the administrative centre of the Western Baggara Rural Council following the fall of the Fur Sultanate in 1917 and its subsequent incorporation into British administration.

Sudan. Reports [suggest](#) it resulted from a negotiated surrender, mediated by local tribal leaders, coupled with prolonged siege conditions and the [desertion](#) of some SAF personnel. The SAF leadership offered no immediate comment on the incident.

After the RSF took control, the city witnessed a surge in armed robberies, threats, kidnappings, extrajudicial killings and arbitrary arrests, according to eyewitnesses. These acts extended to surrounding areas and villages, which also suffered from aerial bombardments by the SAF targeting RSF positions often located in civilian areas, such as markets, public streets, and displacement camps.

Nearly every part of Nyala experienced military targeting, either through direct clashes or specialised operations by both warring parties. Many of the city's institutions and landmarks were looted, including Nyala International Airport, World Food Programme [warehouses](#) west of the main bus terminal, and the Nyala Medical Supplies Depot, which serves the broader region. Most health centres, shops, pharmacies, and storage facilities, whether in Nyala's central market or neighbourhoods such as As-Sikka Hadid, Al-Masani, Al-Wadi, and North Nyala, were not spared.

According to [reports](#), the RSF restored and resumed operations at Nyala Airport after it was bombed by SAF warplanes, enabling semi-regular flights since late September. These flights are be-

In late 1921, a revolt against British colonial rule erupted in Nyala, led by Al-Faki Abdullah Al-Suhaini. The guerrilla, armed with traditional weapons, attacked the local garrison and seized its armoury, killing Nyala's inspector, McNeill. However, the guerrilla was short-lived. The insurgents retreated to the Joqanah Zurga forest, and colonial forces quickly regained control. Al-Faki Al-Suhaini had been opposing British rule since 1919.

Nyala's economy relies on agriculture and the trade of livestock. Its products include millet, ground peanuts, gum Arabic, hibiscus, and tamarind. After the partitioning of Darfur into separate states (North, South, East, Central, and West), Nyala remained the capital of South Darfur. Wadi Berli, one of Darfur's largest seasonal rivers, flows through the city from west to east, collecting rainwater from the Jebel Marra highlands. ♦

lieved to be used for evacuating injured RSF personnel to destinations outside Sudan.

The significance of Nyala to both the army and the RSF, along with their allied and loyal factions, stems from its political and economic positioning. Situated at the heart of the Darfur region, Nyala occupies a strategic location for trade routes, economic activities, and investment opportunities. Furthermore, it represents a unique social model. Politically, controlling Nyala equates to governing vast parts of Darfur, amplifying its symbolic importance.

Nyala has served as a central operational base for the RSF since the outbreak of the conflict, benefiting from its strong ties with local components in the state. The RSF has sought to maintain its influence in Nyala, while the city has acted as a military bastion for the SAF, allowing it to retain political and social power as a representative of the central ruling authority.

Over six months of intense conflict in Nyala have led to the displacement of tens of thousands of its residents. Many fled to neighbouring states, localities, villages, or border countries such as Chad, South Sudan, and the Central African Republic. This displacement has been accompanied by catastrophic humanitarian conditions, with displaced persons and refugees suffering from lack of food, water, shelter, and proper healthcare. Residential areas

in Nyala endured heavy shelling and indiscriminate military attacks, resulting in numerous civilian casualties. The military operations also caused the collapse of healthcare services, closure of major markets such as Nyala's Grand Market and the Popular Market, and a complete halt to commercial and investment activities, exacerbating a severe shortage of essential services.

Over six months of intense conflict in Nyala have led to the displacement of tens of thousands of its residents. Many fled to neighbouring states, localities, villages, or border countries such as Chad, South Sudan, and the Central African Republic.

During direct clashes from April to October 2023, both sides used Nyala's Grand Market as a battleground due to its proximity to the army's military headquarters on the western and northern sides. Residential neighbourhoods such as Al-Wadi and Al-Masane were bombarded with heavy artillery and drones, and other areas in the city centre, north, east, and south of Al-Wadi endured months of severe conflict. Displacement camps, including Dereij to the east, At-tash to the north, Kalma to the east and south, and Al-Salam to the south, were not spared the violence, subjecting their residents to repeated displacement.

Engineering and Urban Resistance

Thanks to its distinct architectural and urban features, Nyala emerged as a significant military stronghold and a point of fierce resistance for the army in defending its headquarters against the RSF for over six months. The city's sprawling residential neighbourhoods, narrow and interconnected streets, hindered the RSF's movement and that of allied looters and bandits, known locally as Shafshafa, who use motorbikes, camels, and horses. Civilian efforts to barricade streets, dig trenches, and block roads with stones and cement bricks further constrained the RSF's movements, limiting its capacity for armed robbery, threats, and arrests within the city.

The army's 16th Infantry Division headquarters played a crucial role in the SAF's maintenance of its headquarters. The presence of strategic military warehouses, particularly for ammunition, medical services and fortified facilities, inside and outside its headquarters enabled the SAF to establish trenches, tunnels, and defensive centres. This gave the SAF a strong defensive advantage against the RSF, which relies on surprise attacks. Additionally, elevated buildings around the headquarters served as observation and targeting points, providing the SAF with visual control over the city and its surroundings.

The SAF managed to maintain supply lines and protect key strategic points such as water wells, medical services, and logis-

tical supply routes by redeploying forces across the 16th Infantry Division's command area. These efforts were supported by hidden pathways and secondary roads, along with the public's support, particularly from neighbourhoods adjacent to the Division's headquarters. These factors allowed the SAF to sustain prolonged resistance and thwart RSF strategies aimed at turning the city into a graveyard, as seen in Khartoum and Al-Jazirah State.

The 16th Infantry Division's command is surrounded by prominent landmarks and institutions. To the east lie Nyala's Grand Market, the state building, and the municipality headquarters. The narrow streets and solid stone buildings in the area hindered the RSF's swift advance. The Wadi Berli bridge connects the city's north and south, limiting RSF attacks from that direction. To the north are the Nyala Central Courts Complex, police headquarters, and ministries of health, culture, and media, along with the SAF's strategic medical base. To the west are the neighbourhoods of Al-Jeer North and Al-Salam, leading to Al-Geinea Bus Terminal Market.

Heavy rainfall during the rainy season worsened road conditions and further impeded the flow of troops, conscripts, and military supplies into Nyala. Additionally, the RSF's weak and disorganised urban combat tactics contributed to its failure to defeat the SAF. Their reliance on swift raids and surprise attacks, a core aspect of their "Faza" strategy, proved ineffective in this context.

Social and Economic Resilience

Speaking to *Atar*, Sarah Ahmed, a former resident of Nyala who was later displaced, attributed the resilience of the city's people primarily to the manifestation of their social values, such as cooperation and solidarity. At the height of the war, which caused severe shortages in essential services, residents shared water, food, and care services, especially after widespread looting of markets, shops, and businesses left everyone without means of livelihood. Sarah described how the tradition of Al-Dhara, communal gatherings where people share food and drink, became a lifeline for many families and individuals facing hunger.

With communication and internet networks down, residents exchanged goods and medications. Many traders, pharmacists, and doctors began operating from their homes, fostering barter systems and the sale of household items to mitigate the economic downturn.

Electricity services were disrupted in the war's early weeks, pushing residents to adopt solar panels, whose trade flourished in the city, providing partial relief for energy needs. Water was transported using "fanatis" carts from the many wells within and on the outskirts of Nyala, following the collapse of public water supply lines.

Nyala's tightly-knit social fabric, rooted in shared interests among its diverse

ethnic communities, enhanced social solidarity. Residents leveraged familial and tribal connections to exchange support during hardships. Local charitable associations and community support networks, like emergency response groups (ERRs), provided urgent relief, including food, water, and health services, despite inconsistent and often absent external aid.

These grassroots initiatives established temporary health clinics within neighbourhoods. In education, language and training centres emerged, offering curriculum reviews, alongside the revival of Quranic schools (*khalawi*) and mosques, which played a crucial role in alleviating the harshness of war, particularly for children and youth whose activities had been halted.

The city's residents demonstrated remarkable adaptability to the shifting violence by reorganising their daily routines to avoid conflict zones, safeguarding their homes and possessions, and fortifying streets with barricades and trenches.

The city's residents demonstrated remarkable adaptability to the shifting violence by reorganising their daily routines to avoid conflict zones, safeguarding their homes and possessions, and fortifying streets with barricades and trenches. These efforts weakened attempts by the

RSF and rogue groups to loot and intimidate.

To address gas shortages, people turned to alternative fuels like coal and firewood, despite their scarcity. Residents also planted fast-growing crops, even amid threats from herders and RSF elements who warned that their harvests would only feed livestock. Many faced assaults in their fields or en route to and from them.

The informal economy also helped alleviate the strain of daily life, with small-scale trade continuing in neighbourhood markets and weekly bazaars. Many merchants moved their goods to their homes to sustain buying and selling, while locals relied on agricultural and forest products

The city witnessed bombardment for the thirteenth consecutive day on the morning of Monday, January 13.

and kept livestock at home. Some families had stocked up on supplies at the crisis's onset, while smuggling networks along the South Sudanese, Chadian, and Libyan borders played a role in extending their survival.

Despite their resilience, Nyala's residents continue to face aerial bombardments by the SAF after the city fell into RSF control. The city witnessed bombardment for the thirteenth consecutive day on the morning of Monday, January 13.



First published in Arabic, **Atar** weekly magazine, issue 60, January 9, 2025.



Sudan in Perspective

From

FACTSD

FACTS CENTER FOR JOURNALISM

Journalists Working on Sudan,
anywhere.



To receive a pdf copy of Atar magazine,
you can subscribe via Email or WhatsApp:

atar@sudanfacts.org

+254115438212

     @atarnetwork

www.atarnetwork.com