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for the case to now also be dropped.

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Macky Sall (L) arrives in Abidjan, Ivory Coast recently. AFP PHOTO

Opposition street protests paralyse Kinshasa

BY AFP

KINSHASA. A strike called by the opposition to warn DR Congo's president Joseph Kabila against trying to cling to power closed most shops and schools in Kinshasa yesterday.

The usually bustling city of 10 million people seemed eerily quiet with few buses and pedestrians on the streets and a stoppage by taxis and motorcycle taxis also preventing people from getting to work.

The strike "call to the people" was issued by a coalition including dozens of political parties and civil society organisations allied to the two main opposition parties in parliament and the Group of Seven (G7) -- parties that quit the presidential majority last November.

Opposition leaders believe, Kabila, in power since 2001, wants to get round the constitution and run for office again, after his final mandate expires in December.

The protest was also timed to mark the February 16 anniversary of a bloody crackdown on the "Christian march" of 1992, when many thousands of Roman Catholics rallied in a bid to persuade then dictator Mobutu Sese Seko to open the way for democracy.

Back then police opened fire on the marchers, killing some 20 of them according to authorities, while organisers said about 100 people had been shot dead.

In January last year, several dozen people were killed in Kinshasa when security forces cracked down on rioters after an opposition demonstration spiralled out of control.

Ahead of yesterday's protest, police had announced a massive deployment to ensure that strikers did not try to prevent people who wanted to work from going to their jobs, but few police officers were seen on the streets except around the parliament buildings.