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N'DJAMENA, May 03 -- The streets in Chad's capital are quiet as presidential polls take place in Chad, with President Idriss Deby seeking a third term in office.

The poll is controversial, with the opposition refusing to put forward candidates, saying it will be rigged.

The campaign was also interrupted three weeks ago by a rebel attack on the Chadian capital, N'Djamena.

The country remains largely divided, with serious concerns about security dominating the election.

Only a few voters were seen around polling stations shortly after they opened and most businesses in the capital were closed for the day, reports AP news agency.

A trader in the capital, N'Djamena, refused to tell Reuters news agency if she would vote.

"All we want is peace, that everything goes on without incident.. with peace, we can go on with our business," said Celestine Maimouna.

The BBC's Stephanie Hancock in N'Djamena says that for many Chadians, the election day may be less about democracy and more about fears for their own safety.

The forces of President Deby insist their candidate deserves a third term in office.

Opposition leaders hold a different view, however, and have asked citizens to boycott the polls entirely and to stay at home and refuse to vote.

The Roman Catholic Church here as well as civil-rights groups have also joined this call for a boycott.

Critics say that with all key opposition leaders refusing to field candidates, the elections have become meaningless, and many people say the polls will not be free and fair.

President Deby is adamant his country is under control and says elections can go ahead, yet in reality his army is preparing for the possibility of another rebel attack.

Human-rights groups here say soldiers have laid mines on the outskirts of the capital to deter a new assault.

At the weekend, the two main rebel groups in Chad announced they'd joined forces and said they would do everything in their power to prevent the polls taking place.

Some 5.8m people are registered to vote at 11,800 polling stations.

Unemployed graduate Dionmaye Mbaimoundou told AP news agency he would not vote because he believed the register of voters had been tampered with and the country's electoral commission was not independent. "To show that we are not with him (the president), we will not vote."

Trader Saleh Djibril Bashir said he was going to vote for the president because he "built the roads here, the bridge, he began exporting petrol".

President Deby accuses Sudan of supporting the rebels. Chad plays host to some 200,000 refugees who have fled the violence across the border in Darfur. - bbc

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