

Sudan's first post-Bashir cabinet sworn in

Author:

Sun, 2019-09-08 19:45

KHARTOUM: Sudan's first cabinet since the ouster of president Omar Al-Bashir was sworn in Sunday as the African country transitions to a civilian rule following nationwide protests that overthrew the autocrat.

The 18-member cabinet led by Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok, which includes four women, took oath at the presidential palace in Khartoum, an AFP correspondent reported.

It is expected to steer the daily affairs of the country during a transition period of 39 months.

The line-up was formed after Sudan last month swore in a "sovereign council" – a joint civilian-military ruling body that aims to oversee the transition. The 18 ministers were seen greeting members of the sovereign council, including its chief General Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan, in images broadcast by state television from the palace.

"We have to put in a lot of efforts to meet our people's demands,"

Information Minister Faisal Mohamed Saleh told reporters after the swearing in ceremony.

"The world is watching us. It is waiting to see how we can solve our issues." The sovereign council itself is the result of a power-sharing deal between the protesters and generals who had seized power after the army ousted Bashir in April.

Hamdok's cabinet, which has the country's first female foreign affairs minister, is expected to lead Sudan through formidable challenges that also include ending internal conflicts in three regions.

Rebel groups from marginalized regions of Darfur, Blue Nile and South Kordofan states had waged long wars against Bashir's forces.

"The road ahead is not easy. We will face many challenges but we have to work on them," said Walaa Issam, Minister for youth and sports.

Sudan's power-sharing deal aims to forge peace with armed groups.

Hamdok's cabinet will also be expected to fight corruption and dismantle the long-entrenched Islamist deep state created under Bashir.

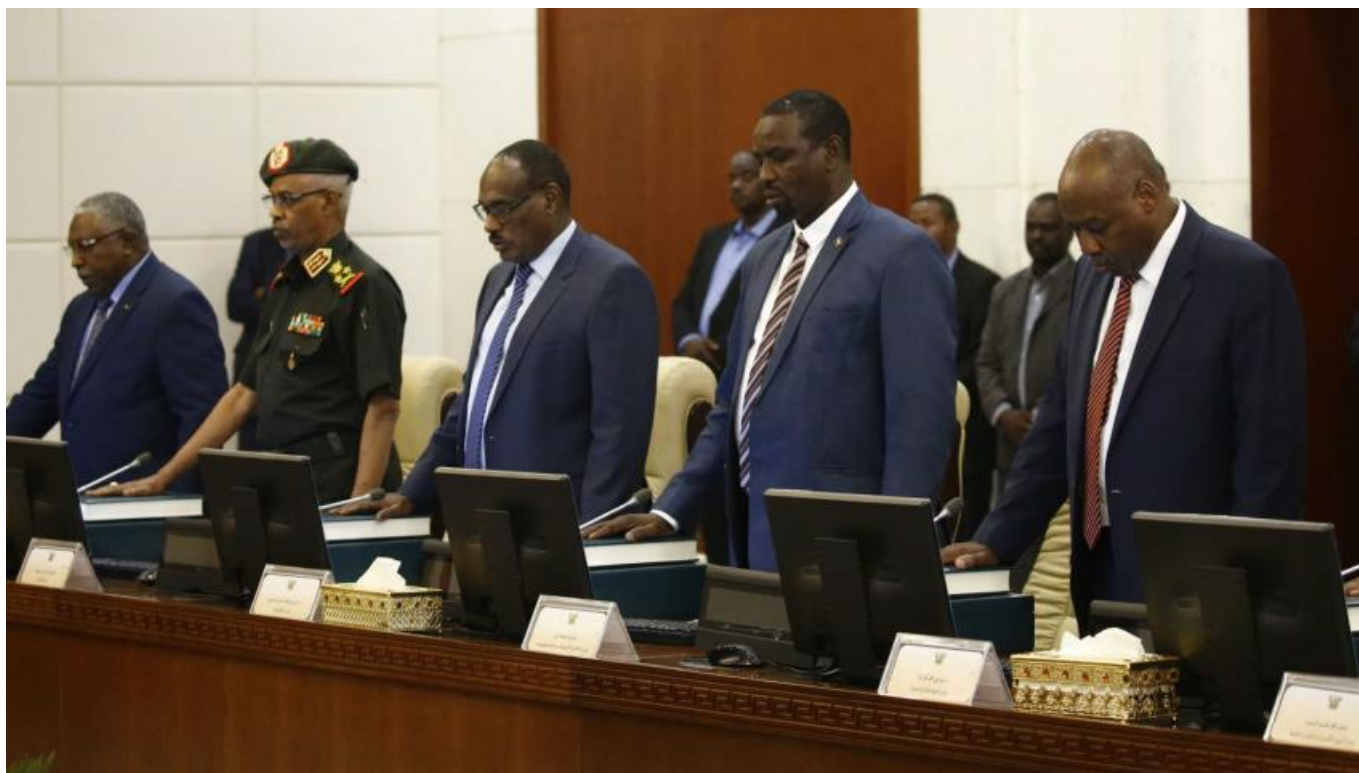
Bashir had seized power in an Islamist-backed coup in 1989 and ruled Sudan with an iron fist for three decades until his ouster.

It was a worsening economic crisis that triggered the fall of Bashir, who is now on trial on charges of illegal acquisition and use of foreign funds.

According to doctors linked to the umbrella protest movement that led to Bashir's fall, more than 250 people have been killed in protest-related violence since December.

Of that at least 127 were killed in early June during a brutal crackdown on a weeks-long protest sit-in outside the military headquarters in Khartoum.

Officials have given a lower death toll.



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Sudan announces first Cabinet since Al-Bashir's ouster
Sudan's post-Bashir transition faces further delay

[IAEA found uranium traces at Iran 'atomic warehouse'](#)

Sun, 2019-09-08 18:33

VIENNA: Samples taken by the UN nuclear watchdog at what Israel's prime minister called a "secret atomic warehouse" in Tehran showed traces of uranium that Iran has yet to explain, two diplomats who follow the agency's inspections work closely say.

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) is investigating the particles' origin and has asked Iran to explain the traces. But Tehran has not done so, according to the diplomats, stoking tensions between Washington and Tehran. US sanctions have slashed Iranian oil sales and Iran has responded by breaching its 2015 nuclear deal with world powers.

In a speech a year ago Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who vehemently opposed the deal, called on the IAEA to visit the site

immediately, saying it had housed 15 kg (33 lb) of unspecified radioactive material that had since been removed.

Reuters first reported in April that the IAEA, which is policing the nuclear deal, had inspected the site – a step it had said it takes “only when necessary” – and environmental samples taken there were sent off for analysis.

Israeli and US media have since reported that the samples turned up traces of radioactive material or matter – the same vague language used by Netanyahu. Those traces were, however, of uranium, the diplomats said – the same element Iran is enriching and one of only two fissile elements with which one can make the core of a nuclear bomb. One diplomat said the uranium was not highly enriched, meaning it was not purified to a level anywhere close to that needed for weapons.

“There are lots of possible explanations,” that diplomat said. But since Iran has not yet given any to the IAEA it is hard to verify the particles’ origin, and it is also not clear whether the traces are remnants of material or activities that predate the landmark 2015 deal or more recent, diplomats say. The IAEA did not respond to a request for comment. Iranian officials were not available to comment.

The deal imposed tight restrictions on Iran’s nuclear program in exchange for sanctions relief, and was based on drawing a line under Iran’s past activities. Both the IAEA and US intelligence services believe Iran had a nuclear weapons program that it ended more than a decade before the deal. Iran says its nuclear ambitions have always been peaceful.

Hawks such as Netanyahu, who has repeatedly accused Iran of seeking Israel’s destruction, point to Tehran’s past to argue that it can never be trusted. The Islamic Republic’s previous secrecy might explain why uranium traces were found at a location that was never declared to the IAEA.

The IAEA takes environmental samples because they can pick up telltale particles even long after material has been removed from a site. Uranium traces could indicate, for example, the former presence of equipment or material somehow connected to those particles.

Cornel Feruta, the IAEA’s acting director-general, met Iranian officials on Sunday. An IAEA statement said afterwards: “Feruta stressed that these interactions (on its nuclear commitments) require full and timely cooperation by Iran.”

The United States, pulled out of the nuclear deal last year by President Donald Trump, is trying to force Iran to negotiate a more sweeping agreement, covering Tehran’s ballistic missiles and regional behavior, than the current accord.

Iran says it will not negotiate until it is granted relief from US sanctions, which France is trying to broker. In the meantime, Iran is breaching the deal’s restrictions on its nuclear activities step-by-step in response to what it calls US “economic warfare.”

A quarterly IAEA report issued a week ago did not mention the sample results because inspection-related matters are highly confidential. But it did say Iran’s cooperation could be better.

“Ongoing interactions between the Agency and Iran...require full and timely cooperation by Iran. The Agency continues to pursue this objective with Iran,” the report said.

It is far from the first time Iran has dragged its feet in its interactions

with the IAEA over the agency's non-proliferation mandate. The IAEA has made similar calls in previous reports, in relation to promptly granting access for inspections.

The IAEA has likened its work to nuclear accounting, patiently combing through countries' statements on their nuclear activities and materials, checking them and when necessary seeking further explanations before reaching a conclusion, which can take a long time.

The process of seeking an explanation from Iran has lasted two months, the IAEA's safeguards division chief told member states in a briefing on Thursday, diplomats present said. But he described what it was seeking an answer to far more generally as questions about Iran's declaration of nuclear material and activities, since the details are confidential.

"It is not something that is so unique to Iran. The agency has these cases in many other situations," a senior diplomat said when asked about the current standoff with Iran. "Depending on the engagement it can take two months, six months."

That does not mean all member states will be happy to wait.

"IAEA Acting Director General going to Iran just as IAEA informs its Board that #Iran may be concealing nuclear material and/or activities," US National Security Adviser John Bolton said on Twitter on Saturday. "We join with other @iaeaorg Board member states eager to get a full report as soon as possible." The IAEA's policy-making, 35-nation Board of Governors holds a week-long quarterly meeting starting on Monday.





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Netanyahu: Israel discovered second atomic storage facility in Iran

[Four blasts hit Baghdad, 14 wounded](#)

Author:

By QASSIM ABDUL-ZAHRA | AP

ID:

1567880346268134200

Sat, 2019-09-07 18:07

BAGHDAD: A senior Iraqi security official says four bombs have exploded in the capital, Baghdad, wounding a total of 14 people.

The official said the bombs targeted commercial districts in east, south, central and west Baghdad.

The official spoke on condition of anonymity in line with regulations.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for Saturday's attacks.

Iraq declared victory against Daesh in 2017, but the group continues to carry out attacks through sleeper cells.



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[Iran seizes ship for alleged fuel smuggling in Gulf, holds 12 Filipino crew](#)

Author:

Reuters

ID:

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Sat, 2019-09-07 07:47

TEHRAN: Iran seized a boat and arrested 12 Filipinos as it busted a "fuel-smuggling ring" in the Strait of Hormuz on Saturday, the semi-official news

agency ISNA reported.

"A foreign tugboat was confiscated as well as 283,900 liters (75,000 gallons) of petrol worth 233.71 billion rials (\$20.2 million)," ISNA said, citing the coast guard chief in the southern province of Hormozgan.

"Twelve Philippine nationals were arrested and the relevant judiciary officials are currently taking the required legal measures," Major Hossein Dehaki was quoted as saying.

Dehaki said the group was suspected of operating a fuel-smuggling ring and the confiscated shipment had been intercepted close to Sirik county in the Strait of Hormuz.

The seizure comes amid tensions in the Gulf after the United States unilaterally withdrew from a nuclear deal putting curbs on Iran's nuclear program in return for relief from sanctions.

The escalation has seen ships mysteriously attacked, drones downed and oil tankers seized in the Strait of Hormuz – a chokepoint for a third of world's seaborne oil.

Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps detained a "foreign tanker" in Gulf waters on July 14 for allegedly smuggling contraband fuel.

"With a capacity of two million liters and 12 foreign crew on board, the vessel was en route to deliver contraband fuel received from Iranian boats to foreign ships," the Guards said at the time.

Maritime tracking service TankerTrackers reported the Panamanian-flagged MT Riah, used in the strait for fueling other vessels, had crossed into Iranian waters, and at that point its automatic identification system stopped sending signals.

In the most high-profile seizure, the Guards impounded the British-flagged Stena Impero tanker in the Strait of Hormuz on July 19 for breaking "international maritime rules."

Iran also seized another ship on July 31 with seven foreign crew onboard over fuel smuggling, but it has not revealed the vessel's identity or the nationality of its crew.



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Satellite images show Iran tanker Adrian Darya-1 sought by US off Syria

[Israel strikes in Gaza after rocket attack](#)

Author:

AFP

ID:

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Sat, 2019-09-07 06:47

JERUSALEM: Israeli forces attacked Hamas positions in Gaza after rockets

fired from the Palestinian enclave hit the Jewish state, the military said early Saturday.

The exchange came hours after two Palestinian teenagers were killed by Israeli fire during clashes on the Gaza border.

Late Friday, "five projectiles were launched from the Gaza Strip toward Israel," the army said.

The projectiles hit open fields in southern Israel, army spokesman said.

In response, an "aircraft and tank struck a number of Hamas military targets in the northern Gaza Strip, including a post and military positions," the army said in a statement.

A Hamas security source said there were no casualties resulting from the Israeli strikes.

During border clashes on Friday, two Palestinians aged 14 and 17 were shot dead by Israeli forces, the Gaza health ministry said, with another 46 Palestinians wounded.

The Israeli army said thousands of Palestinians took part in "especially violent" demonstrations along the border fence, which included throwing "fire bombs and explosive devices" at soldiers.

Palestinians have been holding regular mass protests along the fortified border since March 2018.

The protesters have called on Israel to end its crippling siege of the coastal enclave and demanded the right to return to lands their families fled during the war that accompanied the creation of Israel in 1948.

Israel says any such return would mean its end as a Jewish state and accuses Gaza's Islamist rulers Hamas of using the protests as cover for attacks.

At least 308 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli fire in Gaza since the protests began, the majority during the demonstrations.

The protests have calmed in recent months.

Israel and Gaza's Islamist rulers Hamas have fought three wars since 2008.



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