

Hamdok, UN economist turned Sudanese premier

Author:

Thu, 2019-08-22 21:51

KHARTOUM: Sudan's new prime minister, Abdalla Hamdok, is a seasoned economist who faces the daunting task of rescuing his country's moribund economy. Hamdok built a career in continental and international organizations, most recently as deputy executive secretary of the UN's Economic Commission for Africa in Addis Ababa.

He was welcomed off the plane Wednesday by two civilian members of the new Sovereign Council that was sworn in hours earlier and will oversee his government's work.

The joint civilian-military council replaced the transitional military council that took charge in April when Islamist general Omar Al-Bashir was forced from power by relentless street protests.

The Sudanese people's main expectation of Hamdok will be tangible solutions to the dire economic crisis Bashir's rule and the last few months of political turmoil have caused.

"With the right vision, with the right policies, we will be able to address this economic crisis," he told reporters after taking the oath on Wednesday. He vowed to devise an urgent recovery program addressing the shortages of basic commodities that have plagued Sudan and its 40 million inhabitants recently.

The protests that eventually ended Bashir's 30-year rule were ignited in December last year by the tripling of bread prices.

In the longer term, Hamdok emphasised the need to improve productivity and rebuild a banking sector he said had all but collapsed.

His credentials as an economist seem solid, as was abundantly documented in the official biography distributed to media during his oath-taking ceremony. The text stressed Hamdok is "highly credible among African finance and development institutions, the International Monetary Fund and the Paris Club" of creditor countries.

Hamdok worked for the African Development and Trade Bank and is credited with shaping some of the policies that spurred Ethiopia's rapid economic growth under the late prime minister Meles Zenawi.

Greeted as the savior of Sudan's economy, the greying, moustachioed technocrat was all smiles when he took questions from journalists on his first day on the job.

While he was outside Sudan and not directly involved in the protest movement that terminated Bashir's rule, Hamdok's appointment appeared to be well received by the population.

"He has the skills we need the most at the moment," said Sumaila Ibrahim, a 21-year-old student at Khartoum University.

Hamdok is also an alumnus, having completed a degree in agricultural economics in the capital before moving to Manchester in the United Kingdom for his masters.

Besides his credentials as an economist, Hamdok has carved an image as a

champion of transparency and good governance in the course of his rich career in African organizations.

He sat on the board of the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, which was founded by the eponymous Sudanese-British billionaire to promote good governance and leadership in Africa.

Last year he turned down an offer by Bashir to become finance minister as part of a government reshuffle.

As the head of Sudan's future government, which according to a roadmap laid out by protest leaders and generals is to be formed by August 28, Hamdok is not only in charge of the economy however.

He will need to draw on his experience in his various African peace-building initiatives to bring an end to deadly conflicts in Sudan's regions of Darfur, Kordofan and Blue Nile.

This is where the co-existence between generals who all rose to their positions in Bashir's wings and the civilians in the transition's new institutions could be most tested.

Hamdok was born in 1958 in the state of South Kordofan, which found itself on Sudan's southern border when South Sudan became independent in 2011, after decades of war with the north.

His own native village is now in a war zone and Hamdok will be keen to push for a resolution of Sudan's civil conflicts, but he has his work cut out reconciling the military with the rebels.

US Congressman Jim McGovern, a keen observer of Sudanese affairs and vocal critic of Bashir's Islamist regime, highlighted that pitfall in a statement on Wednesday.

"I look forward with hope to a transitional period that places the rights and aspirations of the Sudanese people front and center," the Democrat said.

"I have grave concerns, however, about whether military and political officials associated with the former regime will prove trustworthy partners given their history of violence, repression, corruption and bad faith," he warned.



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Sudan swears in prime minister, civilian-majority ruling council
Sudan forms sovereign council to lead transition

[UN resumes Sanaa aid distribution halted after Houthi thefts](#)

Author:

Wed, 2019-08-21 23:43

SANAA: The World Food Programme (WFP) on Wednesday resumed distributing food in Yemen's capital Sanaa after a two-month stoppage.

The halt in aid came after UN officials found the Houthis were diverting food away from those who desperately needed it.

Dozens of people gathered at a distribution centre in Sanaa to be given flour, vegetable oil, pulses, salt and sugar.

"We are relieved. Thank God. All we can do is praise God," said one recipient, Um Ahmed.

Food distribution for 850,000 people had resumed after the WFP was allowed to “introduce the key accountability measures”, its spokeswoman Annabel Symington told Reuters.

When the agreement with Houthi authorities was reached in early August, the WFP said a biometric registration process would be introduced for 9 million people living in areas under Houthi control.

The system – using iris scanning, fingerprints or facial recognition – is already used in areas controlled by the Saudi-backed government that holds the southern port city of Aden and some western coastal towns.

Meanwhile, the UN Wednesday warned that 22 “life-saving” aid programs will be forced to close in Yemen in the next two months if countries do not pay more than \$1 billion in funding that they pledged earlier this year.

In February countries pledged \$2.6 billion to help, but UN humanitarian coordinator for Yemen, Lise Grande, said less than half that had been paid.

The UN said that of 34 key aid programs only three were funded for the year and 22 “life-saving” programs will need to close in the next two months.



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US military drone shot down in Yemen UN envoy hails 'tireless' Saudi efforts on southern Yemen as STC delegation heads to Jeddah

Jerusalem demolishes Palestinian home built without permit

Author:

Wed, 2019-08-21 23:05

JERUSALEM: Jerusalem's municipality has carried out the court-ordered demolition of what it said was an illegally built Palestinian home in the city's eastern sector.

Owner Ibrahim Ragbe says the home was constructed 15 years ago without a permit and that he was trying to get it licensed. He said 13 people lived in the house.

Dozens of police officers secured the single-story home on Wednesday as an excavator tore it down.

Jerusalem's Palestinian population has long complained that it faces discriminatory housing policies that favor Jews. They say it is virtually impossible to get a building permit and have no choice but to build without them.

The municipality says zoning issues prompted the demolition. It says it is addressing a housing crunch in the city's Arab neighborhoods with new master plans.



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Palestinians and Israeli police clash at Jerusalem holy site
US scraps West Bank conference over Palestinian protests

[Gaza Palestinians fire rocket at Israel](#)

Author:

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Wed, 2019-08-21 19:57

JERUSALEM: Palestinians in the Gaza Strip fired a rocket at southern Israel late Wednesday, the fifth in the past six days, the Israeli army said in a statement.

It did not report any casualties or damage or say where the rocket hit, but Israeli media said it had been tracked as heading for open ground and alarms

were therefore not sounded in built-up areas.

The army said three rockets were launched from Hamas-ruled Gaza on Saturday night and one was fired late Friday.

There were no casualties in any of the attacks or in the retaliatory Israeli air strikes on Gaza which followed.

They were among a series of incidents along the Gaza border since the start of the month.

On Sunday the Palestinian health ministry said three Palestinians were killed by Israeli soldiers overnight in the northern Gaza Strip.

The Israeli army had said earlier that an attack helicopter and tank fired at "a number of armed suspects adjacent to the (border) fence in the northern Gaza Strip."

A week ago, a Palestinian shot at Israeli soldiers along the frontier and was killed when troops returned fire, the army and Hamas's health ministry said. A day earlier, Israel's army said its troops shot dead four heavily armed Palestinians on the border, adding one had managed to cross and throw a grenade at soldiers.

On August 1, a Palestinian seeking to avenge his brother's death by Israeli fire entered Israel from Gaza and opened fire on soldiers, the army said. Three Israeli soldiers were wounded and the Palestinian was killed, the army said.

Regular protests and clashes erupted along the border of the blockaded Gaza Strip in March 2018.

At least 305 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli fire in Gaza since then, the majority during demonstrations and clashes.

Seven Israelis have also been killed in Gaza-related violence over the same period.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is widely seen as wanting to avoid an escalation in the Gaza Strip before September 17 elections, but he also faces heavy political pressure to respond firmly.

Israel and Palestinians in Gaza, including Hamas, have fought three wars since 2008.



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Israeli warplanes hit Gaza after Palestinian rocket attack
Three Palestinians killed by Israeli soldiers at Gaza border: ministry

[Macron says will meet Iranians before G7 summit](#)

Author:

Wed, 2019-08-21 21:27

PARIS: France's president said on Wednesday he would meet Iranian officials ahead of this weekend's G7 summit and make proposals to help de-escalate tensions between Washington and Tehran.

"In the coming hours before the G7 I will have meetings with the Iranians to propose things," Emmanuel Macron told reporters.

Iran's foreign minister said earlier this week he would meet Macron and Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian in Paris on Friday. Two French diplomats said a joint meeting was likely on Friday, but that it had not been made

public due to the sensitivity of the Iran dossier.

France has sought over the summer to play a mediating role as relations between the United States and Iran deteriorate, although there has been little sign of any breakthrough.

With punishing US sanctions squeezing its economy, Iran has said it will gradually reduce its commitments to a 2015 nuclear deal with world powers until the European powers party to the accord – France, Britain and Germany – do more to ensure Tehran benefits financially from the accord.



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