

UN: Yemen's warring parties reach preliminary pullout deal

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UNITED NATIONS: Yemen's warring parties reached a preliminary compromise on a plan for the redeployment of opposing forces from the key port of Hodeida, the United Nations said Thursday.

UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric said the preliminary agreement was reached by representatives of Yemen's government and Houthi rebels meeting on a UN vessel in Hodeida's inner harbor during UN-mediated talks between Feb. 3-6. He said the head of the UN monitoring mission "tabled a proposal that proved acceptable, in principle ... pending further consultations by the parties with their respective leaders."

Dujarric said he couldn't give details, but he said the UN monitoring team expects to reconvene the warring parties "within the next week, with the aim of finalizing details for redeployments."

Retired Dutch Maj. Gen. Patrick Cammaert, the outgoing head of the UN operation monitoring the cease-fire and redeployment of forces from the Hodeida area that both sides agreed to in Sweden in December, chaired this week's initial meetings, Dujarric said.

His replacement, Danish Lt. Gen. Michael Lolloesgaard, attended the meetings and has now taken over.

The agreement in Sweden was seen as a key step in attempts to end the conflict in Yemen, which began with the 2014 takeover of the capital Sanaa by the Iranian-backed Houthis.

The fighting in the Arab world's poorest country has taken a terrible toll on civilians, with thousands killed and a catastrophic humanitarian crisis under way.

UN humanitarian chief Mark Lowcock said in a statement Thursday that the UN and its humanitarian partners are scaling up to reach 12 million people with emergency food, a 50-percent increase over 2018 targets.

He said the Red Sea Mills in a government-controlled area of Hodeidah has enough grain to feed 3.7 million people for a month, but the UN has been unable to gain access since September while the grain possibly spoils in silos.

He deplored that last month two silos were hit by mortar shells and the resulting fire destroyed some grain – "probably enough to feed hundreds of thousands of people for a month."

Lowcock said the Houthis have refused to authorize the United Nations to cross front lines into government-controlled areas to access the Red Sea Mills, citing security concerns.

Discussions are continuing with both sides and Lowcock implored the Houthis and their affiliates "to finalize an agreement and facilitate access to the mills in the coming days."



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Yemen's interior minister calls for national alignment for state restoration
Yemen's Foreign Minister meets with EU officials on political peace process

[UN praises UAE for Arab women peacekeeper training](#)

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Thu, 2019-02-07 22:40

DUBAI: Jean-Pierre Lacroix, United Nations Under-Secretary-General for

Peacekeeping Operations, has praised the launching of a military and peacekeeping program for Arab women in the United Arab Emirates.

Lacroix hailed the program as a step toward achieving “gender parity.”

“More good news concerning our call for more women in @UNPeacekeeping from the United Arab Emirates,” he said on Twitter. “Gender parity is achievable with sustained effort by all partners.”

The military and peacekeeping program for Arab women was launched this week at the Khawla bint Al Azwar Military School in Abu Dhabi.

More good news concerning our call for more women in [@UNPeacekeeping](#) from the United Arab Emirates where a military & peacekeeping programme for Arab women was launched this week. Gender parity is achievable with sustained effort by all partners. [#A4P #WPS https://t.co/7NWhhDuBBz](#)

– Jean-Pierre Lacroix (@Lacroix_UN) [February 7, 2019](#)

The step is aimed at achieving gender balance in the UAE and promotes women’s representation in all work avenues, state news agency WAM reported.

Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak, wife of the late UAE’s founder, said the UAE’s collaboration with UN Women to host the Arab women military and peacekeeping capacity-building training program is “a testament to the great confidence in the country’s leadership.”

Sheikha Fatima, who is also the Chairwoman of the General Women’s Union, GWU, highlighted the UAE’s support to women’s participation in maintaining peace and security in the Arab region.

The UAE signed a Memorandum of Understanding with UN Women on 28 Sept. 2018, to develop the capabilities of Arab women in military and peacekeeping operations.



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[Tunisian government agrees deal with union to avert strikes](#)

Author:

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Thu, 2019-02-07 17:49

TUNIS: The Tunisian authorities on Thursday reached a deal with a powerful trade union over wage hike demands to avert a further round of paralysing strikes.

The Tunisian General Labour Union (UGTT) last month brought the North African

country to a standstill with a 24-hour strike by public sector workers to secure wage hikes and economic reforms.

The union said it had “concluded a deal with the government putting an end to the crisis” that would see pay rises worth up to \$55 per month (just under 50 euros) for civil servants.

The group said it was now calling off another round of strikes scheduled for February 20 and 21.

Tunisia is seen as having had a relatively smooth democratic transition since the January 14, 2011 toppling of president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali after 23 years in power.

But price hikes fueled by the fall of the Tunisian dinar, combined with tax increases and stubborn unemployment, have spurred social discontent.

In 2016, the IMF granted Tunisia a four-year 2.4-billion-euro loan in exchange for a promise to carry out economic reforms and to control civil service salaries.



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Sudan protesters rally in support of detainees

Author:

Thu, 2019-02-07 22:07

KHARTOUM: Crowds of Sudanese protesters rallied on Thursday in downtown Khartoum in support of fellow demonstrators detained in the weeks of rallies against President Omar Al-Bashir's iron-fisted rule, witnesses said.

The latest protest came after Al-Bashir acknowledged that Sudan's controversial public order law and growing economic hardships had angered youths and sent them out into the streets.

The rally was called to express solidarity with the hundreds of demonstrators who have been arrested since anti-government rallies erupted in December.

The protesters returned to the downtown area, chanting their campaign's rallying cry of "freedom, peace, justice," witnesses said.

For almost two weeks a security clampdown had prevented them from converging on the capital's downtown area.

"Bring all your soldiers but today you will fall," chanted the protesters, witnesses said, adding that riot police swiftly confronted them with tear gas.

"The authorities thought we won't be able to reach downtown," a demonstrator told AFP without giving his name for security reasons.

The Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA) which has led the demonstrations called Thursday's protests specifically in support of the detainees who it says are being "tortured."

On Wednesday, Al-Bashir acknowledged that youths, mainly women, were leading the rallies and said the public order law was "one of the reasons" for their anger.

Activists say the decades-old law targets mainly women, often accusing them of "indecent dressing and immoral behavior."

Hefty punishments including fines and jail terms are imposed on women found guilty under the legislation.

According to some Sudanese women's rights groups, more than 15,000 women were sentenced to flogging in 2016.

Al-Bashir, who swept to power in 1989, said the harsh economic conditions in Sudan, such as high inflation, were also driving the protests.

“It’s not only the public order law that we are against,” said Tahani, a female protester who asked not to be fully named for security concerns.

“Once we overthrow the regime, we will change the old laws completely with new laws that respect the dignity and diversity of the Sudanese people.”

Protests first erupted on Dec. 19 after a government decision to raise the price of bread.

But they quickly turned into nationwide rallies against Al-Bashir’s three-decade-old rule, with protesters calling for his resignation.

Officials say 30 people have died in protest-related violence, while Human Rights Watch says at least 51 people have been killed in clashes with security forces.



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Sudan minister appeals to youth as protests continue Sudan’s Bashir vows rural development as new protests loom

Iraq's Shiite militants vow to oust US troops – by law or force

Author:

Thu, 2019-02-07 21:53

BAGHDAD: Ousting US troops from Iraq despite President Donald Trump's vow to stay is now the top goal of pro-Iranian Shiite armed groups. And their leaders say there are only two ways – by passing a new law, or by force.

US-Iraq relations have grown tense once again, after a series of ups and downs over the years, from the 1990 Gulf war through crippling sanctions to the 2003 invasion that toppled Saddam Hussein and the fight against Daesh.

But a year after Iraq declared victory over Daesh following a three-year war against the militants in which it was also backed by Iran, the Americans are seen by some as an unwanted "occupying force."

And if they do stay, "every Iraqi will have the legitimate right to confront them by any means," warned Mohammed Mohie, spokesman for the Hezbollah Brigades in Iraq, a force close to Iran that has also fought on the side of President Bashar Assad in Syria.

The powerful leader of the Asaib Ahel Al-Haq armed group, Qais Al-Khazali, echoed the warning.

"If we are ever needed, we are ready," he said.

There were nearly 4,500 US troops killed in Iraq between 2003 and 2011, including in fighting with Shiite armed groups. But before any decision to take up arms again and spill more blood, Mohie said he wants to give lawmakers a chance to set a time frame for the departure of US troops from Iraq.

A bill has been tabled in Parliament, and there could be a rare show of unanimity in support of it between its two biggest factions: Populist cleric Moqtada Al-Sadr's alliance, which champions Iraq's independence, and the pro-Iranian bloc of former anti-Daesh fighters.

"For three years, the main rivalry in Parliament has been among Shiite factions," said Renad Mansour, a researcher at the Chatham House think-tank.

"They cannot agree on the choice of a minister, but they do on one point: That the experience of having America in Iraq has been bad." Ironically, the person who has given new impetus to the proposed timetable for American troops to leave Iraq is the US president himself.

At the weekend, Trump provoked indignation even among Washington's allies in Baghdad when he said he plans to keep American forces in Iraq to keep an eye on Iran.

As a result, US diplomats and military officials in Baghdad were “very worried” and doing everything to “minimize” the impact of the remarks, said Mansour.

Trump had already irritated the Iraqis by not meeting any of the country’s officials during a surprise Christmas visit to US troops stationed less than 200 km from Baghdad.

US forces left Iraq in 2011, only to return in 2014, at the head of the coalition against Daesh in Iraq and Syria.

But the US is now seeking to use Iraq as “a base for attacking neighboring countries,” Khazali told AFP.

“Trump does not understand that Iraq is now a strong country. But he can be sure that if he persists, he will pay very dearly,” said the Asaib leader wearing a Shiite white turban.

Mohie said adoption of the bill on a US withdrawal would be the “first step.”

But he swiftly added that “we think the United States will again challenge the popular will” by trying to stay in Iraq.

In that case, Mohie said his forces and others like it would move to the “second step” and take up arms against “an occupying force.”

“The resistance factions have gained capabilities and expertise in the fight against” Daesh, he said.

The experience they gained “will serve to confront any army that threatens Iraq and its sovereignty.”

He said that above all any confrontation would allow Shiite factions “to find an external threat on which to focus attention rather than their internal problems.”



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Baghdad anger at Trump plan for US troops in Iraqi base