

Sudan frees ex-officials in effort to end political impasse

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By SAMY MAGDY | AP

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CAIRO: Sudanese authorities released two outspoken former government officials from prison, lawyers said Wednesday, part of trust-building measures amid efforts to end the country's political impasse.

Sudan was plunged into turmoil after an October military coup upended its short-lived transition to democracy after three decades of repressive rule by former strongman Omar Al-Bashir. Al-Bashir and his Islamist-backed government were removed in a popular uprising in April 2019.

Khalid Omar, a former minister of Cabinet affairs, was released late Tuesday and Mohammed Al-Faki Suliman, a former member of the ruling Sovereign Council, walked free from a prison in the capital of Khartoum on Wednesday, their defense team said.

The Criminal Court in northern Khartoum rejected prosecutors' request to renew their detention pending investigations into an array of vague charges, including betrayal of the public trust, according to their lawyers.

Both Omar and Suliman had been detained along with dozens of other officials during the Oct. 25 coup and were released a month later as part of a deal between the military and Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok. The premier resigned in January after failing to bridge the gap between the generals and the protest movement.

The two men were rearrested in February amid a crackdown by the generals on anti-coup groups. Dozens of activists were also detained amid relentless protests against the military's takeover.

The crackdown on protesters killed more than 90 people, mostly young men, and injured thousands, according to a Sudanese medical group.

Suliman was also deputy head of a government-run agency tasked with dismantling the legacy of former autocratic President Omar Al-Bashir's regime. The agency is known as The Committee to Dismantle the Regime of June 30, 1989, in reference to the Islamist-backed military coup that brought Al-Bashir to power. It was created after the uprising and for two years worked to purge Al-Bashir's loyalists from government institutions.

The generals, including coup leader Gen. Abdel-Fattah Burhan, have long criticized the work of the agency. It was dismantled after the coup and the generals appointed another committee to review its decisions. Many of the agency's decision were reversed, measures seen by critics of the military as a way to enable Islamists allied with the generals.

Other members of The Committee to Dismantle the Regime of June 30, 1989, including Wagdi Saleh, Taha Osman and Babiker Faisal were also released Wednesday, their defense team said.

Earlier this month, authorities freed over two dozen activists who were detained in recent weeks over the anti-coup protests.

The military's takeover has plunged the country into turmoil and sent its already fragile economy into free fall, with living conditions rapidly deteriorating.

The UN envoy for Sudan, Volker Perthes, warned in March that Sudan was heading for "an economic and security collapse" unless it addresses the political paralysis. Perthes' comments to the UN Security Council angered the generals and Burhan threatened to expel him.

Perthes is now leading joint efforts with the African Union and the eight-nation east African regional group called the Intergovernmental Authority in Development to facilitate Sudanese-led political talks. Perthes and the two organizations' envoys held a joint news conference Wednesday in Khartoum on their efforts.

Ismael Wais, IGAD special envoy to Sudan, welcomed the releases as a "very positive development." He urged authorities to free all political prisoners and activists and lift the state of emergency as a necessary condition to help facilitate reaching an agreement on a way out of the crisis.

Mohamed Al Hacen Ould Lebatt, the AU's envoy for Sudan, said the group will launch a political dialogue after the Islamic holiday of Eid Al-Fitr, which marks the end of the holy month of Ramadan early in May.

He said the talks will include the military and other political parties and groups except Al-Bashir's now dissolved Congress Party, with the aim of agreeing on how the country will be ruled during the rest of transitional period and holding elections.

"The situation in this country is highly sensitive if it is not extremely dangerous," Lebatt said, adding that the talks eventually aim at "achieving the aspiration of the Sudanese people expressed in their revolution."

There was no immediate comment from the two main protest groups, the Sudanese Professionals Association and the Resistance Committees, which have spearheaded the uprising against Al-Bashir and the ongoing anti-coup protests. They have long demanded the removal of the military from power and the establishment of a fully civilian government.

The generals, however, have said they will only hand over power to an elected administration. They say elections will take place in July 2023, as planned in a constitutional document governing the transitional period.



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Clashes in Sudan's West Darfur killed over 210: governor
Images of Sudan's former strongman Omar Bashir in hospital draw anger

[Iran seeks to expand its military cooperation with China](#)

Author:

Associated Press

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Wed, 2022-04-27 21:34

TEHRAN: Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi expressed Wednesday his government's desire for closer cooperation with China in remarks made during a visit by the Chinese defense minister, state media reported.

According to the report, Raisi told China's Minister of National Defense Wei

Fenghe that Tehran sees its ties with Beijing as strategic. Closer cooperation would serve to confront what the Iranian president described as US unilateralism as talks to revive Tehran's nuclear deal with world powers have stalled.

"Confronting unilateralism and creating stability and order is possible through cooperation of independent and like-minded powers," Raisi was quoted as saying.

Wei in turn said improving ties between Iran and China would provide security, "particularly in the current critical and tense situation."

Wei also met with his Iranian counterpart, Gen. Mohammad Reza Ashtinai, and reportedly invited him to visit China, as well as with other Iranian military officials.

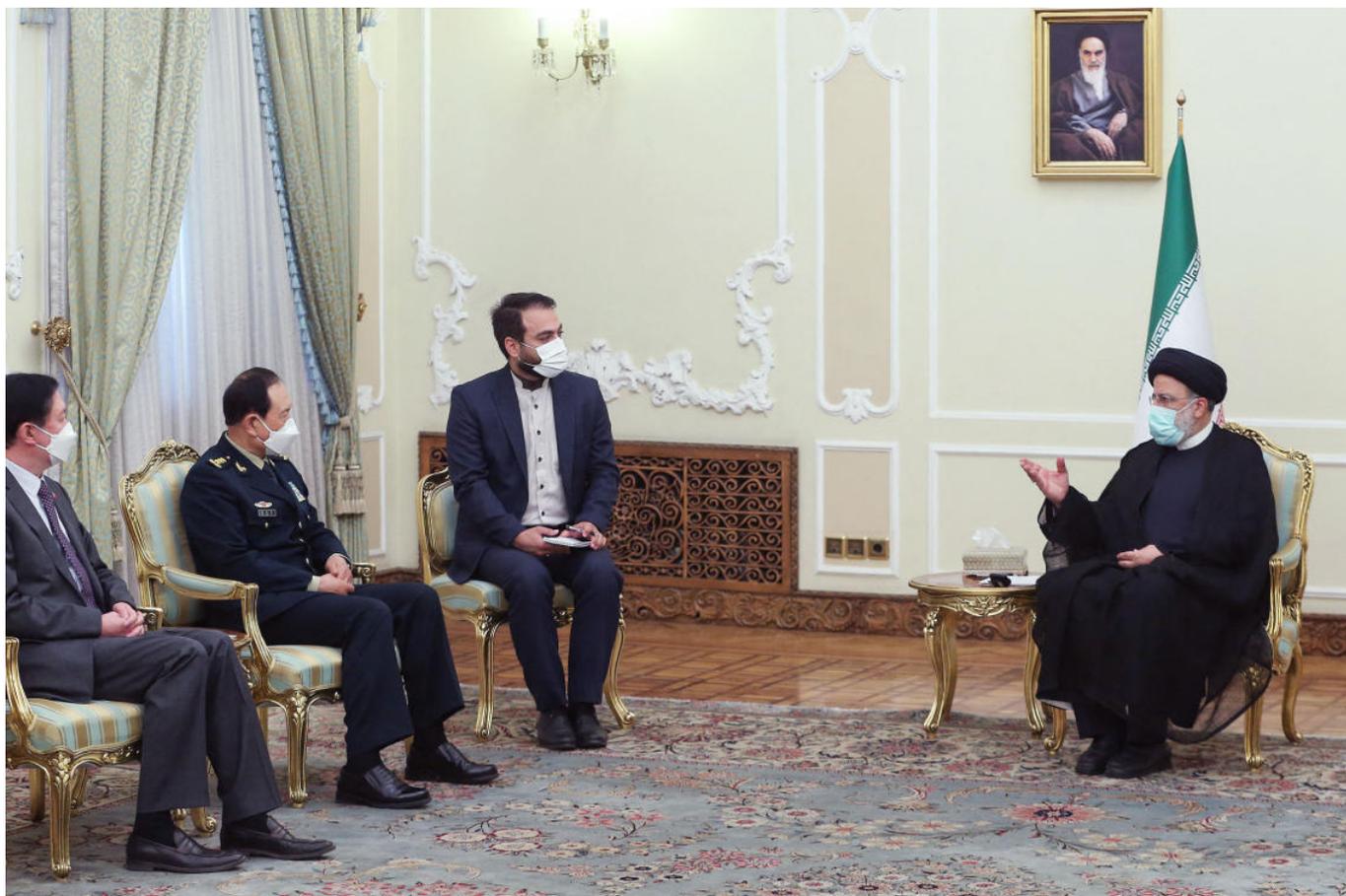
The official IRNA news agency quoted Ashtiani as assailing US military presence in the Middle East and elsewhere, claiming that "wherever the US has had military presence, it has created waves of insecurity, instability, rifts, pessimism, war, destruction and displacement."

Wei said his visit was aimed at "improving the strategic defense cooperation" between Iran and China – cooperation that he said would have a "remarkable" impact in defusing unilateralism and fighting terrorism.

Iran and China have increased their military ties in recent years, with their navies visiting each other's ports and holding joint naval drills in the Indian Ocean.

In 2021, Iran and China signed a 25-year strategic cooperation agreement that covered a variety of economic activities from oil and mining to promoting industrial activity in Iran, as well as transportation and agricultural collaborations.

China is a signatory to the nuclear deal between Iran and world powers, along with Russia, Britain, France and Germany.



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White House worried Iran could develop nuclear weapon in weeks
Iran court sentences 2 students to 16-year prison terms each

[Lebanese PM calls for transparent probe into Tripoli boat capsizing](#)

Author:

Wed, 2022-04-27 00:16

BEIRUT: Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati has called for a swift and transparent probe into a tragic boat accident that left around 10 people dead, including an 18-month-old girl and her mother.

The vessel sank off the coast of Tripoli on Saturday night.

Mikati said that investigations should be conducted quickly and

transparently, away from media pressure, and should include details of what happened even before the boat set off.

Lebanese Army Commander Gen. Joseph Aoun, the director of Lebanese army intelligence Brig. Gen. Tony Kahwagi and the Commander of the Naval Forces Col. Haitham Dhanawy attended an emergency Cabinet session on Tuesday and gave a detailed presentation of what happened with the boat.

The army said the boat had left Lebanon's coast illegally and that the boat's captain had been trying to evade capture when the collision occurred. They said about 60 people had illegally boarded the boat and were headed to Italy and stressed that the army had nothing to do with the boat capsizing.

BACKGROUND

Mikati said that investigations should be conducted quickly and transparently, away from media pressure, and should include details of what happened even before the boat set off.

Several survivors have said that a Lebanese military vessel rammed the boat, leading it to sink. They said a security official aboard threatened to drown them if they did not comply and return to shore. They said the majority of those who were trying to escape did not know how to swim, including women and children.

Lebanese President Michel Aoun said at the beginning of the Cabinet session: "What happened in Tripoli hurt us all," adding that the court must investigate the incident amid conflicting stories, to clarify the truth, and put an end to any contradictory interpretations or explanations.

Ahmed Tamer, director of Tripoli port, said the search to find the missing passengers was ongoing and that a Greek frigate was taking part in the operation.

Dr. Khaldoun Al-Sherif, a political analyst from Tripoli, told Arab News: "The conflicting stories urged Mikati to insist on knowing what happened before the boat's departure. The army says that it spotted the boat before it went out to sea but was unable to catch up and intercepted it when it was at sea. There is a missing link and an inconsistent narrative. The investigation should have started immediately and everything happening now is a waste of time."

In Beirut, people continued to protest against a controversial capital control bill. Adopting a capital control law is one of the reforms requested by the International Monetary Fund to help the crisis-hit country.

Depositors blocked the roads leading to parliament on Tuesday to stop the joint parliamentary committees from continuing their discussions over the bill and successfully prevented MPs from achieving a quorum to hold the session.

George Adwan, head of the Administration and Justice Committee, called for rescheduling the capital control discussions until after the May 15 parliamentary elections. He stressed the need for a complete and comprehensive recovery plan that explained losses and their distribution according to responsibilities and the method for paying off losses.

“Successive governments and corrupt political officials are to blame along with the Banque du Liban, which is an accomplice to the state’s policies,” he added. “So why should we hold citizens and depositors responsible for all this? Any recovery plan must tell people how the economic, financial, and monetary situation will improve and how we will create growth and preserve the banking system after fixing the loopholes, instead of hiding behind what the IMF requested to grant Lebanon \$3 billion over three years.”



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Lebanon mourns as more victims of boat capsizing recovered from seaSix dead in Tripoli boat capsizing, Lebanon minister says

Tunisian opposition announces alliance against president

Author:

Wed, 2022-04-27 00:10

TUNIS: A veteran Tunisian opposition figure announced on Tuesday the creation of a new alliance to “save” the country from deep crisis following President Kais Saied’s power grab last year.

Ahmed Nejib Chebbi, 78, a prominent left-wing politician who opposed Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali’s rule, said the new National Salvation Front aimed to unite political forces, re-establish constitutional and democratic processes and guarantee freedoms and rights in the country.

“We want a return to legitimacy and democracy,” he told a news conference in the capital Tunisia.

Saied – a former law professor elected in 2019 amid public anger against the political class – on July 25 last year sacked the government, suspended parliament and seized wide-ranging powers.

He later gave himself powers to rule and legislate by decree and seized control over the judiciary.

He dissolved parliament last month, dealing another blow to the political system put in place after the North African country’s 2011 revolution.

Chebbi opposes Saied’s moves and describes them as a “coup.”

The new alliance comprises five political parties including Saied’s nemesis the Islamist-inspired Ennahdha party, along with five civil society groups involving independent political figures.

The Front’s priority is to rescue an economy ruined by a “rotten” political system that puts off investors, Chebbi said.

It also aims to involve other political groups and “influential” figures before launching a national dialogue on reforms to “save the country,” he added. Chebbi called for a “salvation government” to lead the country during a “transition period” before new elections.

Last week Saied assigned himself the power to appoint the head of the electoral commission, a move critics say aims to create a tame electoral body ahead of a referendum slated for July on constitutional reforms, and legislative elections due in December.

Last month, Saied also inaugurated a “temporary” council of judges to replace an independent watchdog he abolished when seizing sweeping powers over the judiciary.

Saied's initial power grab last year was welcomed by many Tunisians sick of the often-stale-mated post-revolution political system.

But an increasing array of critics say he has moved the country down a dangerous path back toward autocracy.



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Death toll from migrant shipwrecks off Tunisia rises to 17
Tunisia: Sunken tanker contained no fuel

[White House worried Iran could develop nuclear weapon in weeks](#)

Tue, 2022-04-26 22:59

WASHINGTON: The White House is worried Iran could develop a nuclear weapon in

weeks, press secretary Jen Psaki said on Tuesday, after Secretary of State Antony Blinken noted earlier in the day the country has accelerated its nuclear program.

"Yes it definitely worries us," Psaki said, adding the time needed for Iran to produce a nuclear weapon is down from about a year.

Earlier, Blinken said the US still believes a return to a nuclear deal is the best path with Iran, amid a prolonged standoff in talks.

Facing criticism of the deal during an appearance before Congress, Blinken called the 2015 agreement imperfect but better than the alternatives.

"We continue to believe that getting back into compliance with the agreement would be the best way to address the nuclear challenge posed by Iran and to make sure that an Iran that is already acting with incredible aggression doesn't have a nuclear weapon," Blinken told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

"We've tested the other proposition, which was pulling out of the agreement, trying to exert more pressure," he said.

The result, he said, is that the "breakout time" for Iran to develop a nuclear bomb if it so chooses is "down to a matter of weeks" after the deal pushed it beyond a year.

Former president Donald Trump pulled out of the agreement reached under his predecessor Barack Obama and instead imposed sweeping sanctions, including trying to stop other nations from buying Iranian oil.

President Joe Biden's administration has been engaged in more than a year of indirect talks in Vienna on reviving the agreement, which had promised Iran a relief from sanctions in return for major restrictions on its nuclear work.

Both US and Iranian officials say that most points have been settled.

Disputes appear to include Iran's demand that Biden undo Trump's designation of the clerical state's powerful Revolutionary Guards as a terrorist organization.

(With Reuters and AFP)



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