

Sudan and main rebel group restart peace talks

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Sun, 2021-03-28 15:14

CAIRO: Sudan's interim government and the main rebel group in the country agreed on Sunday to re-start peace talks according to the rebel group and Sudan state news.

The agreement was marked in Juba, the capital of South Sudan, which has mediated past negotiations between the Sudan Popular Liberation Movement – North, led by Abdel-Aziz Al-Hilu, and the government.

In a video posted online by the rebel group, the group's leader joined and raised hands with the leader of Sudan's interim sovereign council Gen. Abdel Fattah Burhan after the signing.

Al-Hilu's movement is Sudan's single largest rebel group and is active in the Blue Nile and South Kordofan provinces, where it controls significant chunks of territory.

Sudan's transitional government has been engaging in peace talks with rebel groups over the past two years, looking to stabilize the country and help its fragile path to democracy survive following the military's overthrow of longtime autocrat Omar Al-Bashir in April 2019 after nearly three decades in power.

In 2020, Sudan's transitional authorities and another rebel alliance signed a peace deal that was a step toward ending the country's decades-long civil wars. Al-Hilu's group participated in negotiations leading up to it but did not sign the final deal.

The rebels have called for a secular state with no role for religion in lawmaking, the disbanding of all of Al-Bashir's militias and the re-vamping of the country's military. Al-Hilu's group says if its demands aren't met, it will call for self-determination in areas it controls.

Special Representative of the UN Secretary General for Sudan, Volker Perthes, welcomed the development, calling it "an important step forward toward comprehensive peace in Sudan," in a Tweet.

In a copy of the initial agreement between the government and the rebel group obtained by The Associated Press, both sides agreed that a principle for the basis of talks was "a civil, democratic, federal State in Sudan."

Sudanese rebels for years fought Al-Bashir's loyalists, in Darfur but also in the southern provinces of Blue Nile and South Kordofan. The fighting has often fallen along religious and ethnic lines. In rebel-held provinces much of the population claims sub-Saharan African descent and are Christian, and were targeted by Al-Bashir's Islamist government in the north of the country.





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Sudan's cabinet backs UAE mediation in border, dam disputes with Ethiopia

Jordan considers state takeover of private hospitals to cope with COVID-19 surge

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Sun, 2021-03-28 18:17

AMMAN: The Jordanian government has threatened to place the country's private hospitals under state control to cope with a surge in COVID-19 cases.

In a bid to cope with a sharp increase in demand for hospital and intensive care beds, Minister of State for Media Affairs Sakher Dudin said that the government had set up a number of field hospitals across the kingdom and had rented four private hospitals.

"But the health care system is now on the line with the surge in coronavirus cases," he said on Sunday.

Asked whether the government would nationalize private hospitals to deal with rising cases, the minister said: "Yes, of course, the government would activate the defense order related to taking over private hospitals and health care providers, if it requires, to slow the spread of coronavirus."

Jordan has seen a surge in COVID-19 cases in recent weeks with hospital occupancy rates reaching around 70 percent.

Health authorities reported 4,399 new cases of COVID-19 and 98 additional deaths on Saturday, bringing the country's total cases to 582,133, with 6,472 fatalities.

Jordan has 70 private hospitals, two university hospitals, 31 public hospitals and 15 royal medical services hospitals.

Dudin said that the government had signed deals with COVID-19 vaccine producers to import 10.2 million jabs – enough to vaccinate more than 50 percent of the kingdom's 10 million population. Some 440,000 doses have already arrived and more than 10 million jabs are to arrive in June, September and December.

Contracts have been signed for the Sinopharm vaccine from China, the Pfizer BioNTech vaccine, Russia's Sputnik V and the Oxford-AstraZeneca jab.



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Jordan inoculates more than 274,000 against COVID-19
Jordan eyeing coronavirus-free tourism zone

[France's Macron and Egypt's El-Sisi discuss Libya, GERD](#)

Sun, 2021-03-28 17:53

LONDON: French President Emmanuel Macron praised Egypt's role in resolving the Libyan crisis during a phone call between with his Egyptian counterpart Abdel Fattah El-Sisi on Sunday.

Macron said Paris was keen to continue intensive cooperation with Cairo on Libya, according to a statement by the Egyptian presidency.

The French president said he appreciated the prominent political weight Egypt holds in the Arab world, Africa and the Mediterranean, and that this had positive repercussions on joint cooperation between the two countries to reach political settlements to existing crises, said Bassam Rady, spokesman for the Egyptian president.

Rady said Macron praised the "vital Egyptian role in resolving the Libyan crisis, and President El-Sisi's efforts, which strengthened the political track to solve the Libyan issue."

El-Sisi affirmed Egypt's efforts to support the new temporary executive authority in Libya in various bilateral, regional and international forums. He called for mercenaries to immediately leave Libya and for the halt of foreign interference in Libyan affairs that contribute to fueling the crisis. The two presidents also agreed on the importance of intensifying joint efforts to combat terrorism in the Sahel region "in addition to the challenge that the phenomenon of terrorism poses to regional security as a whole."

The call also dealt with developments over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam. The French president said he hoped a solution would be reached between Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan that would achieve the interests of all three parties as soon as possible.

They also reviewed the close ties that bind France and Egypt, and ways to strengthen them in various other fields.



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Libya demands mercenary pullout as EU top diplomats visit Egypt and Sudan
welcome UN's support for mediation to solve GERD issue
France to reopen embassy in Libya
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[Turkey's daily COVID-19 cases exceed 30,000 for first time this year](#)

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Sat, 2021-03-27 17:19

ISTANBUL: Turkey has recorded 30,021 new coronavirus cases in the space of 24 hours, the highest number this year, health ministry data showed on Saturday. Measures to curb the pandemic in Turkey were eased this month. The cumulative number of cases stood at 3,179,115 and the latest daily death toll was 151, bringing the cumulative toll to 30,923.

The country will begin vaccinating people over 60 and some risk groups as daily infections climb, Turkey's health minister said. Minister Fahrettin Koca announced on Twitter the spouses of people above 60 are also eligible. The risk groups included in this round of vaccinations are people with underlying conditions. Turkey rolled out its vaccination program in January with CoronaVac by Chinese biopharmaceutical company Sinovac and has administered more than 14.6 million shots. This week, the country also received approximately 1.4 million doses of the Pfizer vaccine.



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Turkey opposition demands probe on central bank corruption claims
Push to ban pro-Kurdish HDP erodes Turkey's political pluralism further

Turkey opposition demands probe on central bank corruption claims

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Sat, 2021-03-27 20:17

ANKARA: Turkey's main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) has called for a parliamentary investigation into the ousting of the central bank governor amid rumors of profiteering and corruption.

The CHP demanded the government reveal the amount of public money lost and the names of officials said to have benefited from foreign currency fluctuations between the announcement of interest rate hikes on March 18 and the dismissal of Naci Agbal two days later.

The request was initiated by 16 MPs from the party.

In the past two years, Turkey has replaced its central bank governor three times, triggering market instability and scaring off foreign investment.

Agbal, who was appointed in November last year and hailed as a "competent" figure, was dismissed two days after he proposed a larger-than-expected increase in interest rates.

"The central bank and all other banks have the list that contains the name of those who profited from the currency fluctuation. It is an organized move and 83 million Turkish citizens should know who benefited from that abrupt dismissal. Those who leaked this sensitive information should be revealed immediately," CHP Istanbul MP Gursel Tekin told Arab News.

Tekin also called for Turkey's Financial Crimes Investigation Board to audit transactions made during the period.

Credit rating agency Moody's said on March 25 that Agbal's dismissal "hurt investor confidence in Turkey."

Last week, Ali Babacan, leader of the opposition DEVA party and former economy chair in the government, drew attention to the allegations surrounding Agbal's dismissal.

Babacan said that Agbal might have been dismissed at midnight because he was planning to investigate the sale of \$130 billion in foreign exchange reserves during former finance minister Berat Albayrak's tenure.

"We do not know if this is true, but I would not be surprised if it was the case," he said.

The Turkish central bank's foreign currency reserves have fallen 75 percent over the last year and now stand at a mere \$11 billion.

Agbal's dismissal resulted in an 11-percent depreciation of the Turkish lira against the US dollar after the appointment of Sahap Kavcioglu as new governor.

Kavcioglu is a well-known advocate of lower interest rates, and will likely shape a new approach that works in the government's favor.

However, economists warn that if the bank reduces interest rates, foreign

exchange rates will spike further and a balance of payment crisis will emerge.

The opposition IYI Party announced on March 22 that it was planning to submit a legislative proposal to Turkey's Parliament to establish a five-year minimum term for the position of central bank governor.

Meanwhile, Turkey's stock exchange Borsa Istanbul named Korkmaz Enes Ergun, previously deputy general manager with 24 years' experience in the sector, as new managing director.

Ergun replaces Hakan Atilla, a controversial figure who was sentenced to 32 months in prison in the US for helping Iran evade sanctions in his role at Turkey's state-run Halkbank.

Atilla resigned from his post on March 8.



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