

Sudan talks enter day two as key issue still unresolved

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KHARTOUM: Talks between Sudan's ruling generals and protest leaders, held after weeks of standoff following a deadly crackdown on protesters, enter a second day Thursday with the key issue of forming a new governing body still unresolved.

Sudan has been rocked by a political crisis since the army ousted longtime ruler Omar Al-Bashir in April on the back of widespread protests, with the ruling generals resisting demonstrators' demands to hand power to a civilian administration.

The generals had previously agreed over a broad civilian structure, but talks between the two sides collapsed in May following a disagreement over who should lead an overall new governing body – a civilian or a soldier.

Tensions further surged between the generals and protest leaders after a deadly pre-dawn raid on a longstanding protest camp in Khartoum on June 3 killed dozens of demonstrators and wounded hundreds.

Talks finally resumed Wednesday after intense mediation by Ethiopian and African Union envoys, who have put forward a draft proposal to break the deadlock.

The two sides were due to meet again on Thursday evening.

"The discussion will be about who heads the sovereign council," a prominent protest leader who is part of the talks, Ahmed Al-Rabie, told AFP, referring to the governing body.

He said the ruling military council that took power after Bashir's ouster insists the head of the new governing body be from the army.

"We believe that symbolically the head of the state must be a civilian," Rabie said.

For weeks this issue has rocked Sudan, extending the political crisis triggered since the fall of Bashir.

The joint Ethiopian and African Union blueprint calls for a civilian-majority ruling body.

On Wednesday, the first day of the latest round of talks, the two sides did not discuss the crucial issue of the governing body.

"The parties conducted responsible negotiations and agreed on some issues," African Union mediator Mohamed El Hacen Lebatt told reporters overnight after long hours of talks held at a luxury hotel in the capital.

"There's a decision taken to release all political detainees."

A group of 235 fighters from a faction of a Darfur rebel group that is part of the protest movement were released later on Thursday.

They were freed from Al-Huda prison in Omdurman, the twin city of Khartoum across the Nile river, an AFP correspondent reported, adding that many relatives had arrived to receive the fighters.

Protest leaders have exerted pressure on the generals since the June 3 raid on the mass sit-in outside army headquarters.

The raid was carried out by men in military fatigues.

The ruling military council insists it did not order the violent dispersal of the sit-in.

At least 136 people have been killed across the country since the raid, including more than 100 on June 3, according to doctors close to the umbrella protest movement, the Alliance for Freedom and Change.

The health ministry says 78 people have been killed nationwide over the same period.

On Sunday, protest leaders managed to mobilize tens of thousands of supporters in the first mass protest against the generals since the raid.

The mass rally had been seen as a test for the protest leaders' ability to mobilize crowds after the generals imposed a widespread Internet blackout and deployed security forces in the capital's key squares and districts, its twin city Omdurman and other towns and villages.

Protest leaders have further upped the pressure on the generals by calling for a similar mass protest on July 13, to be followed by a nationwide civil disobedience campaign a day later.

The campaign, if observed, would be the second such agitation since the June 3 raid.

The first, held between June 9 and 11, paralyzed the country, hitting an already dilapidated economy hard.



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Continued standoff between military, rallyists may slide Sudan into deeper chaos
Mediators call on Sudan generals, protesters to resume talks Wednesday

Angered by police killing, Ethiopian-Israelis demand change

Author:

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KIRYAT HAIM, Israel: Woreka Teka sits in a mourning tent and accepts the hugs of supporters, but begged off when asked about the night his 19-year-old son was killed by a police officer's bullet.

"I want the demonstrations to keep going, but not violently, until they charge the policeman who shot him," the 58-year-old said in his native Amharic language through a translator as he and his wife sat near a picture of his smiling son.

Solomon Teka's death has been a deeply personal tragedy for his family, but for the wider Ethiopian-Israeli community, he has become a symbol as well. Violent protests erupted in areas across the country after he was killed on Sunday.

In Kiryat Ata, near Teka's home in the neighboring community of Kiryat Haim in northern Israel, demonstrators burned tires and blocked roads, the burn marks on the street still visible.

Teka's death has brought renewed attention to the longstanding grievances of the Ethiopian-Israeli community, who say they are discriminated against and targeted by police because of their skin color.

The community now numbers around 140,000, of whom some 50,000 were born in Israel. They are Jewish, but say they are in many cases still seen as outsiders.

One young man gathered with others at a junction in Kiryat Ata fired off an expletive against police when a journalist approached.

A young woman nearby waved him off and spoke of wanting to see "people stop dying because of the color of their skin."

"The cops don't understand what we're all trying to explain to them," said Lihi Achdari, 21.

"They don't know what it is, that people look at you different because of the color of your skin."

The protests turned violent in parts of the country, with police targeted with stones, bottles and firebombs.

Police say more than 140 people have been arrested and 111 officers wounded. Early on, police kept their distance to avoid stoking tensions, but beginning late Tuesday they took a tougher stance and began clearing protesters from roads.

On Wednesday night, the number of protesters and the level of violence were vastly reduced.

Police said Teka was killed when an off-duty officer saw a fight between youths and tried to break it up.

After the officer identified himself, the youths threw stones at him and he opened fire at Teka after "feeling that his life was in danger," a police statement said.

Other young men and a passer-by said the policeman was not attacked, Israeli media reported.

The officer is under house arrest while an investigation continues.

Ethiopian-Israelis arrived in the country as part of a unique history.

Their ancestors were cut off from the Jewish world for centuries before eventually being recognized by Israeli religious authorities as Jews.

Many arrived in two separate Israeli airlifts in 1984 and 1991.

Jews of Middle Eastern descent have faced their own forms of discrimination in Israel, where the government was for many years dominated by those of European descent.

But Ethiopian-Israelis face special challenges due to their relatively recent arrival and other factors, including the simple fact of their skin color.

Teka's death was not the first time a police shooting led to protests.

In January, thousands of Ethiopian-Israelis demonstrated after a young man was shot dead as he allegedly rushed at a police officer with a knife.

His mother said she had called the police to subdue her son, who reportedly suffered from a mental condition, and alleged they used excessive force.

There have been many success stories of Ethiopian-Israelis, said Yaakov Frohlich of Fidel, a non-profit organization that helps the community integrate into society.

But discrimination combined with the struggles of families who arrived poor from a vastly different country have limited others' advancement, he said.

The problem of what Frohlich and others call "overpolicing" of the Ethiopian-Israeli community has also created frustration.

Teka's killing was in some ways the "straw that broke the camel's back," Frohlich said.

"You have a generation now who grew up in Israel who realized that by keeping it inside you don't really get anywhere with it."

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu trod carefully during the protests, calling Teka's death a "tragedy" and acknowledging problems needed to be addressed before eventually declaring that violent demonstrations would not be accepted.

At an Ethiopian restaurant next to the protest site in Kiryat Ata, a suburban-style town of strip malls and industrial areas near the port city of Haifa, Ora Yakov said she supports the protests' message but not violence.

The daughter of the restaurant owners, she said she is studying law to work to defend her community.

"It's not only the kid that was killed," said the 23-year-old, alleging young Ethiopians face regular police harassment.

"It's also the way they treat us every day."



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Israel hit by protests over police killing of youth of Ethiopian origin
Ethiopian-Israelis decry family separation as discriminatory

Full transcript of Arab News interview with Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kono

Author:

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TOKYO: Japan has offered to play a role in the Palestinian-Israeli peace process in the wake of White House adviser Jared Kushner's Peace to Prosperity workshop last month in Bahrain.

"We can play an honest broker in the Middle East, as we have no colonial

history or negative footprint in the region," Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kono told Arab News.

"I think we should all play some role to get the peace process rolling forward and we would be very happy to be involved in this process."

In a wide-ranging interview, Kono said Japan was keen to expand its already strong ties with Saudi Arabia beyond industry and energy, and the relationship was discussed by Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe when Japan hosted the G20 summit in Osaka.

The Japan-Saudi Arabia Vision 2030 agreed in 2017 "includes cultural exchange, entertainment and many other (aspects)," Kono said. "I think we can go even deeper in our bilateral relationship."

The following is the full interview, which took place at Kono's office in the Japanese foreign ministry building in Tokyo.

Arab News: The Osaka G20 was marked, actually, with exceptional time and access granted for Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman with Prime Minister Abe, both as the host of the next G20 and to discuss bilateral relations between Japan and Saudi Arabia. Can you please shed light on the bilateral conversations between Japan and Saudi Arabia during the G20?

Taro Kono: Mainly we confirmed the progress of Japan and Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030. The Japanese government and the Japanese private sector are determined to support His Royal Highness's reform agenda in the Kingdom, and when His Majesty King Salman visited Japan in 2017 we agreed on this Japan-Saudi Arabia Vision 2030.

Our relationship started out with Japan's import of crude oil and export of automobiles, but we wanted to develop the relationship further, so it's not limited to energy and industry, but this vision includes cultural exchange, entertainment and many other (aspects). So, it's a very diversified relationship between our two countries and the PM and His Royal Highness confirmed that we have made much progress; so we agreed on the next stage, Japan-Saudi Arabia vision 2030 version 2. I think we can go even deeper in our bilateral relationship.

AN: So if you were to summarize this vision and its second installment, what would the Japanese-Saudi relationship look like in 2030?

TK: Well, we should have more exchange of people, and Japanese companies investing in Saudi Arabia. There are mega-projects that His Royal Highness is taking leadership (on) and we hope many Japanese companies participate in these projects, as well as (increase) Saudi investment into Japan – and not limited to economy, we hope to receive more Saudi students coming to study in Japanese universities and we'll be happy to send Japanese students to Saudi Arabia.

AN: So, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has several times expressed his interest in the Japanese model and its success story. You've met with him on several occasions; how do you describe your encounters and what aspects of Saudi Vision 2030 do you think are the most aspirational?

TK: His Royal Highness is very much interested in keeping Saudi history and tradition but at the same time (he would) like to develop Saudi economy and society. This is similar to what Japan has been doing. We introduced Western technology and the idea of democracy, but at the same time we have kept Japanese values, traditions and the Japanese way of life. There is a lot in common between Arab culture and our culture, like respecting elders or putting importance on family. So, we would be very happy to share our experience and work with his vision.

AN: There was an unfortunate incident recently with the attack on a Japanese ship during the recent visit of PM Abe to Tehran to mediate and try to avert a crisis in the region. This has been labelled in the media as a direct insult to the foreign policy of Japan. We want to understand from Japan what measures can be taken to prevent such an atrocious attack from happening again, and will this deter Japan's efforts in the region?

TK: Well, as you know, Japan does not produce any crude oil domestically. Our energy depends on imports, mostly from the Gulf region. Forty percent of crude oil we import comes from Saudi Arabia and 80 percent of crude oil we import goes through the Strait of Hormuz, as well as 20 percent of our natural gas. So stability and peace in the Middle East are directly connected to our economy.

It is not just Japan; South Korea, China, and India all depend on the energy sources coming through the Strait of Hormuz. So for Asia, and I would say the global economy, we all depend on the region's peace and stability, and a safe passage through the Strait of Hormuz. So Japan strongly condemns any attack on ships going through the Strait, and we strongly condemn Houthi attacks with missiles and drones on Saudi people and Saudi facilities.

When Prime Minister Abe visited Iran, it was the first time in 41 years that a Japanese prime minister had done so, and the Supreme Leader as well as President Rouhani told him that Iran had no intention to develop nuclear weapons, and that nuclear weapons are against the teachings of Islam.

So, if that is true, we have nothing to worry about. We hope Iran will keep to the nuclear deal. Japan called for every concerned country and concerned party to ease tension in the Middle East. Any differences need to be sorted out through dialogue.

AN: Are any extra measures being taken to protect your ships? To protect Japanese interests?

TK: Well, we are hoping that no further attacks will happen to any ships of

any country going through the Strait of Hormuz.

AN: There has been a recent interesting development when President Trump visited North Korea straight after the Osaka G20. What is the Japanese position regarding this, and what do you expect from your Arab allies when it comes to deterring North Korea's nuclear threat?

TK: After the (February 2019) Hanoi summit there was no designated (communication) window on the North Korean side, so when I spoke with US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo he couldn't really reach out to his counterpart in North Korea as he didn't know who the counterpart was.

But because of Twitter diplomacy, I think it was a very bold move by President Trump because if Chairman Kim Jong Un didn't show up, the media would have criticized President Trump; but he (Trump) took the risk and he went there, had a meeting for 45 minutes and the United States and North Korea have agreed to designate the communication window. So, it will be Mike Pompeo and Steve Biegun on the US side and North Korea will nominate somebody to be the counterpart to them.

We welcome this development, it is a big push to restart the process, but what matters is what's going to be negotiated. So now we're going to be talking about the substance of the negotiations. As for Arab countries, we are very happy that they have been implementing United Nations Security Council resolutions, so the sanctions are binding North Korea's economy and that is the driving force for them to come to the dialogue.

So, we appreciate all the Arab countries' full implementation of the Security Council resolutions, and we hope to work with Middle Eastern and Arab countries to continue doing this.

AN: As you know, straight before the G20 the Manama "Peace to Prosperity" workshop for Palestinians was held, revealing the economic side of Jared Kushner's peace plan. The Palestinian side didn't attend. However, Japan's name has been floated as a backer of the economic effort. What is your involvement level and would you be prepared to play a political mediator role if invited?

TK: Well, ever since I became foreign minister I have put much emphasis on Middle East affairs. I believe Japan should play a bigger political role in this region because Japan is religiously and ethnically very neutral. We can play an honest broker in the Middle East, as we have no colonial history or negative footprint in the region. Also, our economy depends on the energy coming from the region so I think we have to increase our role in the peace process as well.

Japan has been investing quite heavily in the West Bank. We have worked with Palestinians, Israelis and Jordanians to set up an industrial park near Jericho and it's been going very well. Also, Japan set up a framework called

the CEAPAD (Conference in Cooperation among East Asian Countries for Palestinian Development) to bring Southeast Asia to this peace process. We wanted to share how we develop the Asian economy and we want to share our experience with Palestinians and people in the region.

We have been communicating with Mr. Kushner and we are now reviewing his economic plan. It looks nice and we need to see what the political side might look like. If the political side is good, I think we should all play some role to get the peace process rolling forward and we would be very happy to be involved in this process. So, we hope the Palestinians look at the (Kushner) plan and are ready to negotiate. We need to give hope and dreams to the younger generation in Palestine so we would be happy to work with any concerned parties.

AN: So if they invite you (to mediate), you would take the opportunity?

TK: I'll be very glad to, yes.



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Japan offers to be 'honest broker' for Palestinian-Israeli peace
Saudis studying in Japan: Live, work and explore a different culture

Continued standoff between military, rallyists may slide Sudan into deeper chaos

Author:

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CAIRO: The mass marches held in Sudan this week breathed new life into the uprising that toppled long ruling president, Omar Al-Bashir, but the protesters and the ruling military council remain at an impasse amid fears the country could slide into further chaos.

Tens of thousands of people marched through the streets of the capital, Khartoum, and other areas on Sunday, vowing to complete the revolution they launched in December.

Nearly a dozen people were killed in clashes as security forces prevented the demonstrators from reaching the military headquarters and the Nile-side presidential palace.

It was the biggest show of determination by the protesters since security forces dispersed their main sit-in outside the military headquarters on June 3, killing at least 128 people. That triggered the suspension of talks on forming a transitional government just as the two sides seemed on the verge of an agreement.

Ethiopian and African Union (AU) mediators are working to restart the talks, but both sides have hardened their demands since last month's violence, with the generals saying earlier proposals are off the table and the protesters calling for an immediate transition to civilian rule and an investigation into the killings. Here is a look at where things may be heading.

Protests first erupted in December in response to price hikes but rapidly escalated into near-daily marches calling for an end to Bashir's nearly 30-year rule. Troops largely refused Bashir's orders to fire on the protesters, and the military removed him from power on April 11. Bashir now languishes in a Khartoum prison where his forces once jailed and tortured his opponents.

But the protesters remained in the streets, fearing that the military would cling to power. When the military announced it would govern for up to two years until elections could be held, the protesters demanded an immediate transition to a civilian body that would govern the country for four years.

After several rounds of talks the two sides appeared to be closing in on a power-sharing agreement in which the Forces of the Declaration of Freedom and Change, which represents the protesters, would hold 67 percent of the seats in an interim legislative body and appoint a Cabinet. But the two sides

remained divided over the makeup of the sovereign council, which would hold executive power for three years.

The process came to a screeching halt on June 3, when security forces attacked the sit-in. The generals annulled all previous deals but announced to hold elections in nine months.

An unwieldy coalition

Sunday's marches provided a powerful show of unity, but internal divides among the protesters threaten to undermine their struggle going forward.

The initial uprising was led by the Sudanese Professionals Association, an umbrella group of independent unions, which later joined forces with the country's various opposition parties.

The parties appear more eager to cut a deal with the military. Sadiq Al-Mahdi, the head of the Umma Party and Sudan's last democratically elected prime minister, opposed calls for a general strike after the June 3 crackdown. He has also agreed with the military on expanding the negotiations to include other political groups that many protesters view as too close to Bashir.

The Sudanese Revolutionary Front, a rebel group that is part of the protest movement, meanwhile threatened to negotiate separately with the military council, the English language Sudan Tribune reported Monday.

Gibril Ibrahim, an SRF leader, was quoted as saying that decision-making within the coalition has been "kidnapped" by a small committee "formed in vague circumstances with limited representation."

Mediation efforts

Ethiopia's reformist Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed met with both sides in Khartoum last month, and his administration along with the AU has sought to mediate the crisis. The White House has expressed support for those efforts and has appointed a special envoy to Sudan.

Last month, the AU and Ethiopia offered a joint proposal based on previous agreements that left the makeup of the legislative body open for negotiations. The generals welcomed it as the basis for future talks, but the protesters refuse to meet with the military until it fully accepts the roadmap.

"We are back to square one," said Amany El-Taweel, a Sudan expert at Egypt's Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies. "I believe they are playing for time, especially after the pressure from the street decreased due to the breakup of the military headquarters sit-in."

Fears of civil war

The deadlock in the negotiations has stoked fears that Sudan could slide into civil war, as Yemen, Libya and Syria did after their own uprisings.

Sudan has been at war with rebels in Darfur and other regions for decades, and the centrifugal forces that have convulsed the country since independence could tear it apart in the absence of a stable central government.

"Civil war is a terribly distinct possibility," Sudan researcher Eric Reeves said. "The failure of the international community to push harder for civilian governance – for various reasons – is proving deeply counterproductive."

Osman Mirghani, a Sudanese analyst and the editor of the daily newspaper Al-Tayar, said resuming negotiations offers the only hope of avoiding the "Libya model."

"If the impasse continues, Sudan could become a new Libya, which means a set of militias control parts of the country and each militia has its government."

Sudanese novelist Hamour Zyada blamed the impasse on the military, calling it a threat to the country's peace and stability.

"In the near future, I am not optimistic. I do not expect that the military council will relinquish its grip on power," he said. "But at the far future, I am optimistic. The public mood is with the civilian state and the revolution."



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Sudan protesters agree to direct talks with ruling generals
Mediators call on Sudan generals, protesters to resume talks Wednesday

Lebanon says issues still pending over sea border talks with Israel

Author:

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BEIRUT: Lebanon insists any demarcation of its sea boundary with Israel be implemented only as part of a wider package including the land border, and wants this in writing, the parliament speaker said on Wednesday.

Senior US official David Satterfield has been shuttling between Lebanon and Israel in an effort to launch the talks between the countries, which have remained formally in a state of war since Israel was founded in 1948. Settling the maritime dispute could help both countries exploit offshore energy reserves. Israeli Energy Minister Yuval Steinitz said on June 19 he expected US-mediated talks to start within a month.

But Lebanese Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri, speaking to MPs in his parliamentary bloc on Wednesday, said two issues were still pending and hoped that "work will be done towards solving them", one of the MPs, Ali Bazzi, said in televised comments.

"The first matter is related to the linking of the land and sea (borders)," Bazzi said. "The American position was talking about a verbal agreement, but everyone knows the stance of Speaker Berri on this issue – we don't even trust Israel in a written agreement, let alone an oral one," he said.

Lebanon also wants the United Nations to sponsor the talks rather than simply host them, Bazzi cited Berri as saying.

A statement from Berri's office on Tuesday said Lebanon wants the UN representative in Lebanon to sponsor the meetings "to deny the Israeli enemy the opportunity of snatching Lebanese rights".

A senior Israeli official has said that a UN peacekeeper position at Naqoura in southern Lebanon would be a possible venue for the U.S.-mediated talks. Berri, Lebanon's point person with Satterfield, is a close ally of the powerful Lebanese Shi'ite group Hezbollah, a political and military organisation backed by Iran that has fought numerous conflicts with Israeli. Steinitz said it was likely that as soon as the talks begin, energy groups operating in both Israeli and Lebanese waters would be able to carry out the first seismological survey of the disputed area.



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Israel, Lebanon move to ease tensions after border skirmishUS in new push to resolve Israel-Lebanon sea border dispute