

Sudan talks resume after shootings mar breakthrough

Author:

Tue, 2019-05-14 23:13

KHARTOUM: Protest leaders resumed talks with Sudan's military rulers Tuesday seeking to build on a political breakthrough overshadowed by deadly shootings.

The protest movement is demanding a civilian-led transition following 30 years of rule by President Omar Al-Bashir, but the generals who toppled him have been holding onto a leadership role.

An army major and five protesters were killed by unidentified gunmen at a long-running sit-in outside military headquarters in Khartoum late on Monday, just hours after the two sides announced they had reached agreement on the structure and powers of bodies that will oversee a transition.

The Alliance for Freedom and Change – the protest movement umbrella group negotiating with the ruling military council – said the shootings were an attempt to “disturb the breakthrough.”

The military council said it had “noticed some armed infiltrators among the protesters” at the sit-in, but did not identify them.

Protest leaders changed their stand on Tuesday. “It’s their (military) direct responsibility to guard and protect the citizens,” Mohamed Naji Al-Assam, a prominent figure in the movement, told reporters.

On the political track, protest leaders remained locked in talks with council representatives expected to focus on the composition of transitional bodies to run the country. The protest movement has demanded they have civilian majorities.

The military is ready to accept a mainly civilian Cabinet but has been demanding a military majority in a proposed sovereign council that will have the final say on matters of state.

Also on the agenda was the duration of the transition, with the military calling for a two-year timeframe, while the protesters want four years to allow time for preparatory reforms.

The latest round of talks which opened on Monday come after a break in negotiations that saw protest leaders threaten “escalatory measures” to secure their central demand of civilian rule. The issue has kept protesters camped outside army headquarters around the clock ever since Bashir’s overthrow.

The sit-in has become the focal point for the protest movement, overtaking the near-daily protests that had been held across Sudan while the veteran

president remained in power.

But on Tuesday, following the previous night's violence at the Khartoum sit-in, protesters held demonstrations in the Abbassiya and Al-Arbaa regions.

In Al-Arbaa, some demonstrators blocked roads with burning tires, a witness said, adding that troops deployed to the area.

Doctors, who along with other professionals have played a major part in organizing the protests, have set up field clinics at the sit-in where they treated the wounded from Monday's shootings.

"So far all cases are stable, and those unstable have been transferred to hospital," a duty doctor told AFP.



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'Infiltrators' suspected behind shooting dead of 5 protesters, army officer in Sudan Brother of Sudan's Bashir not in detention: army

Egypt teaches students about love and marriage in attempt to curb divorce

Author:

Tue, 2019-05-14 23:09

CAIRO: During a recent class at Cairo University, students laughed as they watched a skit acted out by their peers about a married couple. The husband came home from work and asked his wife, who was sweeping the floor, why dinner wasn't ready.

"I pick up the kids and I go to work ... Am I neglecting something because the food is still on the stove?" the wife asked, to which the husband responded: "The apartment looks like a rubbish dump."

The skit was part of a new government project called Mawadda, which offers lessons to university students about how to pick the right partner and how to handle conflicts in marriage. The goal is to prevent divorce after the number of divorces reached more than 198,000 in 2017, a 3.2 percent increase from the year before.

Mawadda, meaning affection, is still in a trial phase, but the goal is to target 800,000 young people yearly starting 2020 and to eventually make it mandatory for university students to take a class before graduating.

After watching the skit, some students and the teacher pointed out that the husband should carry out more household tasks.

"It's not her obligation to do all that," said Salah Ahmed, the teacher, adding that the Prophet Muhammad helped his wives with all tasks and his example should be followed.

But he also said the wife should have been more understanding and tried to look good for her husband instead of welcoming him while sweeping the floor.

Julia Gosef, a 23-year-old student who attended the class with her fiancé, said she worries that Egypt's economic hardships could harm her marriage. The couple will not be able to rely on one income so she would be forced to work, which could lead to arguments similar to the one in the skit, she said.

"I think I won't be able to take care of our home well enough," she said.

Mawadda's lessons will be accompanied by YouTube videos, a radio program and educational plays. The church and Egypt's top Muslim authority, Al-Azhar, are partners.

"If we want to solve the problem from the root we need to target people before they get married," said Amr Othman, manager of Mawadda at the Social Solidarity Ministry. He added that there's a correlation in Egypt between divorce and problems such as child homelessness and drug addiction.

At a youth conference in July, President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi said divorce and separation meant that millions of Egyptian children were living without one of their parents.

In Egypt, the divorce rate is too high. The project typifies some of El-Sisi's efforts to drive social change.

"He is patriarchal and speaks to Egyptians as if he was their father," Barak Barfi, research fellow at New America, a think tank based in Washington, said of El-Sisi. "It (Mawadda) reflects his belief that transformation can be instituted from the top rather than from below at the grass roots level."

Adhab Al-Hosseiny, 26, who played the role of the husband in the skit, said he hoped to get married in the near future.

He also worries financial difficulties might lead to arguments between him and his future wife.

"What might cause problems after I marry is external pressure," he said. "If there are money issues in terms of affording school fees and food ... all that affects my mental state."



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Egyptian actress faces backlash after appearing in blackface Debate rages in Egypt as priest tells Christian women to cover up

US official in Lebanon to discuss border dispute with Israel

Author:

Tue, 2019-05-14 22:50

BEIRUT: Lebanon's Prime Minister Saad Hariri has received a US official as Washington mediates a maritime border dispute with Israel.

Acting Assistant Secretary of State David Satterfield arrived Tuesday, beginning a two-day visit to meet with Lebanese officials.

Satterfield's visit comes a week after President Michel Aoun presented the US ambassador to Lebanon with a "unified stance" regarding the demarcation of the maritime border between Lebanon and Israel.

Last month, Lebanon's Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri told the commander of the UN peacekeeping force in Lebanon, Maj. Gen. Stefano del Col, that Beirut is ready to establish the maritime border and special economic zone with Israel.

There are some 860 sq. km of waters claimed by the two countries, which are technically in a state of conflict.

Torture allegations

Separately, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has called for "a thorough, effective and independent investigation" into the death of a Lebanese man who was allegedly tortured by police intelligence.

Michelle Bachelet said Hassan Diqa died Saturday despite numerous interventions by a variety of UN entities with Lebanese authorities after he was allegedly tortured while detained on drug-related charges in November.

Bachelet said Tuesday that Diqa's death "highlights what appears to be a number of very serious failings in Lebanon's legal and prison systems."

She said those who ordered the crime must be held accountable.

Diqa's father, Toufic, said his son suffered partial paralysis of his left leg.

He was admitted to hospital in early April and remained there until his dea



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It's austerity or catastrophe, Saad Hariri tells Lebanon
Protests return to Lebanon as government discusses austerity

[Economic conditions 'suffocating the joy of Ramadan' in Gaza](#)

Tue, 2019-05-14 00:24

GAZA CITY: Ramadan has arrived under very harsh conditions in the Gaza Strip, the result of the 13-year siege and waves of Israeli military escalation, as well as the internal division that has existed since mid-2007.

Gazans began the first day of Ramadan by burying the victims of Israeli airstrikes, which targeted hundreds of homes and public and private facilities over two days.

Israeli military escalation has increased the suffering of the Gazans, who

have been denied the joy of Ramadan due to widespread poverty, high unemployment, the salary crisis and the inability of citizens to purchase items.

Employee Mohammed Sultan said that he was unable to provide for his seven-member family because of the delay in paying employees' salaries in Gaza.

"We received the last salary about a month ago, and we expected to get our salaries before the month of Ramadan, but that did not happen," Sultan said.

Employees of the Palestinian Authority (PA) led by President Mahmoud Abbas are no longer better off than their Hamas counterparts.

Since March 2017, the PA has deducted more than 60 percent of the salaries of about 50,000 of its employees in Gaza. The PA says the measure is due to a financial crisis, but Palestinian factions and employees see it as "sanctions" to pressure Hamas "and to destabilize the Gaza Strip since it took control of the Gaza Strip in mid-June 2007."

SPEEDREAD

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"We did not feel the month of Ramadan, nor did we feel happy," said Amal Al-Sattari, an employee of the PA.

"We lost the holy month and we did not feel it because of the salary crisis and our inability to shop for the needs of Ramadan, as we always used to do."

"How are we going to provide iftar and suhoor? And we do not have one shekel in our house. It's a real tragedy," she said.

Al-Sattari, who is raising six children after her husband's death seven years ago, asked how her children could be responsible for the political differences that were causing such suffering.

"Instead of taking into consideration our circumstances for the month of Ramadan, paying our full salaries, the PA increased the deduction rate, and about 40 percent of our salaries were paid to us a few days before Ramadan," she said.

The suffering of workers is even more severe, with 52 percent unemployment and more than half of Gaza's 2 million people dependent on humanitarian aid from UN and other charities.

"We have received Ramadan and the refrigerator is empty, and my sons cry, they want the lantern of Ramadan," said Mohamed Allawi, a construction worker who is unemployed.

"The lowest price for the Ramadan lantern is NIS5 (\$1.40), and if I had (the money), food and drink would be the first (items) to buy. We are in a situation that does not allow us and our children even a simple joy."

Allawi said: "People everywhere are thinking about cooking the best food in Ramadan, and our iftar was beans and some rice on the first day, the same as the day before."

Adnan Ahmed was forced to borrow money from a friend before Ramadan for shopping and celebrating with his nine-member family.

Adnan, a cleaner in a hospital in the southern Gaza city of Rafah, said that he and many of his acquaintances had to sell their wife's jewelry to overcome the economic crisis. However, the crisis went on longer than expected and there was nothing left to be sold.

Mohammed Saleh, a cheese seller, complained of customers' reluctance to buy, despite the cheapness and variety of goods offered, adding that he had been hoping for an economic rebound by the end of Ramadan.

Saleh said: "Although I arrived early on the first day of Ramadan and wanted to offer different types of cheeses, which are usually more popular in Ramadan, this was not enough to attract customers because of the deteriorating economic conditions of most people."

He added that although many people visited the market, the majority could not afford to buy anything.

It was no different for the seller of sweets and nuts, Mohamed Taha, who confirmed that for the third year in a row, Ramadan was one of the most difficult times for the people of Gaza, because of poverty and unemployment. The situation had deteriorated more with the salary crisis of employees at the Palestinian Authority.

He said that he had been selling in the market for many years, but had not seen a recession like the one that was currently being experienced.

Shopper Hisham Madi complained about the rise in the price of many goods, increasing the burden placed on heads of households this month.



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KSA delivers sacrificial meat to needy people in Gaza
Israel reopens Gaza crossings as calm restored

[Soldier killed, large number of protesters wounded in clashes: Sudan's transitional council](#)

Mon, 2019-05-13 14:21

KHARTOUM: Sudan's transitional military council says soldier killed, large number of protesters wounded in clashes in Khartoum late on Monday.

Earlier, the council said on Monday that the structure of transitional bodies had been agreed with opposition groups and their make-up would be addressed in further talks a day later.

"We discussed the structure of the transitional authority and agreed on it completely, and we also agreed on the system of governance in the transitional period," said Lieutenant General Shams El Din Kabbashi, the spokesman for the Transitional Military Council (TMC).

Sudanese protesters resumed negotiations with the army earlier on Monday while calling for renewed demonstrations to press the generals to hand over power to a civilian government.

Meanwhile, Sudan charged ousted president Omar Al-Bashir and others with incitement and involvement in the killing of protesters, the public prosecutor said in a statement on Monday.

Earlier this month, the public prosecutor ordered Bashir to be interrogated on charges of money laundering and financing terrorism.

There has been no comment from Bashir since his ousting and arrest on April 11.

The military removed President Omar Al-Bashir from power in April after four months of mass protests, but the demonstrators have remained in the streets, demanding the dismantling of his regime. In recent weeks they have threatened a general strike and civil disobedience.

Lt. Gen. Shams Al-Deen Al-Kabashi, a spokesman for the military council, said Monday's meeting between army rulers and protest leaders, the first in over a week, was held "in a more optimistic atmosphere."

The protesters are represented by the Forces for the Declaration of Freedom and Change, a coalition of opposition groups led by the Sudanese Professionals Association, which has spearheaded the protests since December.

The protesters said late Sunday that they hope to secure commitments to a swift transfer of power in the three-day talks.

The military agreed last month to recognize the FDFC as the uprising's only legitimate representative in a victory for the protesters. But the generals have called for other political parties – with the exception of Al-Bashir's National Congress Party – to be included in the transition.

The opposition has vowed to continue protests, centered on a sit-in outside the military headquarters in the capital, Khartoum. It has called for a series of nationwide protests, including another march to the main sit-in, for the coming week.

The two sides remain divided over what role the military, which is dominated by Al-Bashir appointees, should have in the transition period until elections can be held. The military wants to play a leading role in a transition lasting up to two years, while the protesters have demanded an immediate transition to a civilian-led authority.

The protesters fear the army will cling to power or select one of its own to succeed Al-Bashir. They also fear that Islamists and other factions close to the deposed leader, who is now jailed in Khartoum, will be granted a role in the transition.



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Sudan tribal clashes leave 7 dead, 22 wounded
Cash crisis tops Sudan's economic woes