

Sudan lawmakers postpone meeting on Bashir term limits

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ID:

1550333356454209300

Sat, 2019-02-16 13:56

KHARTOUM: A Sudanese parliamentary committee has postponed a meeting on amending the country's constitution to allow President Omar Al-Bashir to run for a new term, state media reported Saturday.

The session, set for Sunday, has been shelved for the time being, the official SUNA news agency said, without giving a new date.

Bashir, who is facing deadly nationwide protests against his three-decade rule, is considering running for a third term in elections scheduled for next year.

But for that to happen, lawmakers must amend the country's constitution, which currently allows presidents two five-year terms.

"The committee's meeting has been postponed and a new date will be announced," SUNA reported.

Bashir's ruling National Congress Party (NCP) and its allies have an overwhelming majority in parliament, and in August the party named the veteran leader as its candidate for the 2020 poll.

The parliamentary committee was formed in late 2018 to consider the constitutional amendments necessary to keep Bashir in power, and it was set to meet Sunday for the first time.

Bashir, 75, swept to power in an Islamist-backed coup in 1989, but he faced his first multi-party election in 2010.

In 2015, he took 94 percent of the vote in the face of opposition boycotts. He later said he would not run for a third term.

Rights groups have said both elections lacked credibility.

Bashir has proved to be a political survivor, facing down both domestic and international challenges over the years, but since December 19 he has faced daily nationwide rallies against his rule.

Analysts say the ongoing protest movement is the biggest threat Bashir has faced since coming to power, with demonstrators calling for his resignation. Protesters chanting "freedom, peace, justice," have taken to the streets daily, blaming Bashir for the country's dire economic conditions.

Officials say 31 people have died in protest-related violence so far, while Human Rights Watch has put the death toll at 51.

Bashir has remained defiant, saying the ballot box is the only route through which a government can be changed.



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Sudanese policeman dies from wounds after protesters stone vehicle
Sudan accuses protest leaders of threatening national security

[US-backed fighters closing in on Daesh gunmen in eastern Syria](#)

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By SARAH EL DEEB | AP

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1550326501153540800

Sat, 2019-02-16 13:42

BAGHOUZ, Syria: A US-backed force in Syria is closing in on Daesh militants in a tiny area less than a square kilometer (square mile) in eastern Syria, and will soon declare the defeat of the militant group, a commander with the group said Saturday.

The capture of the last pocket still held by Daesh fighters in the village of Baghouz would mark the end of a devastating four-year global campaign to end

the extremist group's hold on territory in Syria and Iraq – their so-called “caliphate” that at the height of the group's power in 2014 controlled nearly a third of both Iraq and Syria.

“We will very soon bring good news to the whole world,” said Ciya Furat, a commander with the Kurdish-led force known as the Syrian Democratic Forces, speaking at a news conference at the Al-Omar Oil Field Base in the Deir Ezzor province.

President Donald Trump said the White House will make an announcement about Syria and the fight against Daesh by the end of Saturday.

“We have a lot of great announcements having to do with Syria and our success with the eradication of the caliphate and that will be announced over the next 24 hours,” Trump told journalists at the White House on Friday.

An Associated Press team in Baghouz Saturday, hundreds of meters away from the last speck of land where Daesh militants were holed up, saw several aircraft overhead and two airstrikes hit the area. SDF fighters said were fired by the US-led coalition.

The Syrian Democratic Forces declared the final push to capture the village a week ago after more than 20,000 civilians, many of them the wives and families of foreign fighters, were evacuated.

Since then, SDF commanders say they have been surprised to discover that there were hundreds more civilians in the enclave, after they were brought up by the militants from underground tunnels. Their presence has slowed down the SDF advance.

Furat, the SDF commander, said Daesh fighters are now besieged in an area that is about 700 square meters (840 square yards). He said that SDF fighters were able to liberate 10 of their colleagues that were held by Daesh.

Furat's comments were carried by Kurdish news agencies, including Hawar News.

“We are dealing with this small pocket with patience and caution. It is militarily fallen but civilians are used as human shields,” SDF spokesman Mustafa Bali told The Associated Press. Bali added that the SDF believes that Daesh gunmen are also holding previously kidnapped Syrians in the area.

Rami Abdurrahman, who heads the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a war monitor, said SDF fighters are almost in full control of the area once controlled by extremists, adding that there might still be Daesh fighters hiding in a network of underground tunnels.

The Observatory said that some 200 Daesh gunmen surrendered Friday, days after about 240 others surrendered and were taken by SDF fighters and members of the US-led coalition.

“The defeat of Daesh will come within days,” Furat said. He added that after the physical defeat of Daesh, the SDF “will continue in its fight against Daesh sleeper cells.”

Despite the expected defeat on the ground, activists and residents say Daesh still has sleeper cells in Syria and Iraq and is laying the groundwork for an insurgency. The group has claimed responsibility in recent months for deadly attacks, mostly in Iraq, more than a year after the Iraqi government said the extremists have been defeated after losing the northern city of Mosul in 2017, the largest they held.



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Civilians prompt delay in assault on last Daesh enclave: Kurd-led forcesUS says 'committed' to defeating Daesh; allies skeptical

[Tunisian workers kidnapped in Libya](#)

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1550311160482504800

Sat, 2019-02-16 09:52

TUNIS: Militiamen have kidnapped a group of Tunisian workers near the Libyan capital Tripoli, demanding Tunis release a comrade, the foreign ministry and a rights activist said.

"The foreign ministry is following the case of the Tunisian citizens... kidnapped by armed Libyan elements near Zawiya", the ministry said on its Facebook page late Friday.

Rights activist Mustapha Abdelkebir said the armed group behind Thursday's kidnappings was demanding the release of one of its members held in Tunisia. The kidnap victims were workers at Zawiya oil refinery, Tunisian media said. A diplomatic source told AFP that 14 workers had been taken hostage. "The minister has spoken to his Libyan counterpart to insist on the protection of the detainees, accelerate their release and ensure that they return safe and sound", the ministry said in a statement. Tunisia reopened a consulate in Libya in 2018, after shutting it three years earlier due to the kidnapping of 10 Tunisian diplomats. The Libyan militia which carried out the 2015 kidnapping had demanded the release of one of its leaders, Walid Glib, detained in Tunisia as part of a counter-terrorism investigation. The diplomats were released after several days and Walid Glib was later deported to Tripoli. Libya's Tripoli-based Government of National Accord said it had no information on Thursday's abduction and that it was looking into the matter. The country has been mired in chaos since the fall of dictator Muammar Qaddafi in a 2011 NATO-backed uprising, as two rival administrations and numerous militias grapple for power.



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[Jordan links deadly blasts to militant cell](#)

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1550244204586133300

Fri, 2019-02-15 15:10

AMMAN: Jordan said Friday that two deadly explosions which rocked the Salt region northwest of the capital Amman were apparently linked to a militant cell.

A security source had previously told AFP that old mines were behind Thursday's blasts which killed a farmer and three members of the security forces.

But analysis of the site found the blasts were caused by "homemade explosives buried in the ground matching the type used by a terrorist cell in Al-Fuhais" last August, government spokeswoman Jumana Ghneimat said.

She was referring to an August 11 bomb attack on a security patrol in the nearby town of Al-Fuhais that killed a police sergeant and wounded six others.

The Salt region was the scene of heavy clashes between gunmen and security forces after the attack which targeted a security patrol at a music festival. Four security force members and three "terrorists" were killed during a raid on a militant hideout a day after the blast.



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[al-salt](#)

Mine blasts kill farmer, 3 security personnel in Jordan
Lawmaker who changed Jordan's rape law takes on child marriage

[Egypt official: Home-made bomb explodes near mosque, 3 hurt](#)

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By MAGGIE MICHAEL | AP

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1550238667145584800

Fri, 2019-02-15 12:55

CAIRO: An Egyptian security official says a home-made bomb has exploded near a mosque in Cairo's district of Giza, leaving three people wounded. The official says the blast took place during Friday prayers near Al-Istaqama mosque in a busy square in the heart of Giza. Police sealed off the entire district and diverted traffic as security forces searched for the culprits.

An Interior Ministry statement blamed members of the Muslim Brotherhood for the attack, which it said targeted a security checkpoint. The Islamist group has been banned in Egypt since 2013.

The official says the wounded, including a policeman, were rushed to a nearby hospital. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because he wasn't authorized to speak to the media.

No group immediately claimed responsibility for the bombing.



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Egypt parliament overwhelmingly approves extension of president's term limits
Egypt's presidential term set to be extended