

Sudan PM calls for halt to post-coup sackings

Thu, 2021-11-25 01:34

KHARTOUM: Sudan's newly reinstated Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok on Wednesday ordered a halt to sackings and a review of all appointments made after his detention in last month's military coup.

Top General Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan had grabbed power and detained Hamdok on Oct. 25 but, following international condemnation and mass protests, reinstated the premier last Sunday.

After the coup Al-Burhan had dissolved major institutions and dismissed the heads of state media, public companies and banks as well as many provincial officials.

Ambassadors who had announced their defections were also relieved of their duties.

Hamdok himself was placed under house arrest after the putsch, which sparked a wave of mass street protests that triggered a deadly crackdown by the security forces.

On Wednesday, Hamdok said in a statement that he had ordered "an immediate halt to dismissals and hirings in national and local public institutions until further notice."

The prime minister, who is still without a Cabinet after returning to his post in a controversial deal with Al-Burhan, said "recent hirings and dismissals will be studied and reviewed."

Twelve out of 17 ministers from Sudan's bloc calling for a purely civilian government resigned on Monday, rejecting Hamdok's strategy of engaging with the military.

Despite the agreement that led to the release of a handful of politicians, dozens of others remain in detention.

Protest organizers have accused Hamdok of "treason" and have vowed to maintain pressure on the military-civilian authority overseeing Sudan's transition.

Activists have taken to social media to call for "Martyrs' Day" demonstrations on Thursday in honor of the 41 protesters killed in the post-coup crackdown.

On November 11, Al-Burhan formed a new Sovereign Council in which he and other military figures stayed on but members of the main civilian bloc were replaced.

Prior to the coup, the council had been charged with overseeing Sudan's transition to civilian rule after the ouster of long-time President Omar Bashir in 2019.



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[Hezbollah experiencing political confusion, says political analyst](#)

Wed, 2021-11-24 23:34

BEIRUT: Hezbollah is experiencing political confusion, writer and political analyst Sana Aljak said on Wednesday, amid reports of a disagreement between the party and the Amal Movement headed by Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri on their earlier call to remove Judge Tarek Bitar from his investigation into last year's Beirut port blast.

The government of Prime Minister Najib Mikati has been stuck over how to respond to calls for Bitar's removal, and the positive atmosphere that

prevailed in a meeting on Monday between Berri, Mikati and President Michel Aoun had not materialized into concrete steps by the middle of the week.

There were also claims of a dispute between Berri and Hezbollah on the solutions proposed for resuming Cabinet meetings.

The two allies have boycotted the meetings since Oct. 12, against the backdrop of the port blast investigation, and the government turmoil has been aggravated by a provocative statement from Information Minister George Kordahi about the war in Yemen.

The meeting on Lebanon's Independence Day produced, according to the information that followed, "flexibility, positivity, and openness to resolving outstanding problems."

There has been an increasing level of conversation about solutions related to Kordahi.

There are also reports that Aoun promised to facilitate understanding on solutions provided that the prime minister, after his Vatican visit to meet Pope Francis, invited a Cabinet session that conveyed to the international community the government's seriousness about implementing commitments to save Lebanon from collapse.

The information circulated said the way out regarding Hezbollah's demand to suspend Bitar was to limit his powers.

Accordingly, out of respect for the provisions of the constitution, Bitar should not be allowed to investigate accused officials, including ministers, MPs and a former prime minister, and try these officials before the Supreme Council for the trial of presidents and ministers.

This solution requires that Bitar be removed from the trial of political officials, rather than suspending him entirely.

Respecting the constitution was a requirement for Berri as well as other political parties, especially since the prime minister reiterated his refusal to interfere in the work of the judiciary and was committed to the separation of powers.

But this solution, according to the information circulated, means withdrawing the demand for Bitar's dismissal, a condition that Hezbollah is sticking to in order to let its ministers attend Cabinet sessions.

This development has led to claims of disagreement between Hezbollah and the Amal Movement.

MP Mohammed Khawaja, a member of the Parliamentary Development and Liberation Bloc headed by Berri, confirmed that the speaker "has been making, since the beginning of the crisis, every effort for the return of the government to business and address the thorny files, including the judicial file, whose course is required to be corrected as a starting point to the rest of the issues, foremost of which is the living conditions that affect all citizens

and pressurize most of the Lebanese who have become poor.”

Khawaja said: “It is natural that there is a difference in attitudes between the Amal Movement and Hezbollah, especially in their view of internal political affairs and how to deal with them since they are not one party. The two parties meet on strategic matters and complement each other. There is no need to exaggerate the dispute.”

Aljak said the dispute was “a division of roles” between Hezbollah and Berri.

She told Arab News: “Hezbollah was not able to completely remove Bitar from the file, so the party tried to overthrow the head of the Supreme Judicial Council, who protects Bitar. But it could not (do) either. Hezbollah, which is very powerful in Lebanon, has found that it is incapable of controlling everything and that it is even helpless. The party is now entering into reconciliation with the tribes of Khaldeh, that is, with the murderer of one of its leaders. Hezbollah can no longer use the excess power it possesses. When he boasts that he has 100,000 fighters, this is a sign of weakness, not strength.”

Aljak referred to the attack by a Hezbollah leader, Ghaleb Abu Zainab, against political leaders last Monday, and how the party was forced to say that he did not represent the party’s positions.

“This is evidence that Hezbollah has reached a stage where it thought it could control everything, but suddenly it discovered that its excess power did not benefit it. Hezbollah intervened in many places in the region, but what did it gain? Everyone is talking about an Iranian occupation. Hezbollah’s prestige has declined. Hezbollah has become like a dictator who no longer bothers to convince people to like him, but suddenly discovers that people hate him.

“The party no longer knows how to get out of all the places it has been involved in,” Aljak added.



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[Sudan's road to civilian rule proves rockier than expected](#)

Wed, 2021-11-24 22:34

DUBAI: Sudan's military reinstated Abdalla Hamdok as prime minister of the country's civilian transitional government on Nov. 21 and pledged to release political prisoners following weeks of deadly unrest in the wake of the October coup.

However, the new power-sharing arrangement appears far from secure amid continued protests by Sudanese pro-democracy groups against the military's involvement in the government.

After being held under house arrest since Oct. 25, Hamdok was reinstated upon signing a 14-point agreement with coup leader Gen. Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan

during a ceremony broadcast on state television on Sunday.

“The signing of this deal opens the door wide enough to address all the challenges of the transitional period,” Hamdok said during the ceremony.

“Sudanese blood is precious. Let us stop the bloodshed, and direct the youth’s energy into building and development,” he added, according to Reuters news agency.

SUDAN

Key political locations



Now that he has returned to office, Hamdok will lead an independent technocratic Cabinet until new elections are held before July 2023. However,

it remains unclear how much real power the civilian government will wield under the military's oversight.

Amani Al-Taweel, a researcher and expert on Sudanese affairs at Cairo's Al-Ahram Strategic and Political Studies Center, believes the agreement's effectiveness will depend largely on public acceptance of its legitimacy.

"This is a matter that depends on the extent to which the street and the people accept the agreement that was signed," she told Arab News.

"If it is accepted, we will reach a safe end to the transitional period, and if not, the situation will become more complex and open to security threats."

Many political groups have no confidence in Hamdok's professions of faith in the deal and accuse him of selling out the revolution.



Sudan's Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok chairs an emergency cabinet session in the capital Khartoum. (AFP)

The Sudanese Professionals' Association, one of the key players in the uprising against former leader Omar Al-Bashir, strongly opposes the agreement and says Hamdok has committed "political suicide."

"This agreement only concerns its signatories, and is an unjust attempt to bestow legitimacy on the latest coup and the military council," the group tweeted after the signing ceremony.

The Forces for the Declaration of Freedom and Change, a group made up of

several political parties and pro-democracy groups, has also objected to any new political partnership with the military and insists the perpetrators should face justice.

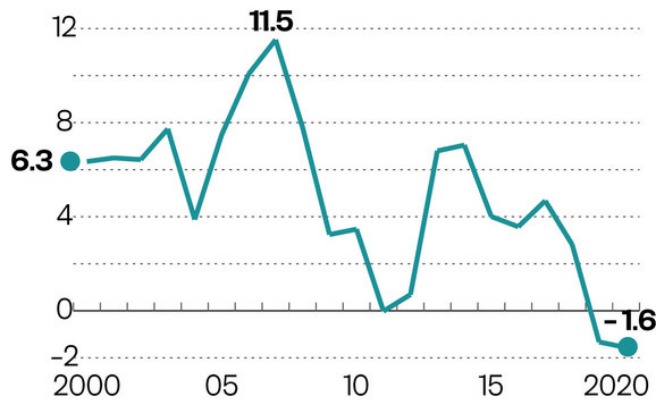
“We totally reject the treacherous agreement signed between Hamdok and Al-Burhan, which concerns only its signatories,” it said in a Facebook statement. “The points of the subservience agreement are far from the aspirations of our people and are nothing more than ink on paper.”

The Umma Party, Sudan’s biggest political bloc, has also issued a statement implying it does not support the deal, AP reports.

SUDAN

Key economic indicators

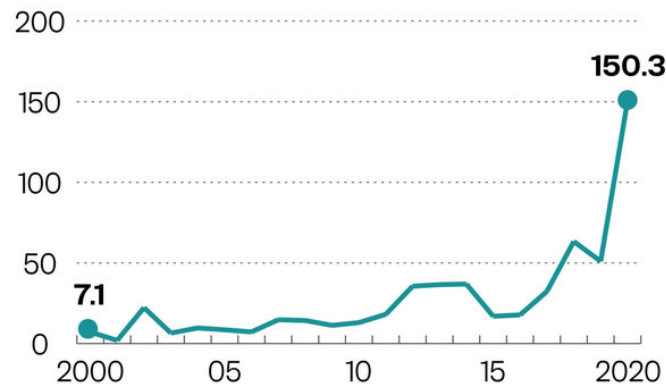
GDP
annual in %



Population
million (2020)



Inflation
yearly change %



External debt
in % of national income (GNI)



Source: World Bank

ARAB NEWS

Meanwhile, protesters have rallied in the capital Khartoum, Omdurman and Bahri, chanting “No to military power,” and demanding a full withdrawal of the armed forces from the government.

According to Zouhir Al-Shimale, head of research at Valent Projects, there are two likely scenarios, both of which depend on what Hamdok chooses to do next.

“In one, Hamdok will play a positive role by supporting the demands for democracy, justice and peace of the Sudanese revolution,” he told Arab News.

“In the other scenario, he will ostensibly back the street’s demands but, in actual fact, legitimize and support the October coup leaders, and act as their international political front.”

Hamdok, 65, has been the face of the country’s fragile transition to civilian rule since the 2019 overthrow of Sudan’s long-time leader Al-Bashir.

The British-educated economist, who was previously deputy executive secretary of the UN Economic Commission for Africa, had developed a reputation as a champion of good governance and transparency.



A woman speaks during the funeral procession for a Sudanese protester in the capital Khartoum. (AFP)

Although he did not take part in the 2019 revolution, he was widely seen as the ideal candidate to help steer Sudan’s democratic transition.

His government inherited a country long squeezed by US sanctions, wracked by economic crisis, suffering shortages of basic commodities, and with a banking sector on the brink of collapse.

Since its independence was recognized in 1956, Sudan has been plagued by internal strife and political instability. The secession of South Sudan in 2011 delivered multiple shocks to the economy following the loss of valuable oil revenues.

The consequent slowdown in growth and double-digit consumer price inflation triggered protests among a population increasing at a rate of 2.42 percent per year.

Sanctions were lifted soon after Hamdok joined a transitional government in August 2019 and Sudan was subsequently removed from the US Treasury's list of state sponsors of terrorism.

Since then, however, the country has been beset by daunting socioeconomic problems, made worse by the global pandemic.



Sudan's top army general Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan speaks during a press conference at the General Command of the Armed Forces in Khartoum. (AFP/File Photo)

In the face of these overlapping crises, army chief Al-Burhan announced a state of emergency on Oct. 25, deposing Hamdok and arresting several members of the transitional government.

The international community condemned the move and suspended much-needed economic assistance to Sudan. The World Bank froze aid and the African Union suspended the country's membership.

Under the circumstances, the Nov. 21 deal has been largely welcomed by the international community, which views it as a first step toward getting Sudan's fragile transition process back on track.

The US, Britain, Norway, the EU, Canada and Switzerland all welcomed Hamdok's reinstatement and, in a joint statement, urged the release of other political

detainees. The Saudi foreign ministry has said the Kingdom supports everything that will achieve peace and maintain security, stability and development in Sudan.

Some political observers believe the coup was simply a crude attempt by the Bashir-era old guard to retake power.



People take part in a funeral procession for a Sudanese protester in the capital Khartoum. (AFP)

“Sudan reached this point due to a post-revolution political dilemma and stalling by members of the Sudanese army, who are the remnants of the pro-Bashir regime and Muslim Brotherhood figures, the Rapid Response Forces, as well as some regional actors,” Al-Shimale told Arab News.

“They have been collectively undermining the post-revolution progress, namely the civilian-led transitional government.”

The October coup triggered weeks of demonstrations across Sudan, in which at least 41 people were killed, according to medical sources. The Nov. 21 agreement sets out plans for a thorough investigation into the killings.

Al-Shimale believes the Sudanese people are divided over the agreement because many of its clauses have not been made public. “The deal has already affected Hamdok’s image among Sudanese both inside and outside the country,” he told Arab News.

“They are arguing that the PM’s deal with the coup leaders is like a stab in the back for those who believed that he supported the civil right movement.

However, others are considering his stance as a political maneuver and not a submission to Al-Burhan's demands nor legitimizing his coup."

Hamdok faces considerable challenges, in addition to the risk of reputational damage.



Sudanese security forces shot at protesters on November 13 in a crackdown on anti-coup demonstrations, medics said, after the military tightened its grip by forming a new ruling council. (AFP)

Before the coup, in order to secure international funding, his government implemented a number of austerity measures, including the removal of subsidies on petrol and diesel, and the floating of the Sudanese pound.

Many Sudanese believe the steps were too harsh and overly hasty. In mid-September, anti-government protesters responded by blockading the country's main sea port, triggering nationwide shortages of wheat and fuel.

Hamdok's government was also accused of failing to deliver timely justice to the families of those killed under Al-Bashir, including those who died during the 2018-19 protests, leaving him vulnerable to criticism.

"The situation facing Sudan after the latest deal is too complicated to predict," Al-Shimale said. "On the political front, Sudan has entered another era of uncertainty and it will take a long time for the new government to come to grips with the business in hand."

He added: "Local resistance coordination groups will continue protesting Hamdok's partnership with the military, and political order won't be restored

unless Hamdok succeeds in crafting a new political dynamic under which a civilian-led – not military-headed – Sudan will be able to address the revolution’s demands.”



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EXPLAINER: What does PM’s reinstatement mean for Sudan? Sudan’s Hamdok says investigation launched into violations against protesters

[Australia lists Hezbollah as ‘terrorist organization’](#)

Wed, 2021-11-24 03:38

SYDNEY: Australia on Wednesday listed all of Hezbollah as a “terrorist organization,” extending an existing ban on armed units to the entire organization, which wields considerable power over Lebanon. Home Affairs Minister Karen Andrews said that the Iran-backed Shiite group “continues to threaten terrorist attacks and provide support to terrorist organizations” and poses a “real” and “credible” threat to Australia.

Hezbollah has been designated as a terrorist group by parts of the West, although some countries have been reluctant to sanction the group's political wing, fearing it could destabilize Lebanon and hamper contacts with authorities.

Hezbollah defies easy definition – acting as part political party, part militant organization and part provider of basic services to Lebanon's Shiite community.

It is the only side that has to date refused to disarm since the country's devastating civil war ended in 1990.

Membership of the organization or providing funding for it will now be proscribed in Australia, which has a large Lebanese community.

No reason was given for the timing of the move, which comes as Lebanon reels from spiralling political and economic crises.

Nearly 80 percent of the population is estimated to be living below the poverty line.

Elections are expected in March 2022 and there is growing public anger about nepotism and corruption among Lebanon's ruling class.

Andrews also announced that Australia would be listing far-right group The Base.

"They are a violent, racist neo-Nazi group known by security agencies to be planning and preparing terrorist attacks," Andrews said.



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UN urges 'patience, calm' as Iraq waits on ratification of election results

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Wed, 2021-11-24 03:17

NEW YORK: Iraqis across the political spectrum should show restraint, shun violence and wait patiently for the final ratification of results from last month's "hard-earned" elections, a senior UN official told the Security Council on Tuesday.

Jeanine Plasschaert, special representative of the UN secretary-general and head of the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq, said there is much for Iraqis "to be proud of" in the Oct. 10 election – the fifth national poll held under Iraq's 2005 constitution – which the UN has praised as generally peaceful and well-managed.

Her comments come as Iraq waits on final confirmation of the election result by the Federal Supreme Court.

Referring to the poll, Plasschaert said: "All in all, it was a substantial achievement, which Iraq's authorities and parties would do well to publicly acknowledge."

She reminded the Security Council that the October elections came in the wake of an unprecedented wave of protests throughout Iraq in 2019, including "demonstrations that were marked by violence, excessive use of force, abductions and targeted killings."

The protests resulted in hundreds of deaths and thousands of injuries, Plasschaert added.

Iraqis went to the polls to elect MPs amid protesters' calls for a halt to endemic corruption and an improvement in living conditions.

Following the elections, supporters of the Fatah Alliance – the coalition representing Iran-backed militias that lost two-thirds of its seats – claimed the poll was rigged and refused to accept the results, despite hundreds of international observers testifying to the integrity of the voting process.

Describing the current Iraqi outlook as "precarious," Plasschaert highlighted clashes that erupted in the weeks following the vote, and sit-ins that escalated into violence and resulted in several deaths.

The UN official called the assassination attempt against Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhimi a direct attack on the Iraqi state, "a heinous act, and one that can only be condemned in the strongest of terms."

Speaking to the Security Council remotely from Baghdad, Plasschaert added: "Let me be clear, under no circumstances must terrorism, violence or any other unlawful acts be allowed to derail Iraq's democratic process."

While acknowledging that emotions run high in any democratic election, she called for dialogue, calm and restraint to ease tensions, and warned that any unlawful attempt to prolong or discredit the electoral results process, through violence, intimidation or pressure, "can only backfire."

"The fact is that citizens in democracies often must recognize that, even if the results are not what she or he hoped for, the process as such might have been sound. In fact, one of the clearest signs of a strengthening democracy is the ability for parties and electors to recognize outcomes – no matter their individual preferences when it comes to results.

While reiterating the absence of any evidence of systemic fraud, the UNAMI chief called for any electoral concerns to be dealt with through legal channels.

"While losing seats can be difficult to digest, it is important – for any party in any democracy – to examine the reasons and to learn for future elections," she said.

With the continued risk of political deadlock in Baghdad, Plasschaert underscored the importance of an inclusive government formation process.

"Iraq desperately needs a government that is able to – swiftly and effectively – tackle the long list of unfinished domestic business. This is the primary responsibility of all political stakeholders," she said.

US Permanent Representative to the UN Linda Thomas-Greenfield also said Iraqis should be proud of this election, which took place "in a world with far too much democratic backsliding."

Thomas-Greenfield also credited the Security Council for the successful results of Iraqi elections.

"This council spoke in unison, authorizing UNAMI to provide electoral technical assistance and election monitors. This council came together and provided the resources the government of Iraq needed to meet the legitimate demands of its people. This council helped strengthen democratic institutions," she said.

The US envoy called for this "spirit of cooperation" to continue across all the files on the Security Council agenda.



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Shiite leader Sadr cautions vote 'losers'