

Sudan to launch historic transition to civilian rule

AFP, Khartoum

Sudan's military rulers and protest leaders are scheduled to sign a landmark deal reached after a bloody uprising which is meant to pave the way for civilian rule.

Today's ceremony will officialise a constitutional declaration inked on August 4 between the country's Transitional Military Council and the opposition coalition of the Alliance for Freedom and Change.

The deal brought an end to nearly eight months of upheaval that saw masses mobilise against president Omar al-Bashir, who was ousted in April after 30 years in power.

The deal brokered by the African Union and Ethiopia was welcomed with relief by both sides, with protesters celebrating what they saw as the victory of their "revolution" and generals taking credit for averting civil war.

While the compromise meets several of the protest camp's key demands, its terms leave the military with ample powers and its future civilian government with daunting challenges.

With today's official signing of the transitional documents, Sudan will kick off a process that will include important immediate first steps.

The composition of the new

transitional civilian-majority ruling council is to be announced Sunday, followed two days later by the naming of a prime minister.

On Thursday, protest leaders agreed to nominate former senior UN official Abdalla Hamdok as prime minister.

The veteran economist, who stepped down last year as deputy executive secretary of the UN's Economic Commission for Africa, is to be formally selected on August 20, a statement said.

The cabinet is to be unveiled on August 28, with the newly-appointed ministers due to meet the sovereign council on September 1 for the first time.

Elections must be held after the 39-month transitional period that began on August 4.

Until then, the country of 40 million people will be ruled by the 11-member sovereign council and a government, which will -- the deal makes clear -- be dominated by civilians.

However, the interior and defence ministers are to be chosen by military members of the council.

The move towards civilian rule could lead the African Union to lift a suspension slapped on Sudan in June after a bloody crackdown on a sit-in in Khartoum.



A young boy joins protesters holding placards at a rally against the Indian government's move to strip Jammu and Kashmir of its autonomy and impose a communications blackout, in Srinagar yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Trump wants US

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There was no official comment from the White House, and the Danish embassy in Washington did not immediately respond to AFP's request for comment.

Some Trump advisors say acquiring Greenland, which is northeast of Canada, could be good for the US, while others called it only a "fleeting fascination" from the president, The Wall Street Journal said.

Others outside the White House say Trump's interest could be a desire to secure a legacy achievement, the paper reported, and advisors wondered about the potential for research or greater military clout for the US.

The US's northern-most military base, Thule Air Base, has been located on Greenland for decades.

But Greenland doesn't quite live up to its lush name -- 85 percent of the island is covered by a 1.9-mile-thick (three-kilometre) ice sheet that contains 10 percent of the world's fresh water.

The world's largest island has suffered from climate change, scientists say, becoming a giant melting icicle that threatens to submerge the world's coastal areas one day.

July saw unprecedented melting of the Greenland ice sheet, with 12 billion tonnes of ice flowing into the sea.

Trump, who in 2017 withdrew the US from the Paris Climate Agreement to cap global warming levels, is reportedly set to visit Copenhagen in September.

This isn't the first time the president has expressed interest in foreign properties -- he has said North Korea's "great beaches" would make ideal locations for condos.

Gaibandha

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Police (KMP) Ehsan Shah said a special team of police is conducting raids to arrest the rapist.

The girl was treated at Khulna Medical College Hospital.

WOMAN RAPED BY SUITOR

In Jhalakathi, a 22-year-old woman was raped by her suitor on Thursday night.

Shakhawat Hossain, OC of Nalchhity Police Station, said the families of the victim and suspect Sagar Hawladar were recently having discussion about their marriage.

Around 8:30pm on Thursday, Sagar took the girl by motorbike to an orchard where he raped her with the help of his aide Riaz, the OC said.

Hearing her screams, locals caught Sagar, but Riaz fled.

The girl was first taken to Nalchhity Upazila Health Complex and shifted to Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital for excessive bleeding, said the victim's father.

A case was filed against the two, said the OC.

NEIGHBOUR 'RAPES' CHILD

Police arrested a man on Thursday for allegedly raping a five-year-old girl in Jashore's Chowgachha upazila.

The girl was home alone in the afternoon when neighbour Khairul Islam, 35, sneaked into the house and raped her, said her mother.

Locals caught Khairul hearing the child's screams.

A case was filed against him, said OC of Chowgachha Police Station Rifat Khan Rajib.

Iran must free women held over veil protests: UN experts

AFP, Geneva

A group of UN human rights experts yesterday called for the immediate release of three Iranian women given long jail terms for protesting laws compelling women to wear veils.

The trio were charged after a video posted online showed them handing out flowers on Tehran's metro on March 8, International Women's Day, according to a statement co-signed by five United Nations special rapporteurs and another expert.

The women -- named in the statement as Mojgan Keshavarz, Yasaman Aryani and Monireh Arabshahi -- were not wearing veils.

They "peacefully protested against Iran's compulsory veiling laws and advocated for a woman's right to choose whether or not to wear the hijab," the statement said.

According to the experts, who are independent and do not speak for the world body, the women were detained in April, "forcibly disappeared" for up

to two weeks, and denied access to a lawyer through the initial investigation.

"Their legal representatives were also reportedly prohibited from representing them at their trial," the statement said.

Keshavarz has been sentenced to 23 and a half years in prison while Aryani and Arabshahi were both given 16-year terms.

All were convicted of national security violations, spreading anti-state propaganda and "encouraging and providing for [moral] corruption and prostitution," the UN experts said.

Keshavarz was convicted of the additional crime of "insulting the sacred".

"We call upon the Iranian authorities to quash these convictions and immediately release all human rights defenders who have been arbitrarily detained for their work in advocating women's rights," the statement said.

It was co-signed by Javadi Rehman, special rapporteur on rights in Iran,

Dubravka Simonovic, UN expert on violence against women and Michel Forst, rapporteur on human rights defenders.

David Kaye, the expert on freedom of expression, Meskerem Geset Tachane, who heads the UN working group on discrimination against women and girls, and Ahmed Shaheed, rapporteur on religious freedom, also signed the letter.

The experts said Tehran responded to their concerns by noting that the women "had been arrested on charges relating to morality and national security offences".

The rapporteurs also reported that arrests of women's activists have risen in recent weeks, with Iran's government having issued an official warning that those who do not wear a veil will face severe punishment.

They cited unidentified reports that 32 people had been arrested, and at least 10 imprisoned, since January of last year for protesting against ruled mandating that hijabs be worn.

Public exam

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period, the applicants sometimes suffer from anxieties"

According to education board officials, annual holidays and other closures eat up more than half of an academic year at many secondary-level educational institutions, forcing the students to turn to private tutors.

The teachers of those institutions also struggle to finish syllabus in almost half of the ideal time. As a result, they rush through the curriculum to prepare the students, affecting the quality of education, said teachers and experts.

The secondary schools and madrasas have at least 137 holidays including 85 public holidays and 52 Fridays. Besides, many of these institutions lose another month or so as the classrooms are used as exam centres for public examinations.

There are 30,000 secondary schools and madrasas in the country now. Last year, 3,412 of them were used as centres for SSC and equivalent exams, 2,541 for HSC and equivalent exams and 2,903 for JSC exams.

Greek fire crews make progress on island blaze

AFP, Athens

Firefighters in Greece yesterday made progress against a four-day wildfire on the island of Evia that has burned through a pine forest and threatened villages, officials said.

"The situation looks better today, there is no active front, but our forces remain in place," a fire department spokesman told AFP, adding that there are still "pockets of fire" smouldering in a ravine.

A massive force of nearly 400 firefighters backed by 110 vehicles, nine planes and four helicopters has been deployed against the blaze.

Two water bombers from Italy and one from Spain are assisting the effort, the spokesman said.

State agency ANA said the fire, which broke out Tuesday, has destroyed over 1,000 hectares of dense pine forest.

251 noted citizens slate curb

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Nepal on Thursday, the academics, journalists and human rights activists said Article 370 of the Indian constitution represented a historical understanding between the people of Jammu and Kashmir and the Indian state.

On August 5, the Indian government not only abrogated Article 370, but also abolished the very statehood of Jammu and Kashmir, bringing the region under New Delhi's direct rule, it read.

"The manner in which the abrogation was accomplished, through executive order and in the absence of a state legislature, is a betrayal of the people of Jammu and Kashmir, whose elected representatives were never consulted.

"This is a sharp departure from democratic governance, and the constitutional validity of these decisions has been rightfully challenged," mentioned the statement.

The noted personalities condemned the curtailment of civil liberties in Jammu and Kashmir; the blackout of telecommunications and internet services; the severe restrictions on media and on the freedoms of movement, peaceful assembly, and protest; and the violent suppression of demonstrations.

These are all violations of international human rights obligations, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which India ratified in 1979, they pointed out.

"We are alarmed by credible media reports of security forces having opened fire on peaceful protestors and disturbed by the denials issued by the authorities, who have gone on to accuse journalists of fabrication.

"We are gravely concerned by the government of India's silencing of voices of dissent, and detention of social activists, lawyers, journalists, and human rights defenders.

We condemn the Government of India's use of majoritarian populism to perpetuate a climate of fear across

the country."

They said the actions of the Indian government exhibit a complete lack of respect for constitutionalism, secularism, and democratic values, which do not bode well for India's people, who have, uniquely in South Asia, benefited from decades of democratic rule.

"We are apprehensive of India's future as a democracy and the implications that this degeneration will have on its population of 1.2 billion as well as on the rest of the subcontinent."

They urged the Indian government to immediately end the "inhuman clampdown" in Jammu and Kashmir, to restore civil liberties as well as the flow of information, release all political detainees and prisoners, and to enter into dialogue with the people of Jammu and Kashmir.

"In the middle of August, when we are meant to celebrate independence from colonialism, we condemn this regression towards despotic rule.

We stand in solidarity with the people of Jammu and Kashmir, and with people across India and South Asia who aspire to peace, prosperity, and fundamental freedoms," they noted.

The signatories include Veena Das, professor of Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore; Partha Chatterjee, professor of Columbia University, USA; AS Panneerselvam, a journalist in Chennai; Ayesha Jalal of Tufts University, Massachusetts; Shahidul Alam, a photographer from Dhaka; Kul Chandra Gautam, ex-assistant secretary general of the UN; historian Gyanendra Pandey of Emory University; Chandra Talpade Mohanty, professor of Syracuse University, New York; MV Ramana, professor of University of British Columbia, Vancouver; Pervez Hoodbhoy of Quaid-e-Azam University, Islamabad; Zia Mian of Princeton University; Sofia Karim, architect and artist from London; Sharmeen Obaid Chinoy, filmmaker from Karachi; Martha C Nussbaum, professor of University of Chicago, and Sheldon Pollock, professor of Columbia University.

Najib Razak faces trial

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He has pleaded not guilty and says the charges are politically motivated.

Prosecutors yesterday handed to the defence thousands of pages of documents related to the case, government lawyer Ahmad Akram Gharib told Reuters.

"Under the rules, a trial can only begin at least two weeks after all the related documents are handed over," he said, adding that about 60 witnesses were expected to be called in the second case.

The first trial, which began in April and revolves around former 1MDB unit SRC International, was adjourned on August 14 after Najib contracted an eye infection, halting the cross-examination of the prosecution's final witness.

That case is also expected to resume on Monday, and lawyers from both sides hope the second trial can be delayed to allow prosecutors to wrap up the first.

"The accused can only be at one place at a time," Najib's lawyer, Harvinderjit Singh, said. "We are hoping the judge will allow us some

leeway in this matter."

After the shock election loss, Najib and his wife Rosmah Mansor were barred from leaving Malaysia and their luxurious lifestyle came under scrutiny, with the discovery of nearly \$300 million worth of goods and cash at properties linked to him.

Rosmah, known for her designer handbags and jewellery, has also been charged with corruption. She has pleaded not guilty.

Najib's lawyers say he had no knowledge of the transfers into his accounts and was misled by Malaysian financier Low Taek Jho and SRC's former chief executive, Nik Faisal Ariff Kamil, who are both at large.

Low, who faces charges in the United States and Malaysia over his alleged central role in the 1MDB case, has consistently denied wrongdoing. A spokesman for Low did not respond to a request for comment.

Nik Faisal, who has never publicly commented on the matter, could not be reached for comment.