

Sudan crisis 'a wake-up call' for South Sudan: UN

AFP, Nairobi

The crisis in Sudan should serve "as a wake-up call" for Juba, the UN envoy to South Sudan said yesterday, urging the government to lay the groundwork for credible elections next year.

Since winning independence from Sudan in 2011, the world's newest nation has lurched from one crisis to another, including a civil war that cost 400,000 lives before a peace deal was signed in 2018.

But the fragile unity government led by President Salva Kiir and his deputy Riek Machar has largely failed to deliver on the promises of the peace agreement.

Kiir has vowed to hold the country's first ever presidential polls by December 2024, but UN envoy Nicholas Haysom warned that the authorities needed to act quickly to ensure "peaceful, inclusive and credible elections."



This handout photograph released by Ukrainian Emergency Service yesterday shows a view of a damaged building at a Ukrainian port on the Danube after a night drone attack in Odesa region, amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

PHOTO: AFP

NIGER COUP

Military intervention 'last resort'

Says W Africa bloc

AFP, Abuja

The West African bloc ECOWAS believes that intervening militarily in Niger to restore the country's elected president following a coup is a "last resort", a senior ECOWAS official said yesterday.

"(The) military option is the very last option on the table, the last resort, but we have to prepare for the eventuality," said ECOWAS commissioner Abdel Fatau Musah, speaking at the start of a meeting of the grouping's military chiefs in the Nigerian capital Abuja.

An ECOWAS team is in Niger to "negotiate", added Musah, commissioner for political affairs, peace and security.

Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) leaders on Sunday imposed trade and financial sanctions on Niger and gave the coup leaders a week to reinstate President Mohamed Bazoum or face potential use of force.

A source in Niger's power company said yesterday Nigeria had cut off its electricity supply to its neighbour under sanctions.

"Since yesterday, Nigeria has disconnected the high-voltage line transporting electricity to Niger," the source at Nigelec told AFP.

NEW GOVT FORMATION

Winning party in Thai polls excluded from coalition

Lawmakers seek to overcome resistance from military, pro-royalist senators

AFP, Bangkok

The reformist party that won Thailand's general election was excluded yesterday from a coalition trying to form the next government, as lawmakers seek to overcome resistance from military and pro-royalist senators.

The Move Forward Party (MFP) won the most seats in May's election, riding a wave of support from young and urban Thais weary of almost a decade of army-backed rule, but it fell well short of a majority.

An eight-party coalition including MFP's closest rival, Pheu Thai, was not enough to get its leader Pita Limjaroenrat elected prime minister, leaving the kingdom in political deadlock.

Harvard-educated Pita, 42, was blocked from the top job by the senate -- whose members were handpicked by the last junta -- because of his determination to reform Thailand's tough royal defamation laws.

After weeks of backroom haggling, Pheu Thai leader Chonlalan Srikaew announced that MFP was out of the coalition.

"The formation of the new government will not include MFP," he told reporters.

"Pheu Thai will work to get enough votes, MFP will be in opposition, and we will work in a new dimension that is beneficial to the people."



The news sparked an angry protest by some MFP supporters, who burned effigies and shouted abuse outside Pheu Thai's offices.

MFP secretary general Chaitawat Tulanon gave a more measured response, saying the party would try to push its policies even from the opposition benches.

"We will do our best to restore Thai politics to a true democracy -- a system in which people's votes really matter," he told reporters.

Pheu Thai will now put forward property tycoon Srettha Thavisin as its candidate to become prime minister, Chonlalan said.

To become prime minister, a candidate must be approved by a majority of both houses of parliament -- the 500 elected MPs

and the 250 senators appointed under the last junta.

Pita managed 324 votes across the two houses in the first vote in parliament, with only 13 senators supporting him.

He was blocked from running in a second ballot and suspended as an MP by the Constitutional Court over his ownership of media shares, which is prohibited for lawmakers under Thai law.

Last month, MFP announced it was stepping back from efforts to form a government, allowing Pheu Thai to lead the coalition instead.

A senior MFP leader said the priority was not to make Pita prime minister but to safeguard Thai democracy by shutting out former junta leaders.

CONTENT BLOCKING

Musk's X challenges India ruling

Cites censorship risk

REUTERS, New Delhi

Social media platform X is seeking to quash an Indian court ruling that it was not compliant with federal government orders to remove content, arguing it could embolden New Delhi to block more content and broaden scope for censorship.

X, formerly known as Twitter, in July 2022 sought to overturn government orders to remove some content from its platform. A court in June 2023 quashed that request and imposed a fine of 5 million rupees.

X has now appealed against that decision, arguing in a 96-page filing that the government "will be emboldened to issue more blocking orders" that violate law. The filing, which was dated August 1 but has not been posted publicly, was submitted by local law firm Poovayya & Co at the Karnataka High Court.

The original lawsuit predates X's ownership by billionaire Elon Musk, who is also pursuing a number of business enterprises in India.

The Tesla chief executive is discussing an investment proposal to set up a factory there making electric vehicles.

ONLINE NEWS ACT

Meta starts blocking news in Canada

AFP, Ottawa

Meta on Tuesday started blocking Canadians' access to news on Facebook and Instagram in response to a new law requiring digital giants to pay publishers for such content. Google, another critic of the Online News Act, has said it is considering a similar move, among an ongoing global debate as more governments try to make tech firms pay for news content. "News links and content posted by news publishers and broadcasters in Canada will no longer be viewable by people in Canada," Meta said in a statement. News posted on foreign sites will also not be viewable by Canadian Facebook and Instagram users, and they will no longer be able to share articles on the two platforms. Meta noted the changes starting Tuesday would be implemented "over the course of the next few weeks." An AFP reporter was still able to see news on Facebook Tuesday, but some users reported already getting messages saying such content was being blocked. The Online News Act builds on similar legislation introduced in Australia and aims to support a struggling Canadian news sector that has seen a flight of advertising dollars and hundreds of publications closed in the last decade. It requires digital giants to make fair commercial deals with Canadian outlets for news and information that is shared on their platforms, or face binding arbitration.

INDIAN-ADMINISTERED KASHMIR

SC hears petitions challenging J&K spl status removal

AGENCIES

India's Supreme Court has begun hearing a clutch of petitions challenging the constitutionality of the legislation passed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government in 2019 that stripped disputed Indian-administered Kashmir's semi autonomy. The removal of the Article 370 of India's constitution by the Hindu nationalist government on August 5, 2019, meant the Muslim-majority region is now run by bureaucrats with no democratic credentials and lost its flag, criminal code and constitution. The five-judge constitutional bench that includes the Supreme Court's chief justice is simultaneously hearing a series of petitions challenging the special status granted to the region after its accession with newly independent India in 1947. Such petitions were filed before the 2019 changes.

The unprecedented move divided the region into two federal territories -- Ladakh and Jammu-Kashmir, both ruled directly by the central government without a legislature of their own, reports Al Jazeera online. "The case is before the country's top-most constitutional bench. We are optimistic as we know our case is very strong," said Hasnain Masoodi, a member of parliament from Kashmir who was one of the first petitioners challenging the Modi government's decision, yesterday. He has also served as a judge at the High Court of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh. "This constitutional framework provided a mechanism to be part of the Indian union. The abrogation was a betrayal and an assault on our identity," he said.



Chinese youth to have smartphone, internet use curbed

AFP, Beijing

Chinese children and teens will be cut off from accessing the internet at night and have their smartphone use curbed under new rules unveiled yesterday aimed at fighting internet addiction.

Under the restrictions, set to come into force on September 2 following a public consultation, anyone under the age of 18 will be cut off from accessing the internet with a mobile device between 10 pm and 6 am.

A tiered system for managing smartphone usage time will also be imposed, spanning a maximum of 40 minutes a day for those under the age of eight to two hours for 16- and 17-year-olds. The new rules -- proposed by the Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC) -- are some of the most stringent in the world. Parents will be able to bypass them if they wish, however.

The CAC said the rules would "improve the positive role of the internet, create a favourable network environment, prevent and intervene in minors' internet addiction problems, and guide minors to form good internet use habits". The measures would build upon existing efforts to strengthen the online protection of minors, it added, including by "enriching age-appropriate content" and reducing "the influence of bad information".

Beijing authorities have pursued expansive regulation of domestic tech sector in recent years, due in part to concerns over the risk posed to young people by digital technology.

In 2021, China capped the amount of gaming time for children with the stated aim of fighting addiction, and froze approvals of new games for nine months, hammering the bottom lines of many companies including sector titan Tencent.



Protesters take part in a silent rally calling for an end to violence against women following a spate of incidents in the country, in Mumbai, India yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP