

# Sudan probing Bashir after large sums of cash found at his home

**KHARTOUM:** Sudan's public prosecutor has begun investigating ousted President Omar Al-Bashir on charges of money laundering and possession of large sums of foreign currency without legal grounds, a judicial source said yesterday. The source said that military intelligence had searched Bashir's home and found suitcases loaded with more than \$351,000 and six million euros, as well as five million Sudanese pounds.

"The chief public prosecutor... ordered the (former) president detained and quickly questioned in preparation to put him on trial," a judicial source told Reuters. "The public prosecution will question the former president in Kobar prison," the source added. Bashir has not been questioned yet, said the source. Two of his brothers were also detained on allegations of corruption, the source said. Relatives could not be immediately reached yesterday for comment about the investigation.

Bashir, who is also being sought by the International Criminal Court (ICC) over allegations of genocide in the country's western Darfur region, was ousted on April 11 by the military following months of protests against his rule and had been held at a presidential residence. Bashir's family said this week that the former president had been moved to the high-security Kobar prison in Khartoum.

Hassan Bashir, a professor of political science at the University of Neelain, said the measures against Bashir are intended as a message to other figures associated with his rule that they are not above the law. "The trial is a step that the military council wants to take to satisfy the protesters by presenting Bashir for trial," he said.

Bashir survived several armed rebellions, economic crises, and attempts by the West to turn him into a pariah during his 30-year rule before he was toppled in a military coup. At a sit-in outside Sudan's Ministry of Defense that began on April 6, protesters stood besides posters of Bashir that called on the ICC to put him on trial. The Sudanese Professionals' Association, leading the protests, has called for holding Bashir and members of his administration to account, a purge of corruption and cronyism and easing an economic crisis that worsened during Bashir's last years in power.

On Wednesday, Sudan's transitional military council ordered the central bank to review financial transfers since April 1 and to seize "suspect" funds, according to state news agency SUNA. The council also ordered the "suspension of the transfer of ownership of any shares until further notice and for any large or suspect transfers of shares or companies to be reported" to authorities. — Reuters



**KHARTOUM:** Sudanese protesters flash victory signs during a rally outside the army headquarters yesterday. — AFP

## News in brief

### Coalition destroys drone cave

**RIYADH:** The Saudi-led coalition launched an air raid yesterday on a cave in the Yemeni capital Sanaa, used by Houthi rebels to stockpile drones, a spokesman said. The cave near the presidential palace in Houthi-held Sanaa contained drones to be used in "terrorist operations", Colonel Turki Al-Maliki said. Earlier this month, the coalition said that Saudi air defenses intercepted two drones launched by Houthi rebels from Yemen that targeted Khamis Mushait, home to a major airbase in the southwest of the kingdom. And in January the Houthis launched a drone attack on Yemen's largest airbase, Al-Anad, north of the southern port of Aden, during a military parade. — AFP

### Turkey arrests two Emiratis

**ISTANBUL:** Turkey has arrested two men suspected of spying for the United Arab Emirates and is probing whether they are tied to Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi's murder. Anadolu state news agency said on Friday. The two were formally detained by Turkish authorities on Friday as part of an investigation by Istanbul prosecutors into alleged spying by the Gulf state, Anadolu reported. The pro-government Turkish newspaper, Yeni Safak, reported that the two suspects were arrested on Monday in a joint operation by Turkish police and the MIT intelligence service. The pair, both UAE citizens, had been in contact with an individual who was under surveillance in the Khashoggi case, the paper reported. — AFP

## Militants kill more fighters across Syria

**BEIRUT:** Militants have killed more than 60 Syrian regime fighters in 48 hours, a monitor said yesterday, in some of the deadliest attacks on pro-Damascus forces in recent weeks. Kurdish-led forces in March announced the defeat of the Islamic State group's "caliphate" in eastern Syria, but the militants have retained hideouts there and in other parts of the country as well as the ability to carry out deadly assaults. Since Thursday, IS militants have killed 35 pro-Damascus fighters in regime-held parts of central and eastern Syria, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

Observatory chief Rami Abdel Rahman said it was "the highest death toll among regime forces since the caliphate was declared defeated" in the eastern village of Baghouz last month. Regime fighters also came under attack on another front of Syria's grinding eight-year war, the Britain-based monitor added. Yesterday, militants linked to Syria's former Al-Qaeda affiliate attacked loyalists outside the northwestern region of Idlib, killing 26 pro-Assad fighters, it said.

It was the latest death tally in a civil war that has killed more than 370,000 people since starting in 2011 with the brutal repression of anti-government protests. President Bashar Al-Assad has managed to claw back around 60 percent of the country with Russian military backing since 2015, but several regions remain beyond the regime's control. These include a large swathe of northeastern Syria held by Kurdish-led forces who have been fighting IS with the support of a US-led coalition, as well as the region of Idlib held by Syria's former Al-Qaeda affiliate.

Regime forces in theory control the vast desert that stretches from the capital Damascus to the Iraqi border, but IS is still present there. Since Thursday they have



**DAMASCUS:** Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad receives Russian Deputy Prime Minister Yuri Borisov yesterday. — AFP

killed 27 troops and allied militiamen, including four Syrian army officers, in the desert east of Homs province, the Observatory said. IS claimed the attacks. The Observatory also said IS fighters killed another eight soldiers and militiamen in the eastern province of Deir Ezzor on Thursday night. That attack targeted a desert village south of the city of Mayadeen on the Euphrates River, upstream from Baghouz.

IS swept across a large swathe of Syria and Iraq in 2014, declaring a cross-border "caliphate" in territory that was once roughly the size of the United Kingdom. But after various military operations in both countries, IS lost the last shred of its proto-state on the eastern banks of the Euphrates last month. The US-led coalition has however repeatedly warned that the battle against the militants is not over.

In the northwestern Idlib region, Assad's forces face Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, Syria's former Al-Qaeda affiliate.

Idlib was to be protected from a massive regime military offensive by a deal inked in September by government ally Russia and rebel backer Turkey. But the accord has unwound as HTS took full control of the region in January, and the area has come under increasing bombardment. A planned buffer zone around the region was never fully implemented as militants refused to withdraw from it.

Yesterday's attack by an HTS affiliate on the western edges of Aleppo city killed 21 loyalists while an ambush by HTS-linked militants took the lives of five more pro-regime fighters in the northeast of Latakia province. On Friday, Assad urged progress on removing "obstacles" to the stalled Idlib deal ahead of talks to be attended by Russia, fellow ally Iran, and Turkey next week in Kazakhstan. And yesterday, he met Russian Deputy Prime Minister Yuri Borisov in Damascus for talks, including on ways to overcome obstacles resulting from international sanctions imposed on Syria, the presidency said. — AFP

## Trump seethes over report; poll...

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Although Mueller stated he was following Justice Department policy in not charging Trump with the crime of obstruction of justice, he laid out 10 instances where the president took steps in that direction. As a result, Mueller said he could "not exonerate" him. That statement was taken by Democrats as an invitation to pursue the president in Congress, while even a top Republican, Senator Mitt Romney, broke from party lines to say he was "sickened" by the report's findings.

At minimum, the almost 450-page report - including scenes of a White House filled with lying, swearing and barely disguised panic - is deeply embarrassing for a president elected on a mission to clear Washington's "swamp". Adding to its weight is the fact that the material is based largely on sworn testimony by Trump insiders, rather than rival politicians.

Whether the Mueller report has any immediate effect on the US political scene ahead of the 2020 elections, however, is uncertain. With Republicans controlling the Senate, Democrats would have little chance of removing Trump through impeachment. For now, Warren is an outlier, with other senior Democrats shying away from the "I" word. And Trump, who throughout the two-year investigation has claimed to be victim of a "witch hunt", is using the latest uproar to cement his "us-against-them" appeal among a loyal right-wing support base.

At his Palm Beach resort, Trump played golf with veteran right-wing radio talk show host Rush Limbaugh, the White House said. He was also photographed by The Daily Mail in his limousine reading what appeared to be the front page of The Wall Street Journal, with coverage

## Kuwait backs 'stable, secure and unified'...

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"The stability of Iraq is necessary for the stability of the region," read the concluding statement. Participating nations also rejected "interference" in Iraq's internal affairs, although most have deep political and economic interests in the country.

Attendees did not announce any diplomatic break-

throughs, despite the summit's symbolic success in bringing together rival countries around a single table. Baghdad has sought to market itself as a neutral meeting place for the Middle East's competing forces. Iraqi premier Adel Abdel Mahdi recently visited both Riyadh and Tehran.

Saudi Arabia and Iran severed diplomatic ties with one another in 2016 and are locked in proxy wars across the region. Turkey and Iran have backed opposing sides in Syria's conflict, which since 2011 has isolated Damascus diplomatically. As part of its new regional role, Baghdad has sought to restore Syria's membership of the Arab League. — Agencies

Another powerful Democrat with subpoena power, House Intelligence Committee chairman Adam Schiff, tore into Trump, saying his campaign's Russia contacts were at a minimum unethical and that Congress should now determine whether his obstruction attempts amounted to a crime. "As I said some time ago, whether these acts are criminal or not... they are unquestionably dishonest, unethical, immoral, and unpatriotic, and should be condemned by every American," Schiff said.

According to the Reuters/Ipsos poll of 1,005 adults conducted Thursday afternoon to Friday morning, 37 percent of people approve of Trump's performance in office - down from 40 percent in a similar poll conducted on April 15, which matches the lowest level of the year. The poll has a credibility interval, a measure of precision, of 4 percentage points. — Agencies

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## Egyptians vote in referendum to...

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The three-day referendum bucks the trend of North Africa's renewed uprisings, in which mass pro-democracy protests this month swept away veteran presidents in Algeria and Sudan. Sisi himself was among the first to vote when polls opened, casting his ballot in the upmarket Cairo suburb of Heliopolis. In Shubra, a working-class neighborhood of the capital, dozens of voters, mostly women carrying their children, queued outside a polling station in the local high school.

In Cairo, troops and police were deployed in numbers although the interior ministry declined to give any nationwide figures. Egypt is still battling a hardened Islamic insurgency based in the Sinai Peninsula that has seen attacks in Cairo and other cities. Sisi has argued that he needs longer to complete the job of restoring security and stability after the turmoil that followed the overthrow of veteran autocrat Hosni Mubarak in the Arab Spring of 2011.

Out on the streets, Sisi's supporters waved flags bearing their campaign motto: "Do the Right" thing, as they pressed passers-by to turn out and vote "Yes". The Egyptian leader won his first term as president in 2014, a year after he led the army in overthrowing elected Islamist president Mohamed Morsi following mass protests against his single turbulent year in power. Standing virtually unopposed after the disqualification or withdrawal of all realistic challengers, he was re-elected in March 2018 with more than 97 percent.

Both elections drew heavy criticism from human rights groups as they were accompanied by swingeing crackdowns on dissent - both Islamist and secular.

Human Rights Watch also took issue with the referendum on extending Sisi's rule, saying the "constitutional amendments" would "entrench repression". In a statement Saturday, the New York-based watchdog criticized the "grossly unfree, rights-abusive environment" of the vote.

For the past few weeks, Egypt's streets have been awash with banners and billboards urging citizens to vote for Sisi, while popular folk singers have exhorted voters to go to the polls. Pro-Sisi campaign volunteers handed out boxed meals at four different polling stations in Cairo to voters after they had cast their ballots, AFP reporters said. A parliamentarian greeted voters and volunteers gave out vouchers for the meals in the Shubra district. In Manyal, a DJ blared loud patriotic songs extolling the virtues of Egypt under Sisi's leadership, including a new song by iconic Lebanese diva Nancy Ajram dedicated to Egypt and called "Ragel ibn Ragel" (What a fine man).

But not everyone is upbeat about the changes. Sporting casual attire, a voter in his mid-30s told AFP in Cairo: "We are all staff in the same company and we were instructed by management to go vote. 'I want to say 'No'... on extending the presidential terms and the amendments related to the judiciary," he said declining to give his name for fear of repercussions. He pointed to his bosses nearby who were making sure employees were voting. "Even if I say 'No', they (the authorities) are still going to do what they want in the end," he added despondently.

Earlier in the week, parliament overwhelmingly endorsed the constitutional changes, which also include the creation of a second parliamentary chamber and a quota ensuring at least 25 percent of lawmakers are women. Think tank the Soufan Center said the main effect of the referendum would be to "solidify Sisi's grip on the Egyptian political regime" in a country that "has become even more autocratic than it was under Mubarak". — AFP