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G7 urges halt to deadly Sudan fighting

Sudan capital hit by blasts as conflict enters fourth day

KHARTOUM: Explosions rocked the Sudanese capital Khartoum on Tuesday as fighting that has claimed nearly 200 lives entered a fourth day, despite growing international calls for an end to hostilities. A weeks-long power struggle erupted into deadly violence Saturday between the forces of two generals who seized power in a 2021 coup: army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and his deputy, Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, who commands the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF).

Battles have taken place throughout the vast east African country and there are fears of regional spillover of the conflict that has seen air strikes, artillery and heavy gunfire. In a statement, G7 foreign ministers meeting in Japan called for the warring parties to "end hostilities immediately", as loud explosions were heard on Tuesday morning in Khartoum, where militiamen in turbans and fatigues roamed the streets.

Terrified residents of the capital are spending the last and holiest days of Ramadan watching from their windows as tanks roll through the streets, buildings shake and smoke from fires triggered by the fighting hangs in the air. According to witnesses, pick-up trucks with anti-aircraft missiles—stationed in residential areas of Khartoum—were loaded with additional ammunition supplies Tuesday morning.

"Bombardments usually start around 4:00 am and they continue for a few hours, but today they haven't stopped," said Khartoum resident Dallia Mohamed Abdelmontem. "We haven't slept in the past four days," she said, adding her family had been staying indoors "trying to keep our sanity intact".

Families waited on Tuesday, heavy suitcases in hand, for the few buses heading south of the capital, according to AFP reporters, as more people use rare lulls in the fighting to flee Khartoum. But as many have lost power and internet connection after four days of sporadic supply, residents are finding it increasingly difficult to get reliable information.

Shortages and misinformation
Misinformation has proliferated on social media,

confusing civilians who are anxious for news about attacks and reported looting, how safe it is to move and what pharmacies are still open. The current toll stands at over 185 people killed and 1,800 injured, according to the UN.

The number of casualties is thought to be far higher, with many wounded unable to reach hospitals, themselves under shelling, according to the official doctors' union. Four hospitals in the greater Khartoum area have been "shelled and evacuated".

Across the country, 16 hospitals are "out of service", according to the union, while those that can still operate are facing "severe shortages", including of medical staff, water and food supplies. Civilians have also seen their food supplies run out, as the violence has prevented the few grocery stores that remain open to replenish dwindling stocks. The fighting has also damaged aircraft and brought a halt to flights to and from Khartoum airport.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said he had spoken with the two generals and "underscored the urgent need for a ceasefire". Daglo said on Twitter after his call with Blinken that the RSF "reaffirms its approval" of a 24-hour "armistice to ensure the safe passage of civilians and the evacuation of the wounded".

Army vows 'crushing defeat'

The army bluntly dismissed his statement, however. "We are not aware of any coordination with the mediators and the international community about a truce, and the rebellion's declaration of a 24-hour truce aims to cover up the crushing defeat it will receive within hours," it warned on Facebook.

Blinken said a US diplomatic convoy had been fired upon on Monday, as the European Union said its ambassador to Sudan was attacked in his home in Khartoum. The fighting broke out on Saturday after bitter disagreements between Burhan and Daglo over the planned integration of the RSF into the regular army—a key condition for a final deal aimed at ending a crisis since the 2021 coup, which derailed a transition to democracy.

Both claim to be in control of key sites, in-



KHARTOUM: People flee from southern Khartoum on April 18, 2023 as fighting between the army and paramilitary forces led by rival generals rages for a fourth day, despite growing international calls for an end to hostilities. —AFP

cluding the airport and the presidential palace—none of which could be independently verified. Analysts say the fighting in the capital is unprecedented and could be prolonged.

Humanitarian organisations shuttered

In the western region of Darfur, international medical aid organisation Doctors Without Borders (MSF) reported receiving 183 wounded patients at the only hospital in El Fasher still operating in North Darfur state, 25 of whom it said had died. "The majority of the wounded are civilians who were caught in the crossfire—among them are many children," MSF's Cyrus Paye said.

Three UN World Food Programme staff were

also among those killed on Saturday in Darfur, where humanitarian missions have had medical and other supplies looted, according to Save the Children and MSF. A number of organisations have temporarily suspended operations in the country, where one-third of the population needs aid.

Influent northern neighbour Egypt said it had discussed with Saudi Arabia, South Sudan and Djibouti—all close allies of Sudan—"the need to make every effort to preserve stability and safety". President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi called on the two sides to "return to the negotiating table" and said he was working on the return of Egyptian military "trainers" captured Saturday at an air base by RSF forces. —AFP

Putin makes rare visit to Ukraine frontline regions

MOSCOW: The Kremlin said on Tuesday that President Vladimir Putin had visited two frontline regions in Ukraine, prompting a strong rebuke from Kyiv which said he was viewing "the crimes of his minions". The Kremlin did not say when Putin visited the southern region of Kherson and the eastern region of Lugansk, which Putin claimed to have annexed last September without fully controlling them.

The Kremlin chief sent troops to Ukraine in February, 2022, triggering the largest conflict in Europe since World War II. Ukrainian forces have said they are preparing for a spring counter-offensive. Mykhailo Podolyak, an advisor to President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, dismissed Putin's trip as "a 'special tour' of the mass murders author... to enjoy the crimes of his minions for the last time." After Putin's visit was made public on Tuesday, Ukrainian officials said Russian forces had shelled the central market area of Kherson, injuring six people. Last year, Russia was beaten back in northern and southern regions and Moscow's forces have made only incremental gains in eastern Ukraine.

Much of the fighting is now concentrated around the eastern town of Bakhmut which has become the longest and bloodiest battle of the conflict. During his trip to Ukraine, Putin met Russian military commanders and discussed the situation on several fronts of the



KHERSON: This screen grab taken from a footage released by the Russian presidential press office on April 18, 2023 shows Russian President Vladimir Putin visiting the headquarters of the Dnieper military grouping in the Kherson region of Ukraine. —AFP

pro-Western country, the Kremlin said. Video footage released by the Kremlin showed Putin disembarking from a helicopter as he visited the headquarters of the Dnieper army group in the Kherson region. He also visited national guard headquarters in Lugansk in eastern Ukraine.

"It's important for me to hear your opinion on the situation, to listen to you and to exchange information," Putin said in the video, surrounded by senior military commanders. The Russian leader wished the troops a happy Easter, which Orthodox Christians marked last Sunday, and gifted them copies of old icons, the Kremlin said. His trips to Kherson and Lugansk came after the Kremlin said in March that the Russian leader had made a surprise trip to the port city of Mariupol that Moscow captured after a long siege last spring. —AFP

A caretaker cabinet has been at the helm since May last year after legislative polls gave no side a clear majority, while independents gained an unprecedented 13 seats after campaigning against the governing elite. Lebanon is supposed to hold municipal elections every six years. The last local ballot was held in 2016. Many blame the political elite for the meltdown, which has pushed most of the population into poverty.

UK sanctions Lebanese

In another development, the UK government on Tuesday said it had imposed a full asset freeze on a Lebanese businessman suspected of financing Hezbollah. The Treasury action against Nazem Said Ahmad on national security grounds follows similar restrictions imposed in 2019 by the United States. "All assets and economic resources belonging to Ahmad in the UK have been frozen and no UK person may do business with him or any of the companies he owns or controls," a statement read. London proscribed Hezbollah's External Security Organization as a terrorist organization in 2001. The ban was extended to all of its military apparatus seven years later.

The Iran-backed Shiite movement is a key political player in Lebanon. According to the Treasury, Ahmad has an extensive art collection in the UK and conducts business with UK-based artists, galleries and auction houses. The sanctions mean he will no longer be able to trade in the UK art market and no other dealers will be able to do business with him or his companies. In December 2019, the US Treasury described Ahmad as "one of Hezbollah's top donors, generating funds through his longstanding ties to the 'blood diamond' trade". —AFP

Cash-strapped Lebanon delays local elections

BEIRUT: Lebanon's parliament on Tuesday postponed municipal elections scheduled for next month, official media said, with the cash-strapped country mired in an unprecedented economic meltdown. It is the second time the polls have been postponed, after they were initially scheduled to take place last year. No new date was announced for the vote. "Parliament has approved a law extending the mandate of municipal councils... until May 31, 2024 at the latest," the state-run National News Agency said.

Deputy parliament speaker Elias Bou Saab warned last week that "holding municipal elections has become almost impossible", citing a lack of funds. Delayed polls were commonplace in Lebanon even before 2019, when the country plunged into an economic crisis that the World Bank has described as among the planet's worst in recent times. The international community had urged Lebanese officials to hold the local vote on time.

"Conducting the municipal elections is important for adhering to Lebanon's constitutional timelines and democratic practices, at a time when the country is already facing a presidential vacancy and widespread institutional paralysis," United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon Joanna Wronecka said earlier this month. Lebanon has been without a president for more than five months amid deadlock between entrenched political barons.

EID MUBARAK

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From 18 to 21.04.2023 £1.200 £0.895	From 18 to 21.04.2023 £5.790	From 18 to 21.04.2023 £3.190	From 18 to 21.04.2023 £3.490 £2.990
From 18 to 21.04.2023 £5.990 £5.390	From 18 to 21.04.2023 £5.990 £4.990	From 18 to 21.04.2023 £3.690 £2.990	From 18 to 21.04.2023 £4.480 £2.975
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