



Zelensky wins diplomatic, military support from G7

Erdogan eyes third decade of rule in historic runoff

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Heavy clashes as Sudan truce agreed

Battle-weary Sudanese skeptical about one-week ceasefire



JEDDAH: Saudi Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan (center), flanked by representatives of the Sudanese army and the rival Paramilitary Rapid Support forces, posing for a photograph after the signing of a ceasefire agreement on May 21, 2023. — AFP

KHARTOUM: Heavy clashes again rocked Sudan's capital on Sunday hours after rival generals agreed to an upcoming one-week ceasefire, the latest in a series of truces that have been systematically violated. The ceasefire is set to take effect at 9.45 pm (1945 GMT) on Monday, the United States and Saudi Arabia said in a joint statement after talks in the Saudi city of Jeddah.

It "shall remain in effect for seven days and may be extended with the agreement of both parties", the statement added. In a statement published Sunday by the official Saudi Press Agency, Riyadh acknowledged multiple truces have been violated since fighting broke out on April 15.

"Unlike previous ceasefires, the agreement reached in Jeddah was signed by the parties and will be supported by a US-Saudi and international-supported ceasefire monitoring mechanism," the foreign

ministry said. But Khartoum residents—who for weeks have been sheltering from brutal urban warfare amid desperately low supplies of food and vital resources—were skeptical that this time would be any different. "They have announced truces that they have not held to before," said Hussein Mohammed, who remains in Khartoum North, sheltering in place with his sick mother even as their neighborhood became deserted. "We hope that this time mediators can monitor that the ceasefire is implemented," he told AFP. The fighting pits the Sudanese army, led by General Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan, against the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), led by Burhan's former deputy Mohamed Hamdan Daglo.

The intense battles have killed around 1,000 people and displaced over one million, with millions more trapped with sporadic access to water, electricity or medicine. Many have been separated from

their families, just a few kilometers away, by unrelenting gunfire. For Sawсан Mohammed, who lives in the capital's south, the ceasefire—if implemented—"will be my first chance to see my mother and father in Omdurman", just a bridge across the Nile River, she told AFP.

'No trust'

Along with the capital, the war-scarred western region of Darfur has seen some of the worst of the fighting. "We do not trust the warring sides," said Adam Issa, a shop owner in El-Geneina, West Darfur. "Every time they announce a truce and they go back to fighting. We want a permanent ceasefire, not a temporary truce."

The region is still reeling from a conflict that erupted in 2003 when former autocrat Omar al-Bashir unleashed the feared Janjaweed militia—which formed

the basis for the RSF—to crush a rebellion by ethnic minority groups. In October 2021, the two warring generals collaborated to oust a civilian government, derailing a transition to democracy following Bashir's ouster in 2019. They installed a ruling council with Burhan at its head and Daglo as his deputy, but their marriage of convenience later disintegrated, and their power struggle came to blows.

Burhan on Friday officially sacked Daglo from his position on the council, giving the vice presidency to former rebel leader Malik Agar. In a statement Saturday, Agar said he was determined to try to "end the war" and press for negotiations.

He also directly addressed Daglo—whose most recent bone of contention with Burhan was over the RSF's integration into the regular army—saying "Sudan's stability can only be re-established by a professional and unified army." —AFP



AARAMTA, Lebanon: Lebanese Hezbollah fighters take part in a large-scale military exercise on May 21, 2023. — AFP

Hezbollah carries out mock raids into Zionist territory

AARAMTA: Lebanon's Hezbollah movement simulated cross-border raids into Zionist territory Sunday in a show of its military might, using live ammunition and an attack drone, AFP correspondents said.

Around 200 Hezbollah fighters took part in the raids, part of large-scale military exercise in Aaramta, around 20 kilometers (12 miles) north of the Zionist entity's border. Dozens of journalists were invited to the event which took place ahead of the anniversary next week of Zionist entity's withdrawal from south-

ern Lebanon in 2000. One simulated raid involved a drone attack against a target inside Zionist region, while in another, fighters attacked vehicles across a mock border, retrieved a dummy's body from one of the cars and whisked it back across the "frontier".

Snipers shot at targets adorned with the Star of David while other fighters jumped through flaming hoops, during the largest demonstration of the group's military muscle in years in southern Lebanon. Hezbollah also put on display heavy and light arms, including anti-aircraft weapons and rocket launchers as well as rocket-propelled grenades.

"If some people in the Zionist entity (Zionist entity) dream of doing something foolish... we will rain down our precision missiles and all the weapons at our disposal," senior Hezbollah official Hashem Saifeddine said at the event. Hezbollah, founded in 1982 to fight Zionist occupation of southern Lebanon, is Iran's main regional proxy. — AFP

Iran hangs three convicted drug traffickers

TEHRAN: Iran on Sunday executed three men convicted on drug trafficking charges, the judiciary said, the latest of hundreds of people hanged in the country since the start of the year. The three men, described as members of a "drug cartel", were hanged after being convicted of "corruption on earth" for producing nearly 40 kilograms (88 pounds) of heroin, the judiciary's Mizan Online news website said.

The executions come one day after a man was hanged following a conviction over leading a human trafficking and prostitution ring.

On Friday three other men were executed for killing members of the security forces in November during protests triggered by the death in custody of Mahsa Amini.

Iran saw waves of nationwide protests following

the September 16 death of 22-year-old Amini, an Iranian Kurd who had been arrested for an alleged breach of the Islamic republic's strict dress rules for women. During the protests, which Tehran described as foreign-instigated "riots", thousands of Iranians were arrested and hundreds killed, including dozens of security personnel.

Friday's executions were denounced by Western countries and human rights groups based outside Iran. Iran executes more people a year than any other nation except China, according to human rights groups including Amnesty International.

The country hanged 75 percent more people in 2022 than the previous year, the Norway-based group Iran Human Rights (IHR) and Paris-based Together Against the Death Penalty (ECPM) said in a joint report in April.

At least 582 people were executed in Iran last year, the highest number of executions in the country since 2015 and well above the 333 recorded in 2021, the two groups said. But the pace of executions this year has been even higher so far, with IHR now counting at least 260 executions since the start of the year. — AFP

Ukraine denies fall of Bakhmut

KYIV: Ukraine on Sunday denied Bakhmut had fallen to Russian troops in the longest battle of the war and said it was instead advancing around the suburbs, making it "very difficult" for Russian troops to stay in the devastated city. A day after President Vladimir Putin congratulated his troops and private mercenary group Wagner who claimed to have taken the city in eastern Ukraine, President Volodymyr Zelensky suggested it would be a pyrrhic victory for Moscow.

"You have to understand there is nothing" there in Bakhmut, he said, sat next to US President Joe Biden on the sidelines of the G7 summit in Hiroshima, Japan. "For today, Bakhmut is only in our hearts." Zelensky's spokesman later clarified that the Ukrainian president was not confirming the loss of Bakhmut to Russian troops.

"The president denied the capture of Bakhmut," spokesman Sergiy Nykyforov said on Facebook. Deputy Defence Minister Ganna Malyar then said Ukrainian troops "have semi-encircled the city".

"The advance of our troops in the suburbs on the flanks, which is still ongoing, makes it very difficult for the enemy to be in Bakhmut." She said Ukrainian troops were still in control of a residential area and some industrial facilities. The loss of Bakhmut would be hugely symbolic for the Ukrainians, who had held on for months, ignoring US advice behind the scenes to focus elsewhere.

But some analysts have said Ukraine has inflicted heavy losses on Russia in Bakhmut and forced it to commit large resources, potentially weakening its defenses in other parts of the front line.

Bakhmut, a salt-mining town that once had a population of 70,000 people, has been the scene



BAKHMUT, Ukraine: Members of Wagner group waving a Russian national flag and Wagner Group's flag on the rooftop of a damaged building in Bakhmut, amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine. — AFP

of some of the bloodiest fighting in Moscow's more than year-long Ukraine offensive. The fall of Bakhmut, where both Moscow and Kyiv are believed to have suffered huge losses, would allow Moscow to bring home a key victory after a series of humiliating defeats. It would also come before a major counteroffensive that Kyiv has been preparing for months. Zelensky himself has warned that the city's loss would open the way for Russian troops to capture more of the Donbas region.

"As a result of offensive actions of the Wagner assault units, with the support of artillery and aviation of the 'Southern' unit, the liberation of the city of Artemovsk was completed," Russia's defence ministry said, using the Soviet-era name of Bakhmut. "Vladimir Putin congratulated the assault units of Wagner as well as all servicemen of units of the Russian armed forces who provided them with the necessary support and flank cover, on the completion of the operation to liberate" the city, TASS news agency quoted a Kremlin statement as saying. — AFP

Bahrain to resume diplomatic relations with Lebanon

DUBAI: Bahrain said Saturday it would restore full diplomatic relations with Lebanon after a year and a half, following a row over the Saudi-led military intervention in Yemen. Bahrain and other Gulf countries followed Saudi Arabia in recalling their diplomats towards the end of 2021 after a Lebanese minister criticized Riyadh's military intervention in the war in Yemen.

Manama — a staunch ally of Riyadh — also called on its citizens in Lebanon to leave the country. But the tiny Gulf kingdom said Saturday that it was bringing an end to the impasse, a move welcomed by Beirut. "The Kingdom of Bahrain has decided to restore diplomatic representation" at ambassador level in Lebanon, the Bahraini foreign ministry said, adding that this would "strengthen

the fraternal relations between the two countries".

Lebanon's prime minister Najib Mikati said the country "appreciated this decision and welcomes it". A diplomatic crisis erupted in Oct 2021 after the then-information minister was quoted criticizing the Saudi role in Yemen, where a grinding war has produced what the UN describes as the world's worst humanitarian crisis. George Kordahi, who has since resigned, said in a television interview that the Houthi rebels fighting Yemen's internationally recognized government were "defending themselves... against an external aggression".

In response, Riyadh recalled its ambassador and ordered Lebanon's envoy to leave the kingdom. Its Gulf allies the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Kuwait followed suit, expelling Lebanon's envoys. Saudi Arabia returned its envoy to Lebanon in April last year. The Bahraini decision comes the day after the Arab League summit in Saudi Arabia against a backdrop of unexpected rapprochement between Riyadh and Tehran, brokered by Beijing. The warming of relations between the region's two great rivals has paved the way for a major diplomatic reshuffle in the Arab world. — AFP