

Palestinian president says to stop agreements with Israel

Thu, 2019-07-25 21:46

RAMALLAH, Palestine: Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas is calling Israel's demolition of several dozen Palestinian homes on the outskirts of east Jerusalem "ethnic cleansing" and says he will take steps to terminate all agreements with Israel.

Abbas issued a statement following a meeting of PLO leaders in Ramallah on Thursday. The president said he would form a committee to advance ending all signed agreements with Israel, but it wasn't clear such a move had a timeline.

The president's remarks came three days after Israel leveled several buildings it says were built too close to its West Bank separation barrier after a years-long legal battle.

Abbas restated his opposition to President Donald Trump's "Deal of the Century" between Israel and the Palestinians, and said that "Palestine and Jerusalem are not for sale or bargain."



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Israel says 12 Palestinian buildings destroyed in controversial demolition
Israeli investigations into deaths of Palestinians often reach nowhere

[Sudan protest leaders, rebels end rift over power deal](#)

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Thu, 2019-07-25 12:59

KHARTOUM: Sudanese protest leaders and their rebel partners have ended their differences over a power-sharing deal signed with the country's military rulers, vowing to work jointly for peace, a leading protest group said Thursday.

On July 17, the umbrella protest movement signed a power-sharing accord with Sudan's ruling generals that provides for a transitional civilian administration, the key demand of demonstrators.

But three armed groups who are members of the protest movement had objected to the deal, saying it failed to address peace in the war zones of Darfur, South Kordofan and Blue Nile.

A group of protest leaders then flew to Addis Ababa for talks with the rebels, and after days of intense negotiations they reached an agreement that was announced on Thursday.

"This agreement has discussed the fundamental roots of war... and aims to reach a comprehensive peace accord with all armed groups," the Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA) said on its Facebook page.

"The agreement paves the way for establishing comprehensive peace urgently once the transitional process for a civilian government begins."

The SPA said the "Addis Ababa Declaration" aims to "speed up the forming of the transitional civilian government."

It said the three armed groups in the Sudan Revolutionary Front have "reconciled with the Alliance for Freedom and Change on the transitional government and connected peace-related issues with the process of transition."

The rebel groups also confirmed the differences they had with the protest leaders had ended.

"I think with this agreement we will be united, we will be stronger," rebel

delegate Nuraddayim Taha told AFP in Addis Ababa.

"This is the first time that such an agreement is linked to issues of democracy and peace. For us, this is the first time in history that an agreement will address the root causes of the conflicts in Sudan."

The rebel groups had been fighting government forces of now ousted president Omar Al-Bashir for years in Darfur, Blue Nile and South Kordofan.

Tens of thousands of people have been killed in the three conflicts and millions displaced, with hundreds of thousands still living in sprawling camps.

The protest leaders and generals are still to sign what is called the "Constitutional Declaration" to thrash out some outstanding issues, including justice for demonstrators killed during months of protests.

The rebel groups had demanded that the "Constitutional Declaration" specify that peace negotiations would be a top priority for the new government.

Once a peace deal is finalized, sources said the rebel groups want their representatives to be part of the transitional government.

It is still unclear whether this demand had been addressed in the agreement reached between the two sides.

The rebels had also called for the extradition from Sudan of those accused of crimes by the Hague-based International Criminal Court, including Bashir.

Bashir is charged with war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide for his alleged role in the conflict in Darfur that erupted in 2003.

The ruling generals have steadfastly refused to hand over Bashir to the ICC.



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Sudan military says coup attempt thwarted, senior officers arrested

[Security forces in crackdown on Lebanon-Syria border smuggling operations](#)

Wed, 2019-07-24 22:50

BEIRUT: The Lebanese government has stepped up efforts to crack down on smuggling operations along its border with Syria which ministers claim are posing major security and economic threats to the country.

Despite Lebanese security forces making 449 arrests and thwarting 336 attempts to smuggle goods and people over a network of crossings, illegal movements to evade customs continue to impact on the Lebanese pound. And ministers have been told that more than 80 percent of illicit trade is taking place at legitimate border crossings between the two countries.

As well as the smuggling of people and goods and the infiltration of terrorists into Lebanese territory, officials have also been battling to prevent Hezbollah fighters from illegally crossing into Syria and back. Various moves have taken place over recent weeks to beef up border controls.

A UN delegation, presided over by the British Ministry of Defense's senior adviser on the Middle East, Lt. Gen. Sir John Lorimer, inspected Lebanon's southern borders with Israel and held meetings with Lebanese political and military officials to discuss the expansion of the eastern borders control area and the building, with UK assistance, of more observation towers.

Separately, Lebanese Defense Minister Elias Bou Saab visited the northern and eastern borders after the government put him in charge of finding a solution to illegal border crossings and smuggling operations.

And the US and UK ambassadors to Lebanon, Elizabeth Richard and Chris Rampling respectively, visited the eastern borders accompanied by the Lebanese Army Chief Joseph Aoun to oversee border control operations in the lead-up to the linking of observation towers equipped with satellite technology to assist with army monitoring work.

Lebanese Minister of Interior Raya Al-Hassan and Bou Saab briefed the country's Parliamentary Committee for Administration and Justice on measures being taken to deal with illegal border activities.

Bou Saab said the northern border with Syria was 100 km long, while the

eastern border stretched for 210 km, adding that the Lebanese Army had thwarted 336 smuggling attempts and arrested 449 smugglers, of which 290 were Lebanese, 145 Syrians, seven Palestinians and seven of other nationalities.

Head of the committee, Georges Adwan, said: "There are dozens of illegal crossings that represent an important threat. Customs evasion through illegal crossing represents 10 percent but the larger portion of evasion takes place through legitimate crossings, with 80 percent or more.

"Some smugglers were arrested for two months before they were released and went back to their smuggling operations."

Addressing the committee, Bou Saab said: "There are 10 to 15 illegal crossings that were closed by the army. However, smugglers opened new crossing points about 50 meters away the next day. Without an actual demarcation of the borders, we cannot say that we control 100 percent of the borders. Vegetables and fruits are being smuggled from Syria, which is harming Lebanese farmers."

Economist Ghazi Wazni said: "The Syrian pound has significantly lost its value. Smuggled goods are replaced by foreign currencies that go to Syria." Bou Saab gave an example of how illegal trades took place.

"A Syrian truck arrives at the northern borders of Nahr Al-Kabir River where it unloads onto smaller trucks and motorcycles. They cross the border within half-an-hour using a wooden bridge placed above the river. We remove such bridges, only to find them again at a different location."

The Lebanese Army has 200 border posts, of which 74 contain advanced towers provided mainly by the UK but also the US, Germany and Canada.

"There are pedestrian crossings to smuggle individuals and terrorists. They were also used to smuggle weapons from Lebanon to Syria during the war," added Bou Saab. "There are goods that cross the border with a customs declaration."

Lebanese MP, George Okais, told Arab News, that Bou Saab had "contacted the relevant parties in Syria to close some illegal borders with dirt" in a bid to stop people smuggling which represented "a dangerous threat."



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Daesh fighters surrender Lebanon-Syria border enclaveThousands poised to leave Lebanon-Syria border zone under deal

[Sudan military says coup attempt thwarted, senior officers arrested](#)

Author:

Reuters

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Wed, 2019-07-24 17:01

CAIRO: Sudan's army chief was among several people arrested in a coup plot, the country's military said Wednesday, shortly after reports emerged of at least a dozen high-ranking army officers and Islamists being taken into custody in the conspiracy.

This was the second coup plot reported this month in Sudan, where talks between the military and the country's pro-democracy movement have dragged out over the final and crucial part of a power-sharing deal for the nation's transitional period.

Earlier in July, the military council that took over the country after ousting longtime autocrat Omar Al-Bashir in April, said it arrested at least 16 active and retired military officers over an attempted coup.

Late Wednesday, a brief statement from the military said the country's chief-of-staff, Gen. Hashem Abdel-Muttalib Babakr, was among those arrested over the alleged plot. The statement said the plot aimed to sabotage the power-sharing deal between the military council and the protest movement.

Babakr was appointed chief-of-staff just days after Al-Bashir's ouster following months of street protests against the president's 30-year rule. Since April, Babakr had appeared loyal to Gen. Abdel-Fattah Burhan, the head of the ruling military council, and only last week visited Egypt with a top-level Sudanese delegation.

Earlier Wednesday, two military officials told The Associated Press that others among those newly arrested were officers working for Sudan's military and the national intelligence and security services.

The arrests all took place this week and several Islamists, including a former minister, loyal to Al-Bashir were also arrested over the same plot, the officials said. They refused to reveal further details and spoke on condition of anonymity because they weren't authorized to talk to the media. Sudan's ruling generals and pro-democracy factions have yet to sign the second, final part of the power-sharing deal. They signed a political declaration that outlines the deal last week, after agreeing on a joint sovereign council that will rule for a little over three years while elections are organized.

Both sides say a diplomatic push by the US and its Arab allies was key to ending the weeks-long standoff between the military and the protesters that raised fears of all-out civil war.

The second, more contentious part of the power-sharing deal – the so-called constitutional agreement – is meant to specify the division of powers during the transitional period.

But that part has now stalled.

Leaders of the pro-democracy movement, known as the Forces for Declaration of Freedom and Change, have been meeting in Ethiopia with leaders of the Revolutionary Front, an alliance of Sudanese rebel groups who are also part of the movement. The Revolutionary Front had rejected the power-sharing deal, arguing it fails to meet their demands for peace.

For decades, Sudan has been convulsed by rebellions in the provinces by ethnic and religious minorities who felt marginalized or oppressed by the Khartoum government, which is dominated by northern Sudanese Arab Muslims. The Revolutionary Front includes rebel groups from Darfur as well as Blue Nile and South Kordofan provinces.



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Sudan is heading in the right direction but much work remains, says US envoy

[Turkey has not agreed with US on Syria safe zone: foreign minister](#)

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Wed, 2019-07-24 12:32

ANKARA: New US proposals for a safe zone in north Syria do not satisfy Turkey, Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said on Wednesday, adding that an agreement on the issue needs to be reached as soon as possible because Ankara

has no patience left.

Turkey has been infuriated by US support for the Kurdish YPG militia, which Ankara considers a terrorist organization. The NATO allies have agreed to create a safe zone in northern Syria following the withdrawal of US forces from the area, which Turkey wants to be cleared of YPG militants.

The YPG, which spearheads the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces, has been the main US ally on the ground in Syria during Washington's fight against Islamic State.

The US special envoy for Syria James Jeffrey was in Ankara this week for talks on the details of the safe zone.

At a news conference in Ankara on Wednesday, Cavusoglu said that the two allies had failed to agree on how deep the safe zone would be, who would control it and whether the YPG would be completely removed from the area. "We got the impression that they want to enter a stalling process here as in Manbij," Cavusoglu said, referring to a roadmap agreed last year to clear a northern Syrian town of YPG fighters. "We need to reach an agreement regarding the safe zone as soon as possible because we have no patience left." Cavusoglu also said that US military officials meeting with a YPG leader on Monday – the same day as Jeffrey's talks at the foreign ministry – indicated Washington was not sincere.

He said on Monday that if the safe zone in northern Syria is not established, and if threats continue against Turkey, Ankara would launch a military operation east of the Euphrates river, a move that Ankara has threatened in the past.

Ankara is also working with Russia and Iran, allies of the Syrian government, to establish a constitutional committee – a long-awaited step in stalled effort to resolve the country's civil war.

Asked about the details of a recent phone call with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, Cavusoglu said the establishment of the constitutional committee could be announced in the coming days.



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showing flexibility on planned Syria safe zone: Turkish minister