

New head of UN observer mission lands in Yemen

Author:

Tue, 2019-02-05 21:09

SANAA: Retired Danish general Michael Lollesgaard arrived Tuesday in Sanaa to head the UN observer mission in war-wracked Yemen and replace his predecessor whose ties with the rebels were reportedly strained.

Lollesgaard replaces Patrick Cammaert, the Dutch general who had been tapped a little over a month ago to lead the mission deployed in the lifeline Red Sea port city of Hodeida.

The new mission head made no comments upon his arrival in Sanaa, an AFP correspondent said, and it was not clear when exactly he would begin his mission in Hodeida.

He will oversee a team of 75 unarmed observers to monitor a fragile ceasefire deal for Hodeida agreed in December between the Huthis and the Yemeni government at UN-brokered talks in Sweden.

Diplomats say relations have been strained between Cammaert and the Iran-linked Huthi rebels battling the Saudi-backed government, and with the UN envoy to Yemen, Martin Griffiths.

Some Huthis have accused him of running his own agenda, a claim disputed by the United Nations which said his only mission was to improve the lives of the embattled Yemeni people.

On January 17, his convoy came under fire in the flashpoint city of Hodeida but he and his team escaped unhurt and the UN said the source of the shooting was unknown.

Hodeida port is the entry point for the bulk of Yemen's supplies of imported goods and humanitarian aid, providing a lifeline to millions on the brink of starvation.

Lollesgaard, born in 1960, commanded the UN peacekeeping force in Mali (MINUSMA) from 2015 to 2016, and he then became Denmark's military representative to NATO and the European Union in 2017.

He was also military adviser to Denmark's UN mission in New York and served in peace support operations in Iraq and Bosnia

His new appointment was endorsed at the end of January by the UN Security Council.

Yemen's rebels have been mired in a war with government forces backed since 2015 by a Saudi-led military coalition.

The conflict has triggered what the UN calls the world's worst humanitarian crisis, with millions of people at risk of starvation.

The World Health Organization has put the death toll since 2015 at about 10,000 people but rights groups say that figure could be five times higher.



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UN-backed talks start in Jordan to discuss stalled Yemen prisoner exchange
Jordan to host new talks on Yemen prisoner swap

[Sudan minister appeals to youth as protests continue](#)

Tue, 2019-02-05 20:57

KHARTOUM: Sudan's defense minister said on Monday that young people caught up in recent turmoil had "reasonable ambition," the second apparently conciliatory gesture in three days from a senior government figure.

Students, activists and other protesters frustrated with economic hardships have held almost daily demonstrations across Sudan since Dec. 19, mounting the most sustained challenge to President Omar Al-Bashir's three decades in power.

Defense Minister Awad Mohamed Ahmed Ibn Auf did not directly address the

protesters' concerns, but said the situation in the country showed a schism between young and old.

That, he added, "requires intergenerational communication and fair solutions to youth problems and realizing their reasonable ambition."

Recent events "showed the need to reshape political entities, parties and armed movements of the political scene with a different mindset than before," he said during a briefing with military officers, according to a ministry statement.

The minister did not spell out what kind of reshaping should take place and there was no immediate response from opposition parties, which have backed the demonstrations.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Rights groups say at least 45 people have been killed during clashes with security services.

- People have taken to the streets across Sudan, frustrated with price hikes and shortages in cash, bread, petrol and other essentials.

Police dispersed dozens of protesters in the Shambat neighborhood of Khartoum on Monday and dozens more across the Nile in Omdurman, the capital's twin city, witnesses said.

People have taken to the streets across Sudan, frustrated with price hikes and shortages in cash, bread, petrol and other essentials, calling for Al-Bashir to go. Many have echoed slogans used in the Muslim world's "Arab Spring" uprisings.

Rights groups say at least 45 people have been killed during clashes with security services, while the government puts the death toll at 30, including two security personnel.

Al-Bashir has shown no sign of being prepared to concede any power and has blamed the protests on foreign agents, challenging his rivals to seek power through the ballot box.

But Prime Minister Moataz Moussa on Saturday appeared to soften the official stance on the protests, describing demonstrators' calls for better living conditions as "legitimate."



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Sudan's Bashir vows rural development as new protests loom
Sudan police fire tear gas on protest after prayers

[Beirut ministry barriers removed after snarling traffic for years](#)

Author:

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Tue, 2019-02-05 13:17

BEIRUT: Lebanon's Interior Ministry removed concrete security barriers in central Beirut on Tuesday that had for years choked a major road nearby, days after the long-delayed formation of a new government.

The office of the outgoing minister, Nohad Machnouk, said he had ordered the barriers removed "owing to the end of security reasons," due in part to his five-year "fight against terrorism."

But the office of the new minister, Raya Al-Hassan, told local TV that she had taken the decision in order to remove a daily encumbrance and improve transport.

Cranes were brought in to lift the concrete panels, each painted with the Lebanese flag.

Cab driver Ibrahim Sauli, 65, said he was no fan of Hassan's politics but added: "I raise my hat to this minister. She's not scared and she wants to work properly."

Hassan is one of a record four women ministers in the new cabinet. Machnouk will pass the baton at a ceremony on Wednesday.

In recent years, Lebanon has suffered from a spillover of tension and sometimes violence from neighboring Syria, where the Lebanese Shiite Hezbollah movement has fought in support of President Bashar Assad.

The last deadly militant operation in Lebanon took place in 2016, when suicide attackers carried out a string of bombings in a village in the north.



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[First wave of new Ethiopian immigrants](#)

arrives in Israel

Author:

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Mon, 2019-02-04 19:40

L0D, Israel: Nearly 100 Ethiopian Jews have landed in Israel in the first wave of new immigration since the government said last year that it would let some of the 8,000 remaining community members join relatives in Israel. Local Ethiopian community members on Monday welcomed the newcomers after years of delays. Israel recognizes the community's Jewish roots but does not consider them fully Jewish, so they require special approval to immigrate that has not always been forthcoming.

Alisa Bodner, spokeswoman for an Ethiopian-Jewish activist group, said she was "far from satisfied" by the slow trickle of Ethiopian immigration, long stalled despite government promises to bring all remaining members of the community to Israel.

The bulk of the Ethiopian Jewish community was airlifted to Israel in major operations in the 1980s and 1990s.



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Ethiopian Israelis rally in Tel Aviv against police violence
Netanyahu gives 1,000 Ethiopians right to immigrate to Israel

Assassination of writer on Karbala street provokes indignation

Mon, 2019-02-04 22:06

KARBALA: The recent assassination of a writer in the middle of a street in Karbala has provoked indignation in Iraqi cultural circles.

The city's police force said several fatal shots were fired at Alaa Mashzoub in front of his home on Saturday.

In a sign of the sensitivity surrounding the subject, the police immediately tasked a senior squad to investigate, and promised to find the perpetrators.

"This is killing words – free, honest and beautiful words," fellow writer Ali Lefta Said said, in reaction to the murder.

On Sunday, intellectuals and artists from Karbala, around 100km south of Baghdad, staged a sit-in.

Ahmed Saadawi – whose novel "Frankenstein in Baghdad" has scored success beyond Iraq's borders – hit out at the culprits on his Facebook page.

"You really have to be a coward to fire a gun at someone who only has words and dreams," he wrote.

"Shame on the murderers – and shame on the authorities, if they don't find and judge them immediately," he added.

Tributes have poured in for the prolific novelist.

Mashzoub was well known in Karbala, whose historic districts he wove with care into his writing.

Parliament's cultural commission has said it will monitor the police probe into his murder. But nobody has been willing to point the finger at potential suspects.

Late last Summer, the death of four high profile Iraqi women – including model and social media influencer Tara Fares, whose fatal shooting was caught on camera – sparked anger.

Official investigations into those deaths have failed to yield convictions or

even publicly announced conclusions.



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Iraqi novelist gunned down in Kerbala
Suicide bomber hits Iraq Shiite shrine city of Karbala