

# Air strikes hit Khartoum; envoy sees sides more open to talks



People gather to ride a truck to flee outside Khartoum, during clashes between the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces and the army, in Khartoum, Sudan, on April 28, 2023. ● REUTERS/STRINGER

Air strikes and artillery rocked Khartoum on Saturday as Sudan entered a third week of fighting between rival military forces despite a ceasefire, prompting more civilians to flee and renewed warnings of wider instability if the war is not stopped. As dark smoke rose over Khartoum, a U.N. envoy offered a possible flicker of hope, saying the warring sides who have so far shown no sign of compromise were now more open to negotiations – though no date had been set. Hundreds of people have been killed and thousands wounded since April 15

when a long-simmering power struggle between Sudanese the army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) erupted into conflict. Despite shelling early in the morning, residents of Khartoum and its neighbouring cities said the fighting had been less intense on Saturday than in recent days. The fighting has pitched Sudan towards a civil war that has derailed an internationally-backed transition toward democratic elections and could destabilise a volatile region. The sides have continued to battle it out during a series

of ceasefires mediated by foreign powers, notably the US. The latest 72-hour truce expires at midnight on Sunday. On Saturday, the RSF accused the army of violating the ceasefire in areas under its control. There was no immediate comment from the army, which has previously blamed the RSF for violations and which said on Saturday its forces were continuing to work to end “the rebellion”. The prospects of negotiations between the leaders of the two sides have so far seemed bleak.

On Friday, army leader General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan said he would never sit down with the RSF’s “rebel” leader, referring to General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, who is more commonly known as Hemedti. The RSF chief in turn said he would talk only after the army ceased hostilities. Nonetheless, the U.N. special representative in Sudan, Volker Perthes, told Reuters he had recently sensed a change in the sides’ attitudes and they were more open to negotiations. “The word ‘negotiations’ or ‘talks’ was not there in their discourse in the first week or

so,” Perthes said. Perthes said the sides had nominated representatives for talks which had been suggested for Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, or Juba in South Sudan, though he said there was a practical question over whether they could get there to “actually sit together”. The immediate task, Perthes said, was to develop a monitoring mechanism for ceasefires. Perthes noted that he had told the Security Council both sides thought they could win the conflict, but he also said attitudes were changing. While the sides had made statements that

the other side had to “surrender or die,” Perthes said, they were also saying, “ok we accept... some form of talks”. At least 528 people have been killed and 4,599 wounded, the Sudanese Health Ministry told Al Jazeera, slightly more than a tally by the UN, which believes the real toll is much higher. The UN said more than 75,000 people had been internally displaced by the fighting. Tens of thousands of people have fled to neighbouring countries, while foreign governments have organised a major evacuation of expatriates.

## Armenia, Azerbaijan to hold peace settlement talks in Washington today



Armenia and Azerbaijan will hold a new round of talks in Washington today to try to normalise relations, the spokesperson of Armenia’s Foreign Ministry said on Saturday. Tensions have been rising again between the two countries over the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region, where Russian peacekeepers were deployed in 2020 to end a war, the second that Armenia and Azerbaijan

have fought over the enclave since the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union. The mountain region is internationally recognised as part of Azerbaijan but populated mainly by ethnic Armenians, Reuters reported. “From April 30 Minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia Ararat Mirzoyan will be in Washington DC on a working visit. The next round of discussions on the agreement on normalisation of relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan is scheduled,” the spokesperson, Ani Badalyan, said on her official Facebook page. There was no immediate confirmation of the meeting by Azerbaijan. Despite years of attempted mediation between them, Armenia and Azerbaijan have yet to reach a peace agreement that would settle outstanding issues such as the demarcation of borders and return of prisoners. Azerbaijan set up a new checkpoint last Sunday on the road to Karabakh, the Lachin corridor, in a move that Armenia that called a gross violation of a 2020 ceasefire.

## Moscow’s ambassador warns of retaliation after Warsaw seizes embassy school

Russia’s ambassador in Poland said Warsaw seizing a Russian school run by Moscow’s embassy on Saturday was “illegal” and warned Moscow would retaliate. “This is an illegal act. An intrusion on a diplomatic facility,” Moscow’s envoy, Sergei Andreyev, told the RIA Novosti news agency. “Of course, there will be a reaction (from Russia),” AFP reported. Poland on Saturday said it had seized a high school building near Moscow’s embassy in Warsaw meant for the children of diplomats, a move the Russian envoy called “illegal”.

The spat over the 1970s multi-storey building has been going on for a year. “This building belongs to the Warsaw City Hall,” Polish Foreign Ministry spokesman Lukasz Jasina told AFP, adding that the move followed a bailiff’s order. The spokesman for the municipality was unavailable for comment. Poland says there is a huge disparity in the number of diplomatic buildings each had in the other country. “This is an illegal act. An intrusion on a diplomatic facility,” Moscow’s envoy, Sergei Andreyev, told the RIA Novosti news agency. Andreyev said this was a “violation of Vienna’s convention of diplomatic relations.” “Of course, there will be a reaction,” Andreyev said, adding that he did not want to give further details and that a decision will be made in Moscow. “We consider the school by the embassy to be part of our diplomatic mission,” he said, saying teachers and staff lived on the territory of the building. Andreyev said the school will continue to work in a different part of the Russian embassy’s premises. “Our priority is ensuring the safety and the interests of our employees and their families.”



The Russian embassy building in Warsaw, Poland ● KACPER PEMPEL/REUTERS

### NEWS IN BRIEF

#### Erdogan returns from three-day campaign absence



● TWITTER

AFP – Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Saturday appeared in public for the first time in three days after a stomach infection kept him off the campaign trail before key polls. Smiling and dressed in a red windbreaker, the 69-year-old leader walked out on the stage of an Istanbul aviation festival and began to toss out flowers to flag-waving supporters in the crowd.

#### House votes to restore solar panel tariffs paused by Biden



AP – The House voted Friday to reinstate tariffs on solar panel imports from several Southeast Asian countries after US President Joe Biden paused them in a bid to boost solar installations in the U.S., a key part of his climate agenda. The 221-202 vote sends the measure to the Senate, where lawmakers from both parties have expressed similar concerns about what many call unfair competition from China. Biden has vowed to veto the measure if it reaches his desk.

#### Five dead in Texas shooting, armed suspect at large



REUTERS – Five people including an 8-year-old child were killed in a shooting at a home in Cleveland, Texas, ABC News reported on Saturday, citing local police and authorities. The shooting took place late Friday and the police were still looking for the suspect, the report added.