

Sudanese pin hopes on Jeddah talks between warring factions

Sudanese are pinning their hopes on talks in Saudi Arabia between envoys of warring factions to end bloodshed that has killed hundreds and triggered a mass exodus, but there is no sign lasting relief will come anytime soon.

There has been no word on the progress of the talks which began on Saturday between the army and the rival paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) in the Saudi Red Sea city of Jeddah, Reuters reported.

The combatants have said they would only try to tackle humanitarian issues like safe passage, not an end to the war. Numerous ceasefires have been violated since conflict erupted on April 15.

The sound of air strikes and clashes echoed anew across the capital Khartoum on Monday, witnesses said.

"If the Jeddah negotiations fail to stop the war this would mean that we won't be able to return to our homes and our lives," said Tamader Ibrahim, a 35-year-old government

employee in Bahri, across the Blue Nile river from Khartoum. "We're waiting on these negotiations because they're our only hope."

Thousands pushing to leave

The U.S.-Saudi initiative is the first serious attempt to end fighting that has turned parts of Khartoum into war zones, stymied an internationally backed plan to usher in civilian rule after years of unrest, and touched off a humanitarian crisis.

A Saudi Foreign Ministry statement said "pre-negotiation" talks began on Saturday and "will continue in the coming days in the expectation of reaching an effective short-term ceasefire to facilitate humanitarian assistance."

However, the scope of talks is limited. "We are not for negotiation right now with (RSF chief) General Hemedti," Dafallah Alhaj, an envoy to the armed forces chief, General Abdel-Fattah al-Burhan, said in South Sudan on Monday.



"What we are doing now is just looking for a ceasefire so that we are able to provide a conducive situation for a humanitarian corridor, but for direct peace talks we are not ready," he added.

Sudan's Forces of Freedom and Change, a political grouping leading the plan to transition to a civilian democracy after decades of military-dominated authoritarianism, welcomed

the Jeddah talks on Saturday. Battles since mid-April have killed hundreds of people and wounded thousands of others, disrupted aid supplies and sent 100,000 people fleeing abroad.

United Nations aid chief Martin Griffiths is in Jeddah for the talks to engage on humanitarian issues in Sudan, his spokesperson said.

Since the fighting erupted, the U.N. refugee agency has registered more than 30,000 people crossing into South Sudan, more than 90% of them South Sudanese. The true number is likely much higher, it says. Aid agencies fear the influx will worsen an already dire humanitarian crisis in South Sudan, which won independence from Khartoum in 2011 after decades of civil war.



A female Saudi Royal Navy officer assists a woman as she disembarks from Saudi Navy Ship with people from different nationalities evacuated to Saudi Arabia from Sudan, to escape the conflicts, at the Jeddah Sea Port, Saudi Arabia, in this photo released by Saudi Ministry of Defense on May 8, 2023.

● SAUDI MINISTRY OF DEFENSE/HANDOUT VIA REUTERS

Macron to make rare Germany state visit amid friction

French President Emmanuel Macron will make his first state visit to Germany in July, the two countries said Monday, amid persistent tensions on issues ranging from energy policy to China.

Macron will visit Germany from July 2 to 4 at the invitation of President Frank-Walter Steinmeier "to honour the close friendship of the two countries in the 60th year of the Elysee Treaty" on bilateral relations, AFP reported.

It will be the first state visit by a French president in 23 years, Steinmeier's office said.

Macron will visit "several regions of Germany" with Steinmeier to "underline the unique ties between our states, our citizens and particularly German and French youth".

"This special event marks the beginning of a new

chapter in the decades-old friendship of the two countries," Berlin said, "as well as the close personal ties" between Steinmeier and Macron.

German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock will travel to Paris this week to prepare the visit, meeting her French counterpart Catherine Colonna on Tuesday and joining a cabinet meeting at the Elysee Palace on Wednesday, Macron's office said. Colonna is expected in Berlin on Thursday for talks with the foreign ministers of Germany, Jordan and Egypt on the situation in the Middle East.

Macron will then travel to Potsdam outside Berlin to meet German Chancellor Olaf Scholz on June 6 ahead of a series of key events, including the conference for a new global financial pact and a European Union summit in late

June, and a NATO summit in July.

The French presidency also announced a meeting of the two governments in the autumn to foster "ever closer cooperation between the two countries". The stepped-up diplomacy comes amid friction on a range of issues central to both governments.

Germany's phase-out of nuclear power as France pursues new construction of reactors has proved contentious in recent months, as have a reform of the EU's stability and growth pact and major defence acquisition programmes.

Macron meanwhile sparked controversy last month after a visit to China, by saying that Europe should not be a "follower" of either Washington or Beijing, or get caught up in any escalation over the future of Taiwan.



German Defence Minister Boris Pistorius criticised Macron's remarks as "unfortunate", adding: "We have never been in danger of becoming or being a vassal of the United States."

Chinese visit

Beijing announced Monday that Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang would visit Germany, France and Norway this week, as China pushes to act as a mediator in the Ukraine conflict.

On Monday, German Foreign Ministry spokesman Christopher Burger denied a major rift between Par-

is and Berlin over China, saying that the two capitals coordinated on policy "more than with hardly any other partner".

Asked about the chronic differences between the core duo at the heart of the EU, Scholz's spokesman Steffen Hebestreit insisted that ties were "friendly and built on trust" and that any close relationship needed work. "It's like in a good marriage," he told reporters. "You can always give it fresh impetus so that it remains good and intensive, and that's the case in the German-Franco relationship."



French President Emmanuel Macron (L) and German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier at the EU Parliament in Strasbourg in 2021.

● FREDERICK FLORIN/AFP

NEWS IN BRIEF

Thousands evacuated from Zaporizhzhia nuclear-plant areas



REUTERS - Some 1,679 people, including 660 children, have been evacuated from areas near the Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant, a Moscow-installed official in the Russia-controlled parts of the Zaporizhzhia region of Ukraine said late on Sunday.

The head of the U.N.'s nuclear power watchdog warned on Saturday that the situation around the plant has become "potentially dangerous" as Moscow-installed officials began evacuating people from nearby areas.

EU cancels Europe Day event over Ben-Gvir's participation

jns.org - The European Union nixed a diplomatic reception set for today in Tel Aviv over the scheduled attendance of Israeli National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir.

At a meeting of ambassadors to Israel from the bloc's member states on Monday, all but Poland and Hungary were on board with canceling the event rather than hearing from the minister, who volunteered to represent Israel in the absence of Foreign Minister Eli Cohen, who will be in India.

Congo flood death toll rises to 400



REUTERS - Dead bodies were still being recovered on Monday from two villages in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo where floods killed more than 400 people last week in one of the country's deadliest disasters in recent history.

Survivors looked on as humanitarian workers piled corpses into freshly dug mass graves over the weekend, in videos posted online.

Arab League's new stance on Syria



● REUTERS

It is important to note that Arab countries' reconsideration towards Syria is not directly due to the Iran-Saudi deal, as Arab delegations from countries such as the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, Bahrain, and Kuwait had

already visited Damascus before the agreement. Rather, it is due to the role played by the resistance front in the region, of which Syria is an important and influential member alongside Iran.

Arab countries have realized after 12 years that

they cannot ignore the resistance front as a reality in the region, and now they are paying attention to Syria as the victorious country. Syria, which was supposed to buckle under pressure of delusional regional and extra-regional plans, now stands strong.

Therefore, the acceptance of Syria into the Arab League is a positive and welcome event as it acknowledges the influence of the resistance front and provides a platform for resolving regional conflicts through interaction and dialogue.

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