

## International

# Sudan boosts security as tribal clashes kill 32

## 127 killed as civilians, soldiers clash in South Sudan

**KHARTOUM:** Sudan has beefed up security in Red Sea state and imposed a curfew in its main sea gateway of Port Sudan after 32 people died in recent tribal clashes, the country's interior ministry said late on Wednesday. Sudan is one year into a three-year transition after the overthrow of former President Omar al-Bashir and faces challenges including simmering insecurity in several regions and a deep economic crisis. Security forces arrested 85 people over the recent violence, which also left 98 people wounded, and local authorities imposed a curfew in Port Sudan to restore order, the ministry said in a statement. The casualties included security force members.

Local media reports and activists on social media said the clashes broke out between the Beni Amer and Nuba tribes which have a history of mutual violence. Representatives of the two tribes signed a reconciliation deal in September last year after deadly clashes. The government had deployed more security forces to the state to impose "the prestige of the state and the rule of law, and to strengthen security and stability," the interior ministry said.

The security measures had helped to stabilize the situation and led to "a cautious calm," it added. Port Sudan is also used by South Sudan to export oil. Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok said in an earlier statement he had held several meetings during the past week with community and political leaders from eastern Sudan to address "the political, security and violence situation" in the region. Hamdok is leading a transitional civilian government under a three-year power-sharing deal with the military.

In another development, clashes between soldiers and civilians during a disarmament exercise in the central South Sudanese town of Tonj have left 127 dead, the army spokesman said

Wednesday. Major General Lul Ruai Koang told AFP that the fighting erupted on Saturday as security forces carried out an operation to disarm civilians in the area which has seen deadly inter-communal clashes.

More than six years after a civil war broke out in the country, and in the absence of a functioning government, many communities are flush with weapons, which they keep for protection or defense against cattle raids. The violence in Tonj began after several armed youths got into a disagreement with soldiers. An initial armed confrontation was brought under control, but according to Koang the youths mobilized others for an attack on the army position.

"On the latest, the number of those killed, I can confirm to you that it rose to 127," Koang said, adding that 45 of those killed were security forces and 82 were youths from the area. A further 32 soldiers were injured. Koang said two military officers involved in "triggering the clashes" had been arrested, and that the situation in Tonj had calmed down. South Sudan is emerging from a six-year civil war that left 380,000 dead and millions displaced, and disarmament is a major stumbling block.

Experts have warned against operations that coerce people to lay down their guns without proper planning, as some communities could find themselves unable to protect themselves after their weapons are removed. "The clashes should be an opportunity to rethink the approach to disarmament. What is the point of removing guns without addressing what drives folks to arms themselves?" Geoffrey Duke, head of the South Sudan Action Network on Small Arms, said on Twitter. "We can take guns away this week & they buy a new one next week (as) long as they still see the need to have (one)." — Agencies

## Saudi king lands in Red Sea megacity to 'rest'

**RIYADH:** Saudi Arabia's King Salman arrived at a planned Red Sea megacity to "rest and recuperate", state media said yesterday, after the 84-year-old ruler underwent surgery to remove his gall bladder. The kingdom has sought to quell speculation over the health of the ageing monarch, who has ruled the top oil exporter and the Arab world's biggest economy since 2015. "The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman arrived in NEOM, where he will spend some time to rest and recuperate," the official Saudi Press Agency said in a brief statement.

State television showed the king standing on an escalator descending from a plane and later arriving in a convoy of cars at what appeared to be a royal palace in NEOM, an area in the kingdom's northwest that is currently under development. The king left Riyadh's King Faisal hospital on July 30 after a 10-day stay following a laparoscopic surgery to remove his gall bladder, according to the royal court. A video released by state media, apparently aimed at dispelling rumors about the king's health, showed him chairing a virtual cabinet meeting from hospital.

It is rare for the secretive kingdom to report on the health of the monarch. In 2017, Saudi Arabia dismissed reports and mounting speculation that the king was planning to abdicate in favor of his son Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, who is seen as the de facto ruler. The Saudi royal family traditionally spends the summer in Morocco and other European destinations. The \$500-billion NEOM, set to be built from scratch along the kingdom's picturesque western coast, was hit by a rare revolt earlier this year after a tribesman was gunned down by security forces.

The tribesman had refused to give up his land for the project. Under the king's rule, Saudi Arabia has launched ambitious economic reforms for a post-oil era and given more rights to women, but also adopted a more assertive foreign policy and entered a war in neighboring Yemen. The king was the second reigning monarch in the Gulf to be hospitalized recently, after Kuwait's 91-year-old emir Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, amid the twin regional crises of the coronavirus pandemic and a plunge in crude prices. — AFP

## Mauritius dodges 2nd catastrophic oil spill

**PORT LOUIS:** Mauritius avoided a second catastrophic oil spill Wednesday after salvage crews pumped the remaining fuel from the tanks of a cargo ship that ran aground off its coast, imperiling world-famous wildlife sanctuaries. The stricken vessel threatens to break apart after more than two weeks stranded on a reef, where it leaked more than 1,000 tons of fuel into pristine seas.

Prime Minister Pravind Jugnauth said "all the fuel" had been pumped from reservoirs beneath the MV Wakashio bulk carrier, dodging what experts warned would be a crippling blow to an island nation popular with honeymooners and ecotourists. "It was a race against the clock, and I salute the excellent work to prevent another oil spill," said Jugnauth, who added that another 100 tonnes still remained elsewhere aboard the Japanese-owned ship. "The weather was calm

and it helped the pumping exercise, it also prevented the breakup of the boat, which is inevitable."

Mauritius declared an unprecedented environmental emergency last week as the Wakashio, which ran aground on July 25, began seeping oil into a protected marine park boasting unspoiled coral reefs, mangrove forests and endangered species. Jugnauth said the "ecological crisis" was beyond the scope of the tiny Indian Ocean nation, and appealed for urgent international help. France and Japan were among those to answer the call, along with thousands of ordinary Mauritians who volunteered day and night to clean sludge from the picturesque tropical coastline to which their economy is deeply tied.

Jugnauth acknowledged there was "still a lot of work to do" assessing and cleaning up the damage, but refused to take responsibility for the disaster. "How did I do wrong?" he said, adding bad weather hindered efforts to pump oil from the ship earlier. "We did everything right from the start. We were told that the risks of an oil spill were very low. The experts convinced us otherwise." Police have launched an investigation into the accident and have seized the black box, log book and other items of interest from



**POINTE D'ESNY:** Handout satellite image obtained courtesy of Maxar Technologies shows a close-up of the MV Wakashio shipwreck off the coast of Mauritius. — AFP

the vessel as part of their inquiries.

Fresh cracks appeared in the hull this week near the fuel reservoirs, spurring fears that the Wakashio could soon split up and inflict irreversible damage on the archipelago's fragile marine ecosystem. The ship struck a reef at Pointe

d'Esny, an ecological treasure fringed by idyllic beaches, colorful reefs, sanctuaries for rare and endemic wildlife, and protected wetlands.

Aerial images showed huge stretches of crystal-clear seas around the marooned cargo ship stained an inky black. — AFP