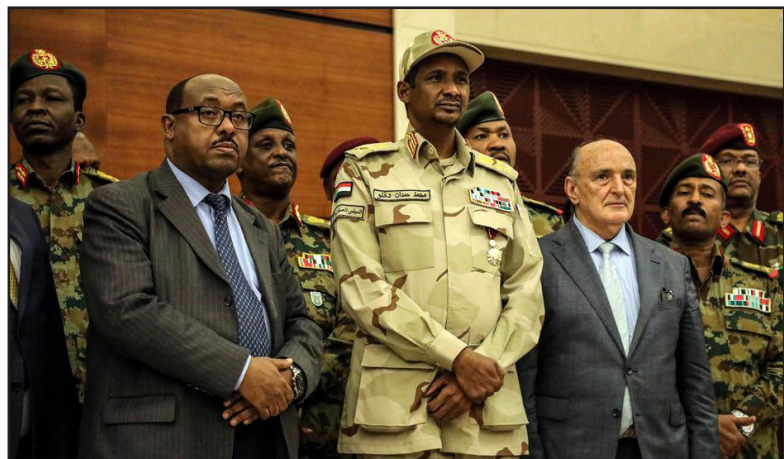


# Sudan Protest Leaders, Junta Sign Transition Deal



Deputy head of Sudanese Transitional Military Council, Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, Ethiopian mediator Mahmoud Dirir and African union envoy to Sudan Mohamed al-Hacen Lebat pose for a photograph after signing a political accord in Khartoum, Sudan July 17, 2019.

KHARTOUM (Reuters/AFP) -- Sudan's main opposition coalition and the ruling military council on Saturday signed a final agreement for a transitional government.

The agreement was signed in the presence of regional and international dignitaries including Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and South Sudanese President Salva Kiir.

"Today, the country begins its historic transition to democracy," read the front page of the Tayar newspaper, a headline echoed by most other dailies.

But the road to democracy remains fraught with obstacles, even if the mood

was celebratory as foreign dignitaries as well as thousands of citizens from all over Sudan converged for the occasion.

The deal reached on August 4 -- the Constitutional Declaration -- brought an end to nearly eight months of upheaval that saw masses mobilize against president Omar al-Bashir, who was ousted in April after 30 years in power.

The agreement brokered by the African Union and Ethiopia was welcomed with relief by both sides -- protesters celebrated what they see as the victory of their "revolution", while the generals took credit for averting civil war.

Hundreds of people boarded a train from

the town of Atbara -- the birthplace of the protests back in December -- on Friday night, dancing and singing on their way to the celebrations in Khartoum, videos shared on social media showed.

"Civilian rule, civilian rule," they chanted, promising to avenge the estimated 250 allegedly killed by security forces during the protests.

After Saturday's signing, Sudan kicks off a process that includes important first steps.

The composition of the civilian-majority transition ruling council is to be announced on Sunday.

On Thursday, former senior UN official Abdalla Hamdok, a veteran economist, was designated as transitional prime minister.

He is expected to focus on attempting to stabilize Sudan's economy, which went into a tailspin when the oil-rich south seceded in 2011 and was the trigger that sparked the initial protests.

The country of 40 million people will be ruled by an 11-member sovereign council and a government, which will -- the deal makes clear -- be dominated by civilians.

However, the interior and defense ministers are to be chosen by military members of the council.

Observers have warned that the transitional government will have little leverage to counter any attempt by the military to roll back the uprising's achievements and seize back power.

## Protesters Rally in Hong Kong to Condemn Riots



Anti-extradition bill protesters try to extinguish tear gas canisters during a demonstration in Wan Chai neighborhood in Hong Kong, China, August 11, 2019.

HONG KONG (Dispatches) -- Protesters kicked off a weekend of fresh rallies on Saturday in a major test for the movement following criticism over an airport protest earlier this week.

The fresh unrest came as thousands of protesters -- many waving Chinese flags -- gathered in a park to condemn riots and support the police.

Ten weeks of riots have plunged the international finance hub into crisis, with mainland China warning of action, including against "terrorist-like" behavior.

On Tuesday, rioters blocked passengers from boarding flights at the

city's airport and later assaulted two men they accused of being Chinese spies.

Pictures and videos of the violent attacks triggered a chorus of condemnation.

Military personnel and armored personnel carriers were deployed across the border in Shenzhen, with the United States wading into the issue to warn Beijing against sending in troops.

At the pro-Beijing rally, where a giant screen showed recent clashes with police, 60-year-old retiree Irene Man rounded on rioters.

"Their acts are not human, they have all become monsters. They are rioters,

with no reason, no thinking," she said.

As evening fell, some hardcore rioters were facing off with police in the district of Mongkok, where multiple clashes have taken place in recent weeks. They blocked roads and shone laser pens at riot police who made occasional charges but the protesters kept dispersing and reforming.

The protests were sparked by opposition to a plan to allow extraditions to the mainland, but have since morphed into unruly riots.

Battles between police firing tear gas and rubber bullets -- and hardcore rioters using rocks, Molotov cocktails and slingshots -- have since become routine in an international finance hub once renowned for stability.

On Friday, Cathay Pacific announced the shock resignation of CEO Rupert Hogg after the carrier was excoriated by Beijing because some staff supported the riots.

On Saturday, the "Big Four" accountancy firms scrambled to distance themselves from an advert placed in a newspaper purportedly by employees saying they supported the protests.

Deloitte and PwC posted statements on their websites saying the ad does not represent their positions and expressing opposition to violent or illegal behavior.

In statements quoted by Chinese state news agency Xinhua, KPMG and EY also expressed opposition to violence and illegal acts.

## Panama to Allow Venezuela Ships Despite U.S. Sanctions

PANAMA CITY (Reuters) -- The Panama Canal will allow vessels coming from Venezuela to transit the waterway provided they present the necessary paperwork, the canal authority's chief said, suggesting a new round of U.S. sanctions on the South American country may not make any difference to canal traffic.

President Donald Trump's administration last week issued an executive order freezing all Venezuelan government assets in the United States. Shortly thereafter, U.S. officials ratcheted up threats against companies that do business with Venezuela.

The measure did not explicitly place sanctions on non-U.S. firms linked to Venezuela, but it threatened to freeze the U.S. assets of any person or company determined to have "materially assisted" President Nicolas Maduro's government.

Asked if the Panama Canal would continue allowing vessels from Venezuela to transit the waterway following the latest U.S. sanctions, Panama Canal Authority chief Jorge Quijano told reporters that the waterway should not submit to pressure from third countries on the issue of whether or not vessels could use the canal, which connects the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.

"We are signatories to a treaty of neutrality, also signed by the United States," he said. "We have to continue with that commitment as long as they (vessels from any country) follow the rules of the game, and the rules of the game are that it's an innocent passage."

Panama earlier this year withdrew its flag from dozens of vessels linked to Iran and Syria. One of the tankers, the Grace 1, was later seized in Gibraltar's territorial waters on suspicion of violating sanctions, raising tensions in the Persian Gulf, where Iran detained a UK-flagged ship in retaliation.

Under international law, every merchant ship must be registered with a country, known as its flag state, which is responsible for safety and the crew's working conditions. When a vessel loses its flag, it typically triggers loss of insurance and classification if it does not immediately find another flag.

Quijano said the Canal expects to move 460 million tonnes of freight in the 12 months through September, above its original projection of 450.7 tonnes. For the 2020 fiscal year, it plans to help move 493.2 million tonnes.

The Panamanian-run waterway also is closely monitoring trade tensions between the United States in China, which led to a gap in the canal's projected revenue since China stopped buying U.S. liquefied natural gas, he said.

## India Eases Restrictions in Kashmir Crackdown



Kashmiri women shout slogans at a protest after Friday prayers during restrictions after the Indian government scrapped the special constitutional status for Kashmir, in Srinagar August 16, 2019.

SRINAGAR, India (Reuters) -- Indian authorities eased restrictions on movement and restored landline telephone links in some parts of Kashmir on Saturday, the biggest relaxation in a crippling lockdown since New Delhi announced it was removing the region's special status on Aug. 5.

The moves came even as there were celebrations and protests by Kashmiris opposed to the Indian policy in Srinagar on Friday night. The celebrations were to mark the first United Nations Security Council meeting about the Kashmir issue for about five decades.

Two police officials and a series of eyewitnesses told Reuters that demonstrations and celebrations took place in various parts of the city. However, the number of incidents of local residents pelting security forces with stones were low compared with recent days, said a security official who toured Srinagar in the morning.

A witness said that hundreds marched in the Rajouri Kadal area of Srinagar and they also let off some fire crackers. They shouted pro-Pakistani and anti-India slogans during the celebrations, two witnesses said.

For the first time since the Indian government announced that it was revoking Jammu and Kashmir state's rights to set some of its own laws, police vans didn't announce imposition of a virtual curfew in Srinagar. The authorities deny there has been a curfew in the past two weeks

but on many occasions people have been ordered to stay indoors.

India has battled a 30-year revolt in the part of Kashmir it controls in which at least 50,000 people have been killed. Critics say the decision to revoke the region's autonomy will cause further alienation and fuel the armed resistance.

The change will allow non-residents to buy property in Jammu and Kashmir state and end the practice of reserving state government jobs for local residents.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government has said the revocation of Kashmir's special status was necessary to ensure its full integration into India and speed up development.

India's move has raised tensions on the heavily militarized border of Kashmir between India and Pakistan and Islamabad said three Pakistani soldiers were killed in cross-border firing this week. Both countries claim all of Kashmir.

While Pakistan has sought to internationalize the issue, India says the territorial dispute must be resolved bilaterally and calls the situation on its side of the border an internal affair.

Even so, the UN Security Council met behind closed doors at the request of China and Pakistan to discuss the issue.

China proposed that the Security Council issue a statement on the situation in Kashmir, but diplomats said the United States, France and Germany objected, in a victory for India. Such statements are agreed by consensus.

## North Korean Leader Supervises 'New Weapon' Launch



North Korean leader Kim Jong Un supervises a missile test in this file photo.

SEOUL (Dispatches) -- North Korean leader Kim Jong Un once again supervised a "new weapon" launch, state media said Saturday, sending another signal on denuclearization ahead of next week's visit to Seoul by the U.S. envoy to Pyongyang.

Friday's launch was the North's sixth test in recent weeks as it protests the annual U.S.-South Korea military exercises which Pyongyang considers rehearsals for invasion.

Defense officials in Seoul said Pyongyang fired what appeared to be two short-range ballistic missiles Friday, that flew some 230 kilometers (140 miles) before splashing down in the sea between the Korean peninsula and Japan.

A report by the official Korean Central News Agency said the tests had a "perfect result", which helped "cement bigger confidence in this weapon system".

"Juche shells were fired in the presence of the Supreme Leader," KCNA said.

Pyeongyang has routinely expressed anger at the war games, but in the past has avoided carrying out tests while the maneuvers are taking place.

The KCNA report came after Pyongyang called South Korean President

Moon Jae-in "impudent" for hoping to resume inter-Korean talks while continuing military drills with Washington.

Plans to resume working-level talks between the North and Washington appear to have stalled since an impromptu June meeting between leaders of the two countries.

But U.S. President Donald Trump, who has been playing down Pyongyang's tests, said last week that he had received a "very beautiful letter" from Kim.

He also agreed with Kim's opposition to the war games -- albeit for financial rather than military reasons.

Stephen Biegun, the U.S. special envoy for North Korea, will travel to Japan and South Korea next week for talks on denuclearizing the North, the U.S. State Department said Friday.

The North has said nuclear talks would be "strictly" between Pyongyang and Washington, refusing to hold separate dialogue with the South.

"We have nothing to talk any more with the South Korean authorities nor have any idea to sit with them again," the North said Friday.

Washington, Seoul's security ally, stations nearly 30,000 troops in the South to defend it from its neighbor.

## News in Brief

COPENHAGEN (AFP) -- A Norwegian man suspected of killing his stepister and opening fire in a mosque near Oslo last weekend has admitted to the crimes though he has not officially entered a plea, police said Friday. Philip Manshaus, 21, was remanded in custody Monday, suspected of murder and a "terrorist act" that police say he filmed himself committing. Answering police questions on Friday, "the suspect admits the facts but has not taken a formal position as to the charges," Oslo police official Pal-Fredrik Hjort Kraby said in a statement. Manshaus is suspected of murdering his 17-year-old step sister Johanne Zhangjia Ihle-Hansen, before entering the Al-Noor mosque in an affluent Oslo suburb and opening fire before he was overpowered by a 65-year-old man.

BEIJING (Dispatches) -- China on Saturday warned the United States against moving forward with a new controversial plan to provide self-ruled Taiwan with F-16 fighter jets, saying Washington will be held responsible "for all related consequences." "In yet another move to further escalate tensions with Beijing, U.S. President Donald Trump approved an \$8 billion sale of F-16 fighter jets to Taipei on Friday. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying said such moves "severely violate" the one-China policy and that Washington should "fully recognize the highly sensitive and harmful nature of the relevant issue." "Otherwise, the Chinese side will surely make strong reactions, and the US will have to bear all the consequences," she said. "China firmly opposes this and has lodged stern representations with the US," she said. "It must be stressed that the Taiwan issue concerns China's sovereignty, territorial integrity and security interests. China has sovereignty over the island and almost all world countries recognize that sovereignty under the policy known as One China."

MOSCOW (Dispatches) -- The Russian Foreign Ministry has lashed out at U.S. President Donald Trump's hawkish national security adviser for his remarks alleging that Moscow was stealing U.S. military technology. The reaction came after John Bolton accused Russia of developing hypersonic glide vehicles and cruise missiles based on stolen U.S. military technology. Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova rejected Bolton's accusations and pointed to past incidents involving the seizure of Russia's diplomatic property by Washington. "Since the issue of theft popped into John Bolton's head, then I'll remind him that Washington stole the buildings of the Russian Consulate General and the residence of Russia's Consul General in San Francisco, the Russian trade mission in Washington, the residence of the Russian Consul General in Seattle, along with two Russian diplomatic facilities in Maryland and New York," the diplomat said.

BRASILIA (Reuters) -- Brazil's backsliding on Amazon conservation under right-wing President Jair Bolsonaro and a likely Peronist return to power in Argentina could delay or even derail ratification of an EU-Mercosur trade agreement that took two decades to negotiate. Deforestation has surged since Bolsonaro's election last year. His plans to develop the Amazon and moves to weaken rainforest protection have alarmed environmentalists and given ammunition to European opponents of the trade deal with the South American common market. Two former Brazilian environment ministers, Jose Sarney Filho and Izabella Teixeira, said Bolsonaro has rapidly undermined Brazil's hard-won reputation as a responsible food producer and a leader in world environmental forums. "Nobody imagined he would dismantle Brazil's command and control mechanisms for protecting the environment so fast and effectively," Sarney said in an interview. He said Bolsonaro has deliberately demoralized environmental agencies and given wildcat miners an incentive to cut down trees and invade indigenous reservations.

MELBOURNE (Reuters) -- Fiji Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama accused Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison of insulting leaders of Pacific island nations during a regional summit earlier this week, and said Chinese officials were far more tactful and better mannered. The Fijian prime minister's comments come after the Pacific Islands Forum failed to agree on tough new climate change commitments at the insistence of the pro-coal Australian government, upsetting leaders of island nations at risk from rising sea levels. Bainimarama said Morrison tried to force his country's policies onto the other nations, and insulted them by saying how much money Australia has given to the region. "The prime minister was very insulting, very condescending, not good for the relationship," Bainimarama told Guardian Australia late Friday, a day after the summit of 18 Pacific nations in Tuvalu.

BANGKOK (Reuters) -- The main group fighting an insurgency in Thailand's largely Muslim south said it had held its first meeting with officials from the new Thai government and had set out demands as a condition for any formal peace talks. The insurgency in the Malay-speaking region of the predominantly Buddhist country has killed some 7,000 people over the past 15 years and has flared on and off for decades. Officials of the Barisan Revolusi Nasional (BRN) said they met a Thai delegation at a location in Southeast Asia on Friday and demanded the release of all people detained over suspected links to the insurgency and a transparent investigation into abuses by security forces. That could be a step toward formal talks, the officials said, while emphasizing that it was very early in the process.