

world

Saudi, UAE pledge \$3 bn aid for Sudan

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates yesterday announced three billion dollars (2.7 billion euros) in financial support for Sudan following the overthrow of long-time leader Omar al-Bashir.

The oil-rich Gulf states pledged to inject \$500 million into the Sudanese central bank and \$2.5 billion to help provide food, medicine and petroleum products, the official Saudi Press Agency (SPA) said.

It did not specify if the money is a gift or a loan.

The deposit for the central bank is aimed at shoring up the Sudanese pound, the SPA said.

In recent years Sudan has been hit by an acute lack of dollars, a key factor behind the nationwide protests that led to the toppling of Bashir by the army this month.

After weeks of silence on Sudan's political turmoil, Saudi Arabia and the UAE called for "stability" and a "peaceful transition" in the days following Bashir's ouster.

Both Gulf nations have voiced backing for Sudan's military rulers, who are facing calls from protesters to cede power to a civilian transitional government.



Sudanese protesters gesture in front of a banner depicting ousted and detained president Omar al-Bashir, during a protest outside the army headquarters in the capital Khartoum

Since Bashir's ouster the Sudanese pound has steadily strengthened on the black market, and on Sunday it jumped to 45 per dollar, after trading at 72 at one stage last week.

The official exchange rate is 475 pounds to the dollar.

Earlier media reports that

Saudi Arabia was expected to send aid to Sudan were seen as a factor boosting the pound.

The Sudanese currency had plunged even after the United States lifted its 20-year-old trade embargo on the country in October 2017.

Expectations that the end of

US sanctions would bring an economic recovery failed to materialise, putting pressure on the pound.

The country's economic crisis has deepened since the secession of South Sudan in 2011 that took away the bulk of oil earnings.

Cash worth \$113 mn seized at Bashir's home: Sudan army



Sudanese boys flash victory signs as they ride on a pickup during a rally outside the army complex in Sudan's capital Khartoum on April

Khartoum, Sudan

lion) during a search at Bashir's home.

Sudan's army ruler General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan said yesterday that more than 113 million dollars worth of cash in three currencies has been seized from ousted leader Omar al-Bashir's residence.

He said a team of police, army and security agents found seven million euros (\$7.8 million), \$350,000 and five billion Sudanese pounds (\$105 mil-

Sudan's new acting prosecutor general Al-Waleed Sayyed Ahmed meanwhile asked authorities to register all private properties belonging to officials of the previous regime, the official SUNA news agency reported. He also asked them to stop processing requests for the transfer of ownership of properties that belonged to former regime officials and members of their families.

Incident on SpaceX pad could delay its first manned flight



Visitors at Playalinda Beach look on as a SpaceX Falcon Heavy rocket launches from Pad 39B at Kennedy Space Center in Florida, on April 11, 2019

Washington, United States

A mysterious but apparently serious incident occurred Saturday in Cape Canaveral, Florida involving the SpaceX capsule intended to carry American astronauts into space late this year, the private company and NASA announced.

"Earlier today, SpaceX conducted a series of engine tests on a Crew Dragon test vehicle on our test stand at Landing Zone 1 in Cape Canaveral, Florida," a SpaceX spokesman said in a statement. "The initial tests completed successfully but the final test resulted in an anomaly on the test stand."

A photo on the Florida Today website showed large amounts of smoke pouring out of the test site, and there was speculation about a possible explosion, but neither SpaceX nor NASA would provide any immediate detail.

NASA administrator Jim Bridenstine referred on Twitter only to an "anomaly."

"This is why we test," he

added. "We will learn, make the necessary adjustments and safely move forward."

Crew Dragon undertook a successful test flight in March, sending an unmanned capsule to dock for five days with the International Space Station before returning to Earth.

NASA called the flight "a major milestone," and it raised hopes that the Crew Dragon's first manned flight could take place before year's end.

The capsule is equipped with eight rocket engines (named SuperDraco) that can provide an emergency backup system: for example, if the launch vehicle encounters a problem, SuperDraco allows the capsule to quickly detach and return the astronauts safely to Earth.

NASA is counting on SpaceX's capsule, as well as Boeing's Starliner, to ferry astronauts to and from the ISS, a task handled since 2011 by Russia.

SpaceX was founded in 2002 by Elon Musk to help reduce space transportation costs -- and with an ultimate goal of helping colonize Mars.

Egyptians vote in second day of referendum to extend Sisi rule



Egyptian security forces stand guard at the entrance of a polling station in the Mediterranean port city of Alexandria, where locals were voting in a referendum on constitutional amendments on the second day of a three-day poll,

Cairo, Egypt

Egyptians voted for a second day yesterday in a referendum on proposed constitutional amendments aimed at cementing the rule of President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi.

Sisi is widely expected to win backing for changes making it possible for him to stay in power until 2030.

Egyptian media outlets have carried images of packed voting stations.

Some voters say their employers have encouraged them to vote, while others say they have received food coupons from unidentified people.

In their initial report on the first day of the nationwide elec-

toral process, an international observer team said "there were no hurdles to voting".

The three-day referendum bucks the trend of North Africa's renewed uprisings, in which mass pro-democracy protests this month swept away veteran presidents in Algeria and Sudan.

Former defence minister Sisi took power in 2013 and was elected president in 2014 after leading the army's overthrow of Islamist president Mohamed Morsi.

He was re-elected for another four-year term in 2018 with more than 97 percent of the vote. The proposed constitutional changes would allow him to extend his current term by two years and to run for another

six-year term.

Since Sisi took power, rights campaigners have regularly accused his government of abuses including mass trials and torture, as well as a clampdown on opposition and the press.

Human Rights Watch has slammed the proposed changes, saying they would "entrench repression".

In a statement Saturday, the New York-based watchdog criticised the "grossly unfair, rights-abusive environment" of the vote.

Supporters of the amendments say they will help ensure Egypt's political stability, security and economic development.

The results are expected to be announced on April 27.

Pakistan PM Imran Khan makes first visit to Iran

Tehran, Iran

Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan began his first official visit to Iran yesterday for talks set to focus on strengthening ties and countering terrorism, state media reported.

Khan began his two-day visit with a stop in the northeastern holy city of Mashhad, Iran's second largest and home to the shrine of Imam Reza who is revered by Shia Muslims, state television said in a live broadcast.

After visiting the shrine, Khan was to fly to Tehran where today he is expected to hold talks with President Hassan Rouhani and other top officials.

Khan's visit to Iran, the first since he took office last year, also comes days after gunmen killed 14 members of Pakistan's security forces in the Balochistan province.

On Saturday Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi said Islamabad had evidence the "terrorist outfits" that carried out the attack have "training and logistic camps inside Iranian areas bordering Pakistan".

Balochistan, which borders Afghanistan and Iran, is Pakistan's poorest province and the largest by land-mass.