

West African leaders suspended Mali from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) at an extraordinary summit Sunday, but stopped short of reimposing sanctions, after a second military coup in nine months.

The putsch had sparked deep concerns over stability in the volatile Sahel region and warnings of fresh economic penalties.

Ten regional heads of state and three foreign ministers attended the summit in the Ghanaian capital Accra, with former Nigerian president Goodluck Jonathan serving as mediator in the crisis.



Junta leader Colonel Assimi Goita has been named president of Mali, where there have been two coups in nine months Photo: AFP / ANNIE RISEMBERG

“The suspension from ECOWAS takes immediate effect until the deadline of the end of February 2022 when they are supposed to hand over to a democratically elected

government,” Ghana’s Foreign Minister Shirley Ayorkor Botchwey said after the meeting.

The final declaration called for the immediate appointment of a new civilian prime minister and the formation of an “inclusive” government.

In a statement, ECOWAS also reiterated that “the head of the transition, the vice-president and the prime minister of the transition must under no circumstances be a candidate for the future presidential election”.



France has threatened to pull its anti-jihadist troops out of Mali if the new military leader lurches towards radical Islam Photo: AFP / Daphn   BENOIT

Mali’s new president Colonel Assimi Goita — who was the nation’s vice-president until Friday — had arrived in the Ghanaian capital Accra on Saturday for preliminary talks.

Goita led the young army officers who overthrew Mali’s elected president Ibrahim Boubacar Keita last August over perceived corruption and his failure to quell a bloody jihadist

insurgency.

After the takeover, the military agreed to appoint civilians as interim president and prime minister under pressure from ECOWAS.



Map of Mali locating the capital Bamako where soldiers detained the president and prime minister on Monday. Photo: AFP / Laurence SAUBADU

But on Monday, soldiers detained transitional president Bah Ndaw and prime minister Moctar Ouane, releasing them on Thursday while saying that they had resigned.

The twin arrests triggered a diplomatic uproar and marked Mali's second apparent coup within a year.

Mali's constitutional court completed Goita's rise to full power on Friday by naming him transitional president.

With the junta going back on its previous commitment to civilian political leaders, doubts have been raised about its other pledges, including a promise to hold elections in early 2022.

The junta said this week it would continue to respect that timetable, but added that it could be subject to change.

ECOWAS issued sanctions against Mali after the August coup before lifting them when the transitional government was put in place.

The 15-nation bloc had warned of reimposing sanctions on the country, as have the United States and former colonial power France.



Map of Mali locating the capital Bamako where soldiers detained the president and prime minister on Monday. Photo: AFP / Laurence SAUBADU

French leader Emmanuel Macron said in an interview with the Journal du Dimanche newspaper published Sunday that Paris “could not stay by the side of a country where there

is no longer democratic legitimacy or a transition”.

And he warned that France would pull its troops out of Mali if the country lurches towards radical Islamism under Goita’s leadership.

France has around 5,100 troops in the region under its anti-jihadist operation Barkhane, which spans five countries in the Sahel — Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger.

Also Sunday, underscoring Mali’s chronic instability, suspected jihadists killed four civilians and a police officer in southern Mali, a region that has previously been mostly spared from the country’s Islamist unrest, a security official said on condition of anonymity.

The unidentified men attacked a checkpoint near the town of Bougouni, around 100 kilometres (60 miles) from Mali’s borders with Ivory Coast and Guinea, before dawn, the official said. A local lawmaker confirmed the attack.

Mali is among the world’s poorest countries, and the previous ECOWAS sanctions hit hard.



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