

Pressure mounts on Houthis to lift Taiz siege

Author:

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AL-MUKALLA: Iran-backed Houthis have named their representatives on a joint committee that will work to reopen roads in Taiz and other provinces, raising hopes of an end to the militants' siege of the strategic city, a Yemeni government official said.

After weeks of delays, the Houthis sent a list of candidates for the committee to the office of the UN Yemen envoy, according to deputy head of the Yemeni government delegation on Taiz, Maj. Mohammed Abdullah Al-Mahmoudi.

The move comes as the militia faces growing pressure at home and abroad to end its eight-year siege of Yemen's third-largest city.

Under the UN-brokered truce that came into effect on April 2, warring factions were expected to stop hostilities on all fronts, allow commercial flights to operate out of Sanaa airport, permit fuel ships to enter Hodeidah seaport, and nominate candidates for a joint committee to discuss the reopening of roads in Taiz and other provinces.

On April 7, the Yemeni government sent a list of four participants for the meeting, according to the UN Yemen's office, almost three days after UN envoys asked both sides to nominate their negotiators.

The Houthis have been accused of failing to take the lifting of the blockade seriously, as they delayed naming representatives and kept up attacks on residents in the city.

Al-Mahmoudi told Arab News on Saturday that the Houthi delegation includes Yahya Al-Razami, Hussein Dhaif, Mohammed Al-Mahtouri and Shukari Mahyoub.

"They are intelligence officers," he said, adding that the committee might meet in the Jordanian capital Amman or elsewhere this week.

Al-Mahmoudi is joined on the government team by Abdul Kareem Shaiban, Abdul Aziz Al-Majeedi and Ali Al-Ajaar.

"We have been told to get ready for the meeting," he said.

Pressure has increased on the Houthis to lift the siege of Taiz as the Yemeni government puts into place its commitments under the truce, including allowing about 12 fuel ships to enter Hodeidah seaport, facilitating the departure of two commercial flights from Sanaa airport, and naming its representatives in talks over the future of the city.

In a rare challenge to the militants, hundreds of people gathered for Friday prayers near a closed road on the eastern outskirts of the besieged city,

despite the risk of coming under fire from Houthi snipers.

After the prayers, people raised posters and chanted slogans that called for roads to be reopened and an end to the siege.

Abdul Jabar Noman, an activist, told Arab News that many people had died on rugged and dangerous roads while seeking to avoid Houthi checkpoints around the city.

Daily protests are aimed at highlighting residents' suffering under the blockade, he said.

"Lifting the siege will help people to move between cities easily, bring down prices of basic commodities, and fuel will be sold at the official price," he said.

Abroad, Saudi, Yemeni and Western diplomats and officials are also increasing pressure on the Houthis to lift the blockade and join efforts to end the war.

Prince Khalid bin Salman, Saudi Arabia's deputy minister of defense, demanded the world, mainly the UN, order the Houthis to lift the siege, deposit revenues from Hodeidah port into the central bank, and comply with peace initiatives.

After meeting Timothy Lenderking, US special envoy for Yemen, in Washington, Prince Khalid tweeted: "Although the momentum of the truce remains high, I reaffirmed the need for the United Nations and the international community to pressure the Houthis into reopening the roads of Taiz, deposit revenues of the Hodeidah port, and engage with peace proposals."

Ahmed Awadh bin Mubarak, Yemen's foreign minister, met with Brett McGurk, the White House coordinator of the Middle East and North Africa, in Washington, where he called for global pressure on the Houthis to respect the truce and reopen roads in Taiz.

"I stressed our appreciation for the US and the need to pressure the #Houthis to adhere to the #truce and end #Taiz siege," the Yemeni minister tweeted.

The Yemeni Embassy in Washington accused the Houthis of using the blockade as a pressure tactic, adding that the siege has isolated thousands of Taiz residents from the rest of Yemen.

"Every day, hundreds of thousands of people in the third-largest city in Yemen – #Taiz – feel like they are boxed in a besieged city since 2015. A city that is cut off from the rest of Yemen by the #Houthis only to be used as a political bargaining chip," the embassy tweeted.



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Saudi aid agency reviews project to protect women in Yemen
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[Turkey tightens foreign citizenship investment from June](#)

Sat, 2022-05-21 21:36

ANKARA: A price hike for foreigners seeking citizenship through real estate investment is the latest attempt by the Turkish government to ease the country's financial woes.

The move is estimated to help Turkey overcome its current account deficit and change the profile of foreign investors.

"Only up to June 3 you can apply for Turkish citizenship by investing \$250,000. Obtain a Turkish passport and citizenship in the most prestigious projects in Istanbul," a popular advertisement reads.

Amid widespread criticism of skyrocketing house prices in the country, which has hit Turkish nationals the most, the government recently raised the amount that foreigners must invest in property in order to become eligible for citizenship.

BACKGROUND

Amid widespread criticism of skyrocketing house prices in the country, which has hit Turkish nationals the most, the government recently raised the amount that foreigners must invest in property in order to become eligible for citizenship.

Accordingly, any foreign national who buys real estate worth at least \$400,000 – raised from \$250,000 in the previous legislation – can get Turkish citizenship. The money should be deposited to a Turkish bank, and the house should not be sold for three years.

Foreign nationals who fulfill this condition, as well as their spouses and children below 18, automatically receive Turkish passports.

The purchase of housing by foreigners is expected to ease Turkey's widening current account deficit and support the real estate sector, as well as construction companies.

Turkey's budget deficit tripled in April compared with the previous year and the fiscal gap reached 50.2 billion liras (\$3.23 billion). The country also posted a current account deficit of \$5.5 billion.

Foreign nationals who join the private pension system with at least \$500,000 or foreign equivalent and stay within the system for three years are also entitled to obtain Turkish citizenship.

Foreign businessmen who provide employment opportunities for 50 people in Turkey or those depositing \$500,000 to Turkish banks without withdrawing it for three years can also get Turkish citizenship, according to the amended law.

The legislative change will apply from June 13.

For the moment, Russians, Ukrainians and Gulf nationals are the top clients in the Turkish real estate sector, and are buying up property in southern resort towns and Istanbul.

Russians also established a record number of companies – 64 – in March, quadrupling the figure from the previous month.

The number of houses sold in Turkey to foreign buyers soared 58 percent annually, according to official data. Russians topped the foreign buyers' list with 1,152 houses. They were followed by Iranians and Iraqis, who bought 905 and 714 houses, respectively.

To facilitate sales, Turkish banks also began opening ruble-based accounts.

From January to April, residential property sales to foreigners increased by 49 percent, reaching 20,791 units.

"As the amount of investments required for citizenship was reduced from \$1 million to \$250,000 over the last four years, there is an increased demand for acquiring Turkish citizenship. But increasing it to \$400,000 will also improve the foreign investors' profile in Turkey," said Selen Kolan-Imir, an attorney specializing in citizenship law.

However, experts note that the growing interest in the Turkish real estate market by foreigners risks increasing housing prices to uncontrollable levels.

The depreciation in the Turkish lira has also made Turkey's real estate market more appealing to foreign investors.

"Rather than asking people to invest in real estate, there is a need to encourage foreigners to generate employment opportunities or open innovative startups to result in long-term advantages for the Turkish economy," Kolan-Imir told Arab News.

With the increased number of foreign children as a result of Turkish citizenship investments, the country should also provide new educational and social facilities, she added.

"Recently there is a surge of private international schools that are opened for foreign children who are living in Turkey with their families or for those who become a new Turkish citizen."

Bulut Bagci, president of the World Tourism Forum Institute, said that offering citizenship through investment is common in Europe, and that Turkey is choosing to follow a similar path.

"Compared to the similar cases in Europe, especially in the UK, this amount is still low. However, it will support tourism in Turkey and increase tourism revenues, because people who buy a house will visit the country frequently and go to the touristic destinations," he told Arab News.

However, last month, some opposition lawmakers submitted a motion to parliament for a temporary ban on property sales to foreigners.

Bagci added that foreign nationals who receive Turkish citizenship should be encouraged to take part in the tourism sector by buying hotels and other facilities.

"Following prolonged conflicts in its neighborhood, Turkey needs tourism revenues to meet its foreign exchange needs. My only concern is that the purchase of houses should not be made open to abuse as it needs to be monitored closely with a strict regulation. I have heard so many cases where people sell their houses after getting citizenship to take benefits from this sector," he said.

After the government recently revealed a new package to provide cheaper housing loans, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said that property prices in Turkey should be tightly monitored.



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[Tunisia heads for 'new republic' in dialogue without political parties](#)

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Fri, 2022-05-20 23:20

TUNIS: Tunisia's President Kais Saied on Friday appointed a loyalist law professor to head a committee charged with writing a constitution for a "new republic", through a national dialogue that excludes political parties.

On July 25 last year, Saied sacked the government and suspended parliament, sidelining the political parties that have dominated Tunisian politics since

the 2011 revolution that sparked the Arab Spring uprisings. He has since vowed to scrap the country's 2014 constitution and draft a replacement to be put to referendum in July, but has repeatedly inveighed against political parties despite calls for an inclusive dialogue. On Friday the official gazette announced that law professor Sadeq Belaid would head the newly created "National Consultative Commission for a New Republic", charged with drawing up a draft constitution. Saied has also created three other committees to focus on socio-economic issues, the judiciary and on national dialogue. While major organisations including the powerful UGTT trade union confederation are supposed to be involved, no political party is set to take part. Saied announced in early May the establishment of a long-awaited "national dialogue" – at the same time attacking the political parties he accuses of having plundered the country. Since his July power grab, many Tunisians have supported his moves against a political class seen as corrupt, but opponents have labelled his moves a coup and he has faced calls from home and abroad for a dialogue involving all of the country's major actors.



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Thousands in Tunisia protest against president, demand democratic

Sandstorms pose serious risk to human health: WMO

Author:

Fri, 2022-05-20 23:14

PARIS: Sandstorms have engulfed the Middle East in recent days, in a phenomenon experts warn could proliferate because of climate change, putting human health at grave risk.

At least 4,000 people went to hospitals on Monday for respiratory issues in Iraq where eight sandstorms have blanketed the country since mid-April. That was on top of the more than 5,000 treated in Iraqi hospitals for similar respiratory ailments earlier this month.

The phenomenon has also smothered Iran, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the UAE with more feared in the coming days.

Strong winds lift large amounts of sand and dust into the atmosphere, that can then travel hundreds, even thousands, of kilometers.

Sandstorms have affected a total of 150 countries and regions, adversely impacting on the environment, health and the economy, the World Meteorological Organization said.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The UN agency WMO has warned of the 'serious risks' posed by airborne dust.
- The fine dust particles can cause health problems such as asthma and cardiovascular ailments.
- They also spread bacteria and viruses as well as pesticides and other toxins.

"It's a phenomenon that is both local and global, with a stronger intensity in areas of origin," said Carlos Perez Garcia-Pando, a sand and dust storm expert at the Barcelona Supercomputing Center and the Catalan Institution for Research and Advanced Studies.

The storms originate in dry or semi-dry regions of North Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, Central Asia and China.

Other less affected areas include Australia, the Americas and South Africa. The UN agency WMO has warned of the "serious risks" posed by airborne dust. The fine dust particles can cause health problems such as asthma and cardiovascular ailments, and also spread bacteria and viruses as well as pesticides and other toxins.

"Dust particle size is a key determinant of potential hazard to human health," the WMO said.

Small particles that can be smaller than 10 micrometers can often become trapped in the nose, mouth and upper respiratory tract, and as a result it is associated with respiratory disorders such as asthma and pneumonia.

The most at-risk are the oldest and youngest as well as those struggling with respiratory and cardiac problems.

And the most affected are residents in countries regularly battered by sandstorms, unlike in Europe where dust coming from the Sahara is rare, like the incident in March.

Depending on the weather and climate conditions, sand dust can remain in the atmosphere for several days and travel great distances, at times picking up bacteria, pollen, fungi and viruses.

"However, the seriousness is less than with ultrafine particles, for example from road traffic, which can penetrate the brain or the blood system," says Thomas Bourdrel, a radiologist, researcher at the University of Strasbourg and a member of Air Health Climate collective.

Even if the sand particles are less toxic than particles produced by combustion, their "extreme density during storms causes a fairly significant increase in cardio-respiratory mortality, especially among the most vulnerable," he said.

With "a concentration of thousands of cubic micrometers in the air, it's almost unbreathable," said Garcia-Pando.

The sandstorms' frequency and intensity could worsen because of climate change, say some scientists.

But the complex phenomenon is "full of uncertainties" and is affected by a cocktail of factors like heat, wind and agricultural practices, Garcia-Pando told AFP.

"In some areas, climate change could reduce the winds that cause storms, but extreme events could persist, even rise," he said.

With global temperatures rising, it is very likely that more and more parts of the Earth will become drier.

"This year, a significant temperature anomaly was observed in East Africa, in the Middle East, in East Asia, and this drought affects plants, a factor that can increase sandstorms," the Spanish researcher said.



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World's tallest building engulfed as Mideast sandstorms hit UAE
Sandstorms disrupt flights to and from Kuwait

[Iran holds pro-government rallies after price protests turn political](#)

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Fri, 2022-05-20 22:40

DUBAI: Thousands of supporters of Iran's clerical establishment, including 50,000 Revolutionary Guards and Basij militia members, rallied on Friday, state media reported, after protests against rising food prices turned political.

"The enemies mistakenly think the Iranian people will respond to ...the rumors that they spread and lies they tell," Guards commander Hossein Salami said in televised remarks at the massive rally outside the capital Tehran, which marked a major victory in Iran's war with Iraq in the 1980s.

Iranian authorities say the unrest over rising food prices has been fomented by foreign enemies. On Friday, state television showed pro-government marchers chanting "Death to America" and "Death to Israel" in southwestern cities of Yasuj and Shahr-e Kord, scenes of recent protests.

Iranians took to the streets last week after a cut in food subsidies caused prices to soar by as much as 300 percent for some flour-based staples. The protests quickly turned political, with crowds calling for an end to the Islamic Republic, echoing unrest in 2019 which began over fuel prices hike. The government acknowledged the protests but described them as small gatherings. State media reported last week the arrests of "dozens of rioters and provocateurs."

Authorities have also arrested a number of labor union and rights activists, accusing them of contacts with foreigners, a leading rights group said on Friday.

"The arrests of prominent members of civil society in Iran on baseless accusations of malicious foreign interference is another desperate attempt to silence support for growing popular social movements in the country," said Tara Sepehri Far, senior Iran researcher at Human Rights Watch, in a statement.

Iran's state television on Tuesday showed what it described as details of the arrest of two French citizens earlier this month, saying they were spies who had sought to stir up unrest.

France has condemned their detention as baseless and demanded their immediate release, in an incident likely to complicate ties between the countries as wider talks stall on reviving a nuclear deal.

In recent months, teachers across Iran have staged protests demanding better wages and working conditions. Dozens have been arrested.

Social media users inside Iran say Internet services have been disrupted since last week, seen as an apparent effort by authorities to stop use of social media to organize rallies and disseminate videos. Iranian officials denied any disruption to Internet access.



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Turkey, Iran race to fill Russian 'void' in Syria