

# Iran and Iraq commit to boosting border cooperation and trade

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DUBAI: Iran and Iraq on Saturday pledged to improve border cooperation and boost trade between the two neighbours that has been hit hard by the coronavirus pandemic.

"We remain committed to increasing political, economic and cultural cooperation between the two countries," President Hassan Rouhani told visiting Iraqi Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein, according to a government website.

Hussein called for implementing bilateral accords in areas including border cooperation, transportation and trade between the two countries, the website said.

The pandemic has led to border closures and disruptions to trade and visits by millions of pilgrims and tourists.

Iran, which shares a long border with Iraq, has been the epicentre of the virus in the Middle East but the spread has also accelerated in Iraq.

Iran is one of Iraq's biggest trading partners. Both countries' economies are in crisis. Iran continues to suffer from US sanctions and Iraq's economy has been battered by years of wars, sanctions and an extremist insurgency.

Tehran also used to meeting to denounce the US military presence in the region.

"We consider the presence of American forces in the region, whether in Iraq, Afghanistan or the southern states of the Persian Gulf, to the detriment of security and stability in the region," Rouhani said.



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## [Palestine's Mahmoud Abbas asks UN for international peace conference next year](#)

Author:

AFP

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Fri, 2020-09-25 14:11

UNITED NATIONS, New York: Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has called for an international conference early next year to “launch a genuine peace process” while criticizing the recent decision of two Arab countries to normalize relations with Israel.

In an address before the UN General Assembly on Friday, Abbas seemed to acknowledge the growing international weariness with the decades-old conflict, saying “I wonder what more I can say after all I’ve said on

countless occasions.”

The Palestinians have rejected President Donald Trump’s proposal to end the conflict that overwhelmingly favors Israel, and have officially cut off contacts with both the US and Israel. Instead, they have called for a multilateral peace process based on UN resolutions and past agreements. They have also rejected the decision of the UAE and Bahrain to normalize ties with Israel, viewing it as a betrayal of the longstanding Arab consensus that recognition of Israel should only come in exchange for territorial concessions.

In his speech, Abbas said the agreements, signed at the White House earlier this month, are a “violation” of the “principles of a just and lasting solution under international law.”

Abbas spoke before a large plaque reading “State of Palestine.” The Palestinians upgraded their status to “observer state” at the UN in 2012. Abbas closed by saying “there can be no peace, no security, no stability, no coexistence in our region without an end to the occupation.”

“We will not bow down. We will not surrender. We will not compromise. And we shall triumph,” he said.



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Abbas forum decries ‘dagger in the back of Palestinians’ Middle East peace talks remain priority, Macron says after call with Abbas

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## At least 13 people drown in migrant shipwreck off Libya

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Fri, 2020-09-25 10:26

CAIRO: Over a dozen migrants trying to reach Europe drowned in the Mediterranean Sea when their small dinghy capsized off the coast of Libya, the United Nations reported Friday, the latest shipwreck to underscore the deadly risks facing those who flee the war-afflicted North African country. Libyan fishermen spotted the sinking boat late Thursday, said the International Organization for Migration, and managed to pull 22 people from the water, including those from Egypt, Bangladesh, Syria, Somalia and Ghana. But at least 13 of the other passengers were missing and presumed drowned. Three dead bodies were found floating in the water, including one Syrian man and woman. The boat had set off from the town of Zliten, east of the Libyan capital of Tripoli, late on Wednesday.

The Libyan Coast Guard said that it had ordered the rescue, and that search teams were scouring the area for more victims.

"So many boats are leaving these days, but autumn is a very difficult season," said Commodore Masoud Abdal Samad. "When it gets windy, it's deadly. It changes in an instant."

Following the 2011 uprising that ousted and killed longtime dictator Muammar Qaddafi, Libya has emerged as the dominant transit point for migrants hoping to get to Europe from Africa and the Middle East. Smugglers often pack desperate families into ill-equipped rubber boats that stall and founder along the perilous Central Mediterranean route. At least 20,000 people have died in those waters since 2014, according to the UN

Those who survived Friday's disaster were taken to the Tripoli port, where they received medical care for their burns, a common consequence of leaked engine fuel mixing with saltwater, said Safa Msehli, an IOM spokeswoman. Libyan authorities shepherded the survivors to the Zliten detention center, run by the Tripoli-based government's Interior Ministry. Migrants rescued at sea and returned to Libya routinely land in detention centers notorious for torture, extortion and abuse. Amnesty International revealed in a report Thursday that thousands of migrants have been forcibly disappeared from unofficial militia-run detention centers.

The shipwreck, the second to be recorded by the UN in as many weeks, "signals the need now more than ever for state-led search and rescue capacity to be redeployed and the need to support NGO vessels operating in a vacuum," said Msehli.

Since 2017, European countries, particularly Italy, have delegated most search-and-rescue responsibility to the Libyan Coast Guard, which intercepts migrant boats before they can reach European waters. Activists have lamented



that European authorities are increasingly blocking the work of nongovernmental rescue organizations that patrol the Mediterranean and seek to disembark at European ports.



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Amnesty: Migrants face 'vicious cycle of cruelty' in Libya

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## [Turkey to arrest 82 including mayor over pro-Kurdish protests](#)

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Fri, 2020-09-25 06:44

ANKARA: Turkish authorities on Friday issued arrest warrants for 82 people, including a mayor, over pro-Kurdish protests six years ago, officials and

local media said.

The warrants relate to October 2014 protests in Turkey sparked by the seizure by Daesh militants of the mainly Kurdish Syrian town of Kobane.

Police were on the hunt for the 82 suspects in the Turkish capital and six other provinces, the Ankara chief public prosecutor's office said in a statement.

The prosecutor's office did not specify what offences the 82 are alleged to have committed.

But it said crimes committed during the protests included murder, attempted murder, theft, damaging property, looting, burning the Turkish flag and injuring 326 security officials and 435 citizens.

There was also a warrant for the mayor of the eastern city of Kars, Ayhan Bilgen, Hurriyet daily reported.

Bilgen won the city in 2019 local elections representing the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), which is Turkey's second-largest opposition group in the parliament.

Of a total of 65 HDP mayors returned in those elections, 47 have now been replaced by unelected officials, with some detained on terror charges, the party said last month.

The Turkish government accuses the HDP of being a political front for the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party – which has waged an insurgency against the state since 1984 – but the party denies this.

Former HDP co-leaders, Figen Yuksekdag and Selahattin Demirtas, were named in the investigation but both have been in jail since 2016 pending multiple trials.

The government accused the HDP of urging people to take part in the protests across Turkey that left 37 dead.

But the HDP blames Turkish police for the violence.



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## [Yemen's FM blames Houthis for looming Safer oil tanker disaster](#)

Fri, 2020-09-25 09:15

DUBAI: Yemen's Foreign Minister Mohammed Al-Hadhrami blamed the Houthi militia for the Safer oil tanker's looming disaster as the militia continued to block the United Nation's help to access the damage.

Al-Hadhrami stressed the importance of pressuring the Houthis to allow technicians from the international organization to access the tanker during a meeting with senior British diplomats on Thursday, state news agency Saba New reported.

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia warned the UN Security Council that an "oil spot" has been sighted in a shipping lane 50 km west of abandoned and decaying Safer oil tanker off the coast of Yemen. Experts fear it could spill 1.1 million barrels of crude into the Red Sea.

The tanker has been moored near Ras Issa oil terminal for more than five years. The UN previously warned that it could leak four times as much oil as was spilled during the 1989 Exxon Valdez disaster off the coast of Alaska. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and the Security Council have repeatedly called on Houthi insurgents in Yemen to grant access the tanker for a technical assessment and emergency repairs.

UN humanitarian chief Mark Lowcock said last week that a new UN proposal to assess and carry out initial repairs on the Safer oil tanker was being discussed with the Houthis. "We hope the new proposal will be quickly approved so the work can start," he said.

Meanwhile President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi on Thursday urged Houthis to stop impeding the flow of urgently needed humanitarian aid following a warning from the UN humanitarian chief last week that "the specter of famine" has returned to the conflict-torn country.

His plea came in a pre-recorded speech to the UN General Assembly's ministerial meeting being held virtually because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We are trying to save our country and establish a just and lasting peace," Hadi said, blaming Iran for meddling in his nation.

"The objective is to stop the bloodletting in Yemen," he said.

Lowcock told the UN Security Council last week that famine in Yemen, the Arab world's poorest country, was averted two years ago because donors swiftly met 90 percent of the UN's funding requirements. But the UN's latest figures show that the current \$3.4 billion appeal is less than 38 percent funded.



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