

# Lebanon crippled by electricity, water outages

Tue, 2022-05-24 19:54

BEIRUT: Lebanon has been plunged into darkness after oil stocks in the country's last functional power plant in Deir Ammar ran out on Tuesday morning.

Lebanon exhausted its oil stock, which it imports from Iraq, during the parliamentary elections to ensure power was maintained during the electoral process. The country has to wait for an oil tanker to arrive at the end of the week, then wait some more until the oil is tested before it can be unloaded.

Elsewhere, the Beirut and Mount Lebanon Water Establishment has announced that it has been "reluctantly forced" to subject the locations to "severe and harsh" water rationing.

The shortage of diesel, the steady rise in prices and the extensive power cuts are hindering pumping stations from providing water supply, the authorities said, warning of further deterioration. The water establishment added that should any pumping station go out of service, securing the needed funds to repair it would be close to impossible.

The Lebanese have for many years provided alternatives to the basic state services, including a mass market for power generators. However, hundreds of thousands can no longer afford any of these alternatives.

On Tuesday, the local currency hit a new record low, trading at 34,100 Lebanese pounds to the dollar on the black market.

Pharmacy owners staged a sit-in in front of the Ministry of Health on Tuesday to demand "implementing the laws of delivering medicines to pharmacies and fighting the phenomenon of smuggling drugs outside Lebanon, specifically to Syria."

Dr. Joe Salloum, head of the Pharmacists' Syndicate, said patients are being subjected to several types of fraud. "Some cancer patients bought medicine that turned out to be counterfeit, while the state and the ministry fails to draw up a solid plan to provide necessary, quality medication."

He added: "Leaving room for smuggled and counterfeit medicine amid chaos and fraud threatens the lives of patients, if they can even afford to buy any medicine."

Salloum said the whole mess could have been avoided if the medication card had been approved two years ago. "(It looks) as if there was a plan to destroy the entire sector, including pharmacies, importing companies, and Lebanon's medical identity."

Amid the chaos, Prime Minister Najib Mikati's government has entered into caretaker mode after failing to approve an electricity plan.

The picture in the newly elected parliament remains blurred as MPs struggle to find ground with the new reformist MP surge.

Mikati revealed that Energy Minister Walid Fayyad deliberately obstructed the offers submitted by General Electric and Siemens in agreement with international groups to supply Lebanon with electricity at a reasonable price.

Mikati said Fayyad withdrew the file from the Cabinet's agenda 15 minutes before the final session was held on May 21, claiming the offers needed "further reviewing."

Mikati insisted on pursuing the issue and asked Fayyad "to dare to name the person who asked him to withdraw the file from the Cabinet's agenda and why," in an indirect reference to Gebran Bassil, head of the Free Patriotic Movement.

"The government had decided to negotiate with four international companies, namely Ensaldo, Mitsubishi, General Electric and Siemens on the possibility of providing Lebanon with generators needed to produce 24-hour electricity permanently," Mikati said, adding: "General Electric and Siemens, in agreement with international groups, made offers to supply Lebanon with electricity before next summer at a very reasonable price, even about the price of gas for energy production, and we simply needed to draw up the terms of reference following the applicable laws."

A source close to Mikati said: "The cost of preparing the terms of reference was agreed upon with the French side but without any warning. President Michel Aoun's political team decided to withdraw the file from the Cabinet's agenda in refusal to record achievement in securing electricity for a government in which the FPM is not directly present."

Aoun's meeting on Tuesday with Anne Grillo, the French ambassador to Lebanon, focused on the upcoming elections and the Lebanese-French cooperation in all fields. Grillo conveyed French President Emmanuel Macron's continued support for Lebanon and its people.

During the Fifth Saudi-Lebanese Cultural Forum, held on Monday evening at the residence of Walid Bukhari, the Saudi ambassador to Lebanon, he spoke about Mufti Sheikh Hassan Khaled, who was assassinated in an explosion targeting his convoy on May 16, 1989.

"His assassination was a prelude to the assassination of all of Lebanon, which is experiencing difficult circumstances, foremost of which is the targeting of its Arab identity and its relationship with its Arab environment."

Bukhari also mentioned the "martyrdom" of Lebanon and the Arab world regarding the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri.

"We know Sheikh Khaled would be happy with the results of the honorable elections and the downfall of all symbols of treachery, betrayal, death and hate," Bukhari said.

Speaking at the forum, Lebanon's Grand Mufti Sheikh Abdel Latif Derian stressed the comprehensive role that Sheikh Khaled played "so that the political quorum and Beirut remain standing, lest the divisions of the war affect the relations between Muslims and Christians, the sons of one nation."



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## [Turkey hints at Syria operation amid discussions of NATO enlargement](#)

Tue, 2022-05-24 19:04

ANKARA: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan announced on Monday evening an impending military operation into northern Syria to establish a 30 km-deep safe zone along the southern border.

Turkey's operation is expected to focus on areas where the country is targeted the most by cross-border attacks. But Erdogan did not go into further detail.

Turkish forces have launched three major incursions into northern Syria since 2016 and took control of areas along the border against threats from Daesh and the Syrian Kurdish People's Protection Units, or YPG, listed as a terror group by Turkey.

The withdrawal of the Syrian Kurdish forces up to 30 km into Syria was part of the Russia-Turkey deal in Sochi.

The announcement comes at a time in which Turkey is vehemently objecting to the NATO membership bids of Sweden and Finland, citing the two Scandinavian countries' support for the terror groups and their arms embargoes following Turkey's previous Syria operation in 2019.

Although the two countries deny any support given to the terror groups on their soil, Ankara asked Sweden and Finland for the extradition of 33 members of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, and an end to the ongoing military export bans to Turkey.

Turkey considers the YPG as the Syrian offshoot of the PKK.

The timing of the announcement, therefore, stirred debate about whether it would be part of a grand bargain between Turkey and the Western alliance to decrease its support for the Syrian Kurdish militants in exchange for Ankara lessening its pressure on the enlargement goals of the organization.

Noah Ringler, an expert from Georgetown University, thinks the northwestern Syrian city of Tal Rifaat is the most likely target of the operation, while Kobane or Manbij is the next most likely option.

"I believe Erdogan still seeks a broader deal with US President Joe Biden on NATO enlargement and the purchase of American-made F-16s and would not like to confront US forces further east near Al-Malikiyah," he told Arab News.

An operation in Tal Rifaat, situated halfway between Aleppo and the Turkish border, has been on the agenda for years as the YPG seized control in the region. The city houses Kurds who fled Afrin when Turkey carried out an operation there in 2018 to root the YPG out.

Ankara, however, perceives a threat coming from the Tal Rifaat area, which is believed to be used by Kurdish forces to conduct cross-border attacks on Turkey.

There have been several fire exchanges between Turkish forces and Syrian Kurdish militants for a couple of months.

As Tal Rifaat is home to many refugees living in Kilis and Azaz and has limited Russian and Iranian presence, Ringler said that Russia is likely willing to let Turkey attack within certain areas with some pre-conditions, like ensuring the lack of Turkish sanctions on Russian goods and services.

"Russia may also ask Turkey to put pressure on the PYD (Kurdish Democratic Union Party) to return them to the table with Syrian President Bashar Assad, as talks have stalled," he added.

Experts also note that any such operation could take advantage of Russia's preoccupation with the invasion of Ukraine and US commitments to defend Taiwan against China.

According to Ringler, Turkey's drone strikes on the YPG in northeastern Syria have always been satisficing, as elections in Turkey draw near.

"Erdogan considers taking new steps as vital to distract the attention from domestic issues and divide the opposition over Kurdish and Syrian issues," he said.

The details of the operation and the decision to launch it will however be discussed during Turkey's National Security Council meeting on Thursday.

Whether the operation has or will have the green light from Russia and US is still unclear.

"Turkish Armed Forces have the capacity to attack all of the above areas, but for political reasons it is likely the best for Erdogan to do sequential operations, threatening additional action closer to next year's elections and in order to gain concessions from the US, Iran, Russia and the YPG," said Ringler.

He added: "I think Assad's forces will fight back like in February 2020, and the extent of Russian air support will be a key indicator of the extent to which Turkey is coordinating with Russia. Assad's forces are unlikely to give up positions without trying to impose costs on Turkish-backed Syrian armed groups and the Turkish Armed Forces for their presence in Syria."

According to Ringler, US Congressional elections will also play a role in negotiations with the US, as presidential powers do not allow Biden to lift some of the existing sanctions and Congress remains committed to arms sanctions on Turkey related to its S-400 Russian missile defense purchase and Operation Peace Spring into Syria.

Currently hosting about 3.7 million refugees from Syria whose presence in the country has increasingly become a hot topic among several opposition parties pledging their immediate repatriation, Ankara has been discussing their resettlement to briquette houses in safe areas along the border.

The Turkish government is also worried that public anger over the refugees' widespread presence will dominate the upcoming election round and influence electoral preferences.

The latest official figures revealed that 400-500 people are returning each week to the safe zones on the Turkey-Syria border. Since 2016, around half a million Syrians have returned to those zones, which are controlled by Ankara-backed groups.

"The regions they returned to are Jarablus, A'zaz, Marea, Al-Bab, Ras Al-Ayn, and Tal Abyad. These are all safe regions in Syria that we have created," Turkey's Interior Minister Suleyman Soylu recently said.

However, the Syrian government considers the presence of safe zones as a kind of “colonialism” and “ethnic cleansing.” Syria’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs recently urged the international community to stop Ankara from proceeding with its plans for building houses and local infrastructure in safe zones to send 1 million refugees back to their country.

Caroline Rose, a senior analyst at the New Lines Institute, thinks that the recently announced Turkish military operation in northern Syria is certainly a tactic Ankara has employed to test Russia in Syria amid its intervention in Ukraine.

“It is also a message Turkey is wishing to send following its opposition to Swedish and Finnish membership in NATO due to grievances related to the PKK, as well as to take advantage of Russian distraction in Ukraine to alter the status quo in Syria and deepen its footprint in the northeast,” she told Arab News.

Rose, however, does not think the US will offer any public or private green light for this operation, nor will Russia publicly support it.

The Syrian Democratic Forces, in a statement on Tuesday, accused Turkey of “destabilizing the region.”

Navvar Saban, a military analyst at the Omran Center for Strategic Studies in Istanbul, believes there is always an opportunity for Turkey to launch a tactic operation targeting a specific area.

“The most reasonable targets would be Tal Rifaat and Manbij. I don’t expect any operation on the eastern side of Syria. Turkey should concentrate its efforts and forces on controlling the strategic points on the M4 highway in Idlib that became a de facto frontier between Turkish-controlled pockets and Kurdish forces,” he told Arab News.

Erdogan’s announcement also came a day before diplomatic delegations from Sweden and Finland landed in Ankara on Tuesday to discuss their NATO membership bid, where Turkey is expected to present some files on PKK activities during their meeting with the Turkish Presidential Spokesperson Ibrahim Kalin and Deputy Foreign Minister Sedat Onal on Wednesday.



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## [Yemenia to operate direct flights between Houthi-held Sanaa, Cairo](#)

Tue, 2022-05-24 18:35

AL-MUKALLA: Yemen's government on Tuesday praised Egypt for allowing the country's national carrier, Yemenia, to operate direct flights from Houthi-held Sanaa to Cairo as part of the UN-brokered truce.

The agreement facilitated the resumption of flights from Sanaa airport for the first time in six years.

On Monday, Sameh Shoukry, Egypt's foreign minister, said that Egyptian authorities would allow the resumption of flights between Sanaa and Cairo as part of efforts to cement the truce and support peace efforts to end the war

in Yemen.

During a call with UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, Shoukry expressed his hope that the move would consolidate the UN truce in Yemen, alleviate the suffering of the Yemeni people and contribute to efforts to establish stability in Yemen.

Under the UN-brokered truce that came into effect on April 2, Yemenia will operate weekly flights from Sanaa airport to Amman and Cairo as warring factions commit to stopping hostilities across the country. The agreement also allows fuel ships to enter Hodeidah seaport.

The first commercial flight since 2016 left Sanaa airport on May 16 – a move that enhanced hopes of strengthening the truce and finding a peace deal to end the war.

The Egyptian decision sparked jubilation among Yemenis, especially among medical patients who seek treatment in Egypt. It was also met with praise from foreign envoys and international mediators.

Baligh Al-Mekhlafi, the information counselor at the Yemeni embassy in Cairo, told Arab News that thousands of Yemenis, mainly patients, will benefit from the resumption of flights, since Egypt is a top destination for Yemenis.

“Opening the airport will contribute to alleviating human suffering and the cost of travel for citizens, especially that 80 percent of the passengers come to Egypt for medical treatment,” Al-Mekhlafi said, announcing the departure of the first flight from Sanaa to Cairo next week.

During a meeting with the Egyptian ambassador in Washington DC, the US Yemen envoy, Tim Lenderking, thanked Egypt for supporting peace in Yemen and the UN-brokered truce.

“The US appreciates Egypt’s strong support for Yemen peace efforts, including the ongoing truce,” Lenderking tweeted.

The Chinese Embassy in Yemen also tweeted praise for Egypt. “We appreciate the Egyptian efforts to operate direct flights from Sanaa to Cairo, hoping that the suffering of the Yemeni people will be alleviated,” it said.

Separately, in the southern port city of Aden, Rashad Al-Alimi, chief of the Presidential Leadership Council, received foreign delegations that visited the interim capital of Aden to express support for the government and listen to plans for reforming state bodies, unifying military and security units, and reviving the economy.

Official media reported on Monday that Al-Alimi met Peter-Derrek Hof, the Dutch ambassador to Yemen, and Birgitta Tazelaar, deputy director general for International Cooperation at the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

“We talked about the reforms the Presidential Leadership Council is working on, including the unification of the military and security institutions under the Riyadh Agreement, and the economic, service and judicial files,” Al-Alimi

said, according to SABA news agency.

The Yemeni leader also met with Richard Oppenheim, the UK ambassador to Yemen. Al-Alimi urged the international community and the UK to mount pressure on the Houthis to respect the truce and open roads in Taiz.

The UK ambassador tweeted from Aden that he had “fruitful” meetings with Al-Alimi and Prime Minister Maeen Abdul Malik Saeed. “I urge all parties to continue with the constructive approach taken. Yemen needs peace,” he said.



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Second flight lands at Sanaa airport as Yemen parties pressured to extend truce  
First commercial flight in six years leaves Sanaa for Amman

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## [UAE announces first case of monkeypox](#)

Tue, 2022-05-24 18:11

DUBAI: The UAE's Ministry of Health and Prevention announced the country's

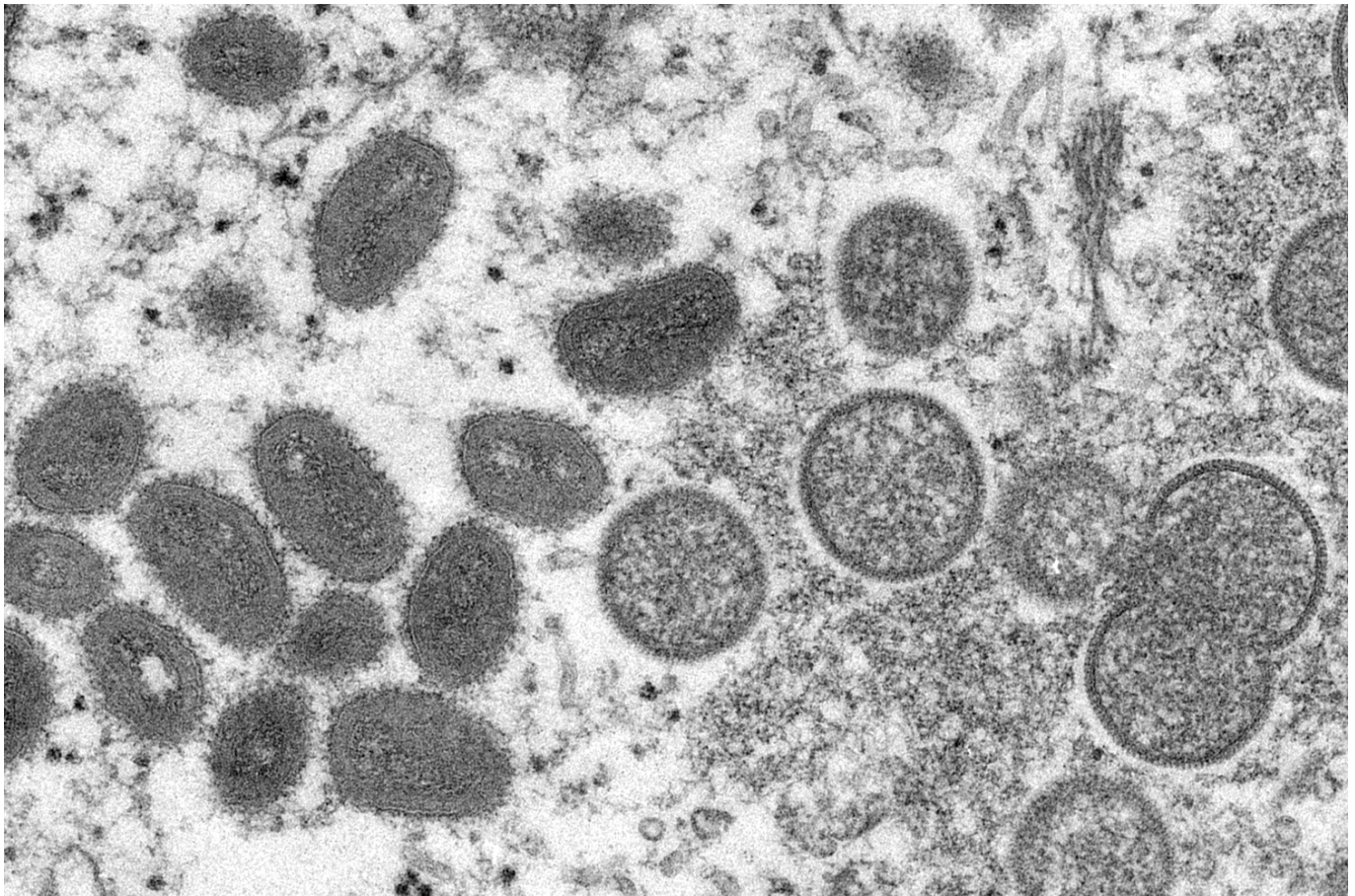
first case of monkeypox on Tuesday.

The case was detected in a 29-year-old woman who arrived from West Africa and is receiving the necessary medical care, Emirates News Agency reported.

The ministry assured the public that health authorities are taking all necessary measures including investigation, the examination of contacts, and monitoring their health.

It added that it is cooperating with other health authorities in implementing an epidemiological surveillance system to ensure sustainable efficiency, protection from communicable diseases, and rapid detection of all diseases and viruses, including monkeypox, in the UAE.

The ministry called on members of the public to obtain information from official sources in the UAE, and to refrain from spreading rumours and false information, highlighting the importance of staying updated on developments and guidelines issued by UAE health authorities.



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Germany orders 40,000 vaccine doses as precaution against monkeypox spread  
No monkeypox cases detected in Saudi Arabia, health ministry says

## Yemeni army reports 4,276 Houthi truce violations

Mon, 2022-05-23 22:41

AL-MUKALLA: Yemen's army has said that the Iran-backed Houthis have violated a UN-brokered truce more than 4,276 times since day one by mobilizing fighters and launching drone and missile attacks on government troops, even as the militia indicated its acceptance of its renewal.

The truce, which is the longest since the war began, came into effect on April 2 and has led to reduced violence and deaths across the country, the UN said.

But the Yemeni army said the Houthis continued to gather heavy artillery, military vehicles, and fighters outside the strategic city of Marib, had attacked government troops in Marib, Taiz, Saada, and Hajjah, and created new military outposts.



Members of Yemen's government forces search for explosive devices in a house in the village of Hays in the western province of Hodeida on Monday. (AFP)

"The Houthis are challenging the truce and international resolutions. They have not adhered to the truce," Maj. Gen. Abdu Abdullah Majili, an army spokesperson, told Arab News on Monday.

## FASTFACT

**The UN's Yemen envoy Hans Grundberg is pushing the government and militia to extend the truce and put into place its unfulfilled components, including opening roads in Taiz and other provinces.**

The Houthi violations come as the UN's Yemen envoy Hans Grundberg pushes the government and militia to extend the truce and put into place its unfulfilled components, including opening roads in Taiz and other provinces.

On Sunday, the head of the Houthi Supreme Political Council, Mahdi Al-Mashat, said the movement would accept an extension of the truce with its opponents, boosting hopes of stopping hostilities across the country for another two or three months.

"We affirm that we are not against extending the truce, but what is not possible is the acceptance of any truce in which the suffering of our people continues," the Houthi leader said.

In Aden, the head of Yemen's Presidential Leadership Council, Rashad Al-Alimi, also expressed his support on Saturday for current efforts by international mediators to extend the truce.

At the same time, activists and rights groups intensified their campaigns on the ground and on social media to highlight the grave consequences of the Houthi siege on thousands of Taiz residents.

The Abductees Mothers' Association, an umbrella group for relatives of those abducted in Yemen, said Sunday that checkpoints manned by the Houthis outside Taiz had seized 417 people seeking to enter or leave the city since the beginning of the war.

The Houthis have laid a siege on Yemen's third-largest city since early 2015 after failing to seize control of it due to strong resistance from troops and local fighters.

The Houthis barred people from driving through the main roads, deployed snipers, and planted landmines, forcing people into using dangerous and unpaved roads.

"Civilians in #Taiz are forced to use alternative long, narrow, winding, and unsafe routes, which caused a lot of accidents that killed and injured hundreds of victims," tweeted the American Center for Justice, a rights group established by Yemeni activists. It added that Houthi snipers indiscriminately gunned down civilians while they carried out their everyday activities.

"Most of the children sniped by Houthi snipers were targeted while fetching water, grazing the sheep, playing near their homes, or returning from schools," the organization said.



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Chief of Yemen's Presidential Council backs extending UN-brokered truce  
Pressure mounts on Houthis to lift Taiz siege