

Yemen's govt proposes passport office in Sanaa

Author:

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AL-MUKALLA: The internationally recognized government of Yemen on Wednesday proposed to open official passport offices in Houthi-controlled Sanaa and other areas so that citizens could get access to travel documents, a move it said could end the deadlock over commercial flights from territory controlled by the militant group.

The first commercial flight scheduled to take off from Sanaa airport to Amman on Sunday was indefinitely postponed after the Iran-backed Houthis added dozens of passengers with unauthorized passports.

The government accused the Houthis of attempting to provide fake passports to military experts and fighters from Lebanon and Iran, so that they could leave the country. The Houthis had refused to allow 104 passengers on the aircraft to leave Sanaa, and insisted on including 60 people with documents issued in their territories.

To end the impasse, Muammar Al-Eryani, Yemen's minister of information, culture and tourism, proposed that his government opens a new passport office at Sanaa airport, in coordination with the office of the UN's Yemen envoy.

If the Houthis agree to this offer, the office could be fully operational in 10 days, the Yemeni minister said. The government would also provide special booths in areas under its control for those from Houthi territory seeking travel documents.

Al-Eryani urged the Houthis to allow passengers with official documents to fly from Sanaa airport to Amman, promising to help those with Houthi-issued passports to get new ones issued by the government.

The Houthis have rejected the offer and accused their opponents of violating Yemeni law and the UN-brokered deal.

Hussein Al-Ezzi, a Houthi official, said that the country's laws allow citizens "the right to obtain a travel document from any province" in Yemen, including areas under their control.

But government officials say that issuing passports is a function of a legitimate administration.

The postponement of the first commercial flight has triggered outrage among thousands of Yemeni people seeking medical help, and prompted the UN's Yemen envoy, Hans Grundberg, to set up a meeting between the parties so that a solution could be found.

Under the two-month-long UN-brokered truce that took effect on April 2,

Yemen's national carrier, Yemenia, would fly twice weekly from Sanaa airport to Amman and Cairo; while at least 18 ships carrying fuel would be allowed to enter Hodeidah seaport. The Houthis and the Yemeni army had agreed to stop fighting on all fronts and open roads in provinces, including lifting the Houthi siege of Taiz.

However, the Houthis have repeatedly violated the ceasefire agreement by continuing to mobilize forces and attacking Marib city, while also directing some of its supporters to conduct raids in Taiz.

On Wednesday, a government committee formed by the Presidential Leadership Council to handle the Houthi's seven-year siege of Taiz, called on the UN envoy to order the Houthis to open main roads that link the densely populated city with Sanaa, Hodeidah and Aden, and to hand over maps that show the location of landmines.

"As a committee approved by the legitimate government, we demand that you order the other party (Houthi militia) that besiege Taiz province to quickly open all main roads leading to Taiz city and link it with other provinces," the committee said in a letter to the envoy's office.

Separately, local media reports said that at least four people were killed when torrential rain and floods hit parts of Yemen over the past 48 hours. Khaled Al-Shajani, the deputy head of Marib's office assisting internally displaced people, said that at least 20 families were sleeping rough after the floods washed away their tents.

The heavy rain also partially ruined tents and spoiled the food of about 40 other families, the Yemeni official said. Yemen's National Meteorological Center on Wednesday said that more heavy rain and thunderstorms were expected, and warned people from crossing flooded areas and driving in low-visibility conditions.



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Houthis gather more forces outside Yemen's Marib city Houthis gather more forces outside Yemen's Marib city

[Jordan's restoration efforts push back on degrading land](#)

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By OMAR AKOUR and WANJOHI KABUKURU | AP

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SABHA, Jordan: Efforts to restore damaged but once fertile land in Jordan's desert are sprouting hope for one of the world's most water-scarce nations, as a land assessment report Wednesday warned of the growing scale of global degradation.

Local organizations believe projects that reintroduce native plants and implement smart water harvesting systems will cushion the impacts of climate

change and desertification, which are only set to worsen, according to the United Nations report.

The UN desertification agency says 40 percent of land globally is currently degraded, blaming unsustainable land and water management, poor agricultural practices, mining, urbanization and infrastructure development for the land's deterioration.

Mira Haddad, from the International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas said several other factors, including "overexploitation of vegetation cover, overgrazing, and...new land practices" as well as climate change are also contributing to land degradation in Jordan.

But environmentalists are already pursuing options to ward off further damage. One of the efforts, run by the Watershed and Development Initiative, is introducing four native plants to 10,000 acres (41 square kilometers) of desert in the Sabha reserve, roughly 56 miles (90 kilometers) east of the Jordanian capital Amman.

"We're working on the water, we're working on the green cover and we're working also with the habitats of the creatures, from insects to animals and all living parts of that ecosystem," Deyala Tarawneh, a WADI founding member, said. "The success rate of these plants is 85 percent, which is considered a very high percentage, and they only need to be watered once, which is also reducing the amount of water needed for the irrigation of the green areas." But despite the success of WADI's planting initiative, land restoration in Jordan is still facing several challenges: the number of land unit areas available for restoration is lacking, and the willingness of local communities to leave the land for at least one or two rainy seasons without grazing is also hindering efforts, said ICARDA's Haddad.

Jordan is one of several countries already grappling with the effects of degradation, with more than 2.3 billion people currently living in water-stressed countries, according to the UN report. It warned that more food supply disruptions, forced migration and greater pressure on species survival are also expected as climate change intensifies and poor land management practices continue. By 2030, it warns that 700 million people could be displaced by drought.

"The situation we have right now is unhealthy and certainly not acceptable," Ibrahim Thiaw, the executive secretary of the UN desertification agency, told the Associated Press. "The more you degrade land the more you emit carbon and the more you contribute to climate change."

The report calls for financial support to bolster conservation and restoration in developing countries. It says the expansion of protected areas and conservation hotspots, better water management, smart agriculture, and the rewilding of biodiversity can be boosted by appropriate funding.

If these kinds of measures are implemented on a wider scale, the UN agency's restoration scenario predicts reduced biodiversity loss and improved soil health, with the benefits particularly felt in North and Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America.

But it also notes that inaction would lead to 16 million square kilometers (6 million square miles) – nearly the size of the entire South American continent – of land degradation by 2050.

The report also recommends scaling up land rights for Indigenous peoples and local communities, urging farmers to draw on ample lessons about land restoration, crop adaptation and livestock from established customs and

traditional knowledge.

“We welcome new allies to this battle, including economic actors who are increasingly interested in avoiding climate risk, but we must make clear that we will not be used for greenwashing,” José Gregorio Diaz Mirabal, the leader of the Congress of Indigenous Organizations of the Amazon Basin, said in a statement. “Partnering with Indigenous peoples requires embracing transformative change.”

The UN’s Thiaw agreed that support for restoration projects should be ramped up.

“The message from the report is that do not take land degradation as a fatality. It can be addressed, and it is the cheapest solution to the climate crisis and biodiversity loss. It is possible to do it by 2050, which is just one generation,” Thiaw said. “It does not require high tech nor a PhD to undertake. Land restoration is accessible and democratic.”

Several countries, like Jordan, are already addressing their own land issues, from drought preparedness programs in Mexico, the USA and Brazil, to the 11-country Great Green Wall in Africa aimed at restoring 100 million hectares (390,000 square miles) of degraded landscapes along the Sahel.

“Land restoration is a win for the environment, economy, society, and for biodiversity,” said Thiaw. “What we are calling for now is the acceleration of such programs.”



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Twitter bans ads that contradict science on climate change
Iraq 'green belt' neglected in faltering climate fight

[Sudan frees ex-officials in effort to end political impasse](#)

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Wed, 2022-04-27 21:45

CAIRO: Sudanese authorities released two outspoken former government officials from prison, lawyers said Wednesday, part of trust-building measures amid efforts to end the country's political impasse.

Sudan was plunged into turmoil after an October military coup upended its short-lived transition to democracy after three decades of repressive rule by former strongman Omar Al-Bashir. Al-Bashir and his Islamist-backed government were removed in a popular uprising in April 2019.

Khalid Omar, a former minister of Cabinet affairs, was released late Tuesday and Mohammed Al-Faki Suliman, a former member of the ruling Sovereign Council, walked free from a prison in the capital of Khartoum on Wednesday, their defense team said.

The Criminal Court in northern Khartoum rejected prosecutors' request to renew their detention pending investigations into an array of vague charges, including betrayal of the public trust, according to their lawyers.

Both Omar and Suliman had been detained along with dozens of other officials during the Oct. 25 coup and were released a month later as part of a deal between the military and Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok. The premier resigned in January after failing to bridge the gap between the generals and the protest movement.

The two men were rearrested in February amid a crackdown by the generals on anti-coup groups. Dozens of activists were also detained amid relentless protests against the military's takeover.

The crackdown on protesters killed more than 90 people, mostly young men, and injured thousands, according to a Sudanese medical group.

Suliman was also deputy head of a government-run agency tasked with dismantling the legacy of former autocratic President Omar Al-Bashir's regime. The agency is known as The Committee to Dismantle the Regime of June 30, 1989, in reference to the Islamist-backed military coup that brought Al-Bashir to power. It was created after the uprising and for two years worked to purge Al-Bashir's loyalists from government institutions.

The generals, including coup leader Gen. Abdel-Fattah Burhan, have long

criticized the work of the agency. It was dismantled after the coup and the generals appointed another committee to review its decisions. Many of the agency's decision were reversed, measures seen by critics of the military as a way to enable Islamists allied with the generals.

Other members of The Committee to Dismantle the Regime of June 30, 1989, including Wagdi Saleh, Taha Osman and Babiker Faisal were also released Wednesday, their defense team said.

Earlier this month, authorities freed over two dozen activists who were detained in recent weeks over the anti-coup protests.

The military's takeover has plunged the country into turmoil and sent its already fragile economy into free fall, with living conditions rapidly deteriorating.

The UN envoy for Sudan, Volker Perthes, warned in March that Sudan was heading for "an economic and security collapse" unless it addresses the political paralysis. Perthes' comments to the UN Security Council angered the generals and Burhan threatened to expel him.

Perthes is now leading joint efforts with the African Union and the eight-nation east African regional group called the Intergovernmental Authority in Development to facilitate Sudanese-led political talks. Perthes and the two organizations' envoys held a joint news conference Wednesday in Khartoum on their efforts.

Ismael Wais, IGAD special envoy to Sudan, welcomed the releases as a "very positive development." He urged authorities to free all political prisoners and activists and lift the state of emergency as a necessary condition to help facilitate reaching an agreement on a way out of the crisis.

Mohamed Al Hacem Ould Lebatt, the AU's envoy for Sudan, said the group will launch a political dialogue after the Islamic holiday of Eid Al-Fitr, which marks the end of the holy month of Ramadan early in May.

He said the talks will include the military and other political parties and groups except Al-Bashir's now dissolved Congress Party, with the aim of agreeing on how the country will be ruled during the rest of transitional period and holding elections.

"The situation in this country is highly sensitive if it is not extremely dangerous," Lebatt said, adding that the talks eventually aim at "achieving the aspiration of the Sudanese people expressed in their revolution."

There was no immediate comment from the two main protest groups, the Sudanese Professionals Association and the Resistance Committees, which have spearheaded the uprising against Al-Bashir and the ongoing anti-coup protests. They have long demanded the removal of the military from power and the establishment of a fully civilian government.

The generals, however, have said they will only hand over power to an elected administration. They say elections will take place in July 2023, as planned in a constitutional document governing the transitional period.



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Clashes in Sudan's West Darfur killed over 210: governor
Images of Sudan's former strongman Omar Bashir in hospital draw anger

[Iran seeks to expand its military cooperation with China](#)

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TEHRAN: Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi expressed Wednesday his government's desire for closer cooperation with China in remarks made during a visit by the Chinese defense minister, state media reported.

According to the report, Raisi told China's Minister of National Defense Wei

Fenghe that Tehran sees its ties with Beijing as strategic. Closer cooperation would serve to confront what the Iranian president described as US unilateralism as talks to revive Tehran's nuclear deal with world powers have stalled.

"Confronting unilateralism and creating stability and order is possible through cooperation of independent and like-minded powers," Raisi was quoted as saying.

Wei in turn said improving ties between Iran and China would provide security, "particularly in the current critical and tense situation."

Wei also met with his Iranian counterpart, Gen. Mohammad Reza Ashtinai, and reportedly invited him to visit China, as well as with other Iranian military officials.

The official IRNA news agency quoted Ashtiani as assailing US military presence in the Middle East and elsewhere, claiming that "wherever the US has had military presence, it has created waves of insecurity, instability, rifts, pessimism, war, destruction and displacement."

Wei said his visit was aimed at "improving the strategic defense cooperation" between Iran and China – cooperation that he said would have a "remarkable" impact in defusing unilateralism and fighting terrorism.

Iran and China have increased their military ties in recent years, with their navies visiting each other's ports and holding joint naval drills in the Indian Ocean.

In 2021, Iran and China signed a 25-year strategic cooperation agreement that covered a variety of economic activities from oil and mining to promoting industrial activity in Iran, as well as transportation and agricultural collaborations.

China is a signatory to the nuclear deal between Iran and world powers, along with Russia, Britain, France and Germany.



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White House worried Iran could develop nuclear weapon in weeks
Iran court sentences 2 students to 16-year prison terms each

[Lebanese PM calls for transparent probe into Tripoli boat capsizing](#)

Author:

Wed, 2022-04-27 00:16

BEIRUT: Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati has called for a swift and transparent probe into a tragic boat accident that left around 10 people dead, including an 18-month-old girl and her mother.

The vessel sank off the coast of Tripoli on Saturday night.

Mikati said that investigations should be conducted quickly and

transparently, away from media pressure, and should include details of what happened even before the boat set off.

Lebanese Army Commander Gen. Joseph Aoun, the director of Lebanese army intelligence Brig. Gen. Tony Kahwagi and the Commander of the Naval Forces Col. Haitham Dhanawy attended an emergency Cabinet session on Tuesday and gave a detailed presentation of what happened with the boat.

The army said the boat had left Lebanon's coast illegally and that the boat's captain had been trying to evade capture when the collision occurred. They said about 60 people had illegally boarded the boat and were headed to Italy and stressed that the army had nothing to do with the boat capsizing.

BACKGROUND

Mikati said that investigations should be conducted quickly and transparently, away from media pressure, and should include details of what happened even before the boat set off.

Several survivors have said that a Lebanese military vessel rammed the boat, leading it to sink. They said a security official aboard threatened to drown them if they did not comply and return to shore. They said the majority of those who were trying to escape did not know how to swim, including women and children.

Lebanese President Michel Aoun said at the beginning of the Cabinet session: "What happened in Tripoli hurt us all," adding that the court must investigate the incident amid conflicting stories, to clarify the truth, and put an end to any contradictory interpretations or explanations.

Ahmed Tamer, director of Tripoli port, said the search to find the missing passengers was ongoing and that a Greek frigate was taking part in the operation.

Dr. Khaldoun Al-Sherif, a political analyst from Tripoli, told Arab News: "The conflicting stories urged Mikati to insist on knowing what happened before the boat's departure. The army says that it spotted the boat before it went out to sea but was unable to catch up and intercepted it when it was at sea. There is a missing link and an inconsistent narrative. The investigation should have started immediately and everything happening now is a waste of time."

In Beirut, people continued to protest against a controversial capital control bill. Adopting a capital control law is one of the reforms requested by the International Monetary Fund to help the crisis-hit country.

Depositors blocked the roads leading to parliament on Tuesday to stop the joint parliamentary committees from continuing their discussions over the bill and successfully prevented MPs from achieving a quorum to hold the session.

George Adwan, head of the Administration and Justice Committee, called for rescheduling the capital control discussions until after the May 15 parliamentary elections. He stressed the need for a complete and comprehensive recovery plan that explained losses and their distribution according to responsibilities and the method for paying off losses.

“Successive governments and corrupt political officials are to blame along with the Banque du Liban, which is an accomplice to the state’s policies,” he added. “So why should we hold citizens and depositors responsible for all this? Any recovery plan must tell people how the economic, financial, and monetary situation will improve and how we will create growth and preserve the banking system after fixing the loopholes, instead of hiding behind what the IMF requested to grant Lebanon \$3 billion over three years.”



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Lebanon mourns as more victims of boat capsizing recovered from seaSix dead in Tripoli boat capsizing, Lebanon minister says