

Yemen war turns nature reserve back into waste dump

Author:

Fri, 2022-03-18 00:07

ADEN: Yemen's Al-Heswa nature reserve was once hailed as a beacon of conservation efforts by the United Nations, but civil war has turned it into a rubbish-strewn wasteland reeking of sewage.

The ticket office has been abandoned at the entrance to the 19-hectare site in Yemen's southern city of Aden, where trees have been cut down and construction waste dumped.

What was long a haven for flamingos and other migratory birds is now swarmed by crows.

"Al-Heswa used to be a recreational outlet for residents and tourists," said Aden resident Ibrahim Suhail. "It has now become a rubbish dump, full of insects and sewage."

Declared a nature reserve in 2006, Al-Heswa was one of 35 initiatives awarded the UN's Equator Prize in 2014 for meeting climate and development challenges through sustainable use of nature.

Wastewater that had previously flown into the sea was treated and redirected to create an artificial wetland on the site of a former garbage dump, attracting the migratory birds.

The initiative was the first of its kind in Yemen, improving livelihoods, creating jobs and generating about \$96,000 in revenue in 2012.

"The communities behind Al-Heswa Wetland Protected Area have successfully transformed a garbage dump into a functioning wetland ecosystem that provides a breeding site to more than 100 migratory bird species," the UN Development Programme said at the time. But since 2014, Yemen, already the region's poorest country, has been embroiled in a conflict between the government, supported by the Coalition to Restore Legitimacy in Yemen, and the Iran-backed Houthi rebels.

The reserve has been left in ruins by the fighting.

The director of Yemen's department of nature reserves, Salem Bseis, said the wastewater treatment tanks had not been serviced since 2015.

Some nearby residents have seized parts for their personal use.

"This led to a disruption in the maintenance and treatment of sewage," Bseis said. While visitors have mostly stayed away, some parts of the reserve have been used as an "informal waste dump," according to the UK-based Conflict and Environment Observatory.

The UN considers war-torn Yemen the world's worst humanitarian disaster, and estimates hundreds of thousands of people have been killed, directly or indirectly, by the war.

Millions have been forced from their homes by fighting, pushing the country to the brink of famine.

"Insecurity from violence, war and conflict poses the most significant threat to the long-term sustainability of this initiative," the UNDP Development Programme said.

"Since the intensification of the conflict in Yemen, visitor levels have dropped to zero."

But the UN believes that all does not have to be lost.

"When peace is restored, the community is committed to working with government officials to enhance the economic and environmental services provided by the protected areas," it added.



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GCC-sponsored talks between Yemeni factions to begin in Riyadh on March 29
Saudi Arabia pumps \$19bn into Yemeni aid program: KSrelief chief

Houthis reject proposed GCC peace talks in Riyadh

Thu, 2022-03-17 23:22

AL-MUKALLA: The Iran-backed Houthis have dashed hopes of ending the war in Yemen by rejecting the latest Gulf Cooperation Council offer to broker comprehensive peace talks in Riyadh between the warring factions.

Yemeni government officials told Arab News on Tuesday that the GCC had offered to sponsor the talks in the Saudi capital to achieve a peace deal.

Hundreds of Yemeni politicians, activists, civil society leaders, and even outspoken politicians will be invited to the conference, which will begin on March 29 and end on April 7.

But Houthi media quoted an anonymous official as saying the movement rejected holding peace talks in Riyadh and demanded that the Coalition to Restore Legitimacy in Yemen eased alleged restrictions on Sanaa airport and Hodeidah seaport.

Aid workers and officials have warned that the humanitarian crisis in Yemen is intensifying.

Yemeni officials said they predicted the Houthis would turn down the offer, citing the movement's track record of derailing peace efforts.

"The Houthi militia's refusal is expected," Abdul Baset Al-Qaedi, undersecretary at Yemen's Information Ministry, told Arab News. "These militias would have surprised the Yemenis if they agreed, but this militia constantly proves that it is malignant cancer that must be eradicated in order for Yemen to be stable."

The government had positively responded to the GCC's offer and pledged to support any peace initiative, including the current UN-brokered peace efforts.

Al-Qaedi said that Houthi leaders who had racked up millions of dollars during the war would resist calls for achieving peace in Yemen.

"The Houthi militia cling to the option of war because they benefit from it by accumulating wealth, looting Yemeni property and usurping power in areas under their control."

Abdulmalik Al-Mekhlafi, Yemen's former deputy prime minister and an adviser to the country's president, called for collective and strong pressure by the international community on the Houthis to force them to accept peace plans and proposed putting into place a humanitarian truce during Ramadan.

"Ramadan is the month of mercy and peace for the Yemenis, and it is the month of death and killing, according to the Houthis. The Houthis are the enemy of

the Yemenis and the enemy of peace and humanity,” Al-Mekhlafi tweeted.

The Houthi rejection came as local aid workers sent a fresh and desperate plea to international donors to step up their humanitarian assistance to war-torn Yemen, expressing concerns that the country’s crisis had been put on the backburner since the beginning of the war in Ukraine.

There is fear that the growing humanitarian crisis in Ukraine might absorb funds from international donors allocated for Yemen.

Jamal Balfakih, the general coordinator of the Yemeni government’s High Relief Committee, said the protracted war had had a destructive impact on people, mainly the thousands of internally displaced, amid a falling currency and a crumbling economy.

“Yemen is experiencing a real tragedy through the war and its impact on the economy and currency,” Balfakih said, calling for a fair and transparent distribution of the latest funds from international donors.

He suggested supporting the fishery and agriculture sectors to help the country secure its food.

“People will not benefit from this relief if it is not organized and if their real needs are not taken into account,” he said.

Other Yemeni relief workers, such as Saeed Munef who deals with several thousand people who fled their homes in Marib province’s southern districts, said that international aid organizations had already reduced food baskets and cash to displaced people.

Munef said that less than 30 percent of displaced people from Maheia, Al-Abedia, and Juba districts had received humanitarian assistance from international organizations.

“The world has quickly and extensively sent aid to Ukraine during the war that started 17 days ago and turned its back to Yemen’s eight-year-old crisis,” Munef told Arab News. “We are in need of help to address malnutrition, landmines, and large displacement.”



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GCC-sponsored talks between Yemeni factions to begin in Riyadh on March 29
World powers pledge financial support for Yemen at UN event

[Investors pay high price as judges target Lebanese banks](#)

Author:

Thu, 2022-03-17 23:03

BEIRUT: A Lebanese judge has issued a travel ban against Creditbank Chairman Tarek Khalife and frozen the bank's assets, including properties and vehicles, as part of an investigation into alleged money laundering.

Mount Lebanon Public Prosecutor Judge Ghada Aoun issued the order after activists filed a lawsuit against several Lebanese banks.

Creditbank is the sixth lender Aoun has taken action against after Bank of Beirut, SGBL, Bankmed, Bank Audi and Blom Bank.

It is the second judicial measure taken within 24 hours against banks in Lebanon.

Earlier, Judge Miriana Anani, head of the Enforcement Department in Beirut, seized all the shares, properties and assets of one of Lebanon's largest banks, Fransabank.

The assets will be auctioned if the bank fails to return a deposit belonging to Ayad Garbawy Ibrahim, an Egyptian national who is among hundreds of depositors unable to access his funds at Fransabank.

Ibrahim is taking legal action against the bank to recover the \$35,000 he claims is owing.

Judge Aoun on Thursday also issued an arrest warrant for Raja Salameh, brother of the governor of the central bank, Riad Salameh, following an investigation.

The Pioneers of Truth activist group said that Salameh had been arrested on the basis of a complaint it filed 10 days ago accusing him of money laundering through fake companies.

The judicial proceedings have angered the banking sector, and the Association of Banks is expected to discuss strike action at a general assembly on Friday.

Prime Minister Najib Mikati described the judges' decisions as "arbitrary and irrational judicial proceedings."

"With all due respect to the judiciary, there is a general impression that some of what is happening does not conform with the judicial norms," he said.

"The rights of depositors are our priority. However, the exaggerated way through which the judicial rights and issues related to banks are being tackled is dangerous and could undermine the remaining confidence in the banking system."

Mikati said: "The depositors will, once again, pay the price, and I am afraid things will escalate if defects are not addressed."

Lebanon's financial crisis is worsening in the absence of any reforms to alleviate it.

Banks have continued to seize the funds of dollar depositors and prevent transfers, and Lebanon has stopped paying all maturing Eurobonds.

However, the Association of Banks said that it rejects "unlawful actions and abusive practices against them."

The association warned that "continued arbitrary and illegal measures against

banks are damaging the banking sector and the interests of depositors are most adversely affected, especially in the light of the negative repercussions of their relations with foreign correspondent banks.”

It described these measures as “the blow to the remainder of the Lebanese economy.”

Experts say that the seizure of Fransabank assets could have repercussions for all banks.

“Unfortunately, the victim of what is happening is the depositor,” financial expert Dr. Walid Abou Sleiman told Arab News.

The judicial decisions, if implemented by banks, “will result in the confiscation of the depositors’ funds allowed by the bank,” he added.

He said that the banking supervisory committee must act fairly with depositors, and banks must address depositors and reassure them regarding their deposits.

Abou Sleiman called for an end to “false promises and vague slogans,” adding: “Deposits are confiscated, capital control has not been approved and withdrawal funds from IMF are being obfuscated.”

Charles Arbid, head of Lebanon’s Economic and Social Council, supported the call for banks to “open up to their depositors regarding their deposits and develop a road map for their return to be implemented.”

He said the silence of the banks was unacceptable. “Obstinacy is hurtful and irresponsible. A just and balanced understanding is required.”

In its statement, the Association of Depositors said that “banks will not return the deposits in friendly ways and, accordingly, there is no choice but to turn to the judiciary and seize the property of banks that have been humiliating and robbing depositors for two years.”



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Lebanese president to visit Vatican next week
Japan, Lebanon sign technical cooperation agreement

[Rockets fell in Iraq's Balad air base leaving no damage](#)

Thu, 2022-03-17 22:28

CAIRO: The Iraqi Security Media Cell said on Thursday that four rockets fell in open areas in Balad air base, leaving no damage or casualties, the state news agency (INA) reported.

Balad base, north of Baghdad, hosts US contractors and Iraqi fighter jets. No group has claimed responsibility, but armed groups that some Iraqi officials say are backed by Iran have claimed similar incidents in the past.



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Iraqi rapper Narcy to teach course on Kanye West at Concordia
Iraq MPs to vote for president on March 26

[Forum on security media during crises and disasters launched](#)

Author:

Wed, 2022-03-16 21:54

JEDDAH: The opening session of the Scientific Forum on Security Media during Crises and Disasters took place on Wednesday in Morocco.

Media and security experts will take part in the forum from March 16 to 18 to shed light on the important role of the media, the challenges they face during times of crises and disaster, and the solutions to confront those challenges.

Organized by the Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, in cooperation with Naif Arab University for Security Sciences, the forum is being held at ICESCO's headquarters in Rabat.

Khalid Alharfash, vice president for external relations at NAUSS, said in his opening remarks: "This conference sheds light on the role of media agencies & the challenges they face in managing crises and disasters.

"NAUSS seeks to translate the interest in security media into reality through various programs. This conference is part of a larger cooperation between the

university and ICESCO.”

The forum will hold lectures, presentations, and discussions across the three days.

Participants will discuss the impact of new media on crises and disaster management, the tools used to support security media, and the role of technology, communication, and information in the prevention of natural disasters.

NAUSS specializes in advanced security-related studies and offers postgraduate degrees and short-term training. It is a member of the UN Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Programme network.

The university has adopted the concept of “security media” and worked to incorporate it through its scientific activities.

Part of its work involves allocating specialist programs, based on in-depth studies, that aim to develop and train specialists in security media.

It has also contributed to studies and research papers on security media focusing on Arab countries.

The forum will also cover topics related to the social impacts of rumors, media as a soft power, and a discussion on the lessons learned from the coronavirus crisis.







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ICESCO announces prizes in Remote Culture initiative 50 research papers up for presentation in Madinah scientific forum