

Indonesian president in UAE to woo investment ahead of capital city relocation

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JAKARTA: Indonesia's president was on Wednesday hoping talks in the UAE would help provide a crucial investment shot-in-the-arm toward driving forward plans to relocate his country's capital from Jakarta to the island of Borneo. Joko Widodo wants the switch to take place in early 2024 and was pinning his hopes on gaining Emirati financial backing for the \$34 billion project during his discussions in Abu Dhabi, Indonesian Ambassador to the UAE Husin Bagis told Arab News.

The southeast Asian nation's leaders have for decades proposed moving the capital from overcrowded and polluted Jakarta, and in 2019 Widodo announced that the relocation of the country's administrative center to East Kalimantan province would finally take place over the following years.

Under the plans, most government offices would move to Borneo, along with parliament, military, and police headquarters, while Jakarta would remain the country's financial and commercial hub.

In September, the government submitted a bill to parliament for the relocation to take place in the first half of 2024. Initially, the groundbreaking was expected in early 2021, but was stalled by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

To attract foreign investors to the new city, Widodo established a steering committee consisting of global figures, including Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, who he was due to meet on Wednesday. Bagis said: "I expect talks about the new capital development project would be on the table during their bilateral."

Widodo recently said his visit to Abu Dhabi would focus on strengthening ties with the UAE, particularly in trade and investment.

Investment was crucial for the capital project as only a fifth of the cost was intended to come from the state budget, with the rest generated from private funding.

The area earmarked for the new capital, 1,300 km away from Jakarta, covers 256,142 hectares of forest, and straddles the districts of North Penajam Paser and Kutai Kartanegara, close to two developed cities – Samarinda, the provincial capital of East Kalimantan, and Balikpapan, an oil and coal mining town.

The relocation idea, originally floated by Indonesia's first president in the 1960s, was announced by Widodo as a vision to build a smart, sustainable, "forest city" where 75 percent of the area would be allocated to green spaces, in contrast with the heavily polluted, traffic gridlocked Jakarta. The move was also aimed at igniting economic growth in the eastern half of

Indonesia, which is significantly less developed than the densely populated island of Java in the western part of the archipelago. However, with Widodo pushing to inaugurate the new capital before the end of his second term in 2024, critics have become more vocal as the country continued to reel from COVID-19 pandemic recession. Opposition lawmakers, such as Suryadi Jaya Purnama from the Prosperous Justice Party, recently warned they would object to the plans if the government did not first focus on public health and economic recovery. Nirwono Joga, an urban planner from Trisakti University in Jakarta, said there was too little time to complete a comprehensive feasibility study that should be conducted over at least five years. "The move in 2024 would just be symbolic but the new capital would not be a living and functioning city since it would require a much longer process. "It would be the best legacy for the president to leave a well-prepared master plan for a future capital move instead of pushing for a symbolic move amidst the pandemic, a limited budget, and hasty preparation," he added.



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Iraq's civil society protest movement seeks to find a voice in parliament

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Thu, 2021-11-04 03:18

NASIRIYAH: For the first time in Iraq, a new breed of representatives is entering parliament, born from a civil society movement fed up with the corruption that has long tarnished politics.

Among the newcomers is pharmacist Alaa Al-Rikabi, 47, whose party Imtidad (Extension) emerged in the aftermath of the October 2019 protest movement against the entrenched political elite.

Imtidad positions itself as the "opposition" to governments that have emerged through an informal ethno-sectarian quota system that has been in place since the US-led invasion of 2003, Rikabi told AFP.

Despite campaigning with extremely limited finances, the party secured nine of the 329 seats in the Iraqi Council of Representatives in the October 10 election, according to preliminary results.

"I'm aware that our size in parliament will not allow us a lot of leeway" to push a political agenda, Ribaki said, stressing that his party instead aims to perform a watchdog role.

"We will not participate in any government set up on the basis of quotas, so that we will be able to hold leaders to account," Rikabi said in his home in Nasiriyah, a flashpoint of protests in Iraq's mainly Shiite south.

Overall, big political blocs retained their dominance in the election, which was marked by a record abstention rate.

The biggest winner was the Sadrist movement, led by firebrand Shiite cleric Moqtada Sadr. It took 70 seats, according to the results that are expected to be finalized within a few weeks.

Behind the scenes, there have been discussions over the formation of blocs to create a parliamentary majority that would distribute the upcoming Cabinet posts.

But it is specifically against this system that the protest movement, and by extension Imtidad, was forged.

Imtidad is seeking its own alternative alliance to make its presence felt.

With only nine seats, the party "will not be able to extend its influence in parliament", said Saleh Al-Alawi, a judge and a political scientist.

Rikabi pointed out that, "according to the constitution, we need at least 25 MPs to be able to question a minister".

To this end, he said, "we are trying to come to an understanding" to team up with other parties.

In particular, Imtidad has been in talks with a small Kurdish party, the New Generation Movement, which has similar leanings and also holds nine seats.

The unprecedented protest movement that broke out two years ago railed against the political class running the oil-rich but poverty-stricken country where youth unemployment is soaring.

The streets of Nasiriyah still bear witness to the anger, and posters of the “martyrs” adorn the walls, honoring many of the hundreds of activists who paid with their lives.

Factions of the Hashd Al-Shaabi – a paramilitary group integrated into the armed forces and represented by the pro-Iran Fatah (Conquest) Alliance in parliament – have faced accusations of targeting activists.

Hussein Ali, 28, said he has been in a wheelchair for two years since being shot in the back during a demonstration.

“I voted for Imtidad because I hope they can fight for the rights of the demonstrators,” he said. “Ever since I was injured, I haven’t received any compensation from the government.”

Unlike many established Iraqi politicians, newcomers like Rikabi have little money and had to run low-cost campaigns.

Imtidad spent 4 million dinars (about \$2,700) for posters and events in the province of Dhi Qar, of which Nasiriyah is the capital – a fraction of the tens of millions often spent by larger parties.

In a bid to break with what he calls the “stereotype of the representative,” who is out of touch with voters and with reality, Rikabi drives his own car and does not have an office.

Others have been even more frugal, such as Mohammed Al-Anouz, who came to be known on social media for putting up his own campaign posters in the Shiite shrine city of Najaf.

For him, opposition is the only option, he told AFP.

“The big parties have contacted me to find out my position,” he said. “I will not form an alliance with the parties that have led the country in past years.

“It is they who got us into this situation where there are no public services and corruption reigns.”



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[US envoy to Yemen Lenderking to travel to Middle East on Thursday](#)

Thu, 2021-11-04 00:20

LONDON: US envoy to Yemen Tim Lenderking will travel to the Middle East on Thursday to continue negotiations to reach an agreement to end the war in Yemen.

Lenderking will hold talks with Yemeni government officials and civil society representatives, senior regional government officials, and other international partners, the US State Department said in a statement on Wednesday.

"The special envoy and his team remain focused on the need for the Houthis to stop their offensive on Marib and repeated attacks against civilian areas, which are exacerbating the humanitarian crisis," the statement said.

The Iran-backed Houthi militia have renewed their offensive to take control of Marib, one of the last remaining government strongholds, following a lull in September.

“Lenderking will also continue to stress the US government’s commitment to working with the international community to press the parties to implement critical economic reforms, secure regular imports and distribution of fuel, and resume commercial flights to Sanaa airport,” the State Department added.



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Iran nuclear talks with world powers to resume Nov. 29

Wed, 2021-11-03 22:13

DUBAI: Nuclear talks between world powers and Tehran on reviving the Iran nuclear deal will resume in Vienna on November 29, the EU said in a statement Wednesday.

"The Joint Commission of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) will convene in a physical format on 29 November in Vienna," said the EU's European External Action Service in a statement.

The meeting would be chaired by Enrique Mora on behalf of EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell, the statement added.

The United States – which is willing to rejoin the deal if Iran rolls back nuclear advances it has made in retaliation for US sanctions – said an agreement was possible if Iran was "serious".

In Tehran, Deputy Foreign Minister Ali Bagheri, Iran's lead negotiator, confirmed the November 29 resumption of talks in Vienna. He tweeted that the date had been set in a phone call with Mora.

The EU statement said that the remaining parties to the deal – Britain, China, France, Germany, Russia, and Iran – would be represented.

"Participants will continue the discussions on the prospect of a possible return of the United States to the JCPOA and how to ensure the full and effective implementation of the agreement by all sides," it said.

Bagheri tweeted: "We agreed to start the negotiations aiming at removal of unlawful and inhumane sanctions on 29 November in Vienna."

The United States withdrew from the Iran nuclear deal in 2018 on orders from then president Donald Trump.



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[How GCC investment in clean hydrogen can supercharge energy transition](#)

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DUBAI: As world leaders convene in Glasgow for the COP26 summit, the untapped potential of hydrogen among other alternative energy sources has occupied the attention of experts and delegates who have descended on the Scottish city to explore ways to mitigate climate change.

Hydrogen fuel has become a viable contender for energy transition as heat-trapping greenhouse-gas emissions continue to increase despite the goal set by the Paris Agreement to limit global warming to well below 2 degrees Celsius and to pursue efforts to limit it to 1.5 degrees Celsius.

According to a joint report by consultancy Roland Berger and the international industry network Dii Desert Energy titled “The Potential for Green Hydrogen in the GCC Region,” hydrogen’s intrinsic characteristics make it a clean and versatile energy carrier, with the potential to become the new oil or natural gas.



Hydrogen’s intrinsic characteristics make it a clean and versatile energy carrier, with the potential to become the new oil or natural gas. (AFP)

Hydrogen gas can be used to store energy for long periods of time, in large tanks or in salt caverns. And, according to engineering firm Geostock, some GCC countries have the ideal geological conditions to allow for large-scale underground storage facilities inside rock formations, which could serve as a buffer for varying seasonal demand.

In any case, thanks to their vast empty spaces, strong regular sunshine and, in some places, powerful winds, the GCC states are well positioned to develop low-cost, large-scale renewable energy projects.

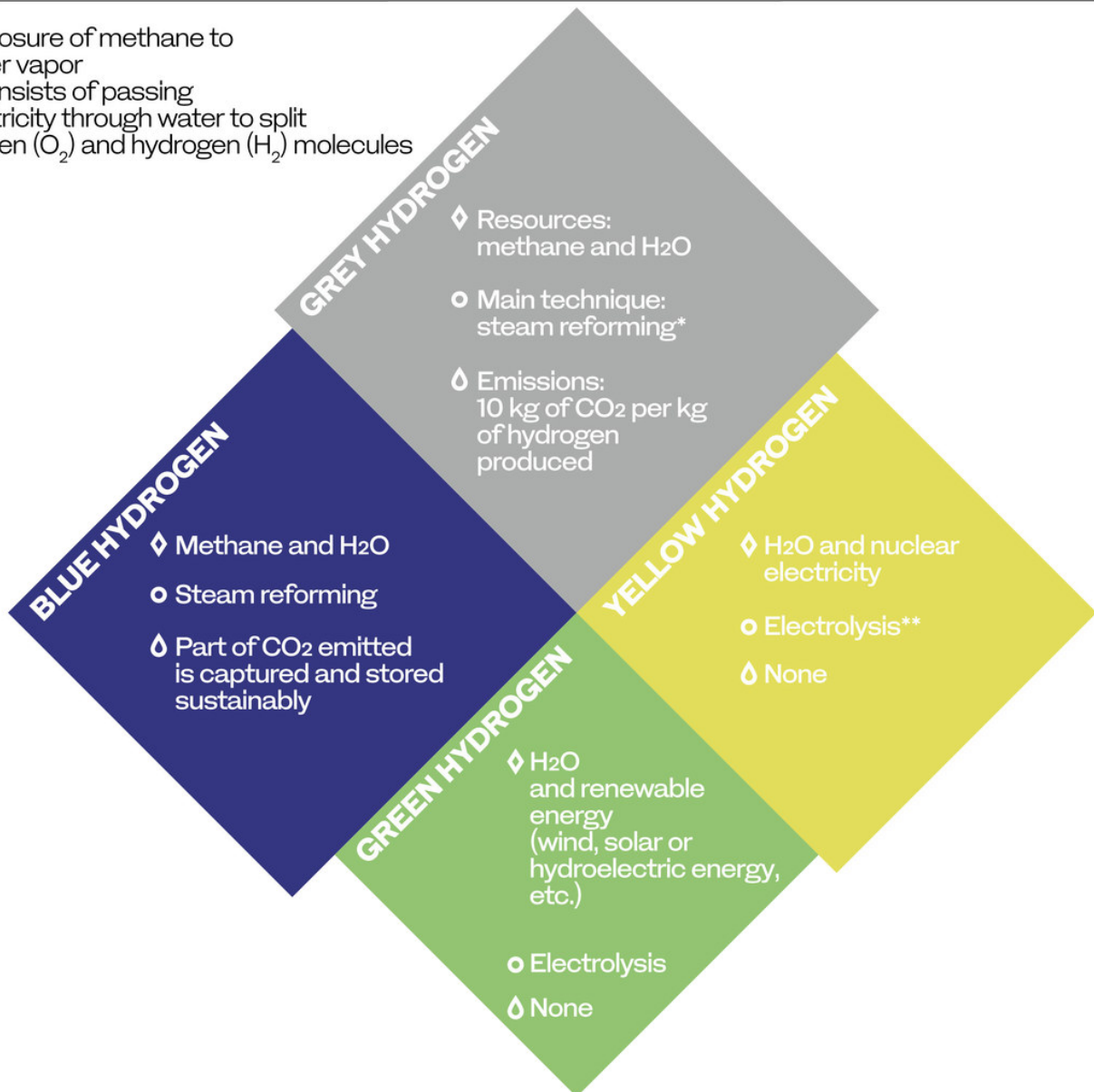
Last year, IHS Markit predicted that the price of “green hydrogen” in GCC countries would be competitive with “blue hydrogen” by 2025 and with “grey hydrogen” by 2030.

PRODUCTION OF HYDROGEN

Different types of hydrogen are labeled by colour, with grey polluting the most

*Exposure of methane to water vapor

**Consists of passing electricity through water to split oxygen (O₂) and hydrogen (H₂) molecules



Sources: International Renewable Energy Agency (Irena), Alternative Energies and Atomic Energy Commission (CEA), French Ministry for ecological transition

ARAB NEWS

“This is a CO₂-free energy source,” Heinz Sturm, a civil engineer and expert on hydrogen and fuel cells, told Arab News. “I see Saudi Arabia and the UAE as very important suppliers for worldwide green hydrogen supply, especially for countries in the EU.”

Hydrogen is derived through water electrolysis, which uses electricity to split water molecules into oxygen and hydrogen. Green hydrogen is produced using renewable energy sources such as solar and wind to drive the chemical reaction, without emitting carbon byproducts.

“The problem is it’s too expensive and it needs wind or solar, which is a huge problem for developing countries,” said Sturm, who regularly advises governments and the UN on hydrogen and the circular economy, climate change and clean energy.

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However, “another way to do it is through the gasification of biomass waste. It’s 30 percent cheaper than water splitting, reduces waste, and is totally free of carbon.”

Sturm is also the founder of the Bonn Climate Project, which is being implemented by the Germany-based International Clean Energy Partnership and Climate Technology Center.

In 2017, he developed a technical report titled “Hydrogen Economy for Arab Countries,” commissioned by the Berlin-based Ghorfa Arab-German Chamber of Commerce and Industry to find ways to tackle climate change from a new angle.

“It’s important for Gulf countries because they are the existing suppliers of oil to the EU and we will still need such supply to continue in the future,” said Sturm.



Hydrogen fuel has become a viable contender for energy transition as heat-

trapping greenhouse-gas emissions continue to increase. (AFP)

“So, they need to build this business and switch it to hydrogen instead of oil. For North African countries, they have other opportunities to produce green hydrogen by thermal chemical reaction of biomass waste, which will help their economy grow. It’s a social, political and economic project.”

Experts say the potential for green hydrogen in sectors ranging from chemicals and refineries to transport and residential is immense. According to the International Energy Agency, the abundance of renewables in the GCC countries makes the bloc potentially one of the most price competitive for hydrogen production.

Progress is already being made in Egypt, the UAE and Oman, while in Saudi Arabia a 2-GW green hydrogen production facility for ammonia is in the works for NEOM, the smart-city project taking shape on the Kingdom’s Red Sea coast.

Developed through a partnership between ACWA Power, Air Products and NEOM, the project is among the biggest green hydrogen initiatives in the world.

“Given the availability of competitive and low-cost renewable energy, NEOM will produce green hydrogen at scale and convert it to green ammonia for export,” according to the Dii Desert Energy report.

“NEOM’s prime location enables world record low renewable energy prices, and among the highest combined capacity factors by solar and wind energy beyond 70 percent.”



Thanks to their vast empty spaces, strong regular sunshine and, in some places, powerful winds, the GCC states are well positioned to develop low-cost, large-scale renewable energy projects. (AFP)

NEOM has developed a comprehensive localization approach and strategy, which

the report says could turn it into the first hydrogen valley in the MENA region – an area where several applications are combined into an integrated hydrogen ecosystem.

“It could serve as an incubator for NEOM and other green hydrogen projects nationally and potentially internationally,” the Dii Desert Energy report said.

The potential economic benefits are huge, including new employment opportunities across a wide spectrum of positions and skills.

“For the GCC, hydrogen has the potential to become a \$200 billion industry and it could create 900,000 direct and indirect jobs by 2050, which is significant,” Frank Wouters, green energy developer and chairman of the MENA Hydrogen Alliance, an initiative led by Dii Desert Energy, told Arab News.

The joint Dii Desert Energy and Roland Berger report predicts between 200,000 and 450,000 jobs could be created in the region by 2050 in renewables related to hydrogen production. However, such jobs will require new skills that do not exist in the current workforce. As a result, it recommends that the GCC develop an ecosystem of capability building, including educational and training programs.

It also advises GCC countries to develop hydrogen valley projects, while setting up research and development partnerships with international technology providers to accelerate the development of hydrogen ecosystems, particularly for advanced technologies.



“This is a CO₂-free energy source,” Heinz Sturm, a civil engineer and expert on hydrogen and fuel cells. (Supplied)

To unlock the full potential of the hydrogen economy, the report added that GCC countries will need to set a clear direction for all key actors with integrated hydrogen strategies. This could ultimately result in the generation of up to \$200 billion in revenues annually.

To this end, Sturm wants to see tech-sharing deals reached between the Gulf countries and Germany.

“We need hydrogen as a universal energy for all sectors, as no other energy source can do that,” he said. “Gulf countries are already further ahead than most other nations thanks to their decisive commitment to climate protection.”

Looking to the not-too-distant future, Sturm said: “If they work in parallel with Germany and the EU for the introduction of a hydrogen economy, we can save our climate and, with it, our world.”

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