

'No sign of life' in search for Beirut blast survivor

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BEIRUT: Rescue workers said Saturday there was no longer any sign of life in a collapsed Beirut building, dashing hopes raised by sensor readings showing a pulse beneath the rubble from last month's blast.

The cataclysmic August 4 explosion in the port of Beirut killed at least 191 people, making it Lebanon's deadliest peacetime disaster. One month on, seven people are still listed as missing.

On Wednesday night, a sniffer dog deployed by Chilean rescuers detected a scent beneath a collapsed building in the heavily damaged Gemmayzeh neighborhood adjacent to the port.

High-tech sensors confirmed an apparent heartbeat and rescue teams took up the search.

But after three days' work removing piles of masonry, Chilean rescue specialist Francesco Lermada late Saturday said there was no longer any sign of life under the rubble.

"Sadly today we can say that technically we have no sign of life inside the building," he told the media.

Two female rescue workers on Saturday slipped through a final tunnel to check for any victim in the last air pocket where there could possibly be but found nobody there, he said.

Work would however continue to make the zone secure and ensure there was no possibility of any victim being left inside, Lermada said.

In the afternoon, engineer Riyadh Assad had said the workers had cleared two layers of rubble and reached a stairway, where they found no one.

The civil defense agency's operations director, George Abou Moussa, in the morning said the chances of finding someone alive were "very low."

But civil defense officer Qassem Khater said his team was determined not to give up.

"We are not leaving the site until we've finished going through the rubble, even if a new building collapse threatens," he said.

Chilean specialist Walter Munoz in the morning had put the chances of finding a survivor at "two percent."

Lebanese officials had played down the chances of anyone surviving so long beneath the rubble.

But even the faint hope of a miracle caught the imagination of a country already reeling from the coronavirus pandemic and the country's worst economic crisis in decades.

"I was not aware I needed a miracle that much. Please God, give Beirut this miracle it deserves," said Selim Mourad, a 32-year-old film-maker.

Lebanon lacks the tools and expertise to handle advanced search and rescue operations, so they have been supported by experts from Chile, France and the

Unites States.

The Chileans, in particular, have been praised as heroes by many Lebanese on social media, who have compared their expertise with the lackluster performance of what they see as their own absent state.

The country observed a minute's silence for the dead on Friday.





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Egypt and UAE discuss Eastern Mediterranean

Sat, 2020-09-05 22:10

CAIRO: With the escalation of tension between Egypt and Turkey, Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry discussed with his Emirati counterpart Abdullah bin Zayed the latest developments in the Eastern Mediterranean.

The two sides also discussed relations between their countries and ways to enhance joint cooperation in all fields, according to UAE News Agency WAM.

This coincides with Greece's denial of holding talks with Turkey, mediated by NATO, with the aim of easing tensions between the two parties due to disputes over maritime borders and gas exploration in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Turkey is provoking Greece – which has drawn its maritime borders with Egypt in accordance with recognized international agreements – by exploring gas in the Eastern Mediterranean on its own, a move that was met with great international condemnation.

“There are deep, brotherly relations between the UAE and the Arab Republic of Egypt and a continuous keenness to strengthen each other and develop areas of joint cooperation,” bin Zayed said.

Both countries share similar visions with regard to the Eastern Mediterranean, Libya, and a number of other issues.

HIGHLIGHT

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Bin Zayed confirmed his country's rejection of any measures threatening stability in the Eastern Mediterranean region.

Last month, Egypt and Greece signed an agreement to demarcate the maritime borders between them, which Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan described as worthless.

Egypt responded by expressing its astonishment at the Turkish position, explaining that it was surprising that such statements and allegations should be issued by a party that did not know the agreement and its details.

Two days ago, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo called on Athens and Ankara to de-escalate tension in the Eastern Mediterranean around the maritime borders and energy reserves in the region, after strong statements from

Turkey.



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Erdogan raises rhetoric in Greece standoff in Mediterranean NATO sets up talks in search for solution to Turkey-Greece conflict

[Yemen president orders troops to foil Houthi attacks on Marib](#)

Sat, 2020-09-05 22:04

AL-MUKALLA: Yemeni President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi has repeated accusations about the Houthis serving Iran's agendas by fueling a "futile" war in Yemen, the official Saba news agency reported.

In a telephone conversation with the governor of Marib, Sultan Al-Arada, and the defense minister, Mohammed Al-Maqdishi, Hadi hailed army troops and allied tribesmen who have pushed back Houthi attacks on the central city of

Marib and other areas in Yemen – and vowed to foil Iran’s plots against the country.

The Yemeni president said that the Houthis had dispatched thousands of “deceived” fighters to Marib and other contested areas, fueling a war that only served the agendas of their masters in Tehran.

According to Saba, Hadi thanked the Arab coalition for the military support to government troops, ordering army commanders to join forces to thwart Houthi attempts to seize control of new areas in Taiz, Jawf, Marib, Al-Bayda, Sanaa, Dhale and other contested locations.

Hadi’s repeated commitments to challenge the Iran-backed Houthis came as his forces, backed by the Saudi-led coalition’s air cover and military logistics, engaged in heavy battles with the rebels in the province of Marib.

Despite local and international calls to cease their attack on the densely populated Marib, the Houthis have sent thousands of fighters to the province over the past couple of weeks in an attempt to defeat government forces that have pushed them back, Yemeni officials say.

Rights groups fear that the Houthi invasion of Marib could trigger a huge humanitarian crisis and displacement since the city hosts more than a million people who have fled Houthi occupation of their home provinces.

Yemen is still reeling from the world’s worst humanitarian crisis caused by Houthi military expansions since late 2014.

SPEEDREAD

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Yemen’s army website reported on Friday that more than 3,000 Houthis, including senior commanders, were killed or wounded, in addition to losing 150 military vehicles and tanks and drones last month.

The army’s chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Sagheer bin Aziz, said that military operations against the Houthis would continue until the rebels were driven from the areas under their control, including the capital, Sanaa.

Inspecting battlefields in the northern province of Jawf, the chief of staff vowed to defeat the Houthis, saying the army and tribesmen had scored large victories.

On Friday, the army announced the seizing of control of a strategic mountain north of Houthi-controlled Hazem, the capital of Jawf, and the besieged Labenat military base in the province.

Yemeni Army's spokesperson, Abdullah Abdu Majili, said that the continuing battles against the Houthis in Jawf, Al-Bayda and Marib had greatly diminished Houthi manpower and equipment, adding that Arab coalition warplanes played a role in paving the way for government forces to advance on the ground.

In Marib, hundreds of people on Friday attended the funeral of Roubesh Wahban, a member of parliament who was killed in fighting with the Houthis in Marib province.



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Yemeni vice president slams Houthis for blocking international peace efforts
KSRelief launches training initiative for Yemeni women

[El-Sisi backs Egyptian companies building major dam in Tanzania](#)

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Sat, 2020-09-05 21:59

CAIRO: President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi has expressed his support for the

construction of a dam at the Julius Nyerere Hydropower Station in Tanzania by two Egyptian companies.

Arab Contractors and Elsewedy Electric were awarded the contract for the construction of the dam on the Rufiji River by the Tanzanian government in December 2018, at a cost of \$2.9 billion.

Prime Minister Mostafa Madbouly has held a meeting to follow upon the project. He said President El-Sisi wanted the dam in Tanzania "to express the ability of the Egyptian contracting sector to complete major projects to the highest quality."

Minister of Housing Assem Al-Jazzar confirmed that the project aims to generate energy with a capacity of 2115 megawatts, to be transmitted through 400 kV lines.

Head of the Central Agency for Reconstruction Maj. Gen. Mahmoud Nassar said the Julius Nyerere dam protects the surrounding environment from the dangers of flooding and will store about 34 billion cubic meters of water in a new lake that ensures the constant availability of water throughout the year for agriculture and fishing and the preservation of surrounding wildlife.

He said that the project consists of the main concrete dam body and four supplementary dams to form the water reservoir, two temporary dams in front and behind the main dam, and a hydroelectric power station. He explained that a housing complex and a temporary and permanent road network will be established to serve the project, which will also involve a spillway, a 703-meter tunnel, a permanent concrete bridge and two bridges over the Rufiji River.

Gen. Nassar said that despite the challenges faced by those working on the project, mainly caused by four floods between December 2019 and March 2020, they had still managed to complete a large part of the project. The number of employees working on it stood at 5,233 workers, made up of 526 Egyptian workers, and 3,974 Tanzanian workers, as well as 733 foreign workers from other countries.



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[NATO sets up talks in search for solution to Turkey-Greece conflict](#)

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Sat, 2020-09-05 21:33

ANKARA: NATO has taken the initiative to reconcile Turkey and Greece over their spat in the Eastern Mediterranean, but tensions are still running high and experts are skeptical about any immediate outcome.

It announced that Turkey and Greece have agreed to hold "technical talks" to calm military tensions in the region over disputed gas drilling activities. Greece denied it had agreed to hold NATO-brokered talks with Turkey and demanded the immediate withdrawal of all Turkish ships from the Greek

continental shelf as a pre-condition to calm the tension. Ankara, however, backs the idea and expects that talks would focus on preventing accidental clashes.

The differences over exclusive maritime borders and energy exploration rights between the two regional rivals remain as sharp as ever, and commentators said they were unlikely to be resolved immediately through NATO-brokered talks.

"The current crisis between Turkey and Greece has similarities to the 1974, 1987 and 1996 crises between the countries and hence, while there is clearly a chance for escalation, these two countries also have a record of limiting the level of violence between them," Gallia Lindenstrauss, senior research fellow at the Institute for National Security Studies in Israel, told Arab News.

According to Lindenstrauss, the matter of delimitation of exclusive economic zones (EEZ) will be tackled at some point through negotiations, but the question is whether the sides are ready yet for serious talks.

Athens delivered a letter on Turkey's activities in the Aegean and the Eastern Mediterranean to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Friday, requesting him to submit it to the Security Council.

"It seems that the Greek side is still holding to its past positions and that Turkey is using this crisis for a larger agenda than just the legal dispute. Hence, even if the sides will move to negotiations, I would not expect them to achieve more than partial delimitation, if anything," Lindenstrauss said. Germany is taking steps to initiate more dialogue between Greece and Turkey, after Chancellor Angela Merkel held talks with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Thursday.

Paul Antonopoulos, an expert on Turkish-Greek relations, agreed that technical talks between Greece and Turkey will not produce any results due to the disagreements over pre-conditions.

"As Turkey not only refuses to send its ships back to port, but has actually increased war and invasion rhetoric against Greece, discussions will not occur under these conditions," he said.

Antonopoulos thinks that Turkey's recent moves in the East Mediterranean, as well as in Syria, Iraq and Libya, have been motivated by a maximalist push for neo-Ottomanism.

"It is unsurprising that Turkey's military interventions have all been in countries that are not only former Ottoman territories, but are energy-rich," he said. "When we look at Turkey's military escalations wanting to control energy deposits and its flows to support the country's growing population and economic progress, dialogue to resolve issues with Greece will not be fruitful."

Madalina Sisu Vicari, an independent expert on energy geopolitics, thinks that the ideal solution for all the disputes related to the Aegean and East Mediterranean, would be if Greece, Turkey, and Cyprus could settle their maritime issues through bilateral and trilateral negotiations, eventually assisted by a third party.

"However, though in flux, the current relations between the three countries, in conjunction with the late power competitor dynamics triggered by France's goals and actions in East Mediterranean, have dramatically reduced the likelihood of such a solution," she said.

Another option for Vicari would be to bring the matters to the International

Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague or to international arbitration. "But the latter, in principle, has the disadvantage of being less acceptable in case of an unfavorable verdict, and Ankara is not keen on the former option. So a more feasible option would be for the parties to ask the ICJ to rule on the principles that must be applied for the resolution of the disputes, and leave the final settlement to themselves," she said. Vicari noted that the delimitation of the continental shelf in the North Sea, followed by the agreements between Germany and the Netherlands, and between Denmark and Germany, occurred following such an ICJ ruling.



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Turkey must drop 'threats' for talks to begin: Greek PM Erdogan raises rhetoric in Greece standoff in Mediterranean