

Sudan calls for 'decisive talks' on Ethiopia dam

Author:

Sun, 2020-07-26 20:59

CAIRO: Sudan wants a decisive round of negotiations on the Renaissance Dam with Egypt and Ethiopia, provided the latter adheres to a timetable and agenda to address disagreements, Sudanese Minister of Water and Irrigation Yasser Abbas said on Sunday.

The minister added that Addis Ababa must also negotiate without raising issues beyond the scope of the dam and future projects.

Abbas said an African Union (AU) statement on the Renaissance Dam meetings is in line with Sudan's proposals on the need to reach a fair and binding agreement on filling and operating the dam and other future projects.

The AU confirmed it is preparing for a new round of talks on the dam. It has invited Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia to work on reaching an agreement.

Egypt, which relies on the Nile for 95 percent of its fresh water, fears the dam will significantly reduce the river's flow, especially during its filling through periods of drought or in dry years. Ethiopia has said the project is key to its energy development.

Sudan, as a downstream country, also fears the dam will affect its water supply.

Ahmed Hafez, spokesman for the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said that the AU summit on the dam last Tuesday highlighted the need to reach an agreement that will include a mechanism to settle disputes.

The Khartoum State Water Authority announced a sudden rise in the level of the Nile, which led to a decrease in the production of clean water, especially in marine water purification stations. It suggests that work is underway to raise water platforms in the stations.

Anwar Al-Sadat Al-Haj Muhammad, the authority's director-general, said turbidity in the water increased from 3,000 to 14,000 units, reducing the production of clean water in all stations in the state. The North Khartoum and East Khartoum neighborhoods were most affected.

"The historic achievement of the first stage of filling the Renaissance Dam is a testament to the end of the unfair use of the Nile," the Ethiopian News Agency reported Deputy Prime Minister of Ethiopia Demeke Mekonnen as saying.

In a speech to a meeting to coordinate public participation in construction of the dam, Mekonnen said the completion of the first stage of filling the dam puts an end to the unfair use of the Nile, which has "continued for a long time." He referred to the 1959 agreement between Egypt and Sudan that,

60 years after its application, “resulted in Ethiopia suffering.”

During the presentation of the report, Ethiopia’s Minister of Water, Irrigation and Energy Seleshi Bekele said Ethiopia uses less than 10 percent of the 15,000 gigawatt hours the dam is capable of producing from Nile water.

He added that electricity generation from water will be ready in February and April 2021, through two turbines. A further 11 new turbines will be also be installed.

Gamal Hilal, former adviser to the White House, told the Egyptian press that the US has not abandoned mediation in the dam dispute, with US Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin playing a mediating role.

Hilal said Mnuchin’s biggest concern other than the coronavirus pandemic is the process to steady the US economy on behalf of US President Donald Trump and Congress.

“These matters are Mnuchin’s responsibility,” Hilal said.

“All his efforts are focused on saving the economy and negotiating to approve new deals. It is difficult for anyone to imagine that Mnuchin will leave his president and economy, and focus on the Renaissance Dam.”

Hilal said the US position will be neutral, but if Egyptian diplomacy succeeds in making the US ministry of foreign affairs and the treasury make statements in favor of Egypt, then it will be a good step, even if Mnuchin has no time to enter negotiations himself.

“I do not separate the risks of the dam and the risks of the Turkish presence in Libya, because both are an existential threat to Egypt and neither is more important than the other,” Hilal added.



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Nile dam deal 'on the horizon' after mini-summit Nile dam dispute poses a thorny challenge for Ethiopia and Egypt

['No collapse' of Palestinian Authority says minister despite strong UN warning](#)

Author:

Sun, 2020-07-26 20:52

GAZA CITY: The Palestinian Authority (PA) is not on the verge of collapse, one of its ministers told Arab News, despite a UN official saying that its current financial and economic crisis meant it might not be able to pay people's salaries or even carry out its duties in the future.

Khaled Al-Osaily, the PA's national economy minister, viewed the UN official's remarks as a reminder to the the world of its responsibilities

about preventing such a collapse and as a judgement of the international community rather than the Palestinian people.

He downplayed the crisis the PA was experiencing and said that it could borrow from banks to cover necessary expenses, contrary to what observers of Palestinian economic affairs believed.

The PA could still rely on "the option of borrowing from local banks, an amount estimated at about \$400 million, sufficient with internal revenues, to manage its affairs for a few months," Al-Osaily told Arab News.

He acknowledged the difficult reality the PA was facing due to its political position in response to Israel's West Bank annexation plans, but believed in the ability of the Palestinian people to overcome the crisis because they had succeeded in overcoming many challenges during decades of occupation.

UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Nikolay Mladenov gave a briefing to the Security Council last week warning that the PA was on the verge of total collapse.

He expressed concern that the coronavirus pandemic had wiped out 80 percent of Palestinian revenues. In addition, Rammallah's refusal to accept tax revenues from Israel meant it was unclear if there were enough resources to pay future salaries or even for the PA to continue performing its governing duties in the coming months, he said, adding that the PA had been late in paying people's salaries since May.

Israel was trying to take advantage of the PA's deteriorating reality and applying pressure so that it reversed its position on ending existing agreements, especially on security coordination, said Al-Osaily. He stressed that the leadership was sticking to its guns and would not be subject to any blackmail regardless of the pressure. "Our issue is political, not relief or economics," he added.

Financial and economics expert Haitham Daraghmeh said that the PA could not improve its current economic situation especially due to the fallout from its political stance, which coincided with the coronavirus pandemic and its negative effects on the global economy.

"The PA does not have economic alternatives, is unable to manage its affairs, and has made an appeal to Arab countries for support or borrowing but without a meaningful response ... even European countries are satisfied with supporting the health sector at the present time due to the deterioration of economic conditions globally," he told Arab News. "Even borrowing from local banks is no longer available. The PA has borrowed the ceiling (maximum) available to it according to the banking system and, in the event of the current crisis (lasting) for a longer period, the conditions are likely to deteriorate."

But he also believed that the decision to dissolve or allow the collapse of the PA was not a Palestinian option but an international decision and, therefore, whenever the situation worsened the international community would intervene with Israel to ease things.

According to Daraghmeh, the fact that this situation had been in place for a long time with no foreign intervention may lead to anger in the streets and security chaos that Israel would not be spared from. It may even suffer the most severe impact, he added.

A professor of financial and economic sciences at the College of Graduate Studies at Ramallah's Arab American University, Nasr Abdul Karim, said that the PA faced a major dilemma. But he disliked the term "collapse" as he thought the authority was far from that point.

"Mladenov's warning is more functional than political and the PA will not collapse except with an international desire that meets with a Fatah decision," he told Arab News. "As for its collapse due to the current financial crisis it is unlikely (given) that it is not under popular pressure that leads it to sway and collapse which would mean its complete disappearance."



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People's joy at reopened mosques in Gaza 'a blessing' – imam

Lebanon fights coronavirus and rotten food

Sat, 2020-07-25 23:24

BEIRUT: The government's coronavirus follow-up committee has issued a series of recommendations to control the spread of the disease as more infections were recorded in all regions of Lebanon this week.

It has recommended closing bars, nightclubs and indoor pools, electronic games centers for children, children's clubs, sports halls and popular markets, as well as banning beach parties and religious and social events for a week. It said that occupancy in restaurants should not exceed 50 percent of capacity in enclosed areas.

The recommendations, not yet endorsed by the relevant ministries, were formulated by specialized doctors.

The number of cases of COVID-19 infections in Lebanon on Saturday exceeded 3,400 while the death toll rose to 46.

The number of infections during the past week increased from an average of 75 cases to 166 a day.

Dr. Abdel-Rahman Bizri, a member of the national committee for infectious diseases, told Arab News: "If Lebanon continues to witness an increase in cases of infection, and as long as the Lebanese do not adhere to the preventive and precautionary measures, then we must get to this level."

"We are currently wavering between the third and fourth phase in confronting the virus, which means that we reached the stage of societal reproduction because the virus is internally spread and not being transmitted by people coming from abroad," he said.

Lebanon reopened its international airport on July 1 for commercial air traffic, with passengers required to be tested and proved free of the virus.

Dr. Ismail Sukkarieh, head of the health, rights and dignity commission, said that COVID-19 had regained momentum in Lebanon. "The state that is supposed to manage the health crisis lost its credibility. It did not allocate a specific hospital to receive those who have contracted COVID-19 nor did it train people on how to confront it. It is not true that government hospitals are prepared to confront the pandemic, while private hospitals have relinquished their responsibilities and the state was not able to force them to allocate special departments for people infected with COVID-19, noting that they are the biggest beneficiaries of state funds over long years."

"The way the airport was reopened to the public was marred by chaos. There

were frauds in PCR examinations, and no accountability measures were taken against the counterfeiters, and this proves that people in Lebanon are reckless in dealing with the disease,” he said.

“The state wanted to show itself as victor for reasons not related to health, but reality is different. We opened the airport, allowed weddings and gatherings, and the real situation was revealed.”

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Health, along with relevant security services, has seized tons of rotten and expired chicken and fish meat recycled in factories far from Beirut.

Dr. Zouhair Berro, president of the Consumer Protection Association, said it was “only the tip of the iceberg,” and that there were, in Lebanese warehouses, huge amounts of accumulated goods, many of which were sold to Syrian refugees. “The association had warned the Ministry of Health about the issue. What is the government waiting for to implement the laws of food safety, free competition and prohibiting monopoly?”

“There are crises of waste handling, electricity, bread and gasoline. Political parties are all warning of starvation while, at the same time, they are exchanging accusations while no one is held accountable for what has been committed.”

“Warehouses are full and there is no threat of shortage or starvation, rather there are monopolies, theft, fraud and privileged merchants, while the judiciary is absent and I do not know who would protect the citizens.”



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France pledges \$17 million to Lebanon's struggling schools

Turkey 're-conquers' Hagia Sophia amid international disapproval

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Sat, 2020-07-25 22:43

ISTANBUL: Istanbul's Hagia Sophia on Friday hosted its first Islamic prayers in 85 years, despite fierce criticism of the Turkish government's campaign to revert the building to a mosque after being a museum for decades.

For President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the much-publicized congregational worship represented the "conquest" of the 1,500 year-old domed monument. Curtains hide Christian mosaics and symbols at prayer times. The head of the Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs, Ali Erbas, gave the Friday sermon with an Ottoman sword in hand. He read verses about conquest from the Qur'an and gave a stirring, almost provocative speech about "the ones" who turned the Hagia Sophia into a museum being "damned," an indirect reference perhaps to the founder of the Republic of Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk.

Supporters of the conversion campaign saw its successful outcome as a source of national and religious pride, while opponents were concerned about keeping modern Turkey's secular legacy intact.

The monument is on the UNESCO World Heritage list and last year attracted 3.7 million visitors, making it one of the top tourist destinations in the country.

UNESCO as well as authorities in Washington, Moscow, Brussels and Athens expressed their concerns about Turkey's unilateral actions.

Berk Esen, a political analyst from Ankara's Bilkent University, said that although there had been strong objections in some quarters to the conversion, the international response had mostly been mute.

"Obviously, the decision is generally unpopular abroad but few governments took strong notice amid the continuing pandemic," he told Arab News.

"Nonetheless, converting the Hagia Sophia's status to a mosque will be seen by many international observers as yet another move by the Erdogan government to destroy Turkey's secular regime and its links to the West."

There were protests in Greece on Friday against Turkey's decision and, according to Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis, what happened at the Hagia Sophia was "not an indication of power" but a "sign of weakness." Athens said that the latest move would burn bridges between Turkey and the West.

Esen added that Erdogan appeared to have failed to generate sympathy and support in the Muslim world.

"On Erdogan's part, this decision was taken straight out of the populist playbook of changing the public debate and energizing one's voter base by exploiting a cultural significant issue."

He regarded it as a "desperate attempt" to reassert control over the public debate and cater to the Islamist base.

"When coupled with the opposition's decision to not challenge the Hagia Sophia move, Erdogan is left with few opportunities to exploit this issue to mobilize his base and polarize public opinion," he added. "The government's decision does not resolve any of the major problems facing Turkey in the coming months and may turn into a Pyrrhic victory for Erdogan, who finds himself more removed from the swing and undecided voters."

According to Ozgur Unluhisarcikli, the Ankara office director of German Marshall Fund of the United States, Erdogan's push to turn the Hagia Sophia back into a mosque and start hosting prayers had two main goals.

"Erdogan's first goal was leaving a strong legacy as the leader who re-Islamized Hagia Sophia which he would be remembered by right-wing conservatives for generations to come," he told Arab News. "I believe that he has reached this goal."

His second goal was to trigger a culture war which he could not lose and the opposition could not win.

"However, the opposition rejected being lured into such a controversy, denying Erdogan his culture war. The international impact of the decision will be limited as Turkey's image in the West is already very negative and there is not much room for worsening," he added.

EU-Turkey relations are already strained by Ankara's energy exploration in disputed East Mediterranean waters. The issue of the Hagia Sophia has added to the caseload, showing Turkey's defiance on contentious issues preoccupying the international community.

During the past few weeks, the EU's top diplomats urged Ankara to hold off on the conversion project, but Turkey insisted it was a national sovereignty issue.



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Turkey condemns Greek reaction to Hagia Sophia prayers 'Power, politics' behind move to convert Hagia Sophia into mosque: Leading Muslim cleric

[Kuwait to lift lockdown in Farwaniya on Sunday](#)

Author:

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1595702639079426500

Sat, 2020-07-25 18:37

CAIRO: Kuwait will end the strict lockdown imposed in Farwaniya governorate from 5 a.m (0200 GMT) on Sunday, the center for government communication announced on Twitter on Saturday.

Farwaniya was the last area to be effectively isolated in a country which has

reported 63,309 coronavirus cases and 429 deaths.



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Saudi citizens allowed to enter Kingdom by land from UAE, Bahrain and Kuwait