

Houthis back down over access to 'ticking timebomb' Red Sea tanker

Mon, 2020-07-13 01:54

JEDDAH: Houthi militias in Yemen finally backed down on Sunday over access to a stricken oil storage vessel to prevent it from leaking more than a million barrels of crude into the Red Sea.

Engineers from a UN inspection team are now expected to board the FSO Safer in the next few days to assess the vessel's condition and carry out emergency repairs.

The 45-year-old Safer has been moored 7 km off the coast of Yemen since 1988. It is stationary, with no engine or means of propulsion. The vessel fell into the hands of the Iran-backed Houthis in March 2015, when they took control of the coast around the port city of Hodeidah.

The militants have refused for more than 5 years to allow international engineers to board the Safer to carry out essential repairs, and as the vessel's condition deteriorates there are fears that the 1.4 million barrels of oil it contains will start to seep out. A breach would have disastrous results for Red Sea marine life and tens of thousands of people who depend on fishing for their livelihood.

Apart from corrosion, essential work on reducing explosive gases in the storage tanks has been neglected for years. The Yemen government has warned the Safer could explode and cause "the largest environmental disaster, regionally and globally."

FASTFACTS

- The 45-year-old Safer has been moored 7 km off the coast of Yemen since 1988.
- It is stationary, with no engine or means of propulsion.
- The Yemen government has warned the Safer could explode and cause a regional and global environmental disaster.

The latest problem came in May with a leak in a cooling pipe. "The pipe burst, sending water into the engine room and creating a really dangerous situation," said Ian Ralby, chief executive of the maritime consultancy IR Consilium.

If the vessel ruptures, "you're going to have two catastrophes," said Lise Grande, the UN's humanitarian coordinator for Yemen.

"There's going to be an environmental catastrophe that's bigger than almost any other similar kind ... and it's going to be a humanitarian catastrophe

because that oil will make the port of Hodeidah unusable.”

Critics say the Houthis have been using the Safer to blackmail Yemen’s legitimate government into offering concessions in peace talks brokered by the UN and to enable them to sell the vessel’s oil. Yemeni Prime Minister Maeen Abdulmalik Saeed wants the proceeds from selling the oil to be spent on health care and humanitarian aid.

Crude stored in the Safer’s tanks is worth about \$40 million, half what it was before prices crashed, and experts say it may be of poor quality and worthless.



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US ambassador to Yemen says ready to solve Safer tanker crisis Britain calls on Houthis to allow UN access to Yemen’s time bomb oil tanker

[US ‘disappointed’ by Turkey mosque move on Hagia Sophia](#)

Author:

Sun, 2020-07-12 00:48

WASHINGTON: The US said it was “disappointed” by Turkey’s decision to turn the Byzantine-era monument Hagia Sophia back into a mosque and urged equal access for all visitors.

“We are disappointed by the decision by the government of Turkey to change the status of the Hagia Sophia,” State Department spokeswoman Morgan Ortagus said.

“We understand the Turkish government remains committed to maintaining access to the Hagia Sophia for all visitors, and look forward to hearing its plans for continued stewardship of the Hagia Sophia to ensure it remains accessible without impediment for all,” she said on Friday.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who has chipped away at the Muslim-majority country’s secularism, announced Muslim prayers on July 24 at the UNESCO World Heritage site.

A magnet for tourists worldwide, the Hagia Sophia was first constructed as a cathedral in the Christian Byzantine Empire but was converted into a mosque after the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453.

Erdogan’s announcement came after the cancellation of a decision under modern Turkey’s secularizing founder Mustafa Kemal Ataturk to preserve the church-turned-mosque as a museum.

We understand the Turkish government remains committed to maintaining access to the Hagia Sophia for all visitors, and look forward to hearing its plans for continued stewardship of the Hagia Sophia to ensure it remains accessible without impediment for all.

Morgan Ortagus, State Department spokeswoman

Erdogan went ahead despite an open appeal to the NATO ally by US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, an evangelical Christian who frequently speaks about religious freedom.

In a statement last week, Pompeo called the museum status an “exemplar” of Turkey’s “commitment to respect the faith traditions and diverse history” of the country and said a change risked “diminishing the legacy of this remarkable building.”

Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden also said on Friday he deeply regretted Turkey’s decision.

Biden called on Erdogan to reverse it “and instead keep this treasured place in its current status as a museum, ensuring equal access for all.”



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'Sad day for rule of law' as Turkey passes legal bill

[UN fails to find consensus after Russia, China veto on Syrian aid](#)

Author:

Sun, 2020-07-12 00:25

NEW YORK: The UN Security Council failed to find a consensus on prolonging cross-border humanitarian aid to Syria on Friday after Russia and China vetoed an extension and members rejected a counter proposal by Moscow. Without an agreement, authorization for the transport of aid to war-torn Syria, which has existed since 2014, expired Friday night.

Germany and Belgium were working on a final initiative to save the effort, with hopes of bringing it to a vote this weekend.

"We are ready to work round the clock, and call on others to think of the millions of people in Syria waiting for the Security Council to decide their fate," said German Ambassador Christoph Heusgen, who holds the rotating presidency of the Security Council this month.

After Moscow and Beijing wielded vetoes for a second time this week, only

three countries joined Russia in backing its proposal to cut the number of aid transit points from two to one.

China supported Russia, but seven countries including the United States, Britain, France, Germany and Belgium voted against, with four abstentions. An attempt by Russia to pass a similar resolution also failed earlier this week.

The NGO Oxfam had warned that stopping cross-border aid would be “a devastating blow to the millions of Syrian families who rely on this aid for clean water, food, health care and shelter.”

Thirteen countries voted in favor of an earlier German-Belgian draft, but Moscow and Beijing opposed the extension because they favor a more limited proposal.

European countries and the US want to maintain two crossing points on the Turkish border – at Bab Al-Salam, which leads to the Aleppo region, and Bab Al-Hawa, which serves the Idlib region.

The UN authorization allows the body to distribute aid to displaced Syrians without needing permission from Damascus.

Russia and China argue that the UN authorization violates Syria’s sovereignty, and that aid can increasingly be channeled through Syrian authorities.

The latest proposal by Russia, which claims to want continued aid for the insurgent Idlib region, would have kept only the Bab Al-Hawa access point open, and for one year.

Moscow claims that more than 85 percent of current aid goes through Bab Al-Hawa and that the Bab Al-Salam entry point can therefore be closed.

Western countries oppose it, with the US having described two entry points as “a red line.”

In January, Moscow, Syria’s closest ally, succeeded in having the crossing points reduced from four to two and in limiting the authorization to six months instead of a year.

According to Washington’s ambassador to the UN, Kelly Craft, keeping only one border crossing open would cut off 1.3 million people living north of Aleppo from humanitarian aid.

Another diplomat noted that “if the authorization is renewed a few days late, it is not the absolute end of the world. It suspends the convoys for a few days, it does not put them in danger.”

For the UN, keeping as many entry points open as possible is crucial, particularly given the risk of the coronavirus pandemic, which is spreading in the region.

In a report in June, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called for a one-year extension of the aid to include the two current access points.

When asked Thursday if the UN would be satisfied with a single entry point into Syria, body spokesman Stephane Dujarric said: “We need more aid to go through the border. We do not need less to go through.”

David Miliband, president of the International Rescue Committee, called it a “dark day” for Syrian civilians and the UN.

He added it “defies logic or humanity to dismantle a system designed to bring life-saving aid to Syrians in the form of food, health supplies, vaccines, and now critical COVID-19 provisions.”



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Russia and China veto extension of cross-border humanitarian aid to Syria
UN to vote on reduced extension of cross-border aid to Syria

[Ex-Nissan boss Ghosn 'helping everyone who stood by him'](#)

Author:

Reuters

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Sat, 2020-07-11 20:24

BEIRUT: Former Nissan Motor chairman Carlos Ghosn is helping everyone who stood by him, he said in an interview broadcast on Saturday, though he declined to comment on cases of people accused of helping him flee to Lebanon from Japan.

Ghosn, the ex-chairman of an automaking alliance of Renault SA, Nissan Motor Co. and Mitsubishi Motors Corp. was arrested in Japan in late 2018 on charges of underreporting his salary and using company funds for personal purpose – charges he denies.

In late December, he made a dramatic escape from house arrest in Japan, where he was awaiting trial, and fled to Beirut, his childhood home.

Japan has asked the United States to extradite US Army Special Forces veteran Michael Taylor and his son Peter Taylor, who are accused of helping Ghosn flee and were arrested in May.

Asked in an interview with Al Arabiya TV if he was trying to help the Taylors and others involved in his escape, Ghosn said: "You are talking about specific people, and I will not comment on those people who you are singling out.

"What I'm saying is that I am helping everyone who helped me; I'm helping them with my means, with my thinking, and in any way I can," he said. "I am not talking about those people you mentioned specifically," he said, adding that he was talking about people who helped him "in general."

Ghosn has refused to discuss details of his escape from Japan, saying it would put in danger those who helped him.

A US judge said on Friday that Michael and Peter Taylor posed too great of a flight risk to be released on bail given the "spectacular" allegations against them.

Ghosn told Al Arabiya he made "the entire plan" for his escape but he had needed information and assistance from people whom he was not ready to endanger by talking about the matter.

Earlier this month, an executive from a Turkish private jet operator, four pilots and two flight attendants appeared in court on charges of helping to smuggle Ghosn via Istanbul.

Ghosn also said Japan had yet to send his case file to Lebanon as requested by the Lebanese government. "It has been six months and they haven't sent the file. Why haven't they sent the file?"



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Turkey: pilots, others, on trial for helping former Nissan boss Carlos Ghosn escape
US says Ghosn wired money to man who helped him flee Japan

[COVID-19 crisis puts regional health-care occupations in the limelight](#)

Sat, 2020-07-11 22:11

DUBAI: With the coronavirus pandemic showing no sign of ebbing in the absence of a proven vaccine, the importance of medicine and related sciences to humankind's continued existence and well-being has been underscored in dramatic fashion.

As the crisis pummels economies and upends the lives of millions of people by taking away their jobs, restricting their lifestyles and compromising their safety, the world is waking up to the indispensability of doctors, nurses, medical assistants and other health professionals.

For a relatively long period of time, the appeal of these professions had suffered as careers in finance, technology and management exerted a powerful grip on the popular imagination, including in the Arab world. Not anymore.

The pandemic has made unprecedented demands on health-care systems around the world and proved that some sectors of the economic system, namely health care, are essential in every sense of the word.

The increased requirements are not just for surviving the current health crisis, say economists and career counsellors, but also to prepare for a more secure future for humanity.

A strong indication of this realization was found in the mass tributes paid to doctors and other health-care providers during the early stages of lockdowns. From Rome to Dubai, people cheered and clapped from their balconies to express their gratitude and admiration.

Many front-line medical personnel in the Arab region have lost their lives in the line of duty. And more will probably contract the infection if a COVID-19 cure continues to elude researchers around the world.



A health worker prepares to perform nose swab tests during a drive through coronavirus test campaign held in Diriyah hospital in the Saudi capital Riyadh on May 7, 2020 amid the COVID-19 pandemic. (AFP)

Referring to the global outpouring of appreciation for the medical fraternity, Hussein Shobokshi, Saudi businessman and commentator, said he was taken by surprise.

“For a while now, the field of medicine has not been in vogue. The glamor had moved to people on Wall Street, in accounting, finance, to bankers, lawyers and, to some degree, to engineers as well,” he told Arab News.

“Medicine was perceived as a tedious, expensive and taxing profession that stole your social life and made you pay a heavy price for it.”

Many people were not ready “to sacrifice all that for a tiny amount of returns. People didn’t look at it from a moral point of view,” he said. “They were looking at it from a financial perspective.”

In the future, Shobokshi believes, there will be a “revolution in terms of the demand for jobs in the medical field across the world” – the demand will be “massive.”

“The medical field is going to expand, and its definition, from a traditional, classical concept, is going to be reinvented, restructured and re-engineered,” he said.

Priya Babel, a career and education consultant, agrees, saying that the coronavirus crisis has brought about a new understanding both of the many job roles in medicine and health, and their importance in keeping society healthy.

THENUMBERS

Ratio of physicians to every 1,000 patients in the population

– 2.6 in Saudi Arabia (2018)

– 0.5 in Egypt (2018)

– 2.3 in Jordan (2017)

(* World Bank)

People were reluctant to take up certain medical professions because they

believed that “they were secondary to (the role of) a doctor, and not equally important,” but the pandemic has forced them to question their assumptions, said Babel, director of Dubai-based Uni Crest, an education and admissions consultancy.

“I feel that the shift in (careers in) medicine will be from treating the disease to a lifestyle-based approach. I am not saying there won’t be a demand for doctors, but there is also a great demand for physiotherapists, occupational therapists, psychologists and dietitians,” she told Arab News.

“A chest physiotherapist, for example, can teach people breathing techniques while they are being treated for COVID-19. When I say occupational therapists, I am also saying microbiologists because there is a lot of focus on treating the person, not just the disease. There are all these parallel science majors which have become as important, and I think people respect those equally.”

Biochemists, biologists and viral specialists will also be in demand, Babel said.

However, even if these professions find a place in the sun in the post-pandemic era, they have little chance of lessening doctors’ indispensability.

In the pre-pandemic era, the ratio of doctors to the population in the Arab region varied remarkably. According to World Bank data, the ratio of physicians to every 1,000 patients in the population was 2.6 in Saudi Arabia (2018), 0.5 in Egypt (2018), 2.5 in the UAE (2018), 2.3 in Jordan (2017) and 0.7 in Iraq (2018).

The challenges faced by health-care systems in the Arab world during the pandemic are mostly to do with the medical infrastructure’s capacity, measures to contain the spread of the infection and the timing of those measures.

A sharp imbalance between need and capacity developed as a result of a sudden increase in patient numbers, shortage of medical doctors and the lack of “the right equipment to treat patients,” said Babel.



Nurses and doctors pose at the temporary COVID-19 hospital built in downtown Dubai in the United Arab Emirates after it was deactivated, on July 7, 2020. (AFP)

On an individual level, the pandemic has reinforced the importance of self-development in individuals, say experts. The extended lockdown has prompted many people to review their career choices, looking at what they need to do to support themselves in a future that will be very different from what they thought.

According to the experts, the increasing appeal in recent months of online courses in life-coaching, nutrition, meditation and well-being, to name a few, points to a shift in people's thinking triggered by the pandemic.

The need to stay relevant in a post-COVID-19 job market is as popular a theme these days as is self-preservation through better management of stress and higher immunity levels.

"We will see more marriages between technology and medicine to ensure access to knowledge through apps, websites and webinars, simplifying the messages for the masses," said Shobokshi.

In his view, the fight with COVID-19 has taught every nation that medicine is the new defense industry.

"For a long time, the Middle East in general – and I don't discount any country in this statement – has been pouring money into arms and defense-related industries as a priority to secure their borders and skies, which were essential requirements," said Shobokshi.

"However, the concept of the medical field as a defense mechanism, as we have seen in the COVID-19 experience, will lead to further investments in this sector."

Apart from channeling more investment into hospitals and medical centers, governments in the Arab world can "encourage recruitment of national and international talent to help fill the gaps," he said.

Only time will tell if any of these post-COVID-19 scenarios will come to pass. What is certain, however, is that life after the pandemic will be different from before.

Even if a vaccine becomes available to combat COVID-19 in the coming months, the future is likely to be characterized by adaptability, fresh thinking and a renewed respect for the role of health-care professionals in keeping societies safe.

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