

UN seeks \$80 mn to avert 'imminent' Yemen oil spill

Author:

Fri, 2022-04-08 19:14

LONDON: The UN Humanitarian Coordinator in Yemen David Gressly renews the warning of the danger of the Safer oil tanker.

Developing...



Yemen troops battle new Houthi attacks near Marib

Fri, 2022-04-08 18:35

AL-MUKALLA: Fierce fighting broke out on Friday on the outskirts of Yemen's central city of Marib after the Iran-backed Houthis mounted a new attack on government forces defending the strategic location.

The Yemeni Defense Ministry said that army troops and allied tribesmen were fending off a major Houthi assault at flashpoint sites in Juba district, south of Marib.

The attack has been described as the biggest since April 2, the first day of a two-month truce brokered by the UN.

Yemen's government has accused the Houthis of exploiting the ceasefire and absence of Coalition to Restore Legitimacy in Yemen warplanes by mobilizing new forces and military equipment including tanks, artillery, and BMP infantry fighting vehicles.

The army said that the Houthis had committed at least 100 violations of the truce in contested areas in Hodeidah, Jouf, Taiz, Saada, Hajjah, and Marib. The Houthis accused the Yemeni government of attacking their forces in Marib on Friday.

Energy-rich Marib has seen the bloodiest and most aggressive fighting in the war since earlier last year when the Houthis resumed an offensive to control the city.

Thousands of combatants and civilians have been killed outside the city and the group rejected calls to end its attacks that have exacerbated the humanitarian crisis in the country.

Under the terms of the longest truce since the beginning of the conflict, warring factions in Yemen were to halt hostilities on all fronts in addition to stopping cross-border attacks on Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Sanaa airport would open for two flights to Egypt and Jordan each week, and 18 fuel ships would be allowed to enter the western port of Hodeidah.

Yemen's former President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi on Thursday transferred his powers to a presidential council of eight members to run the country and engage in peace talks with the Houthis.

Houthi spokesman, Mohammed Abdul-Salam, on Thursday rejected the formation of the presidential council and the outcomes of Yemeni-Yemeni consultations in Riyadh, claiming the council was meant to reorganize the ranks of their opponents before pushing them into the battlefields to fight them.



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Exploiting truce, Houthis deploy war machinery outside Marib Fighting rages outside Yemen's Marib as UN envoy meets leaders

[Mideast striving to become a space power](#)

Thu, 2022-04-07 17:29

LONDON: The recent memorandum of understanding between the Saudi Space Commission and the UK's Space Agency, which will see them develop a framework aimed at cooperation in the peaceful use of outer space, is the latest move in an ambitious regional space push.

Among those to get out in front on this is technology supplier SpaceChain, which added to operations in the UK and Asia with the March opening of an

office in Abu Dhabi.

Its co-founder and Chief Commercial Officer Nick Trudgen told Arab News that the level of ambition in Saudi Arabia and the UAE was what drew the company to Abu Dhabi.

"We've always seen huge ambition in the UAE, and last year's Mars mission spoke to that, getting everyone's attention," he said.

"I was in Saudi two weeks ago when the MoU with the UK was signed, and they share this level of ambition, and it's coming from both the governments and the private sector as they look not to invest in their agencies but space itself," he added.

"We have projects in the UK and with the European Space Agency. They have more talent, more technical ability, but here (the Middle East) you feel they have more ambitious plans than what we're seeing in Europe."

The UAE became only the third country after the US and Luxembourg to lay legal foundations promoting the exploration and exploitation of what Goldman Sachs termed trillion-dollar asteroids.

The UAE's national point of contact for the Space Generation Council, Sahith Reddy Madara, told Arab News that deep-space asteroid-mining missions are in the works.

"When we talk about the UAE, it has developed an incredibly detailed near-term, medium-term and long-term strategy," Madara said.

"Mining is envisaged as a 20-year project, but before that we'll see satellite launches and further research missions."

This more immediate focus speaks to the belief of Ray Harris, emeritus professor of geography at University College London, who said those looking out to space ignore some central benefits that could be had by the region in its push for the cosmos.

"The Middle East making itself a player on the cultural side, the World Cup for instance, is part of a wider issue of education, research and training," he told Arab News.

"Space is a logical extension of this. Many countries around the world have had their own satellite missions, and Middle Eastern countries had been missing from this until rather recently, but now we're seeing them make this push."

While Harris questions the capacity to commercialize Earth observation, he does not rule out the possibility, noting one Saudi company having sought his help in monitoring whether an oil refinery was being developed in the most efficient manner.

"This is much quicker to achieve via satellite than checking on the ground," he said. "And why isn't remote sensing for environmental issues a mature

sector? Few focus on monetizing satellites this way, but given the advances in the tech, with 31-cm pixel resolution, it can provide vital information on deforestation, river pollution, geological structures through which one can infer the location of oil, even monitoring major construction projects.”

Given the region’s financial clout, the wide range of environmental projects, and the dramatic price drops seen in satellite observation equipment and launch costs, Harris said the Middle East could be the one to make it work.

“And with their focus on the environment, this would further speak to government objectives to see their countries recognized for good global citizenship,” he added.

Trudgen concurs, saying SpaceChain already has a UAE-based partner conducting geo-data analysis on water security, and monitoring of ports and mangroves pointing to the potential benefits the region could find in targeting the remote sensing market.

But to really make a play of this, and the wider potentials offered by space, he said the region must not be complacent when it comes to the Janus-like reality of being an undeveloped market for the space industry.

This means countries can be nimbler in their approach to development, but it also means that in its burgeoning moment it is having to contend with an absence of domestic talent and the requisite levels of education.

“There aren’t the same number of high-quality universities (as in the West), so when it comes to a niche like space, it’s harder to find talent,” said Trudgen.

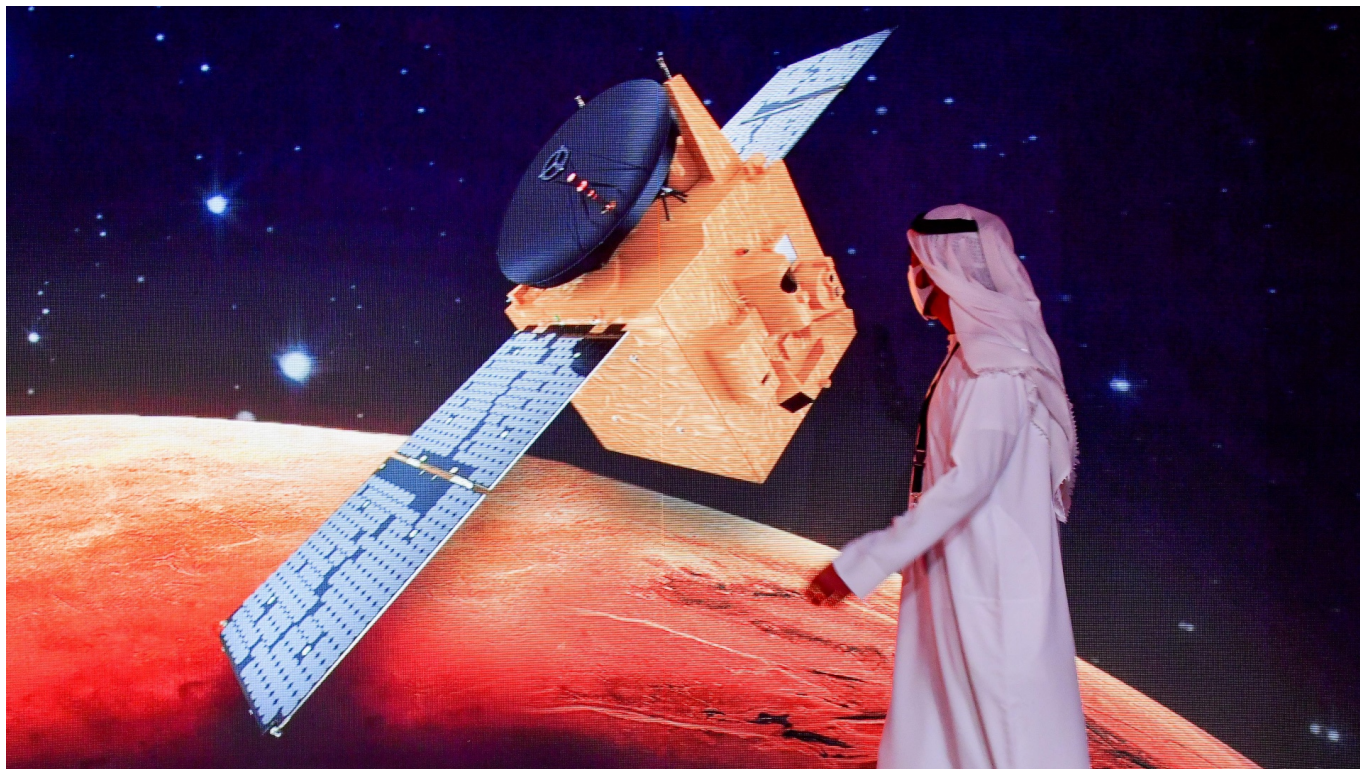
“I know they’re trying to upscale and build a potential workforce of engineers, and this is something they need to focus on to meet their ambitions.”

The SSC is all too aware of this, having founded scholarship programs to fund Saudi students’ attendance at the world’s best universities for space sciences and aerospace engineering.

Partnerships with the stalwarts of space are also assisting, with a NASA spokesperson telling Arab News that it has partnered bilaterally and multilaterally with countries in the region.

Madara said: “The Middle East knows it can’t outsource everything, including education, and while the region may be sending its best and brightest to international universities, the aim is to learn from them and foster faith in domestic institutions through the production of high-quality research. They have centuries on us, but we have the ambition.”

This ambition is regionally endemic, and how far it can go will become clearer with the release of the Saudi space strategy, expected within the year, and Oman’s soon after.



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Saudi Space Commission signs agreement with French counterpart Lockheed Martin sees space as next cooperation area with Saudi Arabia after defense

[Sudanese take to the streets in new anti-coup protests](#)

Author:

By SAMY MAGDY | AP

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1649259265919813000

Wed, 2022-04-06 18:51

CAIRO: Thousands of Sudanese marched in the capital of Khartoum and other cities on Wednesday in new protests against an October military coup that plunged the African country into political turmoil and aggravated its economic woes.

It was the latest in efforts to pressure the ruling generals, whose takeover has triggered near-daily street protests demanding civilian rule. Called by

pro-democracy groups, the demonstrators marched in Khartoum and its twin city of Omdurman amid tight security around the presidential palace, which has seen violent clashes in previous protests.

There were also rallies elsewhere, including in Qadarif and Port Sudan in the east and war-ravaged Darfur region in the west. Footage on social media, which corresponded with The Associated Press reporting, shows young people setting tires on fire and blocking roads.

The army's takeover upended Sudan's transition to democracy after three decades of repression and international isolation under autocratic President Omar Al-Bashir. It also sent the country's already fragile economy into free fall, with living conditions rapidly deteriorating. A popular uprising forced the military to remove Al-Bashir and his Islamist government in April 2019. Since the coup, a crackdown on protesters has killed more than 90 people, mostly young men, and injured thousands, according to a Sudanese medical group.

Western governments and world financial institutions suspended their assistance to Sudan in order to pressure the generals to return to civilian-led government.

The UN envoy for Sudan warned last month that the country was heading for "an economic and security collapse" unless it addresses the political paralysis following the coup.

Wednesday's marches were called for by the Sudanese Professionals' Association and the so-called Resistance Committees, which were the backbone of the uprising against Al-Bashir and have also spearheaded the ongoing anti-coup protests. They demand an immediate handover to a fully civilian government, the removal of the generals behind the coup and holding them accountable in "swift and fair trials."

The US State Department spokesman Ned Price on Tuesday urged Sudan's military rulers to allow peaceful protests to "continue without fear of violence." President Joe Biden's administration last month imposed sanctions on Sudan's Central Reserve Police, which it described as a militarized unit of the country's police forces, for using violence against pro-democracy protests. The latest protests come on the third anniversary of the beginning of a sit-in outside the military headquarters in Khartoum that accelerated the removal of Al-Bashir.

They also come on the 37th anniversary of the overthrow of President Jaafar Al-Nimeiri in a bloodless coup in 1985 after a popular uprising. At the time, the military quickly handed power to an elected government.

However, the dysfunctional administration lasted only a few years until Al-Bashir – a career army officer – forged an alliance with Islamist hard-liners and toppled it in a 1989 coup.



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Sudan's Burhan threatens to expel UN mission head
Sudanese protest military coup, tumbling economy

[Ankara considering opportunities to start talks with Syria: Hurriyet](#)

Wed, 2022-04-06 18:43

ANKARA: The Turkish government is mulling over opportunities to establish a dialogue channel with the Syrian government, the pro-government Hurriyet newspaper has reported.

Using anonymous sources, the Turkish daily said: "The balanced policy recently followed by Turkey and the role that Ankara has played in recent months, especially in resolving the war in Ukraine, have made the current period suitable for resolving the Syrian crisis."

According to the report, the bilateral discussions will focus on three key issues: Protection of the unitary structure of the Syrian state against the activities of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), safeguarding the territorial integrity of Syria and allowing the safe return of about half of the Syrian refugees currently living in Turkey.

There has been no comment yet on the Hurriyet report from either Damascus or Ankara.

Francesco Siccardi, a senior program manager at Carnegie Europe, told Arab News that Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is seizing a political opportunity with a potential move of rapprochement with Syrian President Bashar Assad.

"After presenting himself as the mediator between Russia and Ukraine, he could portray himself as a benevolent leader also in the Syrian scenario. The fact that both initiatives could bear no fruit is secondary to the perception of these posturing that will help him lift his image both at home and abroad," he said.

The improvement of diplomatic ties with Damascus could also help Ankara reduce the political and economic burden of hosting 3.7 million refugees in Turkey amid skyrocketing inflation and decreasing purchasing power. The economic problems crippling the country are often blamed on the presence of an uncontrolled number of refugees.

According to Siccardi, this initiative could produce excellent gains for Erdogan if a portion of the Syrian refugees currently in Turkey are allowed to return to Syria.

Hurriyet also claimed that Assad's visit to the UAE last month was seen in Ankara as a show of his willingness to take new initiatives and rally new support as he hopes to stabilize the country.

In the meantime, the normalization of ties between Turkey and Egypt is also on the horizon, with some unconfirmed reports of an eventual appointment of a Turkish ambassador in Cairo after nearly nine years.

Experts note that Turkey's ongoing normalization efforts with the Middle Eastern and Gulf countries will inevitably require resuming relations with Syria.

Samuel Ramani, an associate fellow at the London-based Royal United Services Institute, said Turkey regards itself as an increasingly important actor in the crisis diplomacy sphere.

"Turkey has acted as a dialogue facilitator and mediator between Russia and Ukraine, and is now trying to channel that experience to Syria. Assad's recent visit to the UAE underscores his growing normalization with Arab countries, and despite Turkey's antipathy toward him, Ankara realizes that Assad is Syria's only leadership option," he told Arab News.

According to Ramani, given the fact that Turkey is trying to ease tensions

with regional powers, such as the UAE and Egypt, removing Syria as a source of tension serves that agenda.

Since the beginning of the civil war in Syria, Turkey conducted multiple military operations in Syria's northern part in a bid to fight back against Syrian Kurdish militants that it associates with the PKK.

According to the 1998 Adana memorandum between Syria and Turkey, both parties are required to take necessary measures to remove PKK fighters from the Syria border.

Ankara has deployed thousands of troops in Syria and set up dozens of military outposts and bases there, which Damascus considers a violation of its sovereignty.

The last meeting between Turkey, Russia and Iran under the Astana process was held in December. How Turkey's potential disagreements with Russia over its pro-Ukrainian neutrality policy will affect dynamics in Syria remain to be seen.

According to Ramani, Turkey has tried to compartmentalize its disagreements with Russia over Ukraine in its engagement with Moscow in Syria.

"Patrols between Russia and Turkey have continued in northern Syria, even as Russian tanks brandish the Z symbol of support for the war which Turkey opposes. Presidential spokesperson Ibrahim Kalin cited Turkey's ability to engage with Russia in theaters, such as Syria, while disagreeing with its conduct in Ukraine as a model for Western countries to follow," he said.

As Turkey has not joined Western sanctions against Russia, Ramani does not expect that Moscow will have any objections to dialogue with Ankara in Syria.

"It will welcome talks between Turkey and Assad too," he said.

For Siccardi, Turkey has much to lose in Syria and a change of the status quo in Idlib could have catastrophic consequences for Ankara.

"More than 3 million civilians have taken refuge there. An Assad regime's offensive – backed by Moscow – could lead to many people crossing into Turkey, where almost 4 million Syrians have already taken shelter. This would be incredibly damaging for Erdogan, who is working for the safe return home of the better part of the Syrians currently living in Turkey. To prevent this outcome, Turkey will continue to be very careful and protective of its relationship with Moscow."

Last year, Erdogan raised the specter of a new Turkish military campaign against Kurdish forces in northern Syria. For the moment, such an offensive is not on the domestic agenda.

"But, with an eye on the country's parliamentary and presidential elections in 2023, any new plan for military operation in Syria will help Erdogan connect with his nationalistic constituencies and drum up support," Aydin Sezer, an expert on Turkey-Russia relations, told Arab News.

“Last year, Russia did not give Syria the green light to any plan of a military offensive. But, considering current balances between Russia and the US over the Ukrainian conflict, Russia may push for a military offensive in Syria against Kurdish militants just to draw the US forces into a new turmoil,” he added.

According to Sezer, if the rapprochement between Ankara and Damascus bears fruit before the elections, the repatriation of refugees may take place with some political offsets.

“Damascus can ask Ankara to take back fighters of the Syrian National Army who mostly have Turkish citizenship, and offer its help for the repatriation of Syrian refugees,” he said, adding: “If Turkey takes coordinated steps with the UAE in Syria, it should also align its strategies with Russia.”

Ankara has, in the last four years, maintained low-level contact with Damascus through intelligence agencies.

But in 2019, Erdogan asserted that he would never talk to Assad, “who is responsible for the death of more than 1 million Syrians.”



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In war-torn Syria, a charity offers hope to kids with cancer Turkey's Erdogan,

Germany's Scholz to hold talks in Ankara on Ukraine