

Fighting rages outside Yemen's Marib as UN envoy meets leaders

Author:

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AL-MUKALLA: Heavy fighting has broken out between Yemeni government troops and the Iran-backed Houthis outside the central city of Marib during the past 24 hours, killing and wounding dozens of combatants, a local military official told Arab News on Sunday.

The fighting took place as the UN Yemen envoy, Hans Grundberg, announced the conclusion of his first week of consultations with key Yemeni parties.

Backed by Arab coalition warplanes, Yemen army troops and allied tribal fighters on Sunday attacked Houthi fighters stationed on mountainous terrain south of Marib city, with the aim of pushing the militia away from the strategic city.

"We set ambushes and attacked the Houthis in Juba district. We managed to advance in the Akada mountain range," the anonymous Yemeni military official said. The fierce fighting on the ground sparked heavy airstrikes by Arab coalition warplanes that destroyed Houthi military reinforcements and vehicles.

"The Arab coalition has carried out many precision airstrikes that hit the enemy's locations and military equipment," the official said.

BACKGROUND

Backed by Arab coalition warplanes, Yemen army troops and allied tribal fighters on Sunday attacked Houthi fighters stationed on mountainous terrain south of Marib city, with the aim of pushing the militia away from the strategic city.

Local media reports also said that the Houthis on Friday and Saturday renewed their attacks on government troops on Al-Balaq mountain range outside Marib city, but largely failed to achieve any territorial gains after government troops repelled their advances.

The strategic Al-Balaq is the closest battlefield to the city of Marib. Houthi seizure of the mountain range would enable artillery strikes over sections of the city. The coalition said on Sunday that 12 air raids by jets killed many Houthis and destroyed eight vehicles in Marib province during the past 24 hours.

For more than a year, the Houthis have relentlessly attacked the city, the government's last bastion in the northern half of Yemen, rejecting warnings

from local and international organizations about the impact of the attacks on the growing humanitarian crisis in Yemen. The Houthi offensive on Marib has claimed the lives of thousands of combatants and civilians, and forced thousands of people to flee their homes across the province.

At the same time, Yemen President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi ordered his government to give urgent attention and financial assistance to army troops battling the Houthis across the country, the official news agency said on Saturday. Hadi told his commanders in Marib city that they should pay soldiers' salaries on time, provide them financial incentives, treat the wounded and take care of the families of dead soldiers.

Separately, the UN Yemen envoy announced in the Jordanian capital, Amman, the conclusion of his first week of direct consultations with key Yemeni parties.

It comes as part of his efforts to listen to views, ideas and suggestions that will be included in his framework for ending the war in Yemen.

During the first week, the UN envoy met with leaders of the General People's Congress and representatives from Al-Islah Party, the Yemeni Socialist Party and the Nasserist Unionist People's Organization. This week, Grundberg will meet in Amman with representatives of the Southern Transitional Council, the Inclusive Hadramout Conference, the General People's Congress, as well as security experts, economists and civil society leaders.

"The special envoy explained that the intent of the consultations was to gather, in an honest and frank way, ideas, views and suggestions on immediate and long-term priorities for the political, security and economic tracks," Grundberg's office said in a statement.



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Houthi bomb-maker killed in northern Yemen clashes

[Lebanon political factions gear up for May elections](#)

Author:

Sun, 2022-03-13 23:10

BEIRUT: More than 500 candidates, including 69 women, have applied to contest Lebanese parliamentary elections on May 15, with the country's Ministry of Interior expecting the number to rise dramatically before the midnight deadline on Tuesday.

A total of 517 candidates had submitted applications by late Friday.

The 2018 elections were contested by 976 candidates, including 113 women, but the number fell after the closure of registrations. As a result, 597 candidates, including 86 women, continued in 77 lists across Lebanese constituencies.

The outlook of this year's election will become clearer after the completion of electoral lists on April 4. Voters will head to the polls on May 15, with candidates competing for the country's 128 parliamentary seats across 15 electoral districts.

A number of the main parties will officially announce their candidates on Monday.

Speaker Nabih Berri will reveal his candidates, including current MPs and defendants in the Beirut Port explosion hearings, at a press conference.

The Free Patriotic Movement announced its candidates during its seventh annual conference on Sunday. In an address, the party's leader, Gebran Bassil, attacked his political opponents, including the March 14 Alliance and the civil movement, which he called "a false revolution," adding that "they will fall."

Bassil defended Hezbollah and said that its partnership with the FPM in the electoral lists, to be formed later, "is not a program partnership, but a process of integrating votes."

Hezbollah seeks to ensure that the FPM reaches parliamentary seats with the least possible losses. Hezbollah officials have said: "Whoever fails the Amal Movement and Hezbollah is a partner in the largest regional and international attack that wants to destroy Hezbollah, which protects Lebanon."

MP Wael Abou Faour of the Progressive Socialist Party said that "the project of the March 8 Alliance (including Hezbollah and its allies) in the elections boils down to obtaining two-thirds of the members of Parliament and thus imposing their spoiled candidate as president of the Republic, (referring to MP Gebran Bassil), controlling constitutional amendments, changing the system and turning the issue of the de facto weapons into a constitutional reality, which will not be the will of the Lebanese."

The Lebanese Forces party will launch its campaign on Monday to coincide with the anniversary of the Cedar Revolution on March 14.

Candidates representing Lebanon's Sunni sect are expected to include a number of independent personalities, even those loyal to the late prime minister Rafik Hariri, after the Future Movement asked its members to resign from the party if they decided to run for Parliament.

Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati is likely to back out of the elections. Three MPs from the FM – Rola Tabsh, Mohammed Hajjar and Asim Araj – said they would do the same, confirming their loyalty to Saad Hariri.

Six groups of civil activists on Saturday launched a joint project to unite progressive oppositional forces in one electoral front. The rally set the stage for the drafting of a joint working paper through which the candidates will be announced early next week.

However, parliamentary elections continue to be threatened by Lebanon's deepening economic crisis and the prospect of the country sliding further toward collapse in the two months leading up to the May 15 poll.

President Michel Aoun has been quoted as saying that "the money for the elections is not yet available."

Opinion polls carried out by several private institutions on an almost weekly basis showed a decline in voter enthusiasm for candidates, as well as an increase in political ambivalence and resentment of ruling authorities.



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Lebanon central bank seeks names of those who failed to repatriate funds amid crisis

[El-Sisi affirms Egypt's support for UNRWA](#)

Author:

Sun, 2022-03-13 15:40

CAIRO: President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi affirmed Egypt's "absolute support for the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees to continue to play its role in providing basic and necessary services to Palestinian refugees."

During his meeting with UNRWA Commissioner General Philip Lazzarini, El-Sisi said the agency "is the only mechanism that carries out the important humanitarian responsibility of improving the conditions of Palestinians in the Palestinian territories, especially in the areas of education and health."

He added: "Egypt stresses during its contacts with all regional and international parties the importance of providing the necessary support to

UNRWA, especially with the conditions it faces and the negative repercussions of the coronavirus pandemic, with the aim of maintaining the continuation of its work in the required manner.”

He alluded to Egypt’s readiness to support some of the agency’s relief projects, especially through the Egyptian Initiative for the Reconstruction of Gaza.

El-Sisi and Lazzarini reviewed UNRWA’s role and the challenges it faces. The latter stressed Egypt’s historic role in mobilizing the support of the international community for the agency to continue to support Palestinian refugees.

Lazzarini also praised the high priority that Egypt attaches to improving conditions in the Palestinian territories, especially the Gaza Strip.



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[Greek, Turkish leaders seek common ground over Ukraine war](#)

Author:
Associated Press

ID:

1647176247689616800

Sun, 2022-03-13 12:55

ISTANBUL: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis held talks in Istanbul on Sunday, seeking a rapprochement against the backdrop of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

"The meeting focused on the benefits of increased cooperation between the two countries" in view of "the evolution of the European security architecture," the Turkish presidency said in a statement after two hours of talks.

"Despite the disagreements between Turkey and Greece, it was agreed... to keep the channels of communication open and to improve bilateral relations," the statement added, saying the two leaders discussed the conflict in Ukraine and their differences in the eastern Mediterranean.

"We are facing so many challenges at the moment... that the most important thing is to concentrate on what unites us rather than on what divides us," the Greek prime minister told journalists after the meeting.

"We stressed the need to forge a positive agenda," Mitsotakis said.

The meeting between the leaders of the neighboring NATO members came as Ankara seeks to shore up its credentials as a regional power player by mediating in the conflict.

Last Thursday, the Turkish resort city of Antalya hosted the first talks between Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba since the start of Russia's invasion.

They failed to broker a cease-fire.

The Turkish and Greek leaders met on Sunday mindful that the burgeoning conflict in Ukraine looms larger than the long-standing tensions between Athens and Ankara.

"From the standpoint of both countries, having a potentially new crisis between them would certainly be very unwanted at this particular point in time," Sinan Ulgen, president of the Center for Economics and Foreign Policy Studies in Istanbul, told AFP.

The Aegean Sea neighbors and NATO allies entered a dangerous stand-off in 2020 over hydrocarbon resources and naval influence in the waters off their coasts.

Mitsotakis then unveiled Greece's most ambitious arms purchase program in decades and signed a defense agreement with France, to Turkey's consternation.

Senior Turkish officials continue to question Greek sovereignty over parts of the Aegean Sea, but last year Ankara resumed bilateral talks with Athens.

"Obviously, Turkey is pursuing a very clear wave of normalization with regional rivals, after several years of having pursued a sort of very assertive foreign policy and being regionally isolated," said Asli Aydintasbas, a fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations.

"I think that both Turkish and Greek leaders understand that the world is changing and the European security order is challenged in ways they have not imagined three months ago," she added.

This week, the Israeli president also visited Ankara after more than a decade of diplomatic rupture.

Antonia Zervaki, assistant professor of international relations at the University of Athens, says Sunday's meeting in Istanbul would provide an

opportunity to “bring the two countries closer together” after a fraught period in relations.

Before his trip to Turkey, Mitsotakis had said he was heading there in a “productive mood” and with “measured” expectations.

“As partners in NATO, we are called upon... to try to keep our region away from any additional geopolitical crisis,” he told a cabinet meeting on Wednesday. Alongside its European partners, Athens strongly condemned the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, calling it a “revisionist” attack and “flagrant violation of international law.”

Before lunch, Mitsotakis attended a celebration at the Orthodox St. George’s Cathedral, Turkey’s largest, in Istanbul.



Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis, fifth right, talks to Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, fifth left, after attending a ceremony for Orthodox Christians at the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, in Istanbul on March 13, 2022. (AP)

The Greek government spokesman this week said Mitsotakis was already due to visit the Istanbul-based Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew on Sunday and had been invited to lunch by Erdogan at the presidential mansion on the banks of the Bosphorus.

Bartholomew, who has said he is “a target for Moscow,” called during the mass for an “immediate cease-fire on all fronts” in Ukraine.

In 2018 the patriarch recognized an independent Ukrainian Orthodox church, a huge blow to Moscow’s spiritual authority in the Orthodox world.

On Sunday he praised the “vigorous resistance” of the Ukrainians and “the courageous reaction of Russian citizens.”



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Turkey, Armenia vow to continue normalizing relationsIsraeli president ends
Turkey trip with synagogue visit

Chad peace talks start in Qatar

Author:

AFP

ID:

1647167475957744300

Sun, 2022-03-13 10:23

DOHA: Chad's military government and dozens of opposition groups started peace talks on Sunday in Qatar as a first step toward ending a rebellion and holding elections.

The landlocked African nation was thrown into turmoil by the killing of longtime leader Idriss Deby Itno in battle with rebels in the country's north last April.

His son, Mahamat Idriss Deby Itno, took over the country after his death, fronting a 15-member military junta and vowing to hold free elections. Chad's Prime Minister Albert Pahimi Padacke and African Union Commission head Moussa Faki Mahamat told the opening of the conference that both sides would have to make "concessions" for the talks to succeed.

But the process risks being protracted and complicated.

Some 44 armed rebel and opposition groups were invited to the Doha meeting – though some were missing at the opening, which had already been delayed from February 27.

Diplomats said these "precursor" talks could take weeks and that a planned "national dialogue" due to start on May 10 may have to be delayed.

Under the younger Deby's plan, the dialogue would be a prelude to agreeing on a new constitution and then holding elections.

Chad has a long history of volatility since gaining independence from France in 1960 and tens of thousands have died in various conflicts.

It has a large and shifting constellation of armed opposition groups.

"The situation in Chad is very serious, we have to deliver this," the African Union's Faki said in his address to the government and armed groups.

Padacke said that "peace requires more courage and maturity than war."

"Real courage does not mean brandishing your weapon but to have the courage to lay it down," added the prime minister.

He also said success in the talks would help stabilize the whole Sahel region where radical Islamist groups have staged regular attacks.

Libya's Foreign Minister Najla Al-Mangoush also said that the peace process would be crucial to improving stability and help "fight terrorism" in the Sahel.

As a condition for the Doha talks, Chadian rebels called for a general amnesty and the release of “prisoners of war” and the return of confiscated assets.

The military government says it has released hundreds of prisoners and amnestied several prominent leaders.

However, it has so far excluded the Front for Change and Concord in Chad (FACT) – the Libya-based group that launched the offensive in which Idriss Deby Itno was killed.

FACT leader Mahamat Mahdi Ali was not at the talks.

Mahamat Idriss Deby Itno, a 38-year-old four-star general, took the helm last April.

The elder Deby himself came to power at the head of a rebel force in 1990. In 2008 and again in 2019, columns of fighters came close to forcing him out, but each time were thwarted by French military power.





مفاوضات السلام التشادية في الدوحة
Chad Peace Negotiations in Doha
Les Négotiations de Paix du Tchad à Doha
الدوحة ١٣ مارس ٢٠٢٢م - Doha, 13 March 2022



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