

Arab coalition says 105 rebels killed in latest Yemen strikes

Wed, 2021-10-27 17:43

AL-MUKALLA: The Arab coalition said on Wednesday it killed 105 Houthi rebels in airstrikes around Yemen's strategic city of Marib.

The coalition, supporting the internationally recognized government, has claimed the deaths of 2,000 Houthis around Marib in strikes it has reported almost daily since Oct. 11.

"Thirteen military vehicles were destroyed and 105" insurgents were killed in strikes in the past 24 hours, the coalition said, according to the Saudi Press Agency.

The latest bombing was carried out in Al-Jawba, about 50 km south of Marib, and Al-Kassara, 30 km to the northwest.

Marib, capital of the oil-rich province of the same name, is the internationally recognized government's last bastion in northern Yemen.

The UN Security Council last week called for "de-escalation" in Yemen, in a unanimously adopted statement to counter "the growing risk of large-scale famine" in the country.

Meanwhile, a group of EU diplomats visiting the port city of Aden, the interim capital of Yemen, has expressed support for the internationally recognized government of Yemen, hailed its return to Aden, and called upon the country's political forces to accelerate the full implementation of the Saudi-brokered Riyadh Agreement.

The EU delegation also urged the Iran-backed Houthis to end their deadly offensive in the central province of Marib and engage with peace efforts to end the war in Yemen.

The delegation includes the deputy head of the EU mission in Yemen, Marion Lalis, French Ambassador Jean-Marie Safa, German Ambassador Hubert Jaeger, Dutch Ambassador Peter-Derrek Hof, and Swedish Envoy for Yemen Peter Semneby.

"The EU ambassadors welcome the return of the Yemen government to Aden, express full support for the government and call for the full implementation of the Riyadh agreement," the mission said in a statement.

The EU delegation touched down in Aden airport on Tuesday and then headed to the presidential palace for a meeting with Yemen's Prime Minister Maen Abdul Saeed.

The official news agency SABA reported that the prime minister told the EU envoys that the Houthis are spoiling efforts to end the war by aggressively

attacking internally displaced people in Marib and civilian targets in Saudi Arabia.

He called for the Houthis and their supporters in Iran to be punished for undermining peace and security in Yemen.

“The terrorist behavior of the Houthis, their war crimes against civilians and IDPs in Marib, and the attack on civilian properties in Saudi Arabia test the international community,” Saeed said.

“Peace process should be based on effective pressure and sanctions on the Houthis and their sponsors in Tehran,” the premier said, urging international donors to expand their assistance to Yemen to include supporting the country’s exacerbating economic meltdown.

Yemen’s Foreign Minister Ahmed Awadh bin Mubarak, who also met the delegation, said that the Europeans discussed offering assistance to the economy and to help alleviate the humanitarian crisis.

“There is great European interest in discussing ways to support the Yemeni government, especially in the economic field,” Bin Mubarak said.

The Dutch ambassador to Yemen said they held an “excellent” meeting with the government and discussed ways to help address the devaluation of the riyal, fight corruption and tackle other economic challenges.

“Excellent meeting today with @Yemen_PM in Aden, expressing EU support for the Government of Yemen and discussing the economic challenges including the exchange rate, inflation, boosting revenues, the needed government reforms and the fight against corruption,” Peter Derrek Hof said on Twitter.

During a meeting with the EU delegation on Wednesday, Aden Gov. Ahmed Hamid Lamli thanked the Europeans for visiting Aden, stressing that the visit carries a message that the city is safe and ready to receive international delegations.

The Europeans also discussed the implementation of the Riyadh Agreement and supporting the government to smoothly resume its duties in Aden with the leader of the pro-independence Southern Transitional Council Aidarous Al-Zubaidi.

Yemeni officials and experts believe that the EU mission visit to Aden would spur the implementation of the Riyadh Agreement, help the government function effectively in Aden and convince many international diplomats to visit the city.

“This is an indication that Aden is safe. The presence of the Europeans in Aden mounts pressure on parties to put into place the Riyadh Agreement and end hostilities in the city,” Najeeb Ghallab, undersecretary at Yemen’s Information Ministry and a political analyst, told Arab News.



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More than 90 Houthis killed, 16 military vehicles destroyed in coalition strikes on Jubah and Al-Kassarah Saudi Arabia summons Lebanese envoy over 'offensive' comments made by information minister

[Israel moves ahead with thousands of settler homes despite US opposition](#)

Author:

AFP

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1635343328296987400

Wed, 2021-10-27 13:41

JERUSALEM: Israel moved forward on Wednesday with plans to build some 3,000 homes for Jewish settlers in the occupied West Bank, defying the Biden administration's strongest criticism to date of such projects.

A senior Palestinian official said the decision showed that Israel's new government, led by far-right politician Naftali Bennett, was "no less extreme" than the administration of the veteran leader he replaced, Benjamin Netanyahu.

An Israeli defense official said a planning forum of Israel's liaison office with the Palestinians gave preliminary approval for plans to build 1,344 housing units and its final go-ahead for projects to construct 1,800 homes. It will be up to Defense Minister Benny Gantz, a centrist in Israel's politically diverse government, to give the nod for construction permits to be issued, with further friction with Washington looming.

"This government is trying to balance between its good relations with the Biden administration and the various political constraints," a senior Israeli official said.

The US on Tuesday said it was "deeply concerned" about Israel's plans to advance thousands of settlement units. It called such steps damaging to prospects for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and said it strongly opposes settlement expansion.

Washington desisted from such criticism when President Joe Biden's Republican predecessor Donald Trump was in office.

HIGHLIGHTS

Israeli move defies strong US criticism.

Palestinians condemn new housing projects.

Settlements a thorny issue for new government.

The latest projects, as well as tenders published on Sunday for more than 1,300 settler homes, amounted to the first major test case over settlement policy with the Biden administration, that took office in January. "The behavior of the Israeli government under Bennett is no less extreme than what it had been under Netanyahu," Bassam Al-Salhe, a member of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization, said.

"The US administration has words, and no deeds, to change the policy that had been put in place by Trump," Salhe said.

There was no immediate comment from Washington on Wednesday.

Walking a political and diplomatic tightrope, Bennett has been facing calls from settler leaders to step up construction. Such projects are likely to be

welcomed by his ultranationalist constituents, who share his opposition to Palestinian statehood. But along with the prospect of straining relations with Washington, Bennett could also alienate left-wing and Arab parties in a coalition governing with a razor-thin parliamentary majority, if they view settlement plans as too ambitious.

Most countries regard the settlements Israel has built in territory it captured in a 1967 Middle East war as illegal.

Israel disputes this and has settled some 440,000 Israelis in the West Bank, citing biblical, historical and political ties to the area, where 3 million Palestinians live.

Palestinians seek to create a state in the West Bank and Gaza, with East Jerusalem as its capital. Israeli-Palestinian peace talks collapsed in 2014.



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UN says Israel move designating Palestinian groups as 'terrorist organizations' unjustified
Israel envoy to brief US over ban on Palestinian groups

Saudi Arabia issues calming statement as Lebanese tensions rise over port explosion case

Author:

Wed, 2021-10-27 01:33

BEIRUT: Saudi Arabia's Ambassador to Lebanon Waleed Bukhari told Lebanese religious figures on Tuesday that the Kingdom "cares for Lebanon's security, stability, institutions and co-existence between Christians and Muslims."

The Saudi embassy's media office said: "There is no legitimacy for the discourse of strife, nor for one that goes against Lebanon's Arab identity."

This was the first Saudi statement since the bloody clashes in Tayouneh on Oct. 14.

At least seven people were killed in the violence in Beirut amid a protest organized by Hezbollah and its allies against the lead judge probing last year's blast at the city's port.

The protestors, gathered by Hezbollah and the Amal Movement, demanded the removal of Judge Tarek Bitar from the investigation.

According to the embassy's statement, Lebanon's Grand Mufti Sheikh Abdul Latif Derian "expressed his appreciation for the Kingdom, led by King Salman and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, for never abandoning Lebanon and its people, despite the unfair stances against the Kingdom by some Lebanese parties that only represent themselves."

Sheikh Derian added that "the Saudi-Lebanese relations have always been and will remain solid regardless of any offensive speeches because our relations are above these speeches and Saudi Arabia will always see Lebanon as an Arab brotherly country."

The statement comes after the Intelligence Directorate summoned the head of the Lebanese Forces, Samir Geagea, to the Defense Ministry on Wednesday as part of the investigation into the bloodshed in Tayouneh.

The summoning was the motivation for Maronite Patriarch Bechara Al-Rahi's spontaneous visits on Tuesday to Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri, Prime Minister Najib Mikati and President Michel Aoun.

Al-Rahi denounced "the summoning of Geagea only by the Intelligence Directorate to testify."

Charles Jabbour from the Lebanese Forces party told Arab News that "Geagea

will not appear at the Defense Ministry on Wednesday.

“They should start with summoning Hezbollah Leader Hassan Nasrallah. All parties should give testimonies, beginning with the party that called for the demonstration. Only when a judge dares to summon Nasrallah, will we be able to talk about a state and a judiciary in Lebanon.”

The move to summon Geagea was condemned by several political figures.

Former Premier Saad Hariri refused “to engage in an absurd conflict and the frontlines of a civil war and sectarian divisions.”

He added: “Announcing that Dr. Geagea was informed to appear before the Intelligence Directorate via a plastered notification is absurd and leads the country into further division along with using state machinery for revenge politics.”

Former Premier Fouad Siniora also denounced “the bias of the judicial authorities in the military court over the deplorable Tayouneh events and the continuing violations of the constitutions by those who were entrusted with the task of preserving and protecting it.”

Siniora rejected “the practices seeking to use the judiciary for reprisals against political opponents, and not for its main mission: To seek the truth and achieve justice.”

Lebanon’s Progressive Socialist Party leader Walid Jumblat criticized the “selectivity instead of a transparent and just investigation for a comprehensive justice.”

He said: “All those who fired shots in the Tayouneh events should be arrested, without discrimination, and this destructive and futile political dispute must be ended.”

Samy Gemayel, head of the Lebanese Kataeb Party, announced his rejection to “all the means Hezbollah and the Amal Movement have resorted to in hampering the investigation into the Beirut port blast.”

Hezbollah accused Geagea of firing the first shot on Oct. 14 at the demonstrators who penetrated the anti-Hezbollah and Christian-majority Ain Remaneh area.

Former Prime Minister Hassan Diab, who is also a defendant in the Beirut port explosion investigation, visited Sheikh Derian on Tuesday, reiterating his demand “to either lift immunity from everyone without exception, or adopt the legal and constitutional mechanisms in force in the Supreme Council for the Trial of Presidents and Ministers.”

So far, all the politicians who have been accused of being involved in the Beirut port blast have declined to appear before Judge Bitar.

Amal Movement and Hezbollah ministers have refused to attend Cabinet sessions unless Judge Bitar is removed and the investigations into Tayouneh are

halted, causing a governmental paralysis at a time when Lebanon is in desperate need of reforms to unblock the international aid that would lessen its dire economic situation.

Prime Minister Mikati hoped on Tuesday that “Cabinet meetings will resume as soon as possible to make the decisions required to activate the work of commissions and committees and do what is needed from the government.”

Mikati added that he hoped his government would supervise “the parliamentary elections with full integrity, to enable these elections to renew the political life in Lebanon.”

The joint parliamentary committees held a session on Tuesday and voted to keep the electoral law as it was, thus rejecting Aoun’s proposal to make amendments.

Aoun had objected to holding the elections on March 27 and to the proposals to change the expatriate voting formula by canceling the six seats allocated for Lebanese voters who live abroad.



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Lebanon top politicians agree solution to political tensions, cleric says
Lebanon’s Najib Mikati hopes cabinet meetings resume soon

Damascus bookshops disappear as crisis hits culture

Author:

Wed, 2021-10-27 01:08

DAMASCUS: The Damascus bookshops and publishing houses that once stood as beacons of Syria's intellectual life are being replaced with shoe shops and money changers, as culture falls casualty to crisis.

Syria is home to some of the Arab world's literary giants, and Damascus boasted an abundance of busy bookshops and publishing houses printing and distributing original and translated works. But the city's literary flare has faded.

A decade-old civil war, a chronic economic crisis and a creative brain drain that has deprived Syria of some of its best writers and many of their readers, have compounded worldwide problems facing the industry, such as the growing popularity of e-books. "People can't afford to read and bookstores can't cover the expenses of staying open," said Muhammad Salem Al-Nouri, 71, who inherited one of the capital's oldest bookshops from his father.

Last month, the iconic Nobel bookshop in Damascus, founded in 1970, closed its doors.

The Al-Yaqza bookshop, founded in 1939, shut seven years ago, with a shoe store now taking its place.

A money exchange office has replaced the Maysalun bookshop which was open for four decades.

The Al-Nouri bookstore, founded in 1930, is at risk of meeting the same fate.

"We wanted it to remain for our children and grandchildren," Nouri told AFP. "But the Al-Nouri bookshop is threatened with closure, as are other bookstores."

The Nouri family currently runs two bookshops in central Damascus.

Three years ago, the family was forced to close a third bookshop they had opened in the capital in 2000 because of poor sales and growing costs.

Its stock remains in place, gathering dust on fully stacked shelves.

On a wooden desk, old photos of celebrity customers, including politicians, artists and poets, are placed on display.

For Sami Hamdan, 40, the cultural heyday of the 1950s and 1960s is long gone. "The war has destroyed what was left" of a cultural scene that was already in

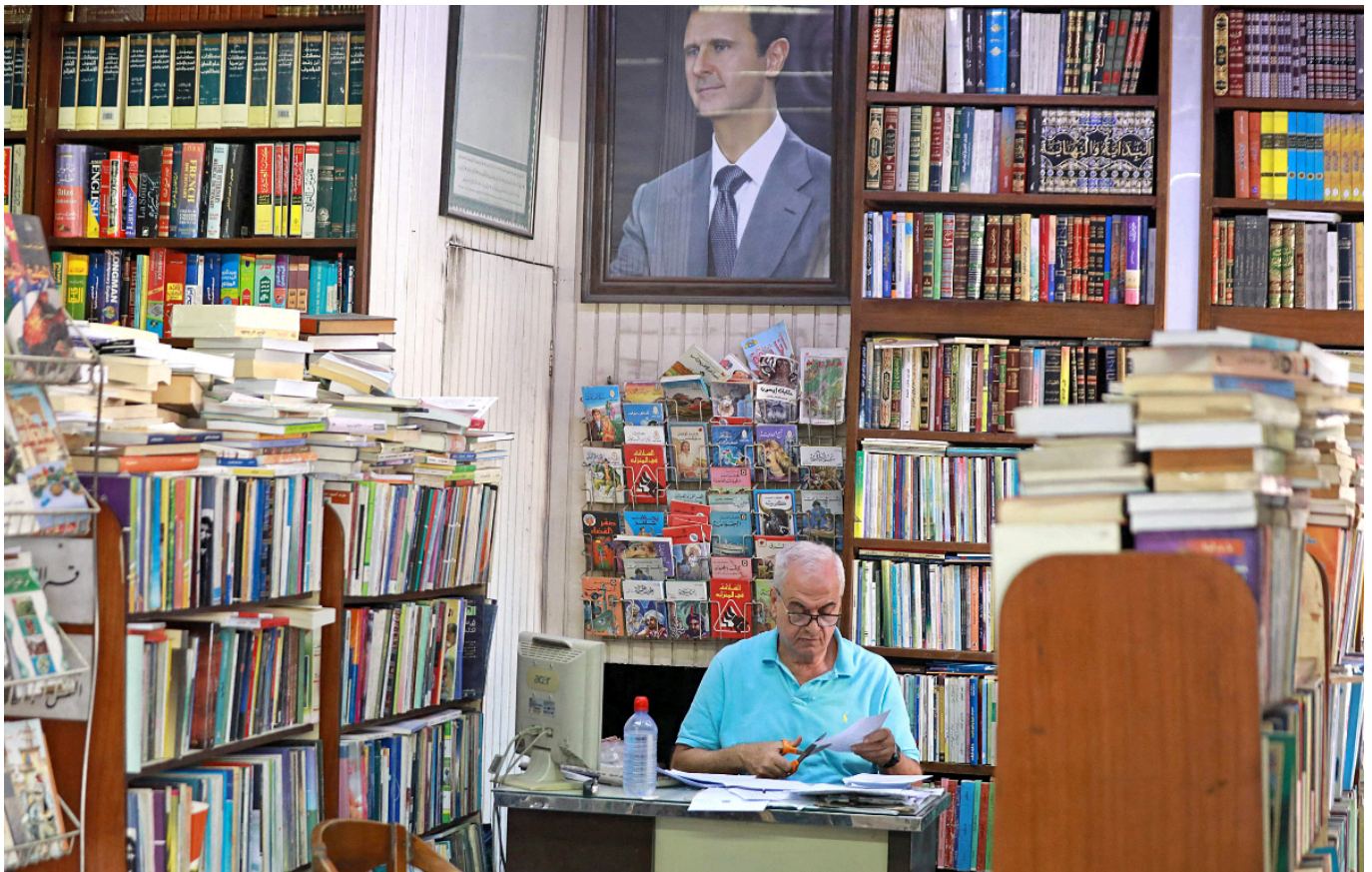
retreat, said the former owner of the Al-Yaqza bookstore.

With 90 percent of the population living below the poverty line and prices skyrocketing in the face of the plummeting value of the Syrian pound, “no one is going to invest in a bookshop during conflict,” Hamdan told AFP.

For Khalil Haddad of the Dar Oussama publishing house, books have become a “luxury” for Syrians.

Surging printing costs and logistical difficulties linked to power cuts have combined to make books too expensive for most, the 70-year-old told AFP.

“People’s priorities are food and housing,” he said.



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Donations pour in to rebuild Gaza bookshopRare books shed light on history of the Arab world

Iraq blames Iran for drastic decline in river flow

Author:

Wed, 2021-10-27 00:49

DARBANDIKHAN, Iraq: Iraqi officials warned Tuesday of a drastic drop in the flow of water in a river from Iran due to low rainfall and dam-building in the neighboring Islamic republic.

The Sirwan river begins in Iran, flowing to Darbandikhan Dam in northeastern Iraq before going through the rural province of Diyala and joining the Tigris.

"There has been an unprecedented decline," said Rahman Khani, the dam's director. "The water level has fallen by 7.5 meters in one year."

The drop was attributed to low precipitation and "the building of more dams in Iran which retain water," he told AFP.

Khani said the dam had this year received 900 million cubic meters of water – a fraction of the annual average of 4.7 billion cubic meters.

The decline had led to a 30 percent fall in electricity production from the dam, he added, warning against the impact on agriculture in Diyala province.

Iraq – which relies on Iran for much of its electricity – has suffered extreme water shortages in many areas in recent years.

This is owing in large part to upstream dam-building in Iran and Turkey, but also to factors relating to climate change and droughts, which have affected the wider region.

The situation has prompted Iraq's Water Resources Minister, Mahdi Al-Hamdani, to call on his government to file a complaint against Iran at the International Court of Justice in The Hague.

A foreign ministry spokesperson refused to comment on the matter.

Aoun Thiab, a senior adviser at the water ministry, said Iran was "violating international law by diverting a river flow" based on the 1997 UN Watercourses Convention on the use of water that crosses international borders.

Thiab acknowledged however that seeking justice would be "a political decision and not a technical one.

"The waters of the Sirwan river have been completely cut off," he told AFP.

Iran has also its own decline in water levels due to drought, said a report from the country's space agency cited by Mehr news agency.

On Tuesday, an official said Tehran was facing its worst drought in 50 years as he reported a 97 percent drop in monthly rainfall compared with last year.

The Iranian capital has had 0.4 millimeters of rain since Sept. 23, compared with 14.3 mm over the same period in 2020, said Mohammad Shahriari, deputy director of the company that supplies the region.

“Groundwater and surface water are at a critical state and there has not been a similar drought for the past 50 years,” he was quoted as saying by Iran’s ISNA news agency.

In July, deadly protests broke out in the drought-hit southwestern province of Khuzestan after people took to the streets to vent their anger over water shortages.



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Iraq pledges to end harmful gas flaring by 2025
Iran provincial governor slapped in a rare security breach