

Five civilians killed in Hodeidah as fighting rages in Marib

Mon, 2021-03-01 02:15

AL-MUKALLA: The UN mission in Yemen's western province of Hodeidah said on Sunday that five civilians were killed and three more wounded on Saturday night, when an explosion ripped through their house in Hodeidah's Al-Hawak district.

"Last night, an explosion occurred in a residential area in Hodeidah's Al-Hawak district, reportedly resulting in the deaths of up to five civilians with injuries to a further three," the UN Mission to support the Hodeidah Agreement (UNMHA) said in a Twitter post, urging warring factions in Yemen to avoid targeting civilians. "UNMHA strongly condemns such acts of violence that breach the Hodeidah Agreement, and demands that the parties refrain from hitting residential areas and causing more suffering to a population in an already dire situation."

Sharing graphic images of the dead, a local government official told Arab News that a mortar shell fired by the Houthis exploded inside the house of Saber Ameen Al-Futaini, killing him and a number of his family in the Houthi-controlled Rabaseh neighborhood.

"The Houthis committed this crime. They have committed many similar crimes in the past," the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to brief the media.

Last month, five women were killed in the same district when a projectile exploded at a wedding held on New Year's Day in Hodeidah. In December, a missile attack by the Houthis killed 10 workers in an industrial complex in the Red Sea port city, sparking outrage inside and outside Yemen.

On Sunday, the Joint Forces, an umbrella term for three major military units in the country's western coast, said that they traded heavy machine-gun fire with the Houthis in the city.



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Yemeni minister warns of looming humanitarian crisis in MaribKSrelief provides medical aid to Yemenis

Turkey, Iran at odds over operations on Iraqi soil

Mon, 2021-03-01 01:32

ANKARA: The diplomatic crisis between Ankara and Tehran has escalated following the latest statement from Iran's Ambassador to Baghdad Iraj Masjedi, who reiterated an opposition to Turkish military intervention in Iraq, a new move that highlights a broader rivalry between the two countries in the region.

"Turkish forces should not pose a threat or violate Iraqi soil," Masjedi said on Sunday.

"We do not accept at all, be it Turkey or any other country, to intervene in Iraq militarily or advance or have a military presence in Iraq," he said, calling on Ankara to withdraw its troops from Iraq and respect international borders.

"The security of the Iraqi area should be maintained by Iraqi forces and (Kurdistan) region forces in their area," he said.

Turkey has deployed several military outposts deep inside Iraqi territories for decades to eradicate the presence of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). Its forces conduct aerial and ground cross-border operations, which have increased in recent years.

These operations have recently drawn anger from Baghdad over territorial violations of Turkish forces and aircraft. But Ankara has continued airstrikes in the Kurdistan region of Iraq to kill senior members of the PKK. The latest Turkish operation on Feb. 19 to free 13 nationals held captive by the PKK for many years failed in the Gara mountains in northern Iraq. While Ankara accused the PKK of killing the prisoners during the operation, the PKK asserted that Turkey fortuitously bombed the cave where the captives were held.

The Iran-backed Iraqi militia, the Popular Mobilization Units also known as Hashd Al-Shabi, has deployed three brigades to Sinjar along the Syrian border to counter Turkish moves in the region.

Ankara summoned the Iranian envoy on Sunday following his remarks on Iraq operations. "Ankara expects Iran to support, not oppose, Turkey's fight against terrorism," the Turkish Foreign Ministry reportedly told the ambassador.

"The Ambassador of Iran would be the last person to lecture Turkey about respecting the borders of Iraq," said the Turkish Ambassador to Iraq Fatih Yildiz.

Turkey recently arrested an Iranian official Mohammad Reza Naserzadeh over the killing of an Iranian dissident, Masoud Molavi Vardanjani, who was murdered in Istanbul in November 2019. This move further strained ties between Turkey and Iran.

"Turkish-Iranian relations are set to become more turbulent," Galip Dalay, an associate fellow at Chatham House in London, told Arab News.

“Iraq still stands as the most important Middle Eastern country for Iran. The increased military presence and political leverage of Turkey in northern Iraq increasingly disturbs Iran, while the Iraqi central government would not welcome any Turkish operation into Sinjar,” Dalay added.

According to Samuel Ramani, an academic and analyst at Oxford University, Turkey-Iran relations are volatile, as phases of escalated competition and cooperation quickly follow each other.

Ramani told Arab News: “Right now, we are entering a phase of heightened competition, as Turkey sees a rising security threat from the PKK in Iraq, while Iran’s relationship with Iraqi Kurdistan has a positive moment following Iran’s most-senior commander Qassem Soleimani’s death last year.” He added that Turkey’s expanded bilateral engagement with Iraq threatens Iran’s aspirations for hegemony, and that Iran is trying to capitalize on latent discontent in Baghdad with expansive Turkish military operations that violate Iraqi sovereignty.

“There is a broader context of tension between Turkey and Iran. Russia-Iran relations are growing in the Caspian region to counter Turkey, Ankara has arrested alleged Iranian spies and both countries are disagreeing over the situation in northern Syria, especially Ayn Issa,” he said.

Given the broader state of tensions, Ramani expects Turkey and Iran to continue having a rhetorical war of words about the legitimacy of Ankara’s anti-PKK operations and of Iran’s interference in Iraq, but direct conflict between Iranian and Turkish forces or local allies is unlikely.

But Dalay expects that a US-supported Turkish operation into Sinjar is highly likely. He said that if the ongoing crisis between Hashd Al-Shabi and Ankara escalates, Iran is likely to be drawn into this regional equation.

“Hashd Al-Shabi provides a cover to the PKK in the region, while the presence of Shingal Resistance Units, a Yazidi militia that collaborates with Hashd Al-Shabi, could trigger an international awareness about the Yazidi religious minority,” he said.



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Iraqi oil minister says Saudi output cut helps stabilize market
Iraq defuses mine attached to Iraqi oil tanker

[Syria reports Israeli missile attack near capital, Damascus](#)

Sun, 2021-02-28 23:31

DAMASCUS: Syrian air defenses were activated in the capital Damascus and its southern suburbs Sunday night to repel an Israeli missile attack, state media reported. There was no word on casualties.

State TV quoted an unnamed military official as saying that most of the Israeli missiles were shot down before reaching their targets near Damascus. Israel has launched hundreds of strikes against Iran-linked military targets in Syria over the years, but rarely acknowledges or discusses such operations.

Israel views Iranian entrenchment on its northern frontier as a red line, and it has repeatedly struck Iran-linked facilities and weapons convoys destined for Lebanon's militant Hezbollah group.

The attack comes after the United States launched airstrikes in Syria on Thursday, targeting facilities near the Iraqi border used by Iranian-backed militia groups.

The Pentagon said the strikes were retaliation for a rocket attack in Iraq earlier this month that killed one civilian contractor and wounded a US service member and other coalition troops.



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Israel vaccinate Palestinians with Israeli work permits against COVID-19

[Egypt's tourism 'will return to pre-COVID-19 levels by fall 2022'](#)

Author:

Sun, 2021-02-28 00:26

CAIRO: Tourism in Egypt will return to pre-pandemic levels by fall 2022, according to a government minister.

Khaled Al-Anani, who is minister of tourism and antiquities, said the sector's recovery and restoration to pre-pandemic levels would be because of countries' COVID-19 vaccination programs as well as Egypt's efforts in developing archaeological sites in the Red Sea and South Sinai areas. He said that, in the last three months of 2020, Egypt had received between

270,000 and 290,000 tourists on a monthly basis, equivalent to 10,000 tourists a day.

Al-Anani said the Grand Egyptian Museum would be finished during the third quarter of 2021 provided that, within the next few days, the winning international coalition to manage the museum's operations was announced. He added that the ministry had contacted 30 companies that organize concerts and Olympics to participate in the opening ceremony of the Grand Egyptian Museum but, while three had been chosen to organize the event, the pandemic had disrupted these plans.

The tourism sector is one of the Egyptian economy's main pillars. It made revenues of \$4 billion in 2020, compared to \$13.03 billion in 2019. The country received about 3.5 million tourists last year, compared to 13 million in 2019.

At the start of 2020 it was expected that Egypt would receive over 14 million tourists.

It received 2 million tourists in the first quarter of last year until the pandemic hit and led to a contraction in tourism, according to the minister's adviser and ministry spokesperson, Soha Bahgat.

"The tourism sector in the whole world has been affected in an unprecedented way due to the pandemic ... and Egypt has taken strict precautionary measures to limit the spread of the virus, and at the same time supportive measures for the economy, including supporting the tourism sector," she said.

Egypt managed to attract about a million tourists from last July to the start of 2021.

Bahgat added that although the number was small, it had led many establishments to resume operations and slowly maintain the tourism sector.



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Egypt has overcome peak of coronavirus second wave, says health official
Egypt backs Sudanese proposal to mediate GERD negotiations

[Egypt has overcome peak of coronavirus second wave, says health official](#)

Author:

Sun, 2021-02-28 00:15

CAIRO: Egypt has overcome the peak of the second wave of coronavirus, according to the president's health adviser Mohammed Awad Taj El-Din. He said that new coronavirus cases were currently decreasing, pointing to the continued presence of the disease, but that precautionary measures still needed to be followed in order to reduce infection rates among people. "The second wave was high, but there is a decrease in new cases. As for cases that need hospitals or ventilators, their numbers have decreased," he added. Taj El-Din regarded the fluctuation in the number of cases, whether it was an increase or decrease, as natural because COVID-19 symptoms appeared in some people up to two weeks after they had contracted the virus.

FASTFACT

Egypt on Tuesday morning received 300,000 doses of the Chinese Sinopharm coronavirus vaccine, the second batch from the company after the first shipment of 50,000 doses in December.

He said that intensive care rooms were available as were respirators and, as long as there was a decline in the number of new cases, there was no reason to be worried.

Egypt on Tuesday morning received 300,000 doses of the Chinese Sinopharm coronavirus vaccine, the second batch from the company after the first shipment of 50,000 doses in December.

It also received 50,000 doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine in early February, as part of its program to vaccinate health workers.

Taj El-Din said the antibodies produced by the coronavirus vaccines could last up to nine months, and the immunity to coronavirus that was produced by the vaccines, the period in which people were protected from contracting the virus again, varied between three and nine months.

He explained that the immunity period varied from one person to another, as some vaccines gave 86 percent protection from the virus while others gave up to 90 percent.

He said it was necessary to limit gatherings and follow precautionary

measures during Ramadan so that there was no new coronavirus wave in Egypt.



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Egypt backs Sudanese proposal to mediate GERD negotiations
Egypt's foreign investments in government debt instruments amounted to \$29bn