

Yemen seizes boat loaded with weapons in Red Sea

Author:

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AL-MUKALLA: Yemen coastguards in the Red Sea have seized a boat loaded with three tons of ammunition, as the country intensifies sea patrols to intercept Iranian weapon shipments to the Houthis.

A local security official said a coast guard vessel on Thursday stopped a boat sailing inside Yemeni waters near Perim Island.

The coastguards who boarded the boat found thousands of ammunition rounds in large plastic bags and unnumbered AK47 assault rifles hidden inside. The official said the three Yemeni crewmen, who come from different Red Sea coastal areas, were arrested.

"They admitted that they were heading to Sudan to sell the ammunition," the official, who preferred to remain anonymous, told Arab News on Saturday.

He said the three Yemenis were part of a large network involved in smuggling weapons from different countries, including Iran, to Yemen and other places. The official did not say if the seized ammunition and rifles were sent from Iran. "The investigation is still going on," he added.

In June, coastguards in the Red Sea seized a small boat loaded with dozens of pistols and thousands of rounds. Also that month, five people were arrested after they were found hiding 40 kilos of cocaine in their boat and heading to Houthi-controlled areas.

The Yemeni coast guard authority that fell apart during the Houthi invasion of the country's coastal areas in early 2015 was later rebuilt by the Saudi-led coalition. Hundreds of soldiers, who were trained inside and outside Yemen, were deployed on fast armed boats along the country's long coastline in the Red Sea and the Arabian Sea.

For the first time since the beginning of the war, the Yemenis have managed to repel incursions by Eritrean boats and intercept many shipments of weapons and drugs.

"We succeeded because everyone supports us including the Saudi-led coalition, the National Resistance and others. We have now 150 boats," the officer said, boasting about their achievements.

The Saudi-led coalition and Yemen's internationally-recognized government have accused the Iranian regime of sending advanced weapons to the Houthis that resupplied their arsenal depleted by fighting and massive aerial bombardment.

In June, the Saudi-led coalition announced the seizure of two Iranian weapon

shipments heading to the Houthis.

In a separate development the Saudi ambassador to Yemen, Mohammed Al-Jaber, said that the separatist Southern Transitional Council (STC) had returned the seized money to the central bank in Aden after the government agreed to pay military and security forces following a successful Saudi mediation.

“Saudi Arabia’s continuous efforts, through direct meetings between the Govt of Yemen and the STC, to resolve issues of CBY funds and salary payments and implement the Riyadh Agreement, have succeeded due to a consensus among the two parties on alleviating suffering in Yemen,” Al-Jaber tweeted on Friday.

Government and STC officials are engaged in extensive talks in Riyadh, brokered by Saudi Arabia, to discuss ending hostilities in southern Yemen and putting into place the Riyadh Agreement.

In northern Yemen the Defense Ministry said that government forces, backed by Saudi-led coalition warplanes, assaulted Houthis in Qania in the central province of Al-Bayda.



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Egyptian rail on track as first Russian trains arrive

Author:

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CAIRO: The Egyptian Railway Authority (ERA) has taken delivery of three new Russian trains which will join the existing Egyptian fleet servicing the governorates of Cairo, Alexandria, Assuit and Luxor.

The trains were decorated with flowers, Egyptian flags and pictures of Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi and the Minister of Transport, Kamel El-Wazir.

The delivery is the first of its type from Russia, following an ERA contract with Russian company Transmashholding, the country's largest locomotive and rail equipment manufacturer. The contract involves building and supplying 1,300 train carriages, some with air-conditioning capabilities.

The first batch of 33 railroad cars arrived recently. 22 arrived several days ago and 10 came at the end of last week. A prototype vehicle is being tested without passengers to ensure the safety of the train cars before the start of full commercial operation.

The 33 cars form three trains and will continue to operate without passengers until the beginning of August. The vehicles will operate on a daily basis until they begin to accept passengers.

The new trains will operate on the main lines in lower and upper Egypt and will replace some railroad cars in use. They are scheduled to move to branch lines used to transport passengers between governorates and suburbs.

As of next month, Egypt is scheduled to receive 35 new railroad cars a month. The contract states that 1,300 railroad cars will be delivered over a 40-month period.

The contract includes the manufacturing of 800 air-conditioned vehicles, 500 of which are third-class. The deal is the largest in the history of the ERA.

The 500 coaches also include 180 second-class air-conditioned cars, 90 first-class air-conditioned cars and 30 which include buffet services. A further 500 third-class carriages include advanced ventilation methods.

Tickets for new carriages will be 20 to 30 percent higher than those of regular services. The contract is estimated to cost over €1 billion (\$1.1 billion), funded by a joint soft loan from the EximBank of Russia and the Hungarian EximBank.

The ERA also delivered a number of newly developed carriages built in the SEMAF factory, which is part of the Arab Organization for Manufacturing.

The trains will be sent to cities including Alexandria, Zagazig, Mansoura, Tanta, Minya, Assiut, Sohag, Luxor and Aswan. The move is intended to demonstrate the willingness of the Ministry of Transportation to put passengers first.

Kamel El-Wazir, the transport minister, visited Ramses Station in downtown Cairo to inspect the new trains and oversee preparations for their operation. The tour included the new Russian trains and those refurbished in Egypt.

El-Wazir said in December last year that by June 30, Egyptian railways would "see new life," with new carriages and coaches helping to reduce passenger congestion.



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African mini-summit on Renaissance Dam slated for Tuesday

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CAIRO: Sudan has confirmed that its Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok has received an invitation from the chair of the African Union (AU), the South African President Cyril Ramaphosa, to participate in a mini-African summit on Tuesday to discuss the Renaissance Dam project. Egypt and Ethiopia have not announced whether they will participate.

Official Egyptian sources told Arab News that Egypt had received an invitation to hold the mini-summit in the presence of Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi and the prime ministers of Egypt and Sudan in a phone call between the president and Ramaphosa.

El-Sisi reportedly rejected any unilateral measures that would harm Egypt's rights to the waters of the Nile, and called for a comprehensive legal agreement between all parties involved in the operation of the dam.

Ramaphosa praised what he said was the constructive approach taken by Egypt during the recent round of negotiations on the dam under the auspices of the AU, which, he added, reflected Egypt's sincere will to reach a solution to the crisis.

The dam, which sits on the Nile's main tributary, the Blue Nile, is upstream of Egypt and has the potential to control the flow of water that the country almost entirely relies on.

It also will be, when fully operational, the largest hydro-electric plant in Africa, and is projected to provide power to 65 million Ethiopians, who currently lack a regular electricity supply.

Sudan could also be affected by the dam and is playing a mediating role.

Previous rounds of negotiations between Sudan, Egypt and Ethiopia have failed to overcome the points of disagreement in the legal and technical aspects of the dam, and have raised fears concerning its impact on the water supply downstream.

Cairo and Khartoum are seeking to reach a legally binding agreement on the rules for filling and operating the dam before Addis Ababa begins filling the reservoir. Egypt and Sudan have repeatedly said they would reject any unilateral Ethiopian measures before a comprehensive agreement on the points of disagreement was reached.

The regional director of water resources at the Center for Environment and Development for the Arab Region and Europe, Khaled Abu Zaid, said he believed that if Egypt attended the African mini-summit, it would be beneficial.

"Reaching a solution in the Renaissance Dam negotiations is easy, but Ethiopia continues to delay finding a solution. The biggest impediment is the filling and operating rules of the dam," Abu Zaid said.

He added that the livestock of Ethiopia consumes more water than the total water share of Egypt and Sudan combined. Any disruption in the drainage of

the dam, or the occurrence of a collapse, would seriously harm Sudan first, then Egypt, Abu Zaid said.

The political director of EXX Africa, Robert Besseling, told Bloomberg: "There is no urgent danger forcing Egypt to respond in a more aggressive way today because it will take the Renaissance Dam reservoir over five years to fill up. The risk for Egypt will start two years from now when its water flow weakens."



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Sudan says Ethiopia denies filling the Renaissance dam reservoir
Egypt weighing possibility of mini-African summit on Renaissance Dam crisis

Berlin, Rome, Paris threaten sanctions on states interfering in Libya

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BERLIN: France, Italy and Germany are “ready to consider” imposing sanctions on foreign powers that violate an arms embargo in Libya, a joint statement by the EU countries’ leaders said Saturday.

“We ... urge all foreign actors to end their increasing interference and to fully respect the arms embargo established by the United Nations Security Council,” the statement said.

“We are ready to consider the possible use of sanctions should breaches to the embargo at sea, on land or in the air continue and look forward to the proposals the EU High Representative/Vice President will make to this end,” it added.



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[One dead in Damascus blast on eve of polls](#)

Sat, 2020-07-18 20:32

DAMASCUS: One person was killed and another wounded in two blasts Saturday in the Syrian capital, state news agency SANA said, on the eve of the country's third war-time parliamentary polls.

It said "one person was killed and another wounded in the explosion of two devices near Anas bin Malik mosque" in the Nahr Aisha area of southern Damascus.

There were no immediate details on the blasts near the mosque, where President Bashar Assad has attended prayers in the past, or the casualties. Syrians go to the polls Sunday to elect a new parliament as the Damascus government grapples with international sanctions and a crumbling economy after retaking large parts of the war-torn country.

Assad's Baath party and its allies are expected to win most of parliament's 250 seats in the first elections since 2016.

For the first time this year, there will be polling stations in former opposition bastions, including in the Eastern Ghouta region outside Damascus and in the south of Idlib province in the country's northwest.

Damascus has largely been secure since Russia-backed government forces expelled rebels and jihadists from the capital's doorstep in 2018.

Syria's war has killed more than 380,000 people and displaced millions from their homes since starting in 2011 with the repression of anti-government protests.



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