

GCC offers to host peace talks between Yemeni factions, including Houthis, in Riyadh

Tue, 2022-03-15 19:05

AL-MUKALLA: The Gulf Cooperation Council is sponsoring unprecedented and comprehensive peace talks between warring factions in Yemen, including the Iran-backed Houthis, that could begin in Riyadh before the end of this month.

"The Gulf Cooperation Council will invite all Yemeni components, both supporters and oppositions, and the putschist Houthis would have some seats in the talks," a senior government official told Arab News. The talks might start on March 27 and would continue for at least one week, they added.

Former Yemeni government ministers and outspoken politicians such as Ahmed Al-Maysari, Saleh Al-Jabwani and Abdul Aziz Al-Jubari would be invited. "Almost no one will be excluded," the official said.

Meanwhile, a car bomb attack on Tuesday on a convoy in which a Yemeni southern military commander was traveling in Abyan province killed two soldiers and seriously injured two more, according to a Reuters report that quoted a military official.

Brig. Gen. Abdul Latif Al-Sayed survived the assassination attempt, said Mohammed Al-Naqib, spokesman for the Southern Armed Forces. Two assailants were also killed, he added.

Al-Sayed is the commander in Abyan of the Security Belt, the military forces of the separatist Southern Transitional Council. In October last year, the governor of Aden, who is a member of the STC, survived a car bomb attack in the port city that killed six people.

The announcement of the proposed GCC-sponsored peace talks came the day after Yemeni President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi met Nayef Falah Al-Hajraf, the council's secretary general, in Riyadh. SABA, the official Yemeni news agency, reported that the two men discussed GCC support for moves to end the war in Yemen and the Houthi coup, based on peace talks, continuing efforts to fully implement the Riyadh Agreement and other issues.

They also reportedly discussed the GCC's financial support for the devalued Yemeni riyal, to address deteriorating services and to alleviate the suffering of the Yemeni people.

Yemeni officials said the peace talks are contingent on the Houthis accepting the invitation. They added that the rebels might intensify their military operations across the country, and in particular outside the besieged central city of Marib, in an attempt to improve their negotiating position if they agree to participate.

“They will carry out major military operations in Marib and on other fronts to thwart any agreement (and force acceptance of) their onerous conditions that they have repeatedly floated during previous talks,” the official said.

The Houthis have rejected previous peace proposals, including the Saudi initiative, and insist that the Coalition to Restore Legitimacy in Yemen must first halt its airstrikes and lift alleged restrictions on Sanaa airport and Hodeidah seaport.

Najeeb Ghallab, undersecretary at Yemen’s Information Ministry, told Arab News that the internationally recognized government of Yemen would strongly support any Arab initiative to end the war, but warned that Houthi resistance could sabotage the proposed peace talks.

“We are most supportive of any Arab role to bring Yemenis together under the umbrella of the Gulf Cooperation Council,” he said.

However, he added that powerful factions inside the Houthi movement, which benefit from the war, and Iran, which uses the rebels as its stooge, would reject any calls for peace.

“The Houthis believe that gathering Yemenis ... under one umbrella will weaken their role,” said Ghallab.



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[Abu Dhabi crown prince to Japanese PM: UAE keen to maintain energy security, global markets stability](#)

Author:

Reuters

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Tue, 2022-03-15 13:05

DUBAI: Abu Dhabi's Crown Prince spoke with Japan's prime minister about the Ukraine crisis and assured him that the United Arab Emirates is keen to maintain energy security and keep global markets stable, Emirates News Agency reported on Tuesday.

Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan also told Prime Minister Fumio Kishida that his country is keen on boosting relations with Japan in the energy field.

Earlier on Tuesday, Kishida said he had agreed with the crown prince to work together to help stabilize the international crude oil market as the Ukraine war has disrupted the market, bolstering the importance of Gulf crude exporters for energy importers like Japan.



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[Lebanese parties jostle for votes; Arab League to monitor elections](#)

Author:

Mon, 2022-03-14 23:04

BEIRUT: Arab League Secretary-General Ahmed Aboul Gheit has announced that his organization is ready to send a team to Lebanon to monitor the parliamentary elections scheduled for May 15.

“The Arab League has done this in Algeria, Iraq, Palestine, and many regions, and I think we will implement this in Lebanon,” he said.

Aboul Gheit visited Lebanon on Monday as part of the arrangements for holding the Arab summit in Algeria on Nov. 1 and 2.

Lebanese President Michel Aoun met with Aboul Gheit and assured him that the elections will take place on time. According to Aoun's media office, he welcomed the idea of an Arab League team monitoring the elections.

With the candidacy deadline ending Tuesday midnight, the electoral competition has intensified between the large blocs who have started to announce their candidates. The number of newly registered candidates jumped to nearly 600 by Monday noon.

Sectarian polarization has started to trickle into electoral campaigns. Some parties, especially Hezbollah and its allies, have attacked foreign parties and their role in these pivotal elections.

Parties will be desperate for votes as the new parliament will elect the next Lebanese president in October.

FASTFACT

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As the political jostling heated up, former Prime Minister Fouad Siniora expressed a glum view about the future of the country.

In his statement on the 17th anniversary of the Cedar Revolution on March 14, he said: "I fear for Lebanon as it experiences some of its most difficult and bitter days. Lebanon's state has become dependent, its institutions have collapsed, its economy deteriorated and the Lebanese are waiting for crumbs of aid in the darkness and the cold.

"Meanwhile, the political tutelage of Iran and its armed party has intensified in Lebanon, in light of constant opposition to political, administrative and financial reform."

Siniora stressed the need to reconfigure and strengthen internal unity to save Lebanon from those who have hijacked it.

Meanwhile, Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri held a press conference in which he announced the names of the candidates of the Amal Movement and the Development and Liberation parliamentary bloc, days after his ally Hezbollah announced the names of its candidates.

"The elections are receiving unprecedented international and regional attention," Berri pointed out.

"This attention, or rather this interference, has not receded. Some are

expressing interest in good faith but others, and there are many, want to invest in the election results to create sectarian strife. These foreign parties are funding some Lebanese parties to achieve strategic political goals to change Lebanon's identity," Berri explained.

Samir Geagea, the head of the Lebanese Forces party, launched its electoral campaign, describing the upcoming vote as "an existential battle and not just a political one."

Geagea added: "The Lebanese have three options in the upcoming elections: Those who want a state but cannot build it, those who do not want a state and are able to continue to obstruct its construction, and those who want a state and can indeed build it."



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Lebanon PM Mikati says he will not run in May parliamentary election
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kidnappers of aid workers

Mon, 2022-03-14 22:27

AL-MUKALLA: Yemen's military and security authorities have vowed to hunt down the abductors of aid workers in the southeastern province of Hadramout as an international aid organization reduced humanitarian activities due to security concerns.

The government's security committee in Hadramout has ordered army units to remove unofficial checkpoints, intensify security measures throughout the province's fast lands and track down the armed men who are holding two international aid workers.

Security forces across the province also received similar orders from the ministry of interior to capture the abductors.

"We will be catching them sooner or later," a senior official at the ministry of interior, who spoke on condition of anonymity, told Arab News on Monday, adding that the ministry was still unaware of the abductors' identities and demands.

"They are a mix of drug addicts and terrorists," the official said.

Earlier this month, unidentified men kidnapped two foreign workers with the international medical charity Doctors Without Borders in a remote area between the city of Seiyun and Aber in the province of Hadramout.

Local media reports said that the abductors posed as military officers after setting up a fake checkpoint in Khousem Al-Ain area, asked the German and Mexican workers and their Yemeni associates to board their Toyota pick-up, and quickly drove deeper into the desert.

The abduction prompted the MSF on Sunday into closing some of its humanitarian operations in the central city of Marib, a move that is expected to exacerbate the already dire humanitarian situation in the Yemeni city that hosts more than two million internally displaced people.

"Medecins sans Frontieres announces the closure of some of its humanitarian activities in the Marib project, following the disappearance of two colleagues as they were on their way to the project," the medical charity said in a statement.

"We consider this as an unacceptable act of violence and we are concerned about the current exposure of the MSF teams in the area," it added.

The MSF said that it would shut down five out of eight mobile clinics operating in Marib and would completely withdraw support from Marib General Hospital.

In the southern province of Abyan, local officials said on Monday that talks to secure the release of five UN workers held by suspected Al-Qaeda militants

reached a deadlock as the militants refused to free the hostages before the government met their demands.

The militants seek to swap the hostages with prisoners in Aden and have demanded a ransom of more than \$300,000.

Last month, the suspected Al-Qaeda militants abducted the five UN workers in Abyan's Moudia district while heading back to their office in Aden after a field mission.

Local officials told Arab News that the militants are holding the abducted workers in rugged and mountainous areas in Abyan and threaten to execute them if the army or security services use force to release them.

Despite the army and ministry of interior's stern orders for hunting down the abductors, critics have cast doubt over the ability of the country's poor security and military units to apprehend Al-Qaeda militants or drug dealers inside their safe havens in Abyan or Hadramout.

Yemeni officials have signaled they would seek to enlist the help of military officers from the US and Saudi Arabia.

Support for the local security service was discussed last week by the first undersecretary of the interior ministry, Maj. Gen. Mohammed Al-Sharef, with American and Arab coalition counterterrorism officers.

Quoting a Yemeni intelligence officer, Al-Ayyam daily newspaper reported last week that American officers have participated in the current efforts to hunt down the abductors in Abyan and Hadramout.

Despite their attempts to make a comeback in south Yemen provinces, Al-Qaeda in Yemen has suffered decisive blows over the past six years after Yemeni military forces, trained and armed by the Arab coalition, expelled them from their major urban and rural strongholds.



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Fighting rages outside Yemen's Marib as UN envoy meets leaders
Houthi bomb-maker killed in northern Yemen clashes

[Lebanon PM Mikati says he will not run in May parliamentary election](#)

Author:

Reuters

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Mon, 2022-03-14 15:25

BEIRUT: Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati said on Monday he would not seek re-election in a parliamentary election scheduled for May 15.

The statement, made in a television address, throws Sunni Muslim politics in Lebanon into deeper disarray two months from a vote seen as important for reinvigorating public life in Lebanon in the third year of a financial crisis.

It follows an announcement by ex-Prime Minister Saad Hariri in January that

he would withdraw from politics and that his Future Movement, which now has some 20 members of parliament, would not field candidates. Hariri is the top Sunni politician in a country where a power-sharing agreement dictates the prime minister must always be Sunni, the president a Maronite Christian and the parliament speaker a Shiite Muslim. All seats in Lebanon's 128-member legislature are also allocated by religious sect, with 27 seats set aside for Sunnis – most of which are now up for grabs. While announcing he would not run, Mikati called on Lebanese to turn out to vote and said his move aimed to "provide room for the new generation". Hariri's decision had raised concerns about a potential boycott of the vote by Sunnis that could undermine the electoral process, though a number of other Sunni candidates are in the running.



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