

Sudan denies that delegation will visit Israel

Author:

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KHARTOUM: Sudan has denied reports that it would send its a first delegation to Israel months after a deal for ties between the two countries, and two Sudanese sources said Khartoum had scrapped a planned visit.

Sources had previously told Reuters that a Sudanese delegation comprising security and intelligence officials would travel to Israel next week.

Sudan agreed to take steps toward normal ties with Israel last year in a deal brokered by then US President Donald Trump's administration. This month, Sudan's Cabinet voted to repeal a 1958 law to boycott Israel.

The issue is divisive in Sudan, which is going through a delicate political transition following the overthrow of former leader Omar Bashir in 2019.

Two official Sudanese sources told Reuters that an invitation to visit Israel had been accepted, but that plans had later changed. They gave no explanation for the change.

Sudan's general intelligence service said "news circulating on some media and social media about the visit of a security delegation to Sudan was not true," state news agency SUNA reported.

Sudan's security and defense council also denied the news.

The deal for Sudan to normalize ties with Israel was struck alongside normalization deals with the UAE, Bahrain and Morocco, and came as the US agreed to remove Sudan from its list of state sponsors of terrorism.

Sudan's military is seen to have led the move, but civilian groups with which it is sharing power are more reluctant and say the deal must be approved by a yet-to-be formed transitional parliament.

Cyprus, meanwhile, hosted a meeting of top diplomats from Israel and the UAE, as well as Greece, for talks they said reflected the "changing face" of the Middle East.

"This new strategic membership stretches from the shores of the Arabian Gulf" to the Mediterranean and Europe, Israeli Foreign Minister Gabi Ashkenazi told a news conference in the coastal resort city of Paphos.

Standing alongside Anwar Gargash, adviser to UAE President Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed, he said their encounter was a sign of "the changing face of the Middle East."

He called for a "strategic partnership in energy between the Eastern Med and the Gulf."

Gargash said ties with the Jewish state amounted to an "alternative strategic view" aimed at bolstering regional security, adding that the Paphos talks covered economic and political cooperation, as well as "using technology to fight COVID-19."

The Cypriot and Greek foreign ministers, unmasked before a backdrop of the Mediterranean, both stressed the new regional grouping was open to all parties.

"The path is open for all countries of the region to join us," said host Nikos Christodoulides, without a direct mention of Turkey, whose troops

occupy the northern third of Cyprus and which is in dispute with Nicosia and Athens over gas deposits in the eastern Mediterranean. Greek Foreign Minister Nikos Dendias, who has visited both Turkey and Libya over the past week, stressed calls for “the withdrawal of all foreign forces” from the North African country, where Turkish troops are posted. On Iran and its controversial nuclear program, Ashkenazi reiterated that Israel would “do whatever it takes to prevent this radical and anti-Semitic regime from acquiring nuclear weapons.”



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[Dozens of fighters killed in battles near Yemeni city of Marib](#)

Fri, 2021-04-16 23:25

AL-MUKALLA: Dozens of rebel fighters and government forces have been killed as fighting continued to rage near Yemen’s central city of Marib, local authorities and media reported on Friday.

Iran-backed Houthis have intensified their relentless attacks on government-controlled areas in Marib province in an attempt to end more than two months of military stalemate in their resumed offensive to capture the government's last bastion in northern Yemen.

Abdu Abdullah Majili, a Yemeni army spokesperson, told Arab News that dozens of Houthis were killed on Thursday and Friday in failed attacks in Marib's major battlefields such as Al-Kasara and Helan, to the west of the city.

The heaviest clashes were reported in Al-Kasara where local army commanders and soldiers said they battled against "consecutive waves" of Houthi fighters and captured dozens of rebels.

"Al-Kasara has turned into a black hole that swallows Houthi fighters," Majili said, adding that warplanes from the Arab coalition destroyed Houthi military reinforcements and positions, helping the Yemeni Army and allied forces to push back the Houthis.

The Yemeni Army has also mourned the death of several combatants who were killed in fighting in Marib. On social media, many government supporters also announced the death of friends during armed encounters with the Houthis in Marib.

Chief of staff of the Yemeni Army, Lt. Gen. Sagheer bin Aziz, on Friday vowed to keep military operations going against the Houthis until the group had been pushed from Marib and the remaining Yemeni territories under their control.

During visits to Marib battlefields, he pledged to defeat the Houthis and thanked the Arab coalition for its military support.

BACKGROUND

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The current escalation in fighting in Marib began on Feb. 8 when the Houthis renewed a major offensive to capture the oil-rich city. Despite dispatching thousands of fighters to the province, the Houthis have been embroiled in a military quagmire as their forces have failed to make major territorial gains amid stiff resistance from government forces.

Briefing the UN Security Council on the situation in Yemen, the UN special envoy for Yemen, Martin Griffiths, said on Thursday that fighting in Marib had become "the major center of gravity" in the country's war and warned that the offensive there was threatening the lives of thousands of displaced people living in Marib city.

"The fighting in Marib, goodness knows we have seen this spike and fall, and

spike and fall and now it is showing dangerous signs of escalating once again. Internally displaced people (IDP), along with local communities, have been in the line of fire, and are threatened by the assault on the city of Marib," Griffiths added.

Yemen's government has repeatedly accused the Houthis of targeting IDP camps outside the city, forcing their inhabitants to flee to safer areas.

The government's IDP management unit said more than 2 million people who had fled fighting and Houthi repression in their home provinces now lived in overcrowded camps in Marib city.





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[Khan Al-Tujjar market in Nablus is a shoppers' paradise](#)

Fri, 2021-04-16 23:19

NABLUS: In the center of the old city of Nablus is Khan Al-Tujjar, a market built about 450 years ago, and still as vibrant today as it was back then.

Known to locals also as the "Sultan's market," a sign at the entrance says that it was constructed by the Ottoman Grand Vizier Qara Mustafa Pasha in 1569, in a similar fashion to the Hamidiyeh market in the Syrian capital, Damascus.

The walls of the roofed building are in the Islamic style – a series of arches raised up with stones and clay – and still bear Ottoman inscriptions.

In the center of each arch is a square hatch that illuminates the road below for pedestrians through the sun's rays, and on both sides of the roof there are many other side windows.

The road through the market, no more than three meters wide, is packed every Sunday with shoppers. Khan Al-Tujjar has managed to endure the ravages of time, and survive despite chaotic events; during the Israeli invasion in 2002, the eastern entrance to the market was destroyed.

Economically, the market represents Nablus' main commercial center, with dozens of shops and vendors; it is considered one of the most famous markets in the West Bank.

Khan Al-Tujjar is full of clothes and shoe stores, and is especially busy during the holy month of Ramadan. Local merchants sell the best products and goods in the city here, ranging from fruit and vegetables to spices, interspersed with sweet shops, fishmongers selling fresh produce, and various trinket and gift shops.

Several smaller markets branch out from the main body of Khan Al-Tujjar, including Al-Haddadin Market, Najjareen Market, Basal Market, and Al-Nasr Street Market.

Amer Hasiba, one of Khan Al-Tujjar's resident merchants, inherited his shop, his ancestors having first bought it hundreds of years ago. Like many others on site, the shop does not exceed 20 square meters in size.

"Khan Al-Tujjar is a major landmark in the city of Nablus, and an important commercial center," Hasiba said. "All a shopper needs can be found in the markets of Nablus at low prices. (During) Ramadan, the commercial movement in Khan Al-Tujjar increases dramatically, and the profits for the merchants increase."

Nablus is one of the oldest cities in the world, and its construction dates back 5,600 years (to around 3600 BC). It is home to ancient Christian and Islamic landmarks, as well as Turkish baths, springs and squares, with a clock tower in the center built in the Ottoman era.

Samira Nabasha, 44, was walking the market streets carrying bags full of things she had bought for Ramadan. "Every year at this time I came to the old market in order to buy Ramadan supplies. There is quality in the products and prices better than other, modern markets. Here I feel I belong to the city," she said.

"Since childhood, we have become accustomed to shopping in Khan Al-Tujjar."



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[Khan Al-Tujjar market in Nablus](#)

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[**Erdogan government slammed after Daesh members revealed as Turkish nationals**](#)

Fri, 2021-04-16 21:28

JEDDAH: Turkey's main opposition the Republican People's Party (CHP) has demanded a thorough investigation after a group of Daesh members were revealed to be Turkish nationals.

The CHP has revealed the details of the recent decision of the government to freeze the assets of 365 individuals and 12 companies linked to terror groups.

The Treasury and Finance Ministry announced last week that the assets of members of terror groups, including Daesh, have been blocked.

The list of individuals whose assets were confiscated was published in the Official Gazette No. 31447, but eight of these individuals were shockingly

listed as Turkish nationals with tax numbers attached.

These individuals – Ziad Alzhouri, Hasan Krayem, Hasan Maher Abdullah Abdullah, Mohamad Qassem, Fayez Alfliti, Saad Ali Saad Saad, Salim Ahmet Bakr Abboosh, and Yusuf El Ali Elhasan – are mostly from Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon.

With a parliamentary inquiry, CHP's Ankara deputy Tekin Bingol asked the government to investigate the matter seriously and transparently.

"These people are traveling freely within Turkish territories, they are conducting trade activities. And we notice this when their assets are frozen," Bingol said.

Daesh, which has been listed as a terror group by Turkey since 2013, has carried out several bloody terror attacks in the country, with at least 10 suicide bombings, seven bomb attacks, and four armed attacks. Daesh killed 315 people and injured hundreds in the attacks.

Bingol said that the authorities should expose those who provided these people with citizenship rights, adding: "Those who are coming to our country and getting privileges should be thoroughly investigated for their involvement in terror attacks. Otherwise, the local networks they are involved with are likely to generate new terror attacks."

"These Daesh militants have the blood of our 103 citizens on their hands," he said, referring to the twin suicide bombing attack carried out by Daesh on a rally near Ankara's main train station on Oct. 10, 2015.

The CHP is demanding the government explain how foreign militants are provided with Turkish identity cards. The party has requested that the government reveal all trade relations that the Daesh members conducted with their tax numbers.

"How were they allowed to conduct trade activities? Which goods did they trade? How did they find the money to manage their business? Those who are responsible should immediately be punished," Bingol said in his address to the Interior Minister Suleyman Soylu and Treasury and Finance Minister Lutfi Elvan.

In recent weeks, Turkish police forces have conducted countrywide anti-terror operations and arrested dozens of Daesh suspects, including foreign fighters.

Official figures show that some 2,000 people have been arrested and 7,000 others deported in anti-Daesh operations in Turkey over the past three years.



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Turkey detains 43 suspected Daesh members, foils plot: police Turkey's missing \$128bn triggers publicity campaign and police action

[US official fires warning shot at Lebanese reform blockers](#)

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BEIRUT: The US undersecretary of state for political affairs, David Hale, has issued a warning against "those who continue to obstruct progress on the reform agenda."

He said that they "jeopardize their relationship with the US and our partners and open themselves up to punitive actions," adding: "Those who facilitate progress can be assured of our strong support."

Hale's statement came after his meeting on Thursday with Lebanese President Michel Aoun.

The political disagreements resulted in the failure of the designated prime minister, Saad Hariri, to form a rescue government of non-partisan specialists to implement reforms demanded by the international community.

President Aoun's team and his supporters object to the government lineup presented by Hariri last December. Aoun and his political team, represented by the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM), are demanding that they have the power to name Christian ministers in the government and to have the blocking vote. Hezbollah, which supports a techno-political government, champions some of these demands.

The US administration had previously imposed sanctions on FPM leader Gebran Bassil on charges related to corruption.

Hale stressed that he came to Lebanon "at the request of Secretary Blinken to underscore the Biden administration's continued commitment to the Lebanese people and our shared desire for stability and prosperity in Lebanon."

Hale reiterated his condemnation of the performance of the ruling authority.

"The Lebanese people are clearly suffering. They are suffering because Lebanese leaders have failed to meet their responsibility to put the country's interests first and to address the mounting socio-economic problems," he said.

Hale referred to his two previous visits to Lebanon, which were in December 2019 and August 2020. He said: "I heard then an unmistakable call for change from Lebanese from all backgrounds. These demands are universal: For transparency, accountability, and an end to the endemic corruption and mismanagement that have caused such hardship.

"If these demands had been met, Lebanon would be on the road to fulfilling its tremendous potential. Yet today, there has been very little progress. But it's not too late."

Hale renewed his call on Lebanon's leaders "to show sufficient flexibility to form a government that is willing and capable of reversing the collapse underway."

He said: "The time to build a government, not block it, is now. The time to build a government is now. The time for comprehensive reform is now. And America and the international community are ready to help. But we cannot help, as I said yesterday, without a Lebanese partner."

Hale specifically criticized Hezbollah: "Hezbollah's accumulation of dangerous weapons, smuggling, and other illicit and corrupt activities undermine legitimate state institutions."

He added: "They rob the Lebanese of the ability to build a peaceful and prosperous country. And it is Iran that is fueling and financing this

challenge to the state and this distortion of Lebanese political life.

“This brings me to America’s renewed negotiations over Iran’s nuclear program. A mutual return to compliance with the Iran nuclear deal is in our interest and in the interest of regional stability, but it would only be the beginning of our work. As we address the other elements of Iran’s destabilizing behavior, America will not abandon our interests and our friends here in Lebanon.”

Hale, who is described in Lebanon as the godfather of the framework agreement for negotiations on demarcating Lebanon’s southern borders with Israel, stressed that “America stands ready to facilitate negotiations on the maritime boundary between Lebanon and Israel on the basis on which we initiated these discussions.”

Hale’s insistence on facilitating negotiations with Israel “on the basis on which we initiated” came as a response to Lebanon’s demand during the 2020 Lebanese-Israeli technical negotiations to amend the area it expects to reclaim due to a calculating error. This amendment will include 2,290 sq. km instead of an area of 860 sq. km. This expansion depended on an effort by the Lebanese Army in 2019 to demarcate the maritime borders.

Lebanon drew up a decree to amend this area to submit it to the UN.

This decree has yet to be signed by Aoun, pending the approval of the cabinet. Caretaker Prime Minister Hassan Diab is refusing to hold a cabinet session due to its illegality.

Following Hale’s statement, Aoun stressed “the importance of continuing negotiations on demarcating the maritime borders between Lebanon and Israel and fulfilling America’s role as an honest and just mediator.”

He said: “Lebanon has the right to develop its position according to its interest, in line with the international law, and in accordance with constitutional principles.”

Aoun called for “the appointment of international experts to demarcate the line and the commitment to refraining from any exploration work in the Karish field and in the adjacent waters.”

He stressed that he would not abandon “the sovereignty, rights, and interests of Lebanon” and would “make every effort to ensure that the demarcation of the borders is a subject of consensus among the Lebanese and not a subject of division, with the aim of strengthening Lebanon’s position in the negotiations.”

Hale’s meeting with Lebanese Army commander Gen. Joseph Aoun focused on “the extent to which the army was affected by the approved spending rationalization decision and its impact on the army’s performance of the great tasks entrusted to it.”

Hale’s meetings in Beirut coincided with the visit of Hariri to Moscow. The Kremlin announced on Thursday that a phone call took place between President

Vladimir Putin and Hariri, who was present at the Russian Foreign Ministry. The call lasted 50 minutes.

The Kremlin's statement said that Hariri briefed Putin on internal developments and the initial measures to form a government and overcome the economic crisis. Russia affirmed its position in support of Lebanon's sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity.

A source among the Lebanese delegation to Moscow told Arab News that the call between Putin and Hariri was "excellent with regard to the government crisis, and it stressed that the government should be formed as soon as possible."



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Lebanon demands Israel halt offshore gas exploration in disputed areaUS ready to facilitate maritime border talks between Lebanon and Israel