

Egypt becomes first MENA country to launch Closing the Gender Gap Accelerator

Author:

Tue, 2021-03-02 03:49

CAIRO: Egypt has launched the Closing the Gender Gap Accelerator, the first institutional cooperation between Cairo and the World Economic Forum, which will advance women's economic empowerment efforts.

In a statement, Minister of International Cooperation Rania Al-Mashat said that the partnership enables Egypt to use the forum's global presence to tell development stories, promote the empowerment of women, and exchange ideas with international partners.

She said that Egypt is the first country in Africa and the MENA region to launch the Closing the Gender Gap Accelerator. The initiative will focus on achieving the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) concerned with gender equality to enhance women's economic empowerment.

It will reduce the gender gap in the labor market and change stereotypes surrounding women.

The ministry has dedicated \$82 million for about 13 projects to achieve the SDGs associated with the empowerment of women. The dedicated SDGs fund will also spend \$3.3 billion implementing 34 projects to close the gender gap in various sectors such as education and health.

Al-Mashat said that the launch of the bridging the gender gap incentive reflects government efforts and the country's commitment to take measures that ensure women play their role in development.

The minister said that several sectors of Egyptian society are working on a three-year time frame to reduce economic gaps between the genders and empower women.

The executive plan includes supporting the representation of women at senior levels of company management, reducing the difficulties women face in balancing their work with childcare responsibilities, and providing women with skills, experiences and scholarship opportunities in fields where they are typically underrepresented.



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[US urges Houthis to 'match Saudi commitment to ending Yemen war'](#)

Tue, 2021-03-02 02:28

NEW YORK, AL-MUKALLA: Saudi Arabia is “committed and eager” to find a way to end the war in Yemen and Iran-backed Houthi militias should do the same, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Monday.

“The necessary first step is to stop their offensive against Marib, a city where a million internally displaced people live, and to join the Saudis and the government in Yemen in making constructive moves toward peace,” Blinken said.

Speaking after a visit to the region by his Yemen envoy Tim Lenderking, Blinken told a UN humanitarian aid conference: “He reports that the Saudis and the Yemen government are committed and eager to find a solution to the conflict. We call on the Houthis to match this commitment.”

Monday's donor conference raised \$1.7 billion, less than half the \$3.85 billion the UN was seeking for 2021 to avert a large-scale famine. Among the commitments were \$430 million from Saudi Arabia, \$191 million from the US, \$230 million from the UAE and \$240 million from Germany.

"Millions of Yemeni children, women and men desperately need aid to live. Cutting aid is a death sentence," UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said. "The best that can be said about today is that it represents a down-payment. I thank those who did pledge generously, and I ask others to consider again what they can do to help stave off the worst famine the world has seen in decades."

The amount raised "does not solve the problem," UN humanitarian chief Mark Lowcock said. "It's going to be impossible with such limited resources to prevent a large-scale famine.

"We are at a crossroads with Yemen. We can choose the path to peace or let Yemenis slide into the world's worst famine for decades. An adequately funded aid operation will prevent the spread of famine and create the conditions for lasting peace. If you're not feeding the people, you're feeding the war."

In Yemen, local health officials said they hoped the new funds would be directed to the health sector.

Dr. Ahmed Mansour, a health official in the southern city of Taiz, told Arab News that health facilities were in desperate need of funds and medical supplies to fight off a new wave of coronavirus.

"We are in need of ventilators, drugs and personal protective equipment, and renovating health buildings," he said.



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US envoy to Yemen Lenderking meets Kuwaiti foreign minister Saudi Arabia pledges \$430m to UN's Yemen response

[US envoy to Yemen Lenderking meets Kuwaiti foreign minister](#)

Author:

Tue, 2021-03-02 01:08

LONDON: Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Ahmed Nasser Al-Mohammed Al-Sabah met Tim Lenderking, the US special envoy for Yemen on Monday, the Kuwait News Agency reported.

Lenderking, who is touring the region, praised Kuwait for its political and humanitarian contributions to the efforts to restore security and safety to Yemen. He also briefed the minister on the latest developments in the crisis. Sheikh Ahmad reiterated Kuwait's desire to do all that it can to help and support the people of Yemen, and to assist with efforts to reach a political solution that restores the nation's security and stability. He added that his country also supports the role and work of the US and its envoy as part of the efforts to end the crisis.

Lenderking said Washington will continue to put pressure on the Houthi militia to halt attacks on civilian areas. He again condemned the repeated assaults by the Iran-backed group on targets in Saudi Arabia which, he said, "is a direct threat to Gulf and Arab national security."



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UN chief laments 'disappointing' \$1.7bn of aid pledges for Yemen
Saudi Arabia is a critical partner: US Yemen envoy

[Footage emerges of Iranian missile attack on US troops](#)

Author:

Mon, 2021-03-01 23:58

LONDON: Footage has emerged of an Iranian missile attack on a US airbase in Iraq last year that could have brought the two countries to the brink of war.

On Jan. 8 last year, 11 missiles, each thought to have been carrying 1,000-

pound warheads, hit Al-Asad airbase, which was home to some 2,000 US troops at the time.

The incident followed the assassination of Maj. Gen. Qassem Soleimani, commander of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, by a US drone in Baghdad on Jan. 3.

That strike was ordered after a spate of incidents targeting American personnel and facilities by Iran-backed forces in Iraq, culminating in an assault on the US Embassy in Baghdad on Dec. 31, 2019.

Marine Gen. Frank McKenzie, commander of US forces in the Middle East, told American TV network CBS that more than 100 troops suffered severe brain injuries due to the attack. He said there was a "retaliation plan" in place in the event that any US personnel were killed.

Half the personnel and most of the aircraft were evacuated from the base before the attack, with McKenzie saying if that had not been done in time, "I think we might have lost 20 or 30 airplanes and we might have lost 100 to 150 US personnel. We had a plan to retaliate if Americans had died."

When the retaliation for Soleimani's assassination came, McKenzie was stationed in Florida and monitored the attack remotely, joined by then-President Donald Trump and Secretary of Defense Mark Esper.

McKenzie said: "I've never been on one (call) like this where real missiles (were) being fired at our forces and where I thought the risks were so high."

An intelligence officer reportedly told senior figures that the "intention is to level this base and we may not survive." The missiles left vast craters and destroyed entire buildings.

Maj. Alan Johnson prepared a farewell video message for his son, urging him to "be strong" and to look after his mother, believing he might not survive the night.

He described the impact that the missiles had on detonation as being "like a freight train," telling CBS: "Words can't even describe the amount of energy that is released by these missiles."

He added that he and 40 other men at one point sought refuge in a bunker designed to house 10 people from much smaller ordinance blasts. "The fire was just rolling over the bunkers, you know, like 70 feet in the air," he said.

Sgt. Kimo Keltz, who was stationed inside a guard post to fend off any possible attack by ground troops during the missile barrage, said: "We got down and we protected our vital organs, our heads, and we waited. One of the closest (missiles) that had hit directly near us actually lifted my body about two inches off the ground."

Despite no fatalities, hundreds of troops started reporting headaches and other side effects, including vomiting, in the immediate aftermath of the attack.

Keltz described a two-week long concussion he suffered as being like "someone hitting me over the head with a hammer over and over and over."

Johnson was one of 29 soldiers awarded purple hearts for courage during the attack, but sustained severe head trauma that still affects him today.

"Headaches every day, horrible tinnitus or ringing in the ears, PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder). I still have nightmares," he said.

Despite the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic since the exchange of hostilities, and a change of US leadership, tensions between Tehran and Washington remain high.

Last week, US President Joe Biden launched an attack on pro-Iran militants on the Syrian-Iraqi border following an attack on the largest American base in Iraq on Feb. 15 by Tehran-backed forces.



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[Lebanon faced with darkness if a government is not formed to purchase fuel for electricity plants](#)

Author:

Mon, 2021-03-01 23:38

BEIRUT: Lebanon “will enter total darkness by the end of this month” if a government is not formed, a source in the Finance Ministry has told Arab News amid a growing electricity crisis.

Beirut has for a week been enduring a blackout. The city – which in recent years was exempt from the harsh rationing of electricity due to its role as the administrative, commercial, and hospital center for the whole country – used to experience no more than three hours a day of power outage.

However, in the last week, the blackouts have exceeded 12 hours a day. There is no clear explanation for these severe blackouts.

Several factors are being discussed, including not unloading shipments of fuel imported by sea.

Other suggestions are that there are administrative disputes over the financial transfers that the Ministry of Energy owes the fuel companies.

Elsewhere, some are arguing that the blackouts have a political background and the aim is to pressure Beirut and Prime Minister-designate Saad Hariri, thus pushing him to step down, in light of his refusal to give the blocking third in the government to President Michel Aoun and the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM). The Ministry of Energy is part of the FPM's share in governing.

Angry protesters have been taking to the streets in Beirut neighborhoods. They have been blocking roads and setting tires ablaze to protest.

Lebanon is under constant electricity-related pressure for structural reasons and now also because of the scarcity of fuel, as its imports are linked to the dollar.

On Monday, the dollar exchange rate on the black market ranged between 9,675 and 9,725 Lebanese pounds.

Most residential neighborhoods and the commercial and industrial sectors depend on private electricity generators powered by diesel, which is a public health risk.

Owners of generators in residential neighborhoods charge exorbitant fees in exchange for providing electricity to subscribers, and they are called the "generator mafia."

They often do not adhere to the rates set by the Ministry of Energy, as they believe they provide a service to citizens that the government cannot provide, and therefore they exert corresponding pressure to maintain their profits.

The successive governments of Lebanon, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund have deemed "electricity reform a vital issue for reducing the debt, which equates to about 150 percent of the GDP."

Net transfers to the state-owned Electricité du Liban (EDL) per year are between \$1 billion and \$1.5 billion, most of which is spent on the purchase of fuel. This is equivalent to about a quarter of the 2020 budget deficit.

The resigned government cannot spend resources on electricity infrastructure as state revenues are required to service the public debt.

The World Bank and investors had pledged at the CEDRE conference to invest \$11 billion in Lebanon's infrastructure, including electricity, but these investments are conditional on implementing reforms, including increasing

electricity prices.

The EDL announced three days ago that despite the arrival of the two carriers loaded with fuel oil to the Lebanese territorial waters and their docking off the coast, it was not possible to unload the fuel due to the failure to open the required letters of credit and the difficulty in completing banking procedures.

This led to a decline in the stock of fuel oil to its lowest level, which neared depletion, and it resulted in a drop in the supply of the electric current by about 400 megawatts of the total energy produced, which is about 1,400 megawatts.

Caretaker Finance Minister Ghazi Wazni signed the opening of credits in favor of the EDL to meet the requirement of the shipment of fuel oil.

These credits, however, are in Lebanese pounds.

A source in the Ministry of Finance told Arab News: "The problem is that the Banque du Liban refuses to convert these credits into dollars at the official rate of 1,505 Lebanese pounds because the central bank suffers from a shortage of dollars."

The source pointed out that "the caretaker energy minister, Raymond Ghajar, was informed by a political authority that the solution is to form a government quickly."

They added: "The matter entered the bazaar of political pressure to form a government that was required to have been formed since last October."

MP Faisal Al-Sayegh expected "the street to explode soon."

He said: "Buying fuel after this month will require issuing a law to give EDL an emergency treasury advance of hundreds of millions of dollars.

"Moreover, the operation and maintenance of the two thermal power plants in Zouk and Zahrani collide with PrimeSouth's claiming for its receivables, which amount to tens of millions of dollars."

Al-Sayegh added: "The two Turkish steamboats that were hired by the Ministry of Energy to generate electricity are to withdraw from Lebanon because they did not receive their dues, which are about \$160 million."

Al-Sayegh said: "With the money that was paid for hiring the two ships, it was possible to establish two production plants, or at least buy two newer and better ships."

The EDL expects a "gradual improvement in the power supply as soon as the two carriers' cargo is discharged if banking procedures are completed and the supplier issues the approval to unload."

But the source in the Finance Ministry said that unless a government is urgently formed, Lebanon "will enter total darkness by the end of this

month.”



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