

# Saudis meet with top Houthi officials in Yemen's Sana'a ahead of ceasefire talks



A Saudi delegation has reportedly met with a number of high-ranking officials from Yemen's Houthis in Sana'a as part of preparations for talks to reach a final ceasefire agreement to end the eight-year war, Press TV reported. Saudi and Omani delegations arrived in Yemen's capital Sana'a, Houthi-run media said on Sunday, to negotiate a permanent ceasefire deal with Houthi officials and end Riyadh's military involvement in the country's longrunning war, Reuters reported. The visit indicates progress in the Oman-mediated consultations between Riyadh and Sana'a, which run in parallel to U.N. peace efforts. Peace efforts have also gained momentum after Iran and Saudi

Arabia agreed to reestablish ties in a deal brokered by China. Yemeni media outlets reported that the Saudi delegates held a meeting with Mohammed Ali al-Houthi, a senior member of Yemen's Supreme Political Council, as well as some high-profile figures of the Sana'a-based National Salvation Government. Yemeni media outlets published pictures of a Saudi official shaking hands with Houthi in Sana'a. The outlets added that the faces of the high-ranking Saudi officials involved in the talks with Ansarullah officials have not been publicized at their request. Meanwhile, an informed source, who asked not to be named, told SABA that the Saudis are going

to negotiate "the removal of the tight naval and air blockade on Yemen, and end to the eight-year-long aggression, restoration of the Yemeni nation's rights, and the payment of civil servant salaries as well as a portion of oil and gas revenues" during talks with Mahdi al-Mashat, the chairman of the council. Local news agencies said Saudi Arabia's Ambassador to Yemen Mohammed Saeed al-Jaber, who resides in the southern port city of Aden, arrived in Sana'a at the head of the Saudi delegation to meet with officials from the Ansarullah movement (Houthis) and the National Salvation Government, hours after the arrival of an Omani delegation. SABA reported that Omani

delegates arrived on Saturday "to discuss the latest developments in the ongoing negotiations in Muscat with the leadership in Sana'a."

"A delegation from Oman has arrived in Sana'a to hold talks" with Ansarullah's leaders "about the truce and the peace process," an unnamed source at Sana'a airport was quoted by AFP as saying.

Mohammed al-Bukhaiti, a member of Ansarullah's political bureau told Lebanon's Arabic-language al-Mayadeen television news network late on Friday that "there is an understanding between Saudi Arabia and Yemen," without going into details.

He said that the understandings, as well as initiatives for peaceful settlement of the Yemen crisis, will be announced in two phases: One before Eid al-Fitr, which marks the end of the holy fasting month of Ramadan, and the other at another time.

"We support any proposals and efforts by Saudi Arabia or other parties to pacify the Yemeni crisis and reach a comprehensive political resolution of the conflict," the senior Ansarullah official said.

On Friday, al-Mayadeen television news network, citing informed sources, reported that Saudi officials had recently held a closed-door meeting with the chairman and members of the so-called Yemeni presidential lead-

ership council, which was established last April after the resignation of ex-president Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, to inform them about a peace plan for Yemen.

Saudi Arabia's Defense Minister Prince Khalid bin Salman briefed the council on Riyadh's solution to end the crisis in Yemen, sources said, adding that the Saudis' vision is to renew the existing UN-brokered truce for a year in an understanding with the Sana'a government.

Riyadh will pledge to pay the salaries of public servants, open Hudaydah port, and help settle the currency problems of Yemen in exchange for Sana'a's acceptance of the truce, according to the report.

Yemen's National Salvation Government says a prisoner swap deal is scheduled to happen in two weeks' time.

Saudi Arabia launched the bloody war against Yemen in March 2015 in collaboration with a number of its allies and with arms and logistics support from the US and several Western states to reinstall Hadi, who resigned from the presidency in late 2014 and later fled to Riyadh amid a political conflict with the popular Houthi Ansarullah movement. The war objective was also to crush the Ansarullah movement, which has been running state affairs in the absence of an effective government in Yemen.



A senior Saudi official shakes hands with Mohammed Ali al-Houthi, a senior member of Yemen's Supreme Political Council, in Sana'a, Yemen, on April 8, 2023.

PHOTO VIA TWITTER

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### Macron: Europe must not be 'follower' of US, China on Taiwan



AFP - French President Emmanuel Macron said in an interview published Sunday that Europe must not be a "follower" of either the US or China on Taiwan, saying that the bloc risks entanglement in "crises that aren't ours".

His comments risk riling Washington and highlight divisions in the European Union over how to approach China, as the US steps up confrontation with its closest rival and Beijing draws closer to Russia in the wake of its war in Ukraine.

### German ambassador expelled from Chad

AFP - The German ambassador to Chad, declared persona non grata by the government for his "impolite attitude", was expelled from the country Saturday evening, officials in N'Djamena told AFP Sunday.

On Friday, the government of Mahamat Idriss Deby Itno, proclaimed head of state by the army two years ago, asked the German diplomat to leave within 48 hours for "non-respect of diplomatic practices".

"The ambassador of Germany to Chad, Jan Christian Gordon Kricke, took an Air France flight Saturday evening," said Foreign Minister Mahamat Saleh Annadif.

### Tennessee becomes new front in battle for American democracy



AP - Tennessee has become a new front in the battle for the future of American democracy after Republicans expelled two Black lawmakers from the state Legislature for their part in a protest urging passage of gun-control measures. In separate votes on Thursday, the GOP supermajority expelled Justin Jones and Justin Pearson, a move leaving about 140,000 voters in primarily Black districts in Nashville and Memphis with no representation in the Tennessee House.

## Thousands join Israeli judicial protests in shadow of attacks



People wearing red, stand in a line during a demonstration against Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his judicial overhaul, in Tel Aviv, on April 8, 2023.

ILAN ROSENBERG/REUTERS

### International Desk

Tens of thousands of Israelis joined protests on Saturday against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's plans to tighten controls on the Supreme Court, despite heightened security worries after two deadly attacks a day earlier.

The latest in a series of protests against the plans, which were paused last month in the face of a wave of strikes and mass demonstrations, come as Israel faces a sharp rise in tensions on several fronts during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, Reuters reported.

The demonstration came a day after a car-ramming attack on the city's seafont killed an Italian visitor and injured seven other tourists.

Violence has surged since Israeli police stormed Al-Aqsa Mosque in Al-Quds on Wednesday after they claimed Palestinians barri-

caded themselves inside.

The assaults on worshippers were followed by rocket barrages into Israel and Israeli strikes into Gaza and Southern Lebanon.

On Thursday, more than 30 rockets were fired from Lebanese soil into Israel, which the Israeli army blamed on Palestinian groups, saying it was most likely Hamas. Also on Sunday, Israeli jets hit Syrian military targets, Israel's military said, as violence flared again following cross-border exchanges of fire during the week.

Pope Francis underlined his "deep concern" over a flare-up in tensions between Israel and Palestinians, as he led Easter Mass on Sunday.

Israelis were also on edge after a car-ramming in Tel Aviv on Friday that killed an Italian man and wounded five other tourists, hours after a gun attack killed two Israeli sisters and wounded their mother near a settlement in the occupied West Bank.

Netanyahu has mobilized border police reservists and ordered the army to reinforce security positions to head off possible trouble, amid calls for calm from the United Nations, the European Union, and the United States.

In central Tel Aviv, a demonstration began with a prayer for the victims of the attacks a day earlier but protesters said they would not be put off by security worries.

## Netanyahu knows Israel is vulnerable



EXCLUSIVE

Following heightened tensions across the occupied Palestinian territories and rocket barrages into Israel from southern Lebanon and the Gaza Strip, some hardliners in Israel expected Benjamin Netanyahu's cabinet to retaliate with massive attacks against Gaza and Hezbollah in southern Lebanon. To their dismay, this did not come true because Netanyahu is aware of his cabinet's vulnerability and the shift of balance in the occupied territories.

The political and security situation in Israel is very unstable at the moment. The current cabinet is considered to be the most right-wing cabinet in Israel in recent years. With its five extremist members, the cabinet has sparked great anger among a lot of Israeli Jews, posing a major challenge for the prime minister.

Last week, Israeli extremists carried out several nighttime raids, led by the Minister of National Security Itamar Ben-Gvir, against Palestinian worshippers in Al-Aqsa Mosque in Al-Quds. These raids, which were senseless and unjustifiable, have created a common front against the extremist cabinet.

In the past few days, Israel has been targeted by attacks from southern Lebanon, Syria, and inside the occupied territories and Gaza. More than 300 rockets have been fired toward Israel, which is a clear sign of the inefficiency of the Iron Dome defense system. Therefore, Netanyahu's cabinet must know that it is in a vulnerable position and cannot ensure the security of the occupied territories. Another point to consider is the internal disputes within Israel, which have further weakened its political system. Netanyahu's plans to tighten controls on Israel's Supreme Court have also deepened the differences and elicited sharp reactions from the left and moderate parties. It is said that during the recent months of protests, more than 400,000 Jews have gathered and marched in Tel Aviv in protest against the cabinet's policies.

Netanyahu, as an expert political figure, knows full well that if he enters into a large-scale war, he will have to withstand Palestinian attacks on several fronts, a capacity that his government does not have. Therefore, he has determined not to react sharply by launching large-scale attacks on southern Lebanon or Gaza, for example. This is a clear sign that Israel's security system is seriously weak and vulnerable.