

Ankara Opposes Moody's Grim Economic Outlook

ANKARA (Dispatches) – Turkey had its debt rating cut deeper into junk by Moody's Investors Service, which warned of a possible balance-of-payments crisis in assigning the lowest grade it's ever given to the country, however Ankara says the picture by the rating agency is not real.

The sovereign credit rating was cut to B2, five levels below investment grade and on par with Egypt, Jamaica and Rwanda. The company kept a negative outlook on the rating, saying fiscal metrics could deteriorate faster than currently expected.

"Turkey's external vulnerabilities are increasingly likely to crystallize in a balance-of-payments crisis," London-based Moody's analysts Sarah Carlson and Yves Lemay said in a report.

Moody's, which last downgraded Turkey more than a year ago, now ranks it one level lower than S&P Global Ratings and two notches below Fitch Ratings.

However, Turkey disagrees with the rating agency's reports and authorities have shown little sign of backing away from the unorthodox policies that are compounding an outflow of foreign capital.



A shopper receives sanitizer hand gel from a municipal worker before shopping at the Fatih outdoor food market in Istanbul, Turkey.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan declared Turkey to be under "economic attack" following Fitch's decision last month to revise the outlook to negative.

Turkey's economy is on the rise and not dipping at the moment, but "they are downgrading our ratings again," Erdogan said in Istanbul on Saturday after the Moody's announcement. "Do what you want to do, your ratings are of no importance."

Moody's rationale for its decision included concern about the level of Turkey's foreign-currency re-

serves, growing dollarization and the erosion of fiscal buffers, once a source of strength.

The rating company also warned that Turkey's return to growth after this year's shock won't be enough "to offset the impact on the upward debt trajectory of primary deficits of around 2% and an increasing interest burden."

Turkey was just emerging from a 2018 currency crisis when COVID-19 hit the country early this year, deepening the nation's vulnerabilities.

With the global health crisis, the

economy has contracted nearly 10 percent in the second quarter of the year. Despite a relief in some economic indicators such as an increasing industry output, economists generally agree that Turkey's gross domestic product (GDP) will shrink more than 1 percent this year.

Turkey is also witnessing important capital flight since the start of the year, more than any other country, Yalcin Karatepe, a scholar and economist from the Ankara University said.

Turkey's overall unemployment rate rose to 13.4 percent and it edged up in May-July during which a coronavirus lockdown was lifted, according to figures announced by the Turkish Statistical Institute, despite a government ban on layoffs.

Amid the pandemic, the rate of unregistered employment of those working without any social security stood at 31.3 percent.

There's also the other side of the coin where companies refuse to hire new workforce, fearing a new possible lockdown in major cities, such as Ankara and Istanbul, where there is a resurgence of new confirmed cases.

Day of... (Continued From Page One)

daily confrontation between residents and Zionist settlers and army forces due to the continued expansion of settlements in the historic city.

"We are expressing our rejection of normalization because it is happening at the expense of the rights and sacrifices of the Palestinian people," he told Middle East Eye.

"It is also a free service to the United States and Israel, taking place at the expense of Arab aspirations for freedom.

"We are not betting on Arab regimes that are trading in the aspirations of their peoples and our Palestinian cause. We only bet on the Arab people who are united that Palestine is a central cause."

Meanwhile, Jamal Zahalka, head of the National Democratic Assembly party, who was taking part in a protest in Wadi Ara on Tuesday, described the signing of the normalization agreement as "a dangerous gift from the UAE and Bahrain to Trump and Netanyahu, who are suffering a suffocating political crisis in their countries."

"Today, the UAE and Bahrain declare that they stand by the Israeli occupation against the Palestinian people. What is being discussed now is not normalization, but rather a strategic alliance," he said.

"Whoever joins an alliance with Israel can never be with the Palestinian people and their just rights."

Nablus, Jenin and Gaza also witnessed protests starting at 11 am, as hundreds marched against the normalization deal.

In Washington, 50 NGOs were slated to take part in a protest outside the White House during the signing ceremony, to voice their rejection of it. Palestinian factions in Lebanon were also due to organize protests on Tuesday to condemn the deal.

Iran... (Continued From Page One)

They have deteriorated sharply since Trump unilaterally pulled out of a landmark international nuclear deal with Iran in May 2018 and reimposed the most aggressive sanctions.

The Iranian navy said last week that it drove off U.S. aircraft that flew close to an area where naval exercises were underway near the sensitive Strait of Hormuz.

The military said three U.S. aircraft were detected by air defenses.

One of them was a U.S. RQ-4 drone, the same model as one shot down by Iran in June last year after violating Iranian airspace.

Trump... (Continued From Page One)

"The timing matches up," Acton said.

The Woodward interview was Dec. 5, around the time of the first W76-2 deployment, which was not announced publicly until Feb. 4. The weapon itself is not revolutionary. It's not even the only low-yield warhead in the U.S. arsenal. It is, however, the first major addition to the strategic nuclear force in recent decades and is a departure from the Obama administration's policy of lessening dependence on nuclear weapons in pursuit of a nuclear-free world. Joe Biden, Trump's rival for the White House, has said the new weapon is overkill, suggesting he might shelve it if he wins in November.

Acton says Trump may well have been making a garbled reference to some other weapon.

"It's clear that the president likes boasting about military capabilities and doesn't always have the tightest grasp on the details," he said.

It cannot be ruled out that the U.S. is developing a new nuclear weapon in complete secrecy. This seems unlikely, however, for two reasons — the cost would be too much for the classified, nonpublic portion of the budget, and too many people would be involved in the project for it to stay secret for long.

It's also possible that Trump had a non-nuclear weapon in mind when he spoke, although he used the word "nuclear."

The president has previously made extravagant claims about U.S. weapons, sometimes straying beyond reality or exaggerating their importance. He has asserted, for example, that the F-35 fighter jet, built with low-observable technologies generally referred to as stealth, is all but invisible.

"You can't see it," Trump said in October 2017. "You literally can't see it. It's hard to fight a plane you can't see."

Just last month he said of the F-35: "Stealth. Total stealth. You can't see it."

The F-35, like other stealth aircraft such as the B-2 bomber and the F-22 fighter, are designed to be harder to detect on radar than conventional planes. But they are not invisible, nor does the military claim they are.

Trump occasionally mentions his interest in hypersonic weapons, sometimes without using the term. Details of these weapons' planned capabilities are mostly classified. In February, Trump said: "We have the super-fast missiles — tremendous number of the super-fast. We call them 'super-fast,' where they're four, five, six and even seven times faster than an ordinary missile. We need that because, again, Russia has some."

And in May, he said: "We have no choice, we have to do it, with the adversaries we have out there," mentioning China and Russia. He added, "I call it the super-duper missile." He said he "heard" it travels 17 times faster than any other U.S. missile.

A hypersonic weapon is one that flies at speeds in excess of Mach 5, or five times the speed of sound. Most American missiles, such as those launched from aircraft to hit other aircraft or ground targets, travel between Mach 1 and Mach 5, although the Minuteman 3 intercontinental ballistic missile, which has operated for decades, can allegedly reach hypersonic speeds.

Yemen Warring Sides in Switzerland to Discuss Prisoner Release

SANA'A (Dispatches) – Delegations from Yemen's warring sides are travelling to Switzerland to discuss a United Nations-backed agreement on prisoner releases, a Houthi Ansarullah movement spokesman and a UN source said on Tuesday.

The two delegations, which had been meeting in Jordan, are flying on Wednesday to Switzerland for week-long talks to finalize a deal on prisoner releases, the UN source said.

Mohammed Abdulsalam, chief negotiator of the Houthi movement told Reuters his group's committee is set to leave Sana'a

on a UN plane.

Earlier this year, the Houthi Ansarullah movement agreed to the UN offer to implement a major prisoner swap with Saudi-sponsored Yemeni militiamen loyal to the country's former president Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi.

Meanwhile, UN Yemen envoy Martin Griffiths told the UN Security Council on Tuesday that he sent an "advanced draft" of a ceasefire deal to Yemen's warring parties last week and "now is the time for the parties to swiftly conclude the negotiations."

He also said the political importance of Marib should not be underestimated and that "military shifts and consequences and events in Marib have ripple effects on dynamics of the conflict across Yemen."

Saudi Arabia and a number of its regional allies launched the devastating war on Yemen in March 2015 in order to bring Hadi back to power and crush Ansarullah movement.

The U.S.-based Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED), a nonprofit conflict-research organization, estimates that the war has

claimed more than 100,000 lives over the past five years.

Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have purchased billions of dollars' worth of weapons from the United States, France and the United Kingdom in their war on Yemen.

Riyadh and its allies have been widely criticized for the high civilian death toll resulted from their bombing campaign in Yemen.

The UN says over 24 million Yemenis are in dire need of humanitarian aid, including 10 million suffering from extreme levels of hunger.

Russian Warplanes Target Terrorist Positions in Syria's Idlib

DAMASCUS (Dispatches) – Russian warplanes targeted positions of the al-Qaeda-linked terrorist groups in Syria's northwestern province of Idlib on Tuesday, a war monitor reported.

The Russian war jets targeted training camps of the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), the umbrella group of the al-Qaeda-linked Nusra Front, in the northern countryside of Idlib, according to the so-called Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

The airstrikes wounded several members of the HTS, added the Obser-

vatory.

Idlib has emerged as the last major terrorist stronghold in Syria.

In another development, a U.S. coalition helicopter made an emergency landing in north Syria on Tuesday with no reported casualties, a U.S. military spokesman said.

The helicopter went down in the village of Tel Haddad, Hassakeh province. Syrian state media, however, reported that the helicopter had crashed and said that American tanks sealed off the area.

Egypt Cuts Highways Across Pyramids Plateau, Alarming Conservationists

MEMPHIS (Reuters) – Egypt is building two highways across the pyramids plateau outside Cairo, reviving and expanding a project that was suspended in the 1990s after an international outcry.

The Great Pyramids, Egypt's top tourist destination, are the sole survivor of the seven wonders of the ancient world and the plateau is a UNESCO world heritage site.

The highways are part of an infrastructure push spearheaded by Egypt's powerful military and championed by President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, who is building a new capital city to ease the population pressure on Cairo, home to 20 million people.

The northern highway will cross the desert 2.5 km (1.6 miles) south of the Great Pyramids. The southern one will pass between the Step Pyramid of Saqqara - the oldest one - and the Dahshur area, home

to the Bent Pyramid and the Red Pyramid.

Each highway appears to be about eight lanes wide.

Critics say they could cause irrevocable damage to one of the world's most important heritage sites. Authorities say they will be built with care and improve transport links, connecting new urban development and bypassing central Cairo's congestion.

"The roads are very, very important for development, for Egyptians, for inside Egypt," said Mostafa al-Waziri, secretary-general of Egypt's Supreme Council of Antiquities. "Know that we take good care of our antiquities sites everywhere in Egypt."

Some Egyptologists and conservationists say the highways will disrupt the integrity of the pyramids plateau, pave over unexplored archaeological sites, generate pollution that could corrode monuments, pro-

duce litter and expose closed areas packed with hidden archaeological treasures to looting.

Al-Waziri said existing roads were much closer to the pyramids and carried a lot of tourist buses. "That is why we are doing a lot of development," he said, noting plans to use electric tourist buses within the plateau to avoid pollution.

The highways, which will dissect the plateau into three, will cross a section of ancient Memphis, one of the world's biggest and most influential cities for almost 3,000 years.

"I was flabbergasted by what I saw," said former senior UNESCO official Said Zulficar, who visited a portion of the southern highway two months ago. "All the work that I had done nearly 25 years ago is now being put into question."