

Aden may tilt scales in conflict

LOYALIST FORCES BATTLE TO OUST IRAN-BACKED MILITIA FROM THEIR REMAINING POSITIONS IN YEMEN'S SECOND CITY

Gulf News Report

Loyalist forces battled to oust Iran-backed militia from their remaining positions in Yemen's second city Aden yesterday as exiled ministers prepared to return to assess the damage from four months of fighting.

The visit by ministers and intelligence officials follows military setbacks for the Al Houthis at the hands of Saudi-backed Yemeni fighters which may mark a turning point in the conflict that has killed more than 3,500 people.

The southern port city of Aden has been a focus of fighting since the Al Houthis first laid siege to it in March when it was home to the government



Victorious return Southern Resistance fighters check the wreckage of a destroyed Boeing 747 plane at the international airport of Yemen's southern port city of Aden. Saudi-backed Yemeni forces captured Aden's main port and a neighbouring district on Wednesday.

which subsequently fled to Saudi Arabia.

"[Exiled President] Abd-Rabbo Mansour Hadi delegated this group to

return to Aden to work to prepare the security situation and ensure stability ahead of a revival of the institutions of

state in Aden," a local official said after the group arrived by helicopter at a military airbase.

The delegation included ministers of interior and transport, a former interior minister, the intelligence chief and the deputy head of the house of representatives.

Airport wrested

Local fighters have wrested Yemen's airport and main seaport from the northern militia group in the past two days, in fighting that killed dozens of people, according to medics.

Yemeni officials said Al Houthis fired rockets at Aden airport, killing at least three people.

A government official said rebels fired Katyusha rockets that landed in the vicinity of the airport early Thursday.

In a statement to the Houthicon-trolled Saba news agency, a spokesman said rebels are fighting back, and are advancing in a neighbourhood northwest of the airport. However, the government

official said the Saudibacked forces control about 80 per cent of Aden, which has been the scene of intense fighting since March.

Al Houthis seized Sana'a in September and pushed into Yemen's south and east in March and April in what they say is a revolution against a corrupt government and radical Islamist militants.

In a statement posted on Al Houthi-controlled state media, the group said it was weathering the Aden offensive, which has been supported by air strikes by a Saudi-led coalition which seeks to return exiled President Hadi to power.

"Over 150 air strikes did not deter the advance of the army and popular committees in achieving victories against the elements of extremism, Al Qaida terrorism, Hadi forces and Saudi mercenaries," news agency Saba quoted a pro-Al Houthi military official saying.

Al Houthi forces fired Katyusha rockets at the Aden oil refinery west of the city, detonating an oil tank and causing a huge blaze, witnesses and officials said.