

24 million Egyptian students begin school year amid virus precautions

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Sat, 2020-10-17 22:00

CAIRO: Amid measures taken to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, 24 million Egyptian students have started their academic year in 56,000 different schools.

School leaders spent the first day of school making announcements to students about essential hygiene and how to prevent the spread of COVID-19. There was generally a high turnout of students in most schools, despite rumors of classes being canceled.

The Ministry of Education and Technical Education circulated precautionary measures for schools, such as following up on those who have been in contact with infected people to limit the transmission of infection, raising awareness among all groups participating in education, including students' families, and maintaining social distancing.

Mahmoud El-Fouly, a representative of the Education and Technical Education Directorate in Giza Governorate, said that the student attendance on the first day of school was 100 percent. He said that he addressed the students in the morning to reassure them about the pandemic.

"Egypt is free of the coronavirus, but prevention is better than treatment," he said.

He called for maintaining personal hygiene and the constant ventilation of classrooms and places where students gather inside schools.

Official sources said that at the beginning of term the ministry will follow up the attendance of students and any problems that might appear. Schools have instructions on how to deal with any cases of sickness quickly.

The Egyptian Ministry of Higher Education denied reports that the start of studies in universities for the academic year 2020-2021 would be postponed. It said that the academic year began in all universities nationwide on the announced date, Saturday.

The first semester of the academic year in Egypt will last for 14 weeks, ending on Thursday, Jan. 21, 2021, with the first semester exams taking place from Jan. 23 until Feb. 4, 2021.

The mid-year break runs from Feb. 6 until Feb. 18, 2021. The second semester starts on Feb. 20, 2021 and continues for sixteen weeks until July 10, 2021. The end-of-semester exams will be conducted during June and July 2021.





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Public outcry following death of Egyptian Maadi girl who was dragged by car
Egypt ready to confront second wave of coronavirus: health minister

[UN Security Council demands 'unconditional' access to decaying Yemen tanker](#)

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Sat, 2020-10-17 21:11

AL-MUKALLA: Members of the Security Council on Friday called on the Iran-

backed Houthis to immediately give access to UN experts to the decaying Safer tanker in the Red Sea.

"The members of the Security Council recognized the grave threat posed by the Safer oil tanker, whose dire and dilapidated condition risks an environmental, economic and humanitarian catastrophe to Yemen and the region, and they called on the Houthis to urgently facilitate unconditional and safe access for UN experts to conduct an assessment and repair mission," the members said in a joint statement.

"They welcomed the recent contributions made by Saudi Arabia, the UK, Germany, the Netherlands and France, and the mobilization of the Peace Support Facility," the statement said thanking the countries that pledged to fund the maintenance mission.

Recent images showing water leaking into the decaying Safer tanker off the Yemeni western city of Hodeidah have triggered international uproar as environmentalists and diplomats warned that the tanker's cargo of more than 1 million barrels of crude oil would cause a major disaster in the Red Sea if the tanker collapsed. Other experts say that a stray shell from nearby battlefields would cause an explosion more powerful than the one that rocked Beirut in August.

The Houthis have blocked vital maintenance of the tanker since 2015 and insisted on including experts from countries that did not back the Arab coalition's military operation in the committee that could inspect the tanker.

The US has called on the Houthis to smooth the way for the UN experts to visit the tanker. "We also call for unconditional access for the UN experts to assess and repair the Safer tanker, which threatens the Red Sea and people of Yemen with catastrophic consequences, including environmental and economic damage and a severe reduction of food and aid imports," Kelly Craft, US ambassador to the UN, said at a UN Security Council briefing on the situation in Yemen.

Yemen's government promised to facilitate the mission of the UN experts, urging the international community to mount more pressure on the Houthis not to politicize the oil tanker. "With regard to the Safer oil tanker, the government of Yemen calls on the Security Council to assume its responsibilities and pressure the Houthis to stop politicizing the issue and immediately allow the UN teams access to the tanker to undertake assessment and repair works to avert an imminent catastrophe," Abdullah Al-Saadi, Yemen's permanent representative at the UN said.

The Security Council expressed its "steadfast" support for the UN Yemen envoy Martin Griffiths and called upon warring factions in Yemen to accept the UN-initiated Joint Declaration.

Inspired by the latest successful prisoner swap between the legitimate government and the Houthis, veteran former diplomats and current government officials believe that only direct talks will lead to a truce and address thorny issues.

"Prisoner swap talks succeeded only because Yemenis engaged in direct talks. They quarrelled at the beginning of the talks, but they reached a consensus by the end of the day," a senior government official said. "So I suggest calling for direct talks before anything else."

Majed Fadhail, deputy minister of human rights and a member of the government delegation in the prisoner swap talks in Switzerland, agreed that talks

succeeded when they and the Houthis met face to face.

Abu Bakr Al-Qirbi, Yemen's former foreign minister, said that recent prisoner swap has rekindled hopes for a comprehensive agreement that would end the war. "The (UN) envoy should immediately call the parties to direct negotiations on the Joint Declaration document, as it is the most effective and shortest way to consensus," he tweeted.

The conflict in Yemen began in late 2014 when the Houthis seized control of the Yemeni capital, Sanaa, and subsequently expanded across Yemen. The war has killed more than 100,000 people and caused the world's worst humanitarian crisis, according to the UN.



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352 Yemenis released on second day of prisoner swap
Yemen government, Houthis swap hundreds of prisoners

Morocco says seized almost 5 tons of cannabis resin

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Sat, 2020-10-17 15:39

RABAT: Moroccan authorities have seized almost five tons of cannabis resin from a vehicle near Casablanca and arrested the driver, the national security service said in a statement Saturday.

The DGSN said a man transporting 4.96 tons of the resin in a utility vehicle was arrested on Friday evening at the entrance to the port city of Mohammedia after a surveillance operation.

An investigation is underway to identify those involved in "the criminal network and determine its national and international ramifications," the statement said.

Earlier this month, authorities announced they had seized over 11 tons of cannabis resin in the northern port city of Tangier.

Morocco is one of the world's top cannabis producers, although the authorities say they are cracking down and seized nearly 180 tons of the drug last year.

The DGSN also announced a separate drug seizure in an operation Saturday morning in the central city of Meknes.

Three people aged between 20 and 22, suspected of transporting the drugs on an inter-city coach, were arrested, it said.

The security agency said the operation led to the seizure of 2,543 pills of ecstasy and the drug Rivotril, along with cocaine, bladed weapons, mobile phones and cash.



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Moroccan taxes and labor help prop up Italian economy
FIFA rejects Munir El Haddadi bid to switch to Morocco from Spain

[For Iraq's persecuted Yazidis, return plan is fraught with risk](#)

Author:

Sat, 2020-10-17 01:49

DOHUK/IRAQ: The Yazidis of northern Iraq, an ancient religious minority brutally persecuted by Daesh, want nothing more than peace, security and a better life in their home town of Sinjar – but they want it on their terms. Many there distrust a new security and reconstruction plan unveiled this week by the Baghdad government and Kurdish regional authorities which hailed it as a “historic” agreement.

“The deal could pacify Sinjar – but it might also make the situation even worse,” said Talal Saleh, a Yazidi in exile in nearby Kurdistan.

The Yazidis have suffered since Daesh marauded into Sinjar in 2014, one of the extremist group's conquests that shocked the West into military action to stop it.

Daesh viewed the Yazidis as devil worshippers for their faith that combines Zoroastrian, Christian, Manichean, Jewish and Muslim beliefs.

It slaughtered more than 3,000 Yazidis, enslaved 7,000 women and girls and displaced most of its 550,000-strong community.

Since Daesh was driven out of Sinjar by US-backed Kurdish forces in 2015, the town and its surrounding areas are controlled by a patchwork of armed groups including the Iraqi Army, Shiite militia, and Yazidi and Kurdish militants with different loyalties.

The government plan would enforce security and allow the return of tens of thousands of Yazidis afraid to go back because of a lack of security and basic services, according to the office of Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhimi.

But many Sinjar natives feel the plan is vague, dictated by Baghdad and the Kurdish capital of Irbil. They say it has not included them and entails security reforms that could mean more division and violence.

SPEEDREAD

Yazidis distrust a new security and reconstruction plan unveiled this week by the Baghdad government and Kurdish regional authorities which hailed it as a 'historic' agreement.

"The PKK and their Yazidi allies are not just going to leave Sinjar without a fight," Saleh said.

The security arrangements include booting out the PKK, a Kurdish separatist group that has fought a decades-long insurgency in Turkey and bases itself in northern Iraq.

It would also drive out PKK "affiliates," an apparent reference to a Yazidi force of hundreds of fighters.

Escape

The PKK with Yazidi volunteers helped thousands of Yazidis escape the Daesh onslaught to Syria after the Iraqi Army fled many areas of Nineveh province and Irbil's peshmerga forces retreated. The peshmerga returned to help recapture Sinjar with US air support.

The PKK is under attack by Turkish forces in Iraq and exists uneasily alongside the peshmerga and the Iraqi Army.

The army and the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), Iraq's state paramilitary body dominated by Shiite militias, would oversee the ejection of the PKK, according to a copy the plan seen by Reuters.

Some locals fear this could split up families where siblings sometimes belong to different militias, forces and groups. The Yazidis also have their own force in the PMF, separate to the Yazidi PKK affiliate.

"There are about six political groups in Sinjar now. Brothers belonging to the same family each join different parties," said Akram Rasho, another displaced Yazidi in Kurdistan. Baghdad and Irbil defend the plan. "This is a

good step to solve problems,” said Kurdistan government spokesman Jotiar Adil. Sinjar has also been caught up in a territorial dispute between Baghdad and Irbil since a failed Kurdish bid for full independence in 2017. Under the plan for Sinjar, the Baghdad and Irbil governments would choose a new mayor and administrators and appoint 2,500 new local security personnel. Supporters of the PKK suspect those would include returning Yazidis affiliated with the peshmerga.

At a demonstration against the deal in Sinjar on Sunday, Yazidi tribal leader Shamo Khadida shouted, “Sinjar belongs to its people and we are the people.” Others distance themselves from the politics and simply want to see delivery of services on the ground.

“If actual efforts are made to improve our situation, the people of Sinjar will find agreement,” said Rasho.



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How art helps Yazidi genocide survivors to heal
Yazidi children freed from Daesh haunted by health crisis

[European powers, GCC condemn Israel](#)

settlement approvals

Sat, 2020-10-17 01:36

BERLIN, RIYADH: European powers on Friday condemned Israel's decision to approve thousands more settlements in occupied Palestinian territory, calling it a "counterproductive" move that undermines regional peace efforts.

"The expansion of settlements violates international law and further imperils the viability of a two-state solution to bring about a just and lasting peace to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict," said a joint statement from the foreign ministers of Germany, France, Britain, Italy and Spain.

"As we have emphasized directly with the government of Israel, this step furthermore undermines efforts to rebuild trust between the parties with a view to resuming dialogue," they said, urging an immediate halt in settlement construction.

The ministers said pushing ahead with more settlements would be a "counterproductive move in light of the positive developments of normalization agreements reached between Israel, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain."

A day earlier, Gulf Cooperation Council's (GCC) Secretary General Nayef Al-Hajjraf also deplored Israeli authorities' approval of building thousands of housing units in the occupied Palestinian territories.

HIGHLIGHT

Pushing ahead with more settlements will be a 'counterproductive move in light of the positive developments of normalization agreements reached between Israel, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain.'

In a statement, Al-Hajjraf affirmed full rejection to the Israeli plans on expanding settlements in the West Bank and imposing its sovereign over it. He stressed the necessity of halting the settlement expansion in the occupied Palestinian territories, saying that building settlements is a big obstacle against reviving peace in the Middle East region.

Al-Hajjraf emphasized the GCC's support to the brotherly Palestinian people and their legitimate right to establish their independent state with East Jerusalem as its capital, in line with the Arab peace initiative, the international legitimacy's resolutions and international laws.

The UAE and Bahrain had in mid-September set aside decades of enmity with Israel to sign a US-brokered deal to normalize ties.

Western powers had hoped the deals would bring regional stability and give a boost to hopes for peace.

But the Palestinians have branded the shift by the Gulf nations as "betrayal."



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Israeli-Palestinian tensions escalate ahead of settlement expansion
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