

Iran says 164 health care professionals among pandemic dead

Author:

Associated Press

ID:

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Sat, 2020-08-22 18:23

TEHRAN: Iran's health minister said Saturday that at least 164 health care professionals have died while battling the coronavirus pandemic, state media reported.

The official IRNA news agency quoted Saeed Namaki as saying new cases have been reported that will be added to that number.

The latest toll of health care worker deaths from the virus is 26 more than the 138 cases reported July 22. Iran at the time said some 12,000 health care workers had been infected.

Iran is grappling with the deadliest outbreak of the virus in the Middle East.

Earlier on Saturday, the country put the total death toll from COVID-19, the illness caused by the virus, at 20,502 out of nearly 356,800 confirmed cases. Health Ministry spokeswoman Sima Sadat Lari said 126 patients died since Friday and there were 2,028 new confirmed cases over the same period. She said 3,850 patients are in critical condition, though 307,702 have recovered so far.



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Retired footballer criticized for comments on Iran's foreign policy
Iran responsible for Houthi attacks targeting Saudi Arabia: Speaker of Arab Parliament

[Sudan's Hamdok says government ready to cooperate with ICC over Darfur](#)

Author:

Reuters

ID:

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Sat, 2020-08-22 18:37

KHARTOUM: Sudan's prime minister said on Saturday the country was ready to cooperate with the International Criminal Court (ICC) so those accused of war crimes in Darfur appear before the tribunal, a list that includes ousted

President Omar Al-Bashir.

Bashir, who has been in jail in Khartoum since he was toppled after mass protests last year, is wanted by the ICC for alleged war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity in Darfur in a conflict that killed an estimated 300,000 people.

The government reached a deal with rebel groups in February that all five Sudanese ICC suspects should appear before the court but Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok had not previously publicly affirmed Sudan's position.

"I reiterate that the government is fully prepared to cooperate with the ICC to facilitate access to those accused of war crimes and crimes against humanity," Hamdok said in a televised address on the anniversary of his ascent to office.

Sudan's transitional government, a three-year joint civilian-military arrangement led by Hamdok, says it is close to a peace deal with some rebel groups active in Darfur, a vast region roughly the size of France.

The government and some of the rebels are expected to initial an agreement on Aug. 28.

Hamdok also said during his TV address that Sudan had come a long way towards being removed from the US list of state sponsors of terrorism.

There are intense communications with the American administration about removing Sudan from the list and significant progress is expected in the coming weeks, a senior government source told Reuters on Sunday.

Washington added Sudan to the list in 1993 over allegations that Bashir's Islamist government was supporting terrorist groups at the time.

The designation makes Sudan technically ineligible for debt relief and financing from the International Monetary Fund and World Bank. The US Congress would need to approve Sudan's removal from the list.



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Sudan fires spokesman after comments on peace with Israel
Sudanese demand reforms a year after deal with generals

[Pompeo to visit Israel, UAE; peace agreement on agenda](#)

Sat, 2020-08-22 21:07

WASHINGTON: The Trump administration will send two top officials to the Middle East this week in a bid to capitalize on momentum from the historic agreement between Israel and the UAE to establish diplomatic relations. Three diplomats say Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and President Donald Trump's senior adviser and son-in-law Jared Kushner plan to make separate, multiple-nation visits to the region in the coming days to push Arab-Israeli rapprochement in the aftermath of the Israel-UAE deal.

Pompeo is expected to depart on Sunday for Israel, Bahrain, Oman, UAE and Sudan, according to the diplomats, who spoke on condition of anonymity because the itinerary has not yet been finalized or publicly announced. Kushner plans to leave later in the week for Israel, Bahrain, Oman and Morocco, the diplomats said.

Neither trip is expected to result in announcements of immediate breakthrough, the diplomats said, although both are aimed at finalizing at least one, and potentially more, normalization deals with Israel in the near future.

Pompeo also plans to meet in Qatar with members of the Taliban to discuss intra-Afghan peace talks that are key to the withdrawal of remaining US forces in Afghanistan, the diplomats said.

The White House and State Department had no comment on the planned trips, which will come as the administration steps up efforts to push for Arab-Israeli normalization even without a resolution to the Israel-Palestinian conflict.

They also come as the administration has taken the step of triggering the restoration of all international sanctions on Iran.

Israel and the UAE announced on August 13 they would establish full diplomatic relations, in a US-brokered deal that required Israel to halt its contentious plan to annex occupied West Bank land sought by the Palestinians. The historic agreement delivered a key foreign policy victory to Trump as he seeks re-election.

US and Israeli officials have suggested that more Arab nations may soon follow the UAE's lead.



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Pompeo says US expects to trigger snapback on Iran soon
UAE minister says UAE-Israel agreement not directed at Iran

[How coronavirus crisis reinvented online learning as a necessity](#)

Fri, 2020-08-21 21:06

CAIRO: In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, 110 million school-aged children stayed at home this term because of school closures, according to UNICEF. The pandemic has led to a regional surge of education technology

(edtech) startups filling the gap in place of traditional and workplace settings.

Before the COVID-19 outbreak, edtech in the Middle East received only \$1.26 million in funding after a record \$20 million was invested in the sector in 2019, according to the startup and investor platform Magnitt.

“This is an exciting time for edtech,” said Bassil Khattab, co-founder and chief operating officer of Egypt’s Zedny, a newly launched Arabic learning and development platform.

“We believe that investors will always be interested in any business that solves a big problem online, and education is of major importance to our future.”



L-R: Badr Ward, founder and CEO of Lamsa World – Khadija Elbedweihi, co-founder PraxiLabs – Essam El-Saadi, co-founder PraxiLabs. (Supplied)

Online learning is no longer a buzz word or trend but a necessity that is here to stay.

“The world as we know it has changed, and it is not going back again,” said Khattab. “In the world today, if you are not online, then you will be offline.”

Zedny, which launched in mid-June 2020 with a \$1.2 million pre-seed investment, offers Arabic online courses and video summaries of best-sellers, applying artificial intelligence to enhance the user experience.

Lamsa World, an Arabic childhood education platform based in the UAE, is also witnessing an unprecedented shift toward online learning. Since the closure

of schools in the UAE, the platform has had at least a 300 percent increase in downloads and content consumption, according to founder and CEO Badr Ward.

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“The pandemic has accelerated what has been in the making for years,” said Ward. “COVID-19 tested the importance of what we’ve been working on and proved that we can look at education differently.

“We need to examine how to deliver education in a more effective and creative way. It’s not a matter of e-learning, it’s a long-awaited innovation toward education.”

While edtech traditionally focused on providing tutoring, content and school management support, it now can be fully integrated into school curriculums.

“Online learning and classroom learning are not mutually exclusive,” Ward said. “We should think about it as a holistic experience where certain aspects are delivered via traditional classrooms and other aspects are delivered online. The goal is to bring the best learning experience.”

Similarly, PraxiLabs, an award-winning online STEM education provider based in Egypt, believes that edtech can complement traditional learning. Focusing on 3D interactive virtual simulations of science experiments, the startup provides students with ample hands-on experience to support in-class learning.

“Our goal is to complement and further enhance students’ experience,” said co-founder Essam El-Saaid.

“While the classroom offers learning that benefits (them), particularly when it comes to character building, teamwork and cooperation, it does not diminish the importance of edtech, specifically when it comes to providing online solutions.

“It’s more of a combined learning approach with enhanced outcomes and massive learning potential for students.”

COVID-19 tested the importance of what we’ve worked on and proved we can look at education differently.

Badr Ward, CEO of Lamsa World, an Arabic childhood education platform based in the UAE

While the shift to online learning was rapid and unplanned, it highlighted the gap between those from privileged and disadvantaged backgrounds – not everyone has Internet or technology access to take part in digital classes.

Recognizing this challenge, governments across the region launched initiatives to support remote learning and working to deal with the pandemic.

In Egypt, free e-education platforms were provided to students, and the UAE started a campaign to help low-income families unable to afford a laptop, computer or tablet to continue online learning.

According to PraxiLabs, the pandemic offers an opportunity to narrow the digital divide.

“Everyone started realizing the importance of Internet and remote setups, hence the focus is shifting toward (providing) different solutions in that direction, which can already be seen by initiatives not only in Egypt but everywhere,” said Kahdija El Bedweihy, co-founder of PraxiLabs.

Going forward, it is clear that the learning experience is forever changing, and all parts of society need to have access.

“It’s no longer an option,” said Ward of Lamsa World.

This report is being published by Arab News as a partner of the Middle East Exchange, which was launched by the Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Global Initiatives to reflect the vision of the UAE prime minister and ruler of Dubai to explore the possibility of changing the status of the Arab region.



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UAE's AI-focused university sees tech as a global positive force
Saudi education minister highlights successful use of distance learning during pandemic

[Iran detains UAE ship, its crew](#)

Author:

Fri, 2020-08-21 00:40

JEDDAH: Iran seized a UAE-registered ship violating its territorial waters this week, Iran's Foreign Ministry said on Thursday, adding that UAE coast guards killed two Iranian fishermen on the same day.

Iran's state TV quoted a ministry statement as saying that the Emirati ship was seized by Iran's coast guards and its crew were detained due to illegal traffic in Iranian waters.

It added that on the same day, UAE guards shot dead two Iranian fishermen and seized a boat. It said the UAE has apologized for the incident.

The UAE Foreign Ministry refused to comment when contacted by Reuters. The Iranian statement said Iran summoned the UAE charge d'affaires in Tehran after the incident to demand the release of the detained boat and the fishermen.

"As a result of Iran's efforts, the UAE authorities ... in a note on Wednesday, expressed their deep regret over the incident and announced their readiness to compensate for all the damage caused," it said.

The Iranian boat and its crew have been released, the statement said, while the legal process of transferring the bodies of the dead is underway.

UAE state news agency WAM reported on Monday that the state's coast guard had tried to stop eight fishing boats which violated its territorial waters northwest of Sir Bu Nu'Ayr island. It did not mention any casualties or seizures of a boat.

Meanwhile, the US will demand that all UN sanctions be reimposed against Iran, President Donald Trump has announced.

"Two years ago I withdrew the United States from the disastrous Iran nuclear deal, which was a product of the Obama-Biden foreign policy failure – a failure like few people have seen in terms of the amount of money we paid for absolutely nothing and a short-term deal," Trump said. He pledged that under his administration, Iran will never have a nuclear weapon.

"If and when I win the election, within the first month, Iran will come to us and they are going to be asking for a deal so quickly because they are doing very poorly," he said, adding that sanctions have crippled Iran's economy and

limited the amount of money it can use to support militant groups. Trump said Secretary of State Mike Pompeo will travel to New York to present the US demand to reimpose the sanctions, accusing Iran of significant noncompliance with the 2015 nuclear deal. Dr. Majid Rafizadeh, a Harvard-educated Iranian-American political scientist, told Arab News that Iran's leaders believe they scored a major political victory against the US, its allies and regional powers when the UN Security Council last week voted down a proposal to extend the 13-year-old arms embargo on Tehran, which is due to expire in October. "The lifting of the arms embargo on the world's top state sponsor of terrorism will further help the Iranian regime advance its military adventurism and arm terror and militia groups with advanced weapons. This is a dangerous threat to regional and global stability, and it will likely trigger a regional arms race," he added. Separately, Iran's state TV reported the country unveiled two new missiles named after Iranian Gen. Qassem Soleimani and Iraqi militia leader Abu Mahdi Al-Muhandis, who were killed outside Baghdad's international airport in a US strike in January.



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US formally notifies Security Council of demand for restoration of UN sanctions against Iran
Russia says US statements on fresh imposition of Iran sanctions are absurd