

France starts supply bridge to help Tunisia cope with virus

Sat, 2021-07-24 01:17

PARIS: France has established a “maritime bridge” to provide COVID-19 vaccines and medical oxygen to Tunisia, which is in the midst of one of Africa’s worst coronavirus outbreaks.

In the past five days, France has flown 1.1 million vaccine doses to the North African country, French Tourism Minister Jean-Baptiste Le Moyne told France-Info radio.

The French navy shipped three huge containers of badly needed oxygen on Thursday, the minister tweeted.

Of the vaccines, 800,000 doses came from French stocks, but Paris is also using the COVAX mechanism, the UN-backed program to provide shots to poorer countries, Lemoyne said.

He did not specify which type of vaccines were sent.

The sea shipments are expected to continue until mid-August, bringing in equipment, masks and other needed material to help Tunisia cope with a sharp rise in infections and hospitalizations.

Other countries in Europe and elsewhere are pitching in to help Tunisia pull out of its health crisis.

FASTFACT

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Tunisia has reported more deaths per capita in the pandemic than any African country and among the highest daily death rates per capita in the world in recent weeks.

The country, which has a population of less than 12 million, has recorded more than 18,000 virus-related deaths in all, according to the Health Ministry.

Tunisian President Kais Saied ordered the military on Wednesday to take over management of the national response to the pandemic.

Last week, Prime Minister Hichem Mechichi ordered governors of nine regions to requisition private hospitals for COVID-19 patients when public hospitals run out of oxygen, the TAP news agency reported. Tunisian hospitals have faced acute shortages of oxygen, staff and intensive care beds, and less than a tenth of the population are fully vaccinated.

In Tunisia’s Mediterranean resort of Sousse, exhausted medics struggle to stem surging coronavirus deaths, desperately monitoring oxygen supplies beside patients’ beds, while on the beach tourists relax in the sun.

“When you are told, ‘in three hours, there is no more oxygen’, it is stressful,” said Khaled Ben Jazia, head of intensive care at the hospital in Sousse, southeast of the capital Tunis.

“Two days ago, there was only an hour of oxygen left. Can you imagine the disaster if we ran out? I’ve never been so stressed ... we were all with bottles at the bedside of patients just in case.”

At the hospital, medics waited anxiously for the truck fetching fresh oxygen bottles to return.

“When we heard the siren of the escort accompanying the truck, it was such a relief,” Ben Jazia said.

After more than a year of intense work coping with the pandemic, medical staff are worn out.

On Wednesday, the prime minister’s announcement that hospital staff would not be able to take any leave sparked anger.

“We are holding up, but the situation is precarious, given the lack of human resources and logistical support,” said Zied Mezgar, head of the emergency department in Sousse hospital.

“The disaster will not come from the influx of patients, but from the exhaustion of caregivers.”

Despite the crisis, the country remains open to visitors and there is no quarantine for people – vaccinated or not – arriving with tour operators.

At the Bellevue Park hotel in Sousse, life at the Mediterranean resort seems to be going on almost as normal.

“I had my two jabs,” said Doris Brecking, a 71-year-old German tourist tanning by the pool.

“In the hospital, there are sick people, but here at the hotel, everything is fine with the health rules ... I am not afraid.”

France, where many tourists come from, has placed Tunisia on its travel “red list,” but allows people who have been double vaccinated to go there.

“The urge to come back here was too strong,” said French tourist Stephanie Wilmert, a beautician from Luxembourg.

She has been vaccinated, but said she was still cautious.

“We sometimes say, ‘it’s good, it’s over’, but no, it’s not over at all.”

Away from the crisis of the pandemic, Tunisia is trying to support the crisis in tourism, a economic pillar making up around a tenth of GDP.

“We must adapt,” said Nizar Marghli, director of the Bellevue Park hotel, where turnover has been slashed by a third.



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Anger in Tunisia at 'criminal' response to virus Italy sends medical aid to Tunisia to combat COVID-19

[Iran is 'water bankrupt', says former regime environment official](#)

Author:

Sat, 2021-07-24 00:53

LONDON: Iran is "water bankrupt" due to years of mismanagement by the regime, according to an exiled member of Tehran's environmental ministry. The result is the severe water shortages that have triggered days of unrest and violence.

Scientist Kaveh Madani, Iran's former deputy environment minister, told *The Times* newspaper that all sources of water are running dry, including rivers, reservoirs and groundwater.

The collapse of these essential systems even prompted Supreme Leader Ali

Khamenei to admit that the protesters might have a point. “We cannot really blame the people,” he said of the thousands of Iranians who have taken to the streets in Khuzestan Province in recent days to protest against the shortage of clean drinking water. At least eight protesters have been killed in the regime’s crackdown on the demonstrations. It has been reported that a police officer was also killed.

According to Madani, who now lives in the US, the crisis is of the regime’s own making.

“The system is water bankrupt when consumption is more than renewable water availability,” he said, adding that years of regime mismanagement is to blame.

In particular, he said, the availability of cheap fuel has proved to be more of a curse than a blessing in its effect on the water industry. With the cost of energy so low, cheap electricity has been used to pump huge amounts of groundwater to help expand the country’s agriculture sector.



Iranian citizens burn tires and wood to block roads as they protest against water shortages in the southwestern province of Khuzestan on July 17, 2021.
(Screengrab from video shared on social media)

This has had a devastating effect on water reserves. Groundwater levels are now so low they are having an effect observable from space: NASA has said the loss of the weight of so much water has affected the region’s gravitational field.

In addition, since the 1979 Iranian Revolution, the Islamic Republic has built about 600 dams across the country, mainly to provide hydroelectricity for the country’s 80 million or so inhabitants. This energy comes with a hidden cost. Experts told The Times that reservoirs in hot and arid parts of Iran lose so much water to evaporation – about 2 billion cubic meters a month – they are a significant part of the problem.

Combined with what has been the driest year in half a century, these factors have caused “irreversible” damage to Iran’s water infrastructure, according

to Madani.

“Iran cannot fully restore its wetlands, aquifers and rivers in a short period of time,” he said. “So, it has to admit to water bankruptcy and stop denying that many of the damages have become irreversible.”

Madani was an academic at Imperial College London when he was recruited in 2017 to be the deputy head of Iran’s Department of Environment. His appointment offended hard-line elements within the regime, however, and he was detained by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, accused of spying, and eventually forced to leave the country.



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[Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps \(IRGC\)](#)

Iran’s Khuzestan protests: Water was the trigger, anti-Arab discrimination is the reason Iran’s Rouhani says water protesters have ‘right’ to demonstrate

[Morocco’s navy rescues 368 migrants bound for Spain](#)

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Fri, 2021-07-23 23:10

RABAT: The Moroccan navy this week rescued 368 migrants including three children as they were trying to cross the Mediterranean to reach Spain, the official MAP news agency said Friday.

It said the migrants, mostly from sub-Saharan Africa, were rescued between Tuesday and Friday when their makeshift boats, including rubber dinghies and kayaks, ran into difficulty.

Last week Morocco's navy reportedly rescued 344 migrants in the Mediterranean and the Atlantic.

Migrants in the North African country often try to reach the Spanish mainland via the Mediterranean, while in the Atlantic Ocean they make for Spain's Canary Islands.

A total of 2,087 migrants died trying to reach Spain by sea during the first six months of 2021, roughly the same number as during all of last year, a migrant rights group said earlier this month.

Spanish interior ministry figures show that between January 1 and June 30, a total of 12,622 migrants arrived in Spain by sea, almost twice as many as those who made the crossings last year.



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UN says migrants detained in Libya face 'extremely inhumane' conditions
Tunisia rescues 166 migrants at sea, 16 dead

Over 140 Palestinians hurt in clashes with Israel troops: medics

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Fri, 2021-07-23 21:37

BEITA, Palestinian Territories: More than 140 Palestinians were hurt Friday in clashes with Israeli troops in the flashpoint West Bank village of Beita, medics said, during protests against an illegal Israeli settlement outpost. The Israeli army said two soldiers were also "lightly injured" in the violence.

Hundreds of Palestinians gathered in Beita, located in the north of the Israeli-occupied West Bank, to protest against the nearby outpost of Eviatar, an AFP correspondent said.

The area has seen regular demonstrations against settlement expansion on Palestinian land.

The Israeli army said that "over the last several hours, a riot was instigated in the area of Givat Eviatar outpost, south of Nablus."

"Hundreds of Palestinians hurled rocks at IDF (army) troops, who responded with riot dispersal means," it said in a statement, adding that the two "lightly injured" soldiers were taken to hospital.

The Palestinian Red Crescent said 146 Palestinians were hurt during the clashes, including nine by live fire, 34 by rubber-coated bullets and 87 by tear gas.

Jewish settlers set up the Eviatar outpost in early May, building rudimentary concrete homes and shacks in a matter of weeks.

The construction came in defiance of both international and Israeli law, and sparked fierce protests from Palestinians who insisted it was being built on their land.

But following a deal struck with nationalist Prime Minister Naftali Bennett's new government, the settlers left the outpost on July 2, while the structures they had built were to remain under army guard.

Israel's defense ministry said it would study the area to assess whether it could, under Israeli law, be declared state land.

Should that happen, Israel could then authorize a religious school to be built at Eviatar, with residences for its staff and students.

Around 475,000 Jewish settlers now live in the West Bank, which Israel has occupied since 1967.



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Hundreds of Palestinians demonstrate against AbbasUS calls on Israelis, Palestinians to 'deescalate' tensions

[Abu Dhabi crown prince receives call from Israeli PM](#)

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1627058429361616300

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DUBAI: The crown prince of Abu Dhabi received a call from the prime minister of Israel on Friday during which they discussed cooperation between the two

countries.

Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan and Naftali Bennett also discussed regional and international issues of common interest and efforts to achieve peace and prosperity regionally and internationally.

Bennett congratulated Sheikh Mohammed on the occasion of Eid Al-Adha and wished him continued health and happiness, and the UAE and its people further progress and prosperity.

Sheikh Mohammed thanked the prime minister and expressed his hopes that peace and prosperity prevail for all of mankind.

The crown prince also congratulated Bennett on assuming the position of Israeli prime minister and expressed his aspiration that the UAE and Israel would work together toward peace, stability and development for the benefit of the region and the world.



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Saudi and Abu Dhabi crown princes discuss 'strong and prosperous' relations
Israeli PM vows 'aggressive' action over Ben & Jerry's ban