

[Lebanon seizes 5m captagon pills at Beirut port](#)

Wed, 2021-02-03 22:41

BEIRUT: Lebanese customs seized five million banned captagon pills at Beirut port on Wednesday, an amphetamine shipment intended for Greece and Saudi Arabia, a customs official said.

Following a tip-off, officers had found the drugs hidden inside a tile-making machine, the official said, asking to remain anonymous as he was not allowed to speak to the press.

Three Lebanese citizens were detained over the affair, he said.

It was latest in a string of similar drug busts in Lebanon.

Captagon is an amphetamine manufactured in Lebanon and probably also in Syria and Iraq. It has been one of the most commonly used drugs in the war in Syria, where fighters say it helps them stay awake for days.

Captagon is cheap and easy to manufacture, and experts say there have also been attempts to market it as a low-priced alternative to cocaine, including in the West.

In July last year, Italy seized a record 14-tonne haul of the drug – or 84 million pills – that had arrived from Syria.



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Hariri urges Arabs: 'Do not give up on Lebanon' Missile fired at Israeli drone over south Lebanon

[Egypt says commercial routes that threaten Suez Canal will not affect revenues](#)

Wed, 2021-02-03 22:03

CAIRO: The Egyptian government has rejected rumors about the impact of the construction of commercial routes to compete with the Suez Canal on its foreign currency earnings.

The Cabinet's media center said it had contacted the Suez Canal Authority, which stressed that the foreign currency revenues of the Suez Canal have not been affected.

The center confirmed that the reports of the Eilat-Ashkelon pipeline restarting the movement of oil trade through the canal are incorrect, explaining that the percentage of that impact will not exceed 12-16 percent of the volume of northbound oil trade.

The authority said the canal route will remain the shortest and safest way to connect the East and the West as shipping containers through the canal can transport larger quantities of goods at a lower cost than land routes.

Reports and analytical studies prepared by the authority's economic unit indicate several reasons for the lack of an actual impact from the pipeline on the traffic passing through the canal – especially the export of crude by the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait to the Asian market.

The statistics of the oil trade crossing the canal also show that there is no reason to fear the competitiveness of the pipeline if it is operating.

The UAE oil trade represents about 0.7 percent of the total oil traffic passing through the canal; Saudi Arabia's 4.9 percent, and Kuwait's 1.4 percent.

Periodic reports indicate an increase in the proportion of trade in petroleum products crossing the canal to 14.2 percent, in contrast to the decline of crude oil to about 8.8 percent of the volume of trade passing through the canal.

The authority's economic unit monitors expect an increase in the costs and time of transportation using the pipeline instead of the Suez Canal, especially since that trade is mostly directed to northwest Europe and will

need to be shipped on tankers in the Mediterranean, in addition to an increase in the time used for unloading and shipping.

The Suez Canal Authority indicated that the revenue generated during 2020 amounted to about \$5.61 billion and that the canal also recorded the crossing of 18,829 ships with a total net tonnage of 1.17 billion during 2020, which is the second-highest annual tonnage in the history of the canal, despite the coronavirus pandemic.

The Cabinet statement clarified that the canal revenues come from a variety of sources – the revenues from container ships represent about 50 percent of the canal's total revenue, while the percentage of dry bulk vessels represents about 17 percent, liquefied natural gas about 5 percent, car carriers about 4 percent, petroleum products and all kinds of chemicals about 12 percent, while crude oil revenues represent 6.4 percent and other types of ships 5.6 percent.



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Egypt steps up efforts to maintain Suez Canal's transport advantage
Egypt's Suez Canal shipping traffic unaffected by coronavirus – chief

S-400s still an issue for US-Turkish ties under Biden

Author:

Wed, 2021-02-03 21:58

ANKARA: Turkey had its first official contact with the administration of US President Joe Biden on Tuesday with a phone call between the top advisors of the two countries.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's top foreign policy adviser, Ibrahim Kalin, and US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan, discussed the latest developments in Syria, Libya, the eastern Mediterranean, Cyprus, and Nagorno-Karabakh.

Many voices in Washington are questioning the alliance between the two countries following Ankara's purchase of a Russian missile defense system in 2019.

Turkey's S-400 system was installed last year, and Erdogan recently committed to proceed with talks for the procurement of a second batch of the missiles from Moscow despite the US opposition.

"We're not in a position to (have to) ask for permission from the Biden administration," he said.

The White House said in a statement that Sullivan expressed "concern that Turkey's acquisition of the Russian S-400 surface-to-air missile system undermines alliance cohesion and effectiveness."

But Ozgur Unluhisarcikli, the Ankara office director of the German Marshall Fund think tank, thinks that Washington is not considering a grand bargain or reset with Turkey.

"What the press release suggests is continuing cooperation on issues on which the two allies agree, resolving what disagreements can be resolved, but most importantly managing disagreements effectively, rather than just agreeing to disagree in a casual manner," he told Arab News.

"While disagreements on secondary issues are easier to manage, disagreements on issues that are related to the core of the treaty alliance between Turkey and the US are a different case," he said.

The conversation between Sullivan and Kalin came a week after another statement from the White House described China and Turkey as a mutual concern for both Washington and the EU, with whom the latter shares an eastern border.

Last December, Washington imposed sanctions on Ankara – including a ban on issuing export licences – over the S-400 acquisition, having already removed its NATO ally from the F-35 fighter jet program, despite several parts of the aircraft being manufactured in Turkey.

The US considers the presence of S-400 missiles on Turkish soil a serious threat to NATO's broader defense systems and the operation of F-35s, although Ankara claims the missiles will not be integrated into the alliance's defenses.

"The US attitude is that the ball is in Turkey's court on the S-400. The sanctions were a warning meant to convey that the US will go further but does not want to do so," Max Hoffman, a Turkey analyst from the Washington-based Center for American Progress, told Arab News.

Turkish concessions, including not buying more weapons systems and not fully activating the current array, were essential to avoid further escalation, he added.

"It will be hard for Erdogan to back down, but it's a situation of his own making – the US consistently warned of the consequences," Hoffman said.

In a recent interview to Deutsche Welle on Jan. 26, James Jeffrey, former US special envoy for Syria, said he did not anticipate any improvement in US-Turkey ties under Biden. He said Ankara failed to seize the "opportunities" on offer during the administration of former US President Donald Trump, failing to make any move to reach compromises.

"We have delayed the S-400 sanctions, we have later again delayed them, and then delayed them once again ... Well, did we manage to move forward? Of course not. This is the inheritance the Biden team has taken over," Jeffrey said.

Antony Blinken, US secretary of state, recently referred to Turkey as a "so-called strategic" partner, hinting at challenging times ahead for bilateral relations.

"The new US administration sees Turkey's ownership of S-400 systems as a problem related to alliance cohesion," Unluhisarcikli said.

"Apparently, there is willingness on both sides to prevent the relationship from rolling over the cliff and improving it if possible, and what they need to do now is agree on a general framework of the relationship, including on how they will manage their disagreements," he added.

The US sanctions received bipartisan support from the US Congress in December, and marked the first time the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) was used against a NATO ally.

The disagreement over the S-400s is likely to rank among the top challenges in relations unless Ankara takes a step back.

According to Hoffman, by promoting the S-400s so actively in the Turkish press, Erdogan has made it more difficult to compromise at home, particularly

among nationalist voters.

Given that the F-35 ejection was a more significant punitive step than the CAATSA sanctions, and yet did not seem to change Erdogan's mind, Hoffman is not optimistic about any future compromise.

"The tradeoff of the F-35 against the S-400 does not make sense in rational, realist foreign policy terms, pointing to the importance of domestic political and ideological concerns in Erdogan's calculus," he said.



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Turkey says turning back on S-400s 'problematic', seeks US dialogue
Turkey will not step back on S-400 missile systems despite US sanctions

[**UAE confirms 3,310 new COVID-19 cases, 7 additional deaths**](#)

Author:

Wed, 2021-02-03 01:14

DUBAI: The UAE on Tuesday recorded seven deaths related to COVID-19 in the previous 24 hours, and 3,310 new confirmed cases of the disease. The number

of infections once against topped the 3,000 mark after dipping below it for two days.

The total number of cases in the country since the pandemic began has reached 309,649 and the death toll stands at 866. A total of 285,201 people have recovered from the virus, including 3,791 in the past 24 hours.

The health ministry said 106,615 people were vaccinated in the preceding 24 hours and that the total number of doses administered has reached 3.448 million.

Saif Al-Dhaheri, a spokesman for the National Crisis and Emergency Management Authority, said the UAE is moving steadily and confidently toward containing the pandemic and planning the recovery phase. He highlighted the success of the national inoculation campaign and said that "taking the vaccine has become an ethical duty for everyone, both citizens and residents, to help protect the health and safety of the community."

He revealed that the inoculation rate has reached 36.04 per 100 people and added that despite the recent rise in new cases, the "UAE has the ability to deal with this increase through a flexible and efficient approach to handling developments."

The Emirates "has the best services that any visitor or tourist can enjoy, and has succeeded in providing a safe touristic experience for its visitors of various nationalities," Al-Dhaheri said.

Helal Al-Marri, director-general of Dubai Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing, said the emirate "is taking steps based on the data on the ground, and we have a very clear plan in dealing with the coronavirus pandemic, and we do not take decisions based on external media reports."

Dubai has been criticized by some countries, particularly the UK, for its increased tourism activity over the New Year holiday, which has been blamed for an increase in the number of COVID-19 cases.

Al-Marri said Dubai has the health care capabilities needed to deal with a variety of scenarios, and that hospital beds, medical equipment and medicines are all available to treat coronavirus patients.

"The Dubai government is closely following the developments of the pandemic, and each sector is considered separately to know where we should tighten measures and where we can ease some of the restrictions," he said during an interview with CNN.

Abu Dhabi's Hope Consortium is partnering with some of the world's leading logistics companies to oversee the safe distribution of billions of doses of COVID-19 vaccine around the world.

The company said it will provide its "expertise, infrastructure and capabilities to meet the complex requirements of storing, transporting and demand-planning for the billions of vaccine doses, under cold and ultra-cold conditions, that are being produced globally."

Meanwhile, Abu Dhabi Media Office said a 100km community cycling event will go ahead as planned on Wednesday "amid stringent precautionary measures."

To encourage a healthy and active lifestyle among community members, a 100km community cycle ride is to take place in [#AbuDhabi](#) on Wednesday 3rd February at 2:30pm amid stringent precautionary measures. Participation is free and open to cyclists of all levels.
pic.twitter.com/2YLJDx4W03

– مكتب أبوظبي الإعلامي (@admediaoffice) [February 2, 2021](#)

Elsewhere in the Gulf, Kuwait reported 811 new cases of COVID-19, raising the total in the country to 166,654, while the death toll rose to 960 after one more patient died from the disease.

تعلن [#وزارة_الصحة](#) عن تأكيد إصابة 811 حالة، وتسجيل 510 حالة شفاء، و حالة وفاة واحدة جديدة بـ [#فيروس_كورونا_المستجد](#) COVID-19، ليصبح إجمالي عدد الحالات 166,654 حالة pic.twitter.com/K76VPHKyXo

– (@KUWAIT_MOH) [February 2, 2021](#) وزارة الصحة – الكويت

Oman's health ministry confirmed 161 new cases and no additional deaths related to the disease, bringing the national totals to 134,685 and 1,532, respectively.

[#Statement](#) No. 280

February 2, 2021 pic.twitter.com/0p4GE8hjc

– (@OmaniMOH) [February 2, 2021](#) وزارة الصحة – عُمان

In Bahrain the death toll stands at 376, with no deaths reported in the previous 24 hours. An additional 657 were confirmed in the country.

Out of 14104 COVID-19 tests carried out on 2 February 2021, 657 new cases have been detected among 330 expatriate workers, 321 new cases are contacts of active cases, and 6 are travel related. There 285 recoveries from [#COVID19](#), increasing total recoveries to 99285 pic.twitter.com/GLM0KgwvEq

– (@MOH_Bahrain) [February 2, 2021](#) وزارة الصحة | مملكة البحرين



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[Dubai Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing](#)

[Dubai](#)

[National Crisis and Emergency Management Authority](#)

Saudi Arabia confirms 4 COVID-19 deaths and 310 new cases, the first in over 2 months
Dubai to start vaccinations with Oxford-AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine

[Yemen security authorities foil kill plot by female Houthi cell](#)

Wed, 2021-02-03 00:45

AL-MUKALLA: Authorities in Yemen have foiled a plot to kill military and security officers after uncovering a Houthi cell of eight women.

The women were planning to carry out attacks against local targets when they were found by police hiding in several houses in the central Yemeni city of Marib, a security source told Arab News on Tuesday.

The officer, who wished to remain anonymous, said security forces had been closing in on the all-female cell for more than a month and when the properties were raided they discovered GPS devices and a list of targets on mobile phones.

During the last five years, security and military authorities have busted several Houthi sleeper cells responsible for guiding ballistic missiles and explosive-laden drones that hit military, security, and civilian locations in densely populated Marib.

In September, a Yemeni court sentenced five Houthis to death for staging attacks in government-controlled areas. But the latest incident was the first time Yemeni officials in Marib had blamed the notorious Houthi policewomen authority, known as Zainabeat, for orchestrating attacks in the city.

Houthi officials denied sending the eight women to kill government officials, and instead accused the Yemeni government of taking the women hostage.

Meanwhile, on Tuesday, official Yemeni state media said Houthis in the northern province of Amran had confiscated a number of homes and other properties owned by army generals who backed the Yemeni government and Saudi-led military operations in Yemen.

Led by Mohammed Ali Al-Metawakel, deputy governor of Amran, a group of Houthis raided the homes of Maj. Gen. Hameed Al-Qushaibi, an army commander who was killed, along with two of his brothers, in clashes with the Houthis in 2014 in Khamer district.

According to reports, the Houthis sealed the houses and wrote on their walls, "confiscated by the state."

Since taking power by force in late 2014, Houthi-controlled courts have sentenced to death and confiscated the properties of hundreds of politicians, military and security officers, activists, and journalists who opposed their rule.

Yemen experts said the militant group was using judicial authorities under its control to justify stealing the properties of its opponents and was seeking to blackmail government officials into surrendering.

A security official narrowly escaped death on Tuesday after an improvised explosive device (IED) attached to his car went off near the historic city of Shibam in the southeastern province of Hadramout, local officials told Arab News.

Shibam district security chief, Col. Ahmed Nasher, was driving his vehicle on the main road between Seiyun and Shibam when the IED exploded, rocking nearby houses.

No one has claimed responsibility for the bombing, but local authorities in Hadramout have previously blamed Al-Qaeda and Daesh operatives for staging attacks.

In May, the former Shibam district security chief, Saleh bin Ali Jaber, and four of his bodyguards, were killed in a similar attack near the old city.



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Are Yemen's Iran-backed Houthis firing warning shots across Biden administration's bows? Yemeni officials meet Saudi Islamic Affairs Minister