

Full steam ahead for Egypt-Sudan rail network

Tue, 2020-10-27 00:49

CAIRO: Egypt's Minister of Transport Kamel Al-Wazir has discussed plans with Sudanese counterpart Hashem bin Auf to build a cross-border railway network between the two neighboring countries.

The pair discussed terms of a joint cooperation document for railway connectivity, which aims to provide funding for an economic, social and environmental feasibility study for the project.

The planned network will extend from the Egyptian city of Aswan across the southern border to Sudan's Wadi Halfa in its first phase.

Funding will be organized through cooperation between Egypt, Sudan and the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development.

Al-Wazir signed the document and delivered it to the Sudanese ambassador in Cairo for signing by the country's transport minister.

The two sides also discussed a number of road projects, including a prospective land road between Egypt and Chad through Sudan. The project aims to be a gateway for trade between the two countries, Chad and West Africa. The Cairo-Sudan-Cape Town road, which passes through nine African countries, was also mentioned by the ministers.

Al-Wazir also said that Egypt is building a Cairo-Arquin road corridor inside its borders, which passes through the governorates of Fayoum, Beni Suef, Minya, Assiut, Sohag, Qena, Luxor and Aswan, and then then extends to the Egyptian border, passing through the Toshka junctions to Arquin, parallel with Sudan.

He added that the new project is important in achieving land connectivity and increasing trade with African countries, as well as serving Egyptian and African citizens, opening new job opportunities and encouraging comprehensive development.

The Sudanese side also requested cooperation with Egypt in maritime transport and the training of maritime cadres at the Arab Academy for Science, Technology and Maritime Transport.

Al-Wazir said that Egypt will provide its capabilities to train the workers, whether through the Arab Academy, Egyptian ports or the Egyptian Authority for Maritime Safety.

The two sides also agreed to hold a joint meeting to follow up on the progress of other cooperation projects and to discuss the development of the Nile Valley Authority for River Navigation.

Al-Wazir's team said that the coming period should include urgent plans to develop the authority, train river workers and provide support through specialized technical cadres.



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Boost for Egypt-Sudan trade relations Sudan says it will discuss trade, migration deals with Israel

[Pandemic lockdowns fueling rise of sexual extortion crimes in Lebanon](#)

Tue, 2020-10-27 00:44

BEIRUT: Coronavirus lockdowns are fueling an increase in sexual extortion crimes in Lebanon, according to a security official.

Figures from the Lebanese Internal Security Forces showed that such crimes had risen significantly in recent months. Authorities received 47 complaints during July and 96 in August. The number of people arrested for these crimes

this year has reached 133.

The security official, from the Public Relations Division at the General Directorate of the Internal Security Forces, said the victims of this type of extortion were aged between 11 and 60, and the percentage of female victims was greater than the percentage of male ones.

“Such incidents are repeated daily, and the perpetrators may be Lebanese or non-Lebanese,” the official told Arab News. “These crimes increased during the presence of people in (their) homes as a result of quarantine due to the outbreak of coronavirus and people, old and young, resorted to social media.”

Despite information warning people against taking inappropriate photos and videos and under any pressure exerted on them, the official said, sexual extortion crimes were repeated because fraud took many forms.

“Perpetrators show their victims a measure of love and care that makes the victims believe them and feel secure with them,” the official explained. “It does not usually take long to convince male victims, while female victims usually look for someone who gives them great emotion to trust him, which takes longer. Usually, the female victims may be girls who suffer from difficult social conditions, and the start of the process of their extortion may take longer than with the male victims.”

Most of the perpetrators in sexual extortion operations had a prior history of such activity and were involved in fraud because it was lucrative, the official added.

The latest crime recorded by the Office of Combating Information Crimes and Protection of Intellectual Property in the Judicial Police Unit revealed that a Lebanese national was threatened with the publication of intimate photographs by someone she had met through Facebook.

A romantic relationship began between the two and she had sent him private photos and videos. He started threatening to upload these unless she sent him money, cell phone recharge cards, and new intimate images and videos of her. He also contacted and threatened one of her relatives, who capitulated and sent him more than 20 recharge cards and sums of money.

Brigadier Fadl Daher, a specialist in criminology and punishment and professor of criminal social studies, said there were three basic reasons for people committing this type of crime.

“The financial motive is the basis for crimes against money. These crimes resort, in most cases, to defamation, and they become more common when the surveillance and prosecution are reduced, and the perpetrator believes that he would not be held accountable,” he explained. “In the time of coronavirus, the family returned home but ... every person in the house resorted to social media so no one knows what the other is doing within the same house.”

Daher said that poverty and need made people resort to all available means to obtain financial returns, and that extortion through social media may be one of those methods as the difficulty of arresting people who used social media

to commit their crimes was four times higher than arresting those who committed their crimes in the street.

“The danger of these crimes is that they may target children and minors,” he added. “The lack of a social safety net through leniency in uncovering these crimes or talking about them led us in the past not to raise any talk about taboos to address them, and launching any campaign to break the silence now by asking victims to call the hotline is not helpful. An integrated mechanism of psychological, judicial and social treatment is required.”



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Lebanon coronavirus cases top 15,000Repatriations to Lebanon continue amid slowdown in recorded virus cases

[Iran reports COVID-19 death every five minutes, hospitals struggle](#)

Author:

Tue, 2020-10-27 00:06

DUBAI: Hospitals in many Iranian provinces are running out of capacity to handle COVID-19 cases, health authorities say, with novel coronavirus now killing around 300 people a day or one person every five minutes.

Authorities have complained of poor social distancing, and Deputy Health Minister Iraj Harirchi said the pandemic could cause 600 daily deaths in coming weeks if Iranians failed to respect health protocols in the Middle East's hardest-affected country.

A caption that ran on state television news said an Iranian died of novel coronavirus every five minutes, a rate that corresponds to daily death tallies reported by the authorities of just above or below 300 over the past 20 days.

Health Ministry spokesman Sima Sadat Lari told state TV on Sunday that 32,616 people had died of the disease and the number of confirmed cases had reached 568,896.

Some experts have doubted the accuracy of Iran's official coronavirus tolls. A report by the Iranian parliament's research center in April suggested that the coronavirus tolls might be almost twice as many as those announced by the health ministry.

The report said that Iran's official coronavirus figures were based only on the number of deaths in hospitals and those who had already tested positive for the coronavirus.

Schools, mosques, shops, restaurants and other public institutions in Tehran have been closed since Oct. 3. As COVID-19 cases and deaths continued to hit record levels, the closure was extended until Nov. 20, state TV reported.

Officials said "extreme measures and limitations" will be imposed in at least 43 counties across the country for one week, where the infection rates have been alarming. TV reported that 21 one of Iran's 31 provinces were on a coronavirus red alert.

Iran has blamed US sanctions for hampering Tehran's efforts to tackle the outbreak. Washington, accusing Iran of "incompetent and deadly governance," has refused to lift sanctions that were reimposed after 2018 when Trump exited Iran's 2015 nuclear deal with six powers.



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Iran's top leader says fighting virus trumps other concerns
Iran coronavirus death toll tops 20,000

[People in Arab countries want US to relax travel restrictions: survey](#)

Tue, 2020-10-27 00:01

BEIRUT: In the wake of the uprisings that shook the Arab world starting in 2011, political unrest and economic hardship across the Middle East and North Africa have left many clamoring to leave the region in search of safety and better opportunities elsewhere.

The US, long known as the land of opportunity, has always been high on the list for aspiring immigrants. Predictably enough, as many as three quarters of respondents to the Arab News/YouGov pan-Arab survey said they want the next US administration to make it easier for people from Arab countries to travel to the US.

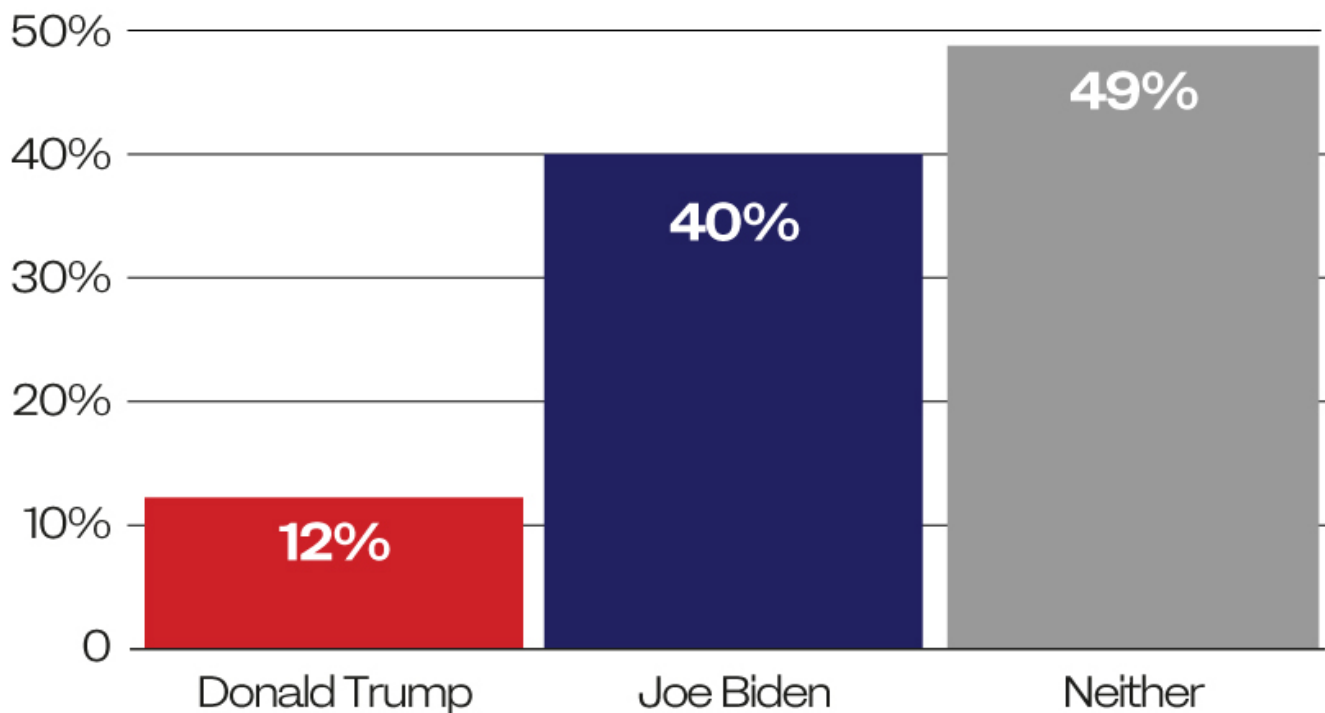
"Many of the young generation of Lebanese want to leave the country today. It feels like history is repeating itself. It's exactly what happened 36 years

ago when I left. Anybody who could afford to leave would leave,” said Rania Matar, a Lebanese-Palestinian photographer currently on a visit to Beirut from Boston.

“However, unless people have American citizenship, the Lebanese and Arabs alike don’t seem as interested in the US as before. They seem more interested in going to Canada or Europe, and perhaps that’s due to the stringent travel restrictions that the US has placed many Arab nations under.”

Biden viewed as better for the Middle East

Who will be better for the Arab region if elected the next US president?



Source: Arab News/YouGov Pan-Arab Survey, 2020

Indeed, over the past three years it has become increasingly difficult for people from Arab countries to travel to the US, especially after President Donald Trump, who is up for re-election on Nov. 3, imposed sweeping travel bans on people from a number of Muslim-majority countries in 2017.

Executive Order 13769 placed tight restrictions on citizens of Iraq, Iran, Libya, Somalia, Syria and Yemen. Plaintiffs challenging the order said the move was unconstitutional and broke federal statutes.

As a result, Trump issued Executive Order 13780, which amended some provisions of the first order, including the removal of Iraq from the list.

“Of course, they should ease up restrictions, especially for the younger generation, as they have zero opportunities in this part of the world,” Basel Dalloul, a tech entrepreneur who lives in Beirut, told Arab News.

“The US is still the land of opportunity for people in this part of the world. If you work hard and are tenacious in the US, chances are that you will make it and that’s what the US means to people here.”

For the 18 countries polled by the survey, 75 percent of respondents agreed that the US should make it easier for people from Arab countries to enter. The corresponding figure for Lebanon was even higher, 79 percent.

“The Lebanese are leaving Lebanon in droves,” said Dalloul. “Everyone and anyone who has the means to leave is leaving. The banking system here has collapsed. You can take out only 2 million Lebanese pounds now per week (\$270 at the black-market rate). How does a family survive on that when they need to pay for rent, food, electricity and education?”

READ: [The methodology behind the Arab News/YouGov Pan-Arab Survey](#)

Lebanon has been rocked by mass anti-government protests since Oct. 2019, which began in response to new taxes. The protests soon escalated into expressions of rage against the entire political establishment. Matters were made even worse on Aug. 4 when a port fire ignited a warehouse full of ammonium nitrate. The resulting blast devastated the city, leaving 203 dead and 6,500 injured.

The disaster seemed to underscore the perceived corruption and ineptitude of Lebanese officials and compounded public anger. With coronavirus containment measures already squeezing the job market, many young Lebanese have simply had enough.

According to this year’s Arab Youth Survey, two in five young Arabs are thinking about emigrating due to the lack of economic prospects brought on by the coronavirus pandemic, conflict and corruption.

Some 15 percent of 18-24-year-old respondents said they are actively trying to leave.

“There’s not many opportunities for Arab youth in the Middle East now,” said Mohamed Tahir, a Lebanese entrepreneur from Beirut. “It’s not just Lebanese but Arab youth across the region, including the Gulf.”

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[Arabs see Iran among top three threats to US interests: poll](#)

Mon, 2020-10-26 23:45

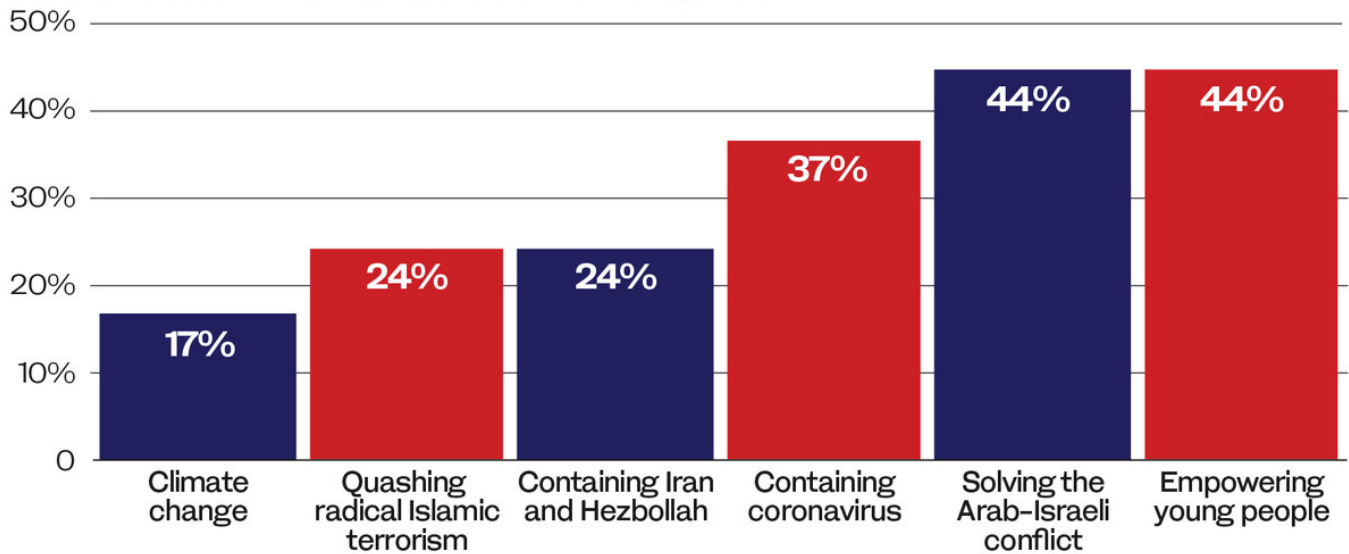
NEW YORK: In just a couple of weeks, Americans will cast their ballots against a backdrop of civil unrest, racial tensions, political polarization and an economy crumbling under the stress of the world's worst coronavirus outbreak.

In the run-up to the Nov. 3 presidential election, the Arab News/YouGov survey asked what the Arab world thinks are the greatest threats facing the US. Given the turbulence, it is difficult perhaps to settle on which of these challenges is the most pertinent.

However, for 32 percent of the respondents, white nationalism topped the list. China came in second place, with 22 percent of Arab respondents identifying the world's second biggest economy as among the biggest threats facing the US today.

Wish list of US priorities in the Arab world

What should the next US president focus on in the coming years?



Source: Arab News/YouGov Pan-Arab Survey, 2020

Iran occupied third place, with 9 percent highlighting Tehran as America's greatest threat, followed by cybercrime, radical Islamic extremism, climate change and finally intrusive federal government as America's chief woes. "The survey results reflect the way Americans themselves view these threats," said Khalil Jahshan, executive director of the Washington DC-based Arab Center, a think tank focusing on US foreign policy in the Middle East.



Extreme, right-wing groups were seen as the biggest threat to the US; respondents had great concerns about the malign influence of Iran. (AFP)

“It shows that the Arab population is better informed about different issues here in the US.”

Arab respondents do seem to have their finger on the US political pulse. Just recently, 13 members of an armed white militia were charged with plotting to kidnap Gretchen Whitmer, the Democratic governor of Michigan, and to overthrow the state government.

It also follows months of growing concern at the apparent spread of “alt-right” views, clashes between Black Lives Matter protesters and white supremacists, and Donald Trump’s failure to denounce the far-right Proud Boys during the first presidential television debate with his rival Joe Biden.

“The threat of racist, extreme, right-wing groups is the number one threat in terms of terrorism committed on American soil,” Jahshan said. “It has replaced a threat that was for a while, after 9/11, perceived as coming from radical Islamic sources.”

Although the US president has had Iran in his crosshairs, it is hardly surprising that the Arab public see China as America’s greater foe. Over the course of his presidency, Trump’s anti-Chinese rhetoric has swung from that of a mere trade war to implying Beijing deliberately unleashed the “Chinese virus” (COVID-19) to weaken the US economy.

READ: [The methodology behind the Arab News/YouGov Pan-Arab Survey](#)

“That didn’t play well in Peking (Beijing). And, of course, that relationship has fallen into disarray,” said Jahshan.

Despite their concerns about Iran’s malign influence in their own Middle East neighborhood, only 9 percent of the Arab News/YouGov pan-Arab poll respondents felt Tehran posed more of a threat to Washington than China.

“That low number reflects the gap between Arab and American public opinion (on the question of the Iranian threat). The typical Arab is not convinced that the US is on his side when it comes to Iran,” Jahshan said. “That is the general sentiment, particularly in the Gulf, a category that tends to view Iran as the principal enemy, with the US as a main ally.”

Beyond geopolitics, Arab respondents appear to have read the mood well on climate change, reflecting the view that Trump has rolled back much of the recent progress on environmental protection. “The fact that 5 percent of Arab females and 9 percent of Arab males see that issue as a vital threat to the US is correct,” Jahshan said. “I only wish the numbers were higher.”

As a longtime Middle East observer who has dealt with several Arab governments over the past four decades, Jahshan says that he is pleased to

see Arab public opinion being taken into consideration for the first time. “It is encouraging and instructive to see these surveys. I hope that will make Arab public opinion become a factor in foreign policy, be it here in the US or in the Arab countries,” he said.

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