

UAE announces 626 new COVID-19 cases, a drop from previous day

Author:

Mon, 2020-09-28 21:25

DUBAI: The UAE on Monday recorded 626 new COVID-19 cases, a drop from 851 the previous day, and one death.

The Ministry of Health and Prevention said the total number of infected cases since the pandemic began has reached 92,095, while the total deaths reached 413.

Some 918 cases recovered from COVID-19 over the previous 24 hours, bringing the total to 81,462 cases.

Meanwhile, Dubai Economy said it issued fines to 18 commercial establishments and gave warnings to 12 shops for not adhering to anti-COVID-19 measures, while 725 businesses were found to be compliant.

These included shops selling perfumes and electronics in various shopping centers around Dubai, as well as two gyms that were fined in cooperation with Dubai Sports Council.

Inspection teams have been carrying out daily tours to ensure that shopping centers, open markets and commercial businesses are complying with the government's preventative measures.

Dubai Municipality also closed two salons for failing to comply with the precautionary measures, fined 58 institutions, and issued 70 warnings during inspection visits.

Elsewhere, Kuwait reported 437 new COVID-19 cases, bringing the total to 103,981, while the death toll reached 605 after four new deaths were registered.

Oman recorded 607 new COVID-19 cases and 12 deaths, bringing total numbers to 98,057 and 924 respectively.



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UAE confirms 851 new COVID-19 cases, one death
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[US warns Iraq of Baghdad embassy closure if attacks continue](#)

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Mon, 2020-09-28 16:56

BAGHDAD: The Trump administration has warned Iraq that it will close its embassy in Baghdad if the government does not take swift and decisive action to end persistent rocket and other attacks by Iranian-backed militias and rogue armed elements on American and allied interests in the country, US, Iraqi and other officials said Monday.

As news of the warning sent shockwaves across Baghdad, Iraq's military said a Katyusha rocket hit near Baghdad airport, killing five Iraqi civilians and severely wounding two others.

A US official said the administration's warning was given to both Iraq's president and prime minister but that it was not an imminent ultimatum. The official was not authorized to discuss the matter publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity.

The warning signals the administration's increasing frustration and anger with ongoing rocket fire from Iranian-supported groups on or near the vast US Embassy compound in Baghdad as it steps up pressure on Iran with the re-imposition of crippling sanctions. However, closing the embassy and withdrawing US personnel from Baghdad would signal a significant retreat from a country in which successive administrations have invested massive amounts of money and lives.

The threat to evacuate the embassy, which has stoked concerns in Baghdad of a diplomatic crisis, was first delivered to President Barham Saleh on Tuesday in a phone call with US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, Iraqi officials said. Pompeo then repeated the warning to Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhimi on Saturday, the officials said.

Pompeo told Saleh that if the US presence continues to be targeted, measures would be taken to close the embassy and a "strong and violent" response would follow against the groups responsible for the attacks, according to three Iraqi officials with knowledge of the call.

Pompeo went further with Al-Kadhimi on Saturday, telling the prime minister that the US will initiate plans to withdraw from the embassy, according to the Iraqi officials who spoke on condition of anonymity in line with regulations.

An official announcement has not been made by the Americans. But the Trump administration has not been shy about expressing its anger and concern about continuing rocket attacks by Iranian-backed groups on or near the embassy compound.

In a tangible sign of a strain in US-Iraq relations, the State Department shortened an Iran sanctions waiver deadline by 60 days last week. The previous waiver, crucial for Iraq to import badly needed Iranian gas to meet power demands, gave the government 120 days.

Without the waiver, Iraq would suffer crippling sanctions barring it access to US dollars.

Despite comments from US officials that a deadline on closing the embassy is not in place, Iraqi officials appeared to be under the impression they have until the waiver expires in two months' time to take action.

"America will observe what measures the government of Iraq takes within two months," one senior Iraqi official said. During this time, Al-Kadhimi's administration must halt the targeting of foreign missions, military

installations and logistics convoys destined for the US-led coalition or else, "aggressive" action would follow, the official said.

Iraq's leadership is feeling the heat.

Al-Kadhimi, Saleh and Parliament Speaker Mohamed Al-Halbousi held a meeting late Sunday in which all three leaders said they supported measures to bring arms under the authority of the state and to prevent the targeting of diplomatic missions.

So far, Iraqi authorities have redistributed some security forces inside the Green Zone.

The Iraqi officials also said two factors might determine whether Iraq's leadership can walk back from an impending diplomatic crisis: Security fallout from protests planned in the coming weeks to mark one year since mass anti-government demonstrations began, and domestic politics inside the US ahead of the November federal election.

"We expect large crowds," said one official of the protests. "And we expect it will impact American thinking."

Two Western diplomats said they had been informed that the US has started the process of closing its sprawling facility inside the heavily fortified Green Zone, but could not provide details. The US Embassy declined to comment. Closing the facility, which is by physical size the largest US diplomatic mission in the world, is expected to be a complex and time-consuming process. The embassy was already functioning at minimum levels since March due to the coronavirus and ongoing security threats.

Diplomats were told the US had already started the process of closing but would "re-evaluate while progressing," one Western official said, suggesting the decision was reversible if security inside the Green Zone improved. In 2018, Pompeo ordered the closure of the US consulate in the southern Iraqi city of Basra due to attacks by Iranian-backed militias.

As a member of Congress, Pompeo had been a strong critic of the Obama administration and former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton over the deadly attack on US diplomatic facilities in Benghazi, Libya. He is loathe to see a repeat of such an attack on his watch, according to current and former US officials. In addition, Trump has been clear about his desire to reduce the US presence in the Mideast, although he has focused primarily on the military.

However, closing the embassy after the massive US investment of lives and money in Iraq since 2003 would likely draw significant criticism from Trump allies in Congress, including lawmakers who supported the invasion and ouster of Saddam Hussein. Ahead of November's election, it is not clear if Trump would be willing to invite that criticism.

The State Department declined to comment on the calls between Pompeo and Iraq's leadership, but said the US will not tolerate threats.

"We have made the point before that the actions of lawless Iran-backed militias remains the single biggest deterrent to stability in Iraq," the department said. "It is unacceptable for Iran-backed groups to launch rockets at our embassy, attack American and other diplomats, and threaten law and order in Iraq."

Meanwhile, attacks targeting convoys continue.

On Monday, five Iraqi civilians were killed and two severely wounded after a Katyusha rocket hit near Baghdad airport, Iraq's military said. The rocket may have been targeting the international airport but struck a residential

home close by instead, Iraqi security officials said, requesting anonymity in line with regulations.

Also on Monday, a roadside bomb targeted a convoy carrying materials destined for US forces southwest of Baghdad, two Iraqi security officials said. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity in line with regulations.



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Five civilians killed in Baghdad rocket attack
Iraqi army: Rocket hits Baghdad's Green Zone; no casualties

[Five civilians killed in Baghdad rocket attack](#)

Mon, 2020-09-28 18:58

BAGHDAD: Iraqi militia groups fired two Katyusha rockets on a house in Baghdad, killing two women and three children and wounding two other

children, the Iraqi military said on Monday.

The deaths were the first among Iraqi civilians in the latest outbreak of violence, during which Iran-backed Iraqi Shiite militias have been blamed for targeting US interests in the country. Police sources said Baghdad airport was the target of the attack.

The rocket was launched from the Al-Jihad neighborhood of Baghdad.

The attacks have become a frequent occurrence, often targeting the US Embassy in Baghdad, within the heavily fortified Green Zone, and US troops present in Iraqi bases as well as Baghdad Airport. Roadside bombs have also frequently targeted convoys carrying equipment destined for US-led coalition forces.

Previous attacks have caused minor damage but rarely deaths or injuries.

The frequency of the rockets have strained Iraq-US relations, prompting the Trump administration last week to threaten to close its diplomatic mission in Baghdad if Shiite militia groups believed to be orchestrating them are not reigned in.

The disparate nature of Shiite militias following the US assassination of Iranian Gen. Qassim Soleimani and Iranian militia leader Abu Mahdi Al-Muhandis has complicated Iraqi efforts to clamp down on rogue armed elements. A government raid on the powerful Iran-backed Kataib Hezbollah, suspected of launching rocket attacks, backfired when those detained were released for want of evidence.



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Iraqi army: Rocket hits Baghdad's Green Zone; no casualties
Three missiles target Baghdad airport

UN's Libya mission praises Libyan rivals for holding direct talks in Egypt

Author:

Mon, 2020-09-28 18:50

CAIRO: Military and police teams from Libya's rival administrations held talks in Egypt on Monday as part of attempts to resolve the conflict. The security and military talks were taking place in Hurghada and were facilitated by the UN's Libya mission, UNSMIL.

France said it welcomed the direct talks between Libyan parties.

The UNSMIL also thanked Egypt for hosting the talks, and the Libyan delegations who "demonstrated a positive and proactive attitude aimed at de-escalation of the situation in central Libya."

The talks are part of the 5+5 Joint Military Commission which started meeting in February. It consists of five senior military officers from each side of the conflict.

Libya split into two rival administrations after the downfall of dictator Muammar Qaddafi in 2011.

The capital Tripoli is controlled by the Government of National Accord, while in the east, a rival government backed by military command Khalifa Haftar holds sway.



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At least 13 people drown in migrant shipwreck off Libya
French ex-president Sarkozy loses challenge to cash-from-Libya case

[Ashrawi urges American Arabs to unify for Palestine](#)

Mon, 2020-09-28 16:42

Hanan Ashrawi, a Ramallah-based member of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) Executive Committee and popular English language voice for the Palestinian cause in the US, urged American Arabs to “mobilize” and set aside their differences to strengthen the voice of the Palestinian diaspora.

During a Zoom discussion Saturday with American Arab leaders, hosted by ArabAmerica.com, Ashrawi said the US Arab community faced many of the same “very difficult conditions and obstacles” that Palestinians face around the world.

But, Ashrawi said, if they could bridge their differences and unite around common principles of justice, they could become an important voice as advocates for the Palestinian cause.

She argued it was especially important as US society becomes more polarized, but argued that Palestinians and Arabs needed to respect each other in order to unify.

"You cannot antagonize others. You can't intimidate others. You cannot insult others. You have to work with them to find common ground," Ashrawi urged.

"Even when you challenge. I challenge a lot. I am known to be very blunt. I don't mince words. But at the same time I don't insult. I don't bring other people down. What you need to do is to be able to challenge in a way that shows you respect yourself so that others will respect you. This is extremely difficult."

Asked about how to bridge the divisions that segment Palestinians in the US and abroad, Ashrawi urged all sides to embrace their differences, saying: "Arabs are not identical and we are not monolithic. We have to celebrate our diversity.

"We are all under attack," she said. "In the US, you are seeing the rise of identity politics ... You cannot be neutral in the face of such racism ... and such distortions. You must embrace your Arab identity and be proud of it. What we have to do is to mobilize to make our space in the public discourse."

Ashrawi criticized the Arab League, calling it "a disaster" in confronting Israel's atrocities and oppression. She acknowledged Palestinians could do a better job of communicating, but said that they were working under oppressive conditions and without major funding or backing.

"It's difficult because what we do, we do voluntarily and there is no funding," Ashrawi said.

"We have a problem, if you want me to be very frank with you. We have a problem with many in the leadership think that they know it all."

Ashrawi also said that rivalries prevented there from being a clear and powerful strategic message.

"They don't think anyone else has the ability to present the cause. We don't have the funds. We don't have the institutions ... we try desperately to face a real assault," Ashrawi said.

She added it was important for Palestinians and Arabs in the US to engage in the political system as a unified voice.

"You need to speak out. You need to stand up and speak out. You need to challenge. You need to make the facts known, to get people to unlearn what they have learned because for a long time Israel was dictating the agenda," she said.

“Work within a group. Work collectively; organize, use the system. Work with other people because it is an intersectional issue. You can work with women. You can work with African Americans. You can work with youth. You can work with indigenous people. You can work with others who feel marginalized, excluded and oppressed. The mentality of oppression is the same everywhere.”

She stressed: “You have natural allies in the state. You have to work together ... Within the system you can influence political decisions. Hold your representatives accountable.”

Ashrawi defended the Palestine National Authority, adding they “do not make political decisions” unlike the PLO.

“It is unfair to say failure, failure, failure ... they did many things. They built many institutions,” she said.

“You have to place it in context. The Palestinian leadership is working under extremely adverse conditions and circumstances. They have no powers. They have no rights like everyone else. Israel controls everything, the lands, the resources, the water, our lives.”

Ashrawi added that while Palestinians continued to push for action from the International Criminal Court, Israel and the US continued to obstruct that legal process.

“They are punishing the individuals who are in charge of the global judicial and accountability system,” Ashrawi said. “This is unconscionable.”



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The many firsts of Hanan Ashrawi, one of Palestine's most notable politicians
Saudi Arabia says it stands by Palestinians, supports efforts for just solution