

Iran reports record 162 COVID-19 single-day death toll

Author:

AFP

ID:

1593434361614814700

Mon, 2020-06-29 11:57

TEHRAN: Iran reported on Monday 162 more deaths from the novel coronavirus, the highest single-day toll since the country's outbreak began in February. "This increase in numbers is in fact a reflection of our overall performance, both in terms of reopening and in compliance with health protocols," health ministry spokeswoman Sima Sadat Lari said at a news conference.

The previous record daily toll of 158 deaths was reported by health authorities in early April.

Official figures have shown an upward trajectory in new confirmed cases since early May, when Iran hit a near two-month low in daily recorded infections.

Iran reported its first COVID-19 cases on February 19 and it has since struggled to contain the outbreak, the deadliest in the Middle East.

Lari announced an additional 2,536 new cases on Monday, bringing the total to 225,205. The overall official death toll is now at 10,670

Iranian authorities have refrained from enforcing full lockdowns to stop the pandemic's spread and the use of masks and protective equipment has been optional in most areas.

Iran closed schools, cancelled public events and banned movement between its 31 provinces in March, but the government progressively lifted restrictions from April to try to reopen its sanctions-hit economy.

Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said on Saturday that "momentum and effort has waned among some of the people and authorities" to combat the virus, warning the country's economic problems would worsen if the disease spreads unchecked.

Authorities launched a campaign over the weekend to encourage people to wear masks and decreed mandatory mask-wearing "in covered spaces where there are gatherings" from Saturday, the beginning of the week in Iran.

The increasing virus caseload has seen some previously unscathed provinces classified as "red" – the highest level on Iran's colour-coded risk scale – with authorities allowing them to reimpose restrictive measures if required.

According to Lari, the provinces of Khuzestan, Hormozgan, Kurdistan, Kermanshah, Boushehr, West and East Azerbaijan and Khorasan Razavi are classified as "red".

The provinces of Ilam, Lorestan and Golestan are on alert, she added.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Coronavirus](#)

[Iran](#)

Iran issues arrest warrant for Trump over killing of top general

[Iran issues arrest warrant for Trump over killing of top general](#)

Author:

Reuters

ID:

1593431968364599800

Mon, 2020-06-29 11:55

Iran has issued an arrest warrant for US President Donald Trump and 35 others over the killing of top general Qassem Soleimani and has asked Interpol for help, Tehran prosecutor Ali Alqasimehr said on Monday, according to the Fars news agency.

On Jan. 3, a US drone strike in Iraq killed Soleimani, leader of the Revolutionary Guards' Quds Force. Washington blamed Soleimani for

masterminding attacks by Iran-aligned militias on US forces in the region.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

[Why thirsty Arab region needs sustainable desalination tech](#)

Author:

Sun, 2020-06-28 22:35

DUBAI: For all its hydrocarbon wealth, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region suffers from a fundamental scarcity, namely of underground renewable freshwater resources.

The region, one of the most water-scarce places on the planet, has some of the lowest water-availability levels on a per-capita basis.

Desalination dependence in the region is therefore high, even though desalination processes have a direct impact on the issue of sustainability and renewable-energy portfolios of these countries.

Data from the International Energy Agency (IEA) show that two-thirds of the water produced from seawater desalination in the region are, at present, from

fossil fuel-based thermal technologies.

The rest is derived from membrane-based desalination, which relies heavily on electricity produced by burning natural gas.

Currently, the Middle East accounts for roughly 90 percent of the thermal energy used for desalination worldwide, with the UAE and Saudi Arabia at the helm.

To satisfy the drinking-water requirements of the region's 400 million-plus people, a high reliance on non-conventional water resources such as desalination and the reuse of treated wastewater is "imperative," Waleed Zubari, coordinator of the Water Resources Management Program at the College of Graduate Studies in Manama, Bahrain, told Arab News.

In fact, desalination becomes the only viable source for drinking water as the reuse of treated wastewater is increasingly being used for agriculture and landscaping, he said.

But the widely used desalination process based on fossil-fuel technology is an economic and environmental burden for countries with a high reliance on hydrocarbon revenues.

"Can we have sustainable water supply by desalination? Alternatively, can we have sustainable desalination?" asked Zubari.

Desalination, particularly co-production technologies that produce electricity and water as by-products, is an "energy intensive" process that claims at "alarming rates" a sizable portion of the energy resources in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, he said.

Despite a "tremendous decrease" in the cost of desalination over the decades, the practice is causing the fast depletion of the region's energy resources and threatening the very source of some countries' income, he added.

The way forward is to look beyond the deployment of non-renewable resources such as fossil fuels to produce desalinated water.

FASTFACT

By 2040, desalinated seawater production in Mideast to increase almost 14-fold. (World Energy Outlook)

According to a special report in the World Energy Outlook series, "Outlook for Producer Economies," for resource-rich economies "the high reliance on hydrocarbon revenues, coupled with the risk of fluctuations in prices, creates well-known pitfalls."

However, the report noted, in response to changing conditions and the growing emphasis on renewables, “many major producers are displaying a renewed commitment to reform and economic diversification.”

The World Energy Outlook series examined six resource-dependent economies that are pillars of global energy supply: Iraq, Nigeria, Russia, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Venezuela.

It assessed how the prospects for these major oil- and gas-producing economies will evolve in various scenarios by 2040.

The production of desalinated seawater in the Middle East, the report said, is projected to increase almost 14-fold during this period.

Globally, too, water desalination as a source of freshwater supply has become a major priority due to rapid population growth, poor water-management practices and global warming. The latter is believed to be decreasing annual rainfall by 20-40 cm.

To meet these challenges, there is “a concerted shift towards membrane-based desalination,” the report said.



Desalination, particularly co-production technologies that produce electricity and water as by-products, is an energy intensive process. (AFP)

Membrane-based technologies use electricity as the driver for desalination.

For example, “reverse osmosis (RO) technologies” in membrane-based processes account for 60 percent of the capacity in Oman and roughly half the capacity in Saudi Arabia.

The Saudi state-owned Water and Electricity Co. is currently developing the Rabigh 3 project, which is expected to come on stream in 2021, with the potential to become one of the largest membrane-based seawater-desalination plants in the world.

The need of the hour, according to Zubari, is to achieve a degree of sustainability for desalination, which he said depends on countries “minimizing associated costs and maximizing desalination’s added value in the region.”

He believes this can be done through investment and ownership of desalination technologies, and urges governments to increase water conservation and decrease water waste and loss.

“One of the main options is the development of renewable energies to power desalination plants, particularly solar energy, in which the GCC countries have a comparative advantage,” Zubari said.

His view is seconded by Dr. Emad Yousef Alhseinat, assistant professor of chemical engineering at the UAE’s Khalifa University.

Energy sustainability is key to achieving sustainable desalination, said Alhseinat, adding that to achieve this objective, GCC countries have to diversify their energy sources to include renewable forms such as solar, wind and wave.

“And to get sustainable desalination processes, we need to invest in developing desalination technologies that are compatible with renewable energy,” he said.

According to Alhseinat, desalination processes, whether classified as thermal or membrane-based, require large amounts of energy to produce fresh water.

For example, “in RO processes, there is a need to reach a pressure of 50-80 bar to desalinate salty water,” he said, adding that this “high pressure” requires big pumps of water that consume large amounts of energy.

In short, he said, this process is “energy intensive, meaning high-cost, low-economic impact and high-carbon footprint.”

Another way to improve desalination in the region, added Alhseinat, is to allocate more investments to research and development in order to enhance the efficiency of current desalination plants.



This picture taken on December 11, 2019 shows a view of Jubail Desalination Plant at the Jubail Industrial City in Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province overlooking the Arabian Gulf. (AFP file photo)

"This can be done through adopting state-of-the-art optimization tools such as data mining and machine learning," he said.

Applying artificial intelligence to analyze desalination data could also be a promising approach, according to Alhseinat.

Another important aspect of the desalination debate is its impact on the ecosystem. Injecting the hypersaline brine, or the waste stream of desalination plants, into the ground is harmful to the marine environment, particularly in the Arabian Gulf, said Alhseinat.

He believes a "zero-liquid discharge approach" could be developed to reduce the environmental impact.

Highlighting the dependence of the Middle East, indeed the world, on desalination technologies is the fact that there exist approximately 18,000 commercial desalination plants in operation internationally, with total installed production capacity of 86.55 million cubic meters per day (m³/day) or 2,870 million gallons per day (MGD).

"About 44 percent of this capacity (37 million m³/day) or 9,860 MGD is located in the Middle East and North Africa. Desalination in this region is projected to grow at a rate of 7-9 percent per year," Alhseinat said.

While it may be the solution to freshwater shortage in the region, "so far

there is no expectation of a direct economic value from it," he added.

"Desalination in the GCC is contributing indirectly to the economic growth of the region even though it is considered as a cost in the countries' energy bill."

At the end of the day, Alhseinat said, assuring the availability of freshwater is a must for any country to have sustainable economic growth.

Twitter: @jumana_khamis





Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Editor's Choice](#)

[desalination plants](#)

[hydrocarbos](#)

[Renewable Energy](#)

Water-scarce Gulf states bank on desalination, at a costSaudi Neom megacity will have world's first 'solar dome' desalination plantCalifornia looks to Saudi Arabia for desalination expertiseHouthi rocket targets desalination plant in Al-Shuqaiq

[UAE announces suspension of all flights from Pakistan](#)

Sun, 2020-06-28 22:08

LONDON: The UAE will temporarily stop receiving passengers on flights coming from Pakistan, the country's civil aviation authority said on Sunday. The suspension, which comes into effect on Monday, will last until a special laboratory to conduct coronavirus tests is established, the Emirates' state news agency WAM reported.

The decision also applies to transit flights originating from Pakistan, where the number of coronavirus cases is rising rapidly. The authority advised all passengers affected by the suspension to get in touch with the airlines they were due to travel with.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Coronavirus](#)

[UAE](#)

[Pakistan](#)

Pakistan army says Indian spy drone shot down in Kashmir
Coronavirus-depleted
Pakistan cricket squad leave for England

[Lebanese security forces investigating explosion near Hariri convoy this month](#)

Author:

Reuters

ID:

1593370640039913700

Sun, 2020-06-28 18:48

BEIRUT: Lebanese security forces are investigating an explosion 11 days ago that took place near the convoy of former Prime Minister Saad Al-Hariri, Hariri's office said on Sunday.

Hariri's office said the incident, in which nobody was hurt, took place during a tour of the eastern Beqaa valley and was not made public at the time to prevent inflaming passions in an already politically charged atmosphere. "Since the convoy did not get exposed to any attack ... (Hariri's) decision was to keep it secret and await the results of the relevant security forces," it said in a statement.

Remnants of a missile were found almost 500 meters away from the route taken by Hariri's 30-car convoy, which was equipped with jamming systems, Saudi owned pan-Arab Al Hadath TV station said in a report on the incident on Sunday.

Hariri, Lebanon's leading Sunni Muslim politician, resigned last October in the face of mass protests against the sectarian ruling elite. The country has since then been in the throes of the worst economic and political crisis since its 1975-90 civil war.

Hariri's father, also a former prime minister, was killed by a bomb in 2005.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Lebanon](#)

[Hariri](#)

Lebanon judge issues media ban against US ambassador over Hezbollah comments