

Iraq hit with record-high COVID-19 deaths

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Thu, 2020-06-25 15:30

BAGHDAD: Iraq registered nearly 2,500 new coronavirus cases and over 100 deaths on Thursday, setting new records in a country whose health sector had been bracing itself for such a spike.

Hospitals across the country have been overwhelmed over the last week by a jump in cases and deaths, following months of the virus spreading relatively slowly.

On Thursday, the health ministry said it had confirmed 2,437 new cases over the last day, bringing the total in the country to over 39,000 – of whom about half have recovered.

Another 107 people died of coronavirus-related causes, pushing the total death toll to 1,437.

Iraq had so far considered itself spared as the virus spread in other regional countries, including in neighboring Iran where more than 10,000 have died.

But the Iraqi health sector has been worn down by years of war and poor investment and appears to be collapsing under the strain of the virus.

Doctors in coronavirus wards have complained of a lack of personal protective equipment, and say they have been made to keep working even if they showed symptoms of infection.

Tests are also still not widely available, with authorities conducting fewer than a half-million tests in March in a country of 40 million people.

China, the United Arab Emirates and the United States have all donated COVID-related aid to Iraq, which is also seeking emergency funding from the World Bank and International Monetary Fund.

Some of Iraq's 18 provinces have maintained full lockdowns, but most have eased restrictions to a nightly curfew in an effort to revive the local economy.

Many shops have reopened, with customers and staff alike declining to wear masks or observe social distancing.



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Long-dreaded virus increase hits Iraq as new cases soar Turkish strikes kill civilians in northern Iraq

[US imposes sanctions on companies operating in Iran's metals sector](#)

Thu, 2020-06-25 17:27

WASHINGTON: The United States on Thursday blacklisted four steel, aluminum and iron companies operating in Iran's metals sector, as well as sales agents of Iran's largest steel manufacturer it said generate tens of millions of dollars for Tehran's metals industry.

The Treasury Department said in a statement it imposed sanctions on Tara Steel Trading GmbH, a Germany-based subsidiary of Mobarakeh Steel Co, three sales agents majority owned by the steel company, and Iran-based Metil Steel.

The Treasury said the sales agents "generated tens of millions of dollars

annually from the foreign sale of Mobarakeh Steel Company products, providing significant contributions to the billions of dollars generated overall by Iran's steel, aluminum, copper, and iron sectors."

Mobarakeh Steel Co is the largest flat steel producer in the Middle East and North Africa and accounts for 1 percent of Iran's gross domestic product, the Treasury said. It has been designated by the United States under different authorities, including counterterrorism and for operating in Iran's metal sector.

Thursday's action also blacklisted three large aluminum, steel and iron producers in Iran, accusing them of contributing billions of dollars in sales and export of Iranian metals.

The sanctions freeze any US assets held by the companies and generally prohibit Americans from dealing with them.

Thursday's actions did not appear related to a Reuters report published on Wednesday disclosing Iran's production of aluminum powder for use in missiles.

"The Iranian regime continues to use profits from metals manufacturers and foreign sales agents to fund destabilizing behavior around the world," Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said in the statement.

Tensions between Washington and Tehran have spiked since Trump unilaterally withdrew in 2018 from the Iran nuclear deal struck by his predecessor, Barack Obama, and began reimposing sanctions that had been eased under the accord.



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[Sisi says Egypt seeks stability in Libya](#)

Wed, 2020-06-24 21:56

CAIRO: Egypt is only interested in restoring stability in Libya, President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi said Wednesday, days after raising the prospect of a military intervention.

Earlier this week, El-Sisi said his country had a legitimate right to intervene in neighboring Libya to protect Egypt's western border. He ordered the military to be ready to carry out any mission outside the country and said such an operation would have international legitimacy.

Speaking during a cabinet meeting Wednesday, where he met with military and civilian officials, El-Sisi stressed the importance of restoring stability in Libya and its institutions to achieve security in the region, and "to protect the Egyptian national security from the western border," he said.

Earlier this week, El-Sisi raised concerns of a military operation when he said his country had a legitimate right to intervene in neighboring Libya. He ordered the military to be ready to carry out any mission outside the country. He said any direct Egyptian intervention would have international legitimacy and would be to protect Egypt's western border.

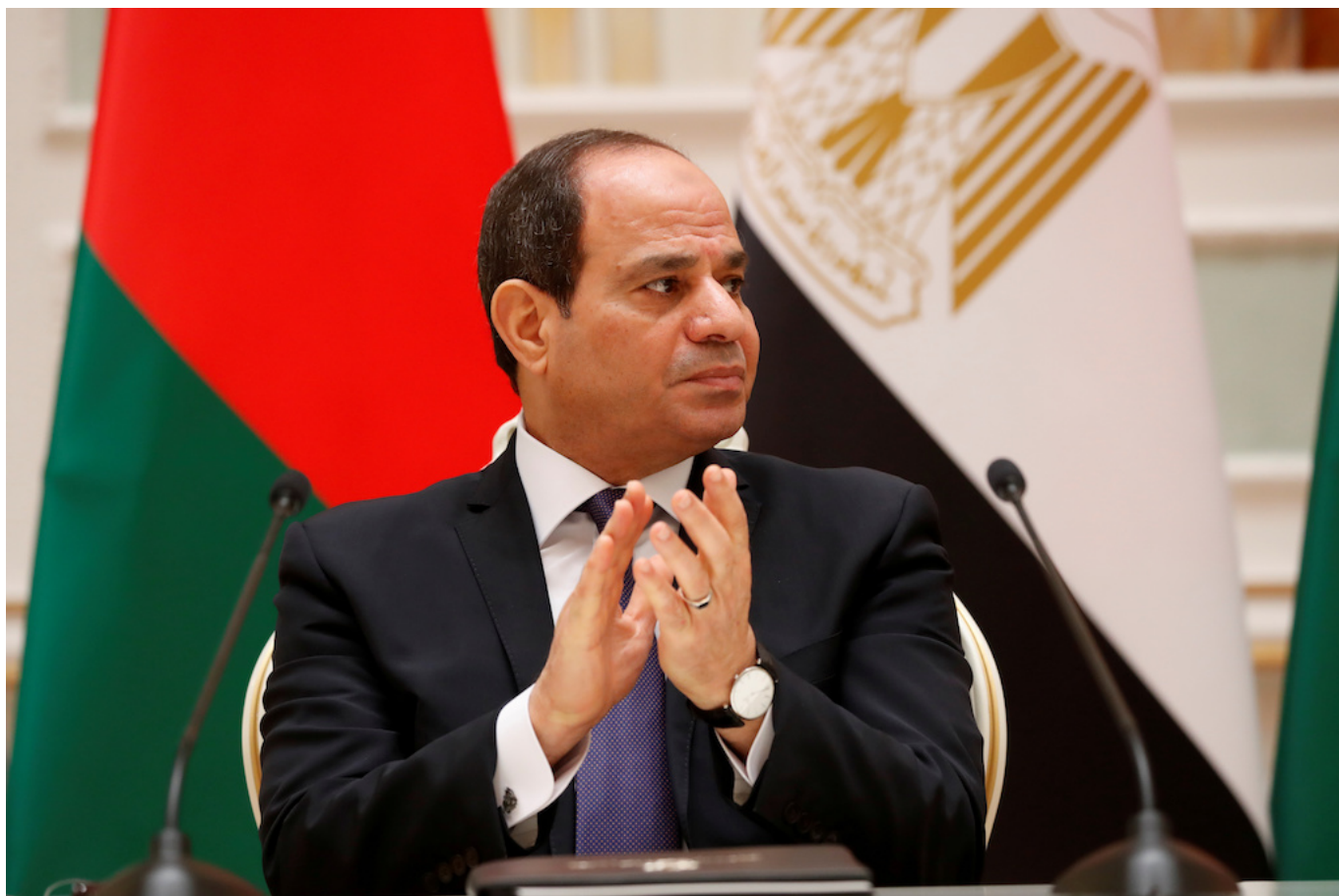
El-Sisi said in the meeting that a cease-fire should remain in place and he called for dismantling Libya's militias, and excluding mercenaries from the conflict in order to reach a comprehensive political solution.

Last month Egypt proposed an initiative for Libyan parties as a basis for resolving the country's conflict.

The move was welcomed by Arab countries and on Tuesday, the Arab league urged Libyan factions to "positively engage" with such initiatives.

The war in Libya started after the downfall of dictator Muammar Qaddafi with the country splitting into two rival administrations.

Fighting has escalated after Turkey intervened on the side of the Tripoli-based government, reversing a 14-month assault on Tripoli by forces loyal to the military commander Khalifa Haftar.



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[UAE lifts coronavirus-related curfew](#)

Wed, 2020-06-24 22:01

DUBAI: The United Arab Emirates' government has lifted its coronavirus-related curfew, it posted on Twitter on Wednesday.

"All members of society are allowed to freely enter and exit throughout the day without restrictions," it said in an announcement also tweeted by the country's National Emergency Crisis and Disaster Management Authority.



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UAE kicks off final stage of clinical trial of COVID-19 vaccine

[Al-Qaeda-linked group arrests British aid worker in Syria](#)

Author:

Wed, 2020-06-24 22:23

LONDON: An aid worker who was stripped of his UK citizenship has been arrested in northwest Syria by a rebel group formerly linked to Al-Qaeda.

Tauqir Sharif was captured in Atmeh, a town in Idlib province, and taken to an “unknown location,” activists in the area said.

Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS), which was formerly linked to Al-Qaeda, controls parts of northwest Syria, one of the last areas of the country still in rebel hands.

According to a post on the Facebook page of Sharif's wife, masked men searched their house in Idlib, where they live with their children. The reason for the 32-year-old Londoner's seizure remains unclear.

His wife, with whom he traveled to Syria in 2012, has called on HTS to provide an official reason for her husband's detention, but has not received a response.

A number of other foreign nationals linked to Sharif are said to have also been arrested, and their laptops and mobile phones confiscated.

Sharif ran an aid organization called Live Updates from Syria that works with orphans and widows and raises awareness of the humanitarian catastrophe that has unfolded in the country.

He had his British citizenship revoked in 2017 after he was assessed to be "aligned with an Al-Qaeda-aligned group," which rendered him stateless and stranded in Syria.

Sharif denies he is linked to Al-Qaeda. "I have never aligned myself with any group involved in the conflict or taken part in any operation that is not related to my aid work," he said in 2017.



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abductedBritish-Iranian aid worker moved back to jail from hospital ward – husband