

[US imposes fresh sanctions on Iranian individuals, companies amid coronavirus](#)

Thu, 2020-03-26 17:56

WASHINGTON: The United States on Thursday blacklisted 20 Iran- and Iraq-based companies, officials and individuals, accusing them of supporting terrorist groups and ramping up pressure on Tehran even as the Islamic Republic battles the coronavirus outbreak.

The US Treasury Department said in a statement that the individuals and entities supported Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) and its elite foreign paramilitary and espionage arm, the Quds Force, as well as transferred lethal aid to Iran-backed militias in Iraq, including Kataib Hezbollah and Asaib Ahl Al-Haq.

Treasury said the people and entities were involved in smuggling weapons to Iraq and Yemen and selling US-blacklisted Iranian oil to the Syrian government, among other activities.

The sanctions freeze any US-held assets of those designated and generally bar Americans from doing business with them.

"Iran employs a web of front companies to fund terrorist groups across the region, siphoning resources away from the Iranian people and prioritizing terrorist proxies over the basic needs of its people," Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said in the statement.



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Iran government grossly under-reporting coronavirus cases, deaths: Radio Farda
Ex-FBI agent missing for 13 years died in Iran custody, family says

Turkey could impose stay-at-home order if coronavirus outbreak worsens

Author:

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Thu, 2020-03-26 12:01

ANKARA: Turkey could order the public to stay at home if coronavirus infections continue to spread, the government said on Thursday as it clamped down further on medical equipment leaving the country.

The government announced such a measure for people older than 65 over the weekend, but not for the general public as some other countries have done. Istanbul's mayor urged national authorities to do so on Thursday, saying nearly a million people were still using public transportation in the country's largest city.

The highly contagious respiratory disease has killed 59 in Turkey after cases surged in two weeks to 2,433.

"Complete social isolation is always on our agenda," Interior Minister Suleyman Soylu said on A Haber TV. Asked whether a complete curfew would be announced, he said: "If we cannot prevent the epidemic with these measures, we can of course take the highest measure."

To contain the virus, Ankara has closed schools, cafes and bars, banned mass prayers, and suspended sports matches and flights. President Tayyip Erdogan said Turkey, which has a population of about 83 million, would overcome the coronavirus outbreak in two to three weeks.

However, Istanbul Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu called on the government to impose a general stay-at-home order, at least in his city if it was not possible nationwide.

"We are in the most critical phase of the outbreak," he said on Twitter. "If the necessary steps aren't taken today, it is evident there will be disappointment in the future."

Separately on Thursday, the government decreed that companies now need permission from authorities to export medical tools used for respiratory support, given rising domestic demand.

The rule covers the export ventilators and related gear, oxygen concentrators, intubation tubes and intensive care monitors, and other medical equipment. Ankara previously said it would stop exporting locally made face masks.

Turkey's Higher Education Council said there would be no face-to-face classes in the spring term, distance learning would continue and university exams would be postponed to July 25-26.

Separately the central government said all municipality meetings in April, May and June, should be postponed except under extraordinary circumstances.



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Turkey limits export of respiratory support gear as coronavirus cases surge

[UAE to participate in G20 virtual summit](#)

Author:

Thu, 2020-03-26 14:00

DUBAI: The UAE will take part in the G20 summit chaired by Saudi Arabia's King Salman, Abu Dhabi's Crown Prince Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan said in a tweet on Thursday.

“In the spirit of global solidarity, the UAE takes part in today’s G20 summit chaired by the His Majesty King Salman of Saudi Arabia. We face an unprecedented challenge in COVID-19, and the people of the world anticipate this meeting to result in effective international measures,” he said. Saudi Arabia’s King Salman said on Wednesday in a tweet that the G20 major economies will hold an exceptional summit to plan initiatives that can help combat the pandemic.

“As the world confronts the COVID-19 pandemic and the challenges to healthcare systems and the global economy, we convene this extraordinary G20 summit to unite efforts towards a global response,” he said.



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Abu Dhabi carrier Etihad boosts cargo fleet to aid UAE’s coronavirus efforts
Malaysia reports 235 new coronavirus cases in biggest daily jump

Oman reports 10 new coronavirus cases, 20 recoveries

Author:

Thu, 2020-03-26 13:15

DUBAI: Oman has reported 10 new coronavirus cases, bringing the total number of cases to 109, Omani press reported on Thursday.

Oman's health ministry also reported the recovery of 20 patients.

"Our goal was to achieve a slowdown in the spread of infections and this is what we were able to do," the health ministry said in statement.

Seven out of the 109 cases are in intensive care unit, the ministry added. Meanwhile, the ministry said more than 3,000 patients have been tested for the new coronavirus.

"We have received more than 3,000 checks since the beginning of the discovery of the first case in the Sultanate of Covid-19," Dr. Amina Jardaniah, the Director of the Central Public Health Laboratories Department, said.

The Ministry also said there were no record of local transmission in the first three weeks. But 26 cases of local transmissions were recorded in the fourth week due to contact with previous cases.



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Malaysia reports 235 new coronavirus cases in biggest daily jump
Iran government grossly under-reporting coronavirus cases, deaths: Radio Farda

[Idlib still turbulent despite virus agenda](#)

Author:

Thu, 2020-03-26 01:18

ANKARA: Three weeks after the signing of a cease-fire agreement, Ankara is expected to do its homework to uphold its shaky March 5 deal with the Kremlin on Idlib and to ensure full security along the strategic M4 highway.

After their first joint patrol on March 15 was cut short due to local protests against the presence of Russian troops, the Turkish and Russian military conducted a second joint patrol along the M4 highway on the section of the highway linking the cities of Aleppo and Latakia on March 23.

Again, the route of the second joint patrol had to be reduced over security concerns because of tough local dynamics, with some armed factions trying to block joint patrols along the highway.

“The first priority of Turkey and Russia now is to ensure the security of the M4 highway linking Syria’s east and west and to eliminate any potential risk of attack. Establishing the safe passage along this road is our specific duty right now and we have to fulfill it within the upcoming months,” Aydin Sezer, an Ankara-based Middle East analyst, told Arab News.

Turkey recently established three new military posts in the Jisr Al-Shughour countryside in Idlib, located in the villages of Badama, Al-Najiya and Al-Sainiya.

Extremist factions that are not controlled by Turkey, especially Caucasian and Central Asian fighters, have been harshly criticized for continuing their destabilizing activities in Idlib – recently detonating improvised explosive devices on the route of a Turkish convoy patrolling the village of Sfukhon in Idlib province.

The explosions damaged two armored vehicles and injured two Turkish soldiers on March 24. Ankara did not, however, release any official statement about the injury of its troops.

The attack on Turkish soldiers came just four days after the country’s first reported casualties since the cease-fire of early March. Two Turkish soldiers were killed and another was injured in a rocket attack by radical groups in Idlib.

"The Turkish side pledged in the near future to take measures to neutralize radical extremist groups that impede the movement of columns of joint patrols of the M4 highway in the security corridor," the Russian Reconciliation Center for Syria recently reported.

Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu visited Damascus on March 23, the same day of the joint patrols with the Turks, for talks with Syrian President Bashar Assad. The visit came just three days after Putin and Assad had a telephone conversation about developments in Idlib.

Turkey's military is responsible for patrolling up to 6 km deep to the north of the security corridor being set up around the M4 highway, while Russian forces will patrol 6 km deep to the southern flank in the war-torn country's last rebel bastion. Turkish-backed rebels are also expected to remain in place for not torpedoing Putin-Erdogan agreement of March 5.

As part of the implementation of the Astana de-escalation agreement of 2017, control groups keep monitoring the compliance with the cease-fire conditions and detecting some cease-fire violations in Idlib province.

In the meantime, humanitarian actions are being carried out for the Syrian population with a total of 4,021,4074 tons of humanitarian cargo delivered so far, according to data from the Russian Reconciliation Center for Syria on March 25.

According to Sezer, there are signs of an impending escalation in northwestern Syria that are similar to the incidents in early February, and "the silence from Turkish authorities by not commenting either on any injury or on the implementation of the March 5 deal confirms it."

While the Assad regime accuses Turkey of backing rebel sabotage of joint patrols in Idlib, some rebel groups, including Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS), rejected the Moscow deal. Some other groups such as Hurras Al-Din, Al-Qaeda's branch in Syria with a considerable number of foreign terrorist fighters in its ranks, is also seen as a rising threat.

"Turkey is expected to distinguish moderate armed opposition and terror groups in Idlib. If Ankara cannot persuade them to lay down arms, it has to enter into a fight to meet the commitments under the Moscow deal. What Russians expect is the total restoration of order in these territories. Therefore, it is early to anticipate a definite success from the Turkish side," Sezer said.

Last month at least 34 Turkish soldiers were killed in a single attack by Russian-backed regime forces. During February, 60 Turkish soldiers died in Idlib.



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UAE to disinfect public transport in battle against coronavirus