

2m Somalis at risk of starvation, says UN

Wed, 2019-06-05 22:06

NEW YORK: A UN emergency relief coordinator has warned that more than 2 million men, women and children could die of starvation in Somalia by summer's end if international aid is not sent quickly to the drought-stricken African country.

UN Undersecretary-General Mark Lowcock said about \$700 million is needed after a rainless season that has killed both livestock and crops.

He said on Tuesday that the UN's Central Emergency Response Fund has allocated \$45 million to cover food shortages, water and daily necessities in Somalia as well as parts of Kenya and Ethiopia affected by droughts.

Of a Somali population of 15 million people, more than 3 million are struggling just to meet minimum food requirements, he said, and the shortages are about 40 percent worse now than this past winter.

"What was forecast to be an average rainy season in Somalia is now one of the driest on record in over 35 years," he said. "Communities that were already vulnerable due to past droughts are again facing severe hunger and water scarcity and are at risk from deadly communicable diseases."

The UN aid complements efforts by governments of the three countries to assist their people, especially those with disabilities or who are internally displaced.

Somalia's humanitarian fund is currently depleted. If financial aid is delayed, the cost of saving lives on the margin of death is much higher, Lowcock said, adding that the option then is to turn to expensive, therapeutic feeding programs.

FASTFACT

More than 3 million are struggling just to meet minimum food requirements

"We could have a quick response now, which would be cheaper, reduce human suffering and more effective, or we can wait for a few months until we get all those horrible pictures on our TV screens and social media of starving kids," Lowcock said.

Lowcock, who heads the UN Office for Humanitarian Affairs, said that in past decades droughts came about every half dozen years but recently they have hit every two or three years.

“There’s not really any question in my mind that these more frequent droughts are related to global warming and climate change,” the UN official said. “So the only middle- and longer-term response is to look at alternative livelihoods – a different way to make a living.”

The drought has also forced more than 49,000 people to flee their homes since the beginning of the year as they search for food, water, aid and work mostly in urban areas, according to UNHCR.

People who are already displaced because of conflict and violence are also affected by the drought, at times disproportionately.

More than 7,000 people were displaced last month alone.

UNHCR has been working with partners and government agencies to assist those affected and displaced by the drought by providing emergency assistance in some of the most affected areas.



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Millions hungry as drought grips Somalia Somalia making progress but ‘must tackle extremism’

Burning trash and factories belching smoke choke Iraqis

Author:

Wed, 2019-06-05 21:53

BAGHDAD: As if life was not bad enough for Adnan Kadhim – he lives in a slum where municipal authorities dump Baghdad’s rubbish – now someone is setting the waste on fire, making his children sick.

As the UN marks World Environment Day on Wednesday, Iraq is suffering a pollution crisis, with trash piling up across the country and thick clouds of smoke produced by inefficient factories hovering above Baghdad.

“The dirt, our children are sick, our families are sick. My daughter has asthma, and I had to take my family to the hospital last night. We had to go at 2 a.m. to give her oxygen. What have we done wrong to deserve this?” asks the 48-year-old, with mountains of rubbish behind him.

No one in his unplanned neighborhood within Baghdad’s southeastern Zaaferaniya district knows who is setting the rubbish on fire, and their complaints to government and municipal authorities have fallen on deaf ears because they are technically not supposed to be living in the area.

“For about a week or 10 days now we have not been able to sleep or work. We just sitting around because of this smoke,” said Jabbar, a builder.

“Every day, it starts at sunset and does not stop until the morning. You can see the tractors (shoveling trash) in front of you. We are being destroyed. We implored the government, and no one did anything, we went to the municipality and still nothing,” he added.

Officials say Iraq suffers from the lack of a formal waste management system, but that they are working on introducing one which they hope will alleviate the country’s numerous environmental hazards which also include pollution from oil production.

“I am sorry to say there are no hygienic official landfills. All what we have are unorganized areas for waste collection,” said Deputy Environment Minister Jassim Humadi. “We are working hard today to issue legislation establishing the National Center for Waste Management.”

Increasing pollution rates and other “environmental challenges” could be linked to rising rates of chronic diseases such as cancer and respiratory issues, as well as birth deformities, he said.

Iraq is working with the international bodies on a plan to help it clean up, he added.

Change is costly

Business owners say they are doing what they can to operate in a more environmentally friendly manner but that it is too costly. The government needs to help them do so, they argue.

At a brick factory in Nahrawan, east Baghdad, ovens running on crude oil are releasing thick smoke, making it hard to breathe, or see anything.

“Crude oil, if burned in an incorrect way, the way we burn it, of course has emissions. The new ovens which we are upgrading to will reduce these emissions by 60 percent, but that should not be the ceiling of our ambitions,” said Ali Rabei, the factory owner.

More environmentally friendly ovens can fashion bricks and produce only 5 percent of the current harmful emissions, and some even produce none, he said, but they cost anywhere between 4 and 6 billion Iraqi dinars (\$3.2-4.8 million), which is not financially feasible for a business like his.



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Across Baghdad, a moment of respite and guarded hope
Baghdad's Green Zone reopens to the public after 16 years

Libyan coast guard intercepts Europe-bound migrants

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BENGHAZI, Libya: Libya's coast guard said Tuesday it intercepted two boats carrying around 140 Europe-bound migrants, including women and children, off the country's Mediterranean coast.

Spokesman Ayoub Gassim said the first rubber vessel had 92 African and Bengali migrants, including 11 women and four children. They were intercepted a day earlier off the coast of the western town of Garaboli, 60 kilometers east of the capital, Tripoli.

Gassim said the second boat with 44 Moroccans and an Egyptian was intercepted Tuesday north of the Bouri offshore oil field, around 105 kilometers from Tripoli.

All of the migrants were given humanitarian and medical aid and then taken to a refugee camp in the Tajoura district of eastern Tripoli, he said.

Libya became a major conduit for African migrants and refugees fleeing to Europe after the 2011 uprising that ousted and killed longtime ruler Muammar Qaddafi.

Libyan authorities have stepped up efforts to stem the flow of migrants, with European assistance.



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[Australian Federal Police search warrants](#)

I understand the AFP will shortly release a statement in relation to recent search warrant activity.

[For the Gulf region, global air quality report is a wake-up call](#)

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DUBAI: Nine out of 10 people globally breathe polluted air, and only one out

of 10 cities meet the World Health Organization's (WHO) air quality standards.

As such, the UN is understandably focused on this emerging environmental risk as World Environment Day is marked on June 5. According to the latest WHO data, Saudi Arabia is home to some of the cities with the worst air quality.

"The Gulf region is one of the most polluted in the world due to its addiction to oil and gas," said Julien Jreissati, a campaigner at Greenpeace Middle East and North Africa (MENA). "This is both on the supply side – with most of the pollution hotspots lying near oil drilling sites, in Saudi Arabia for instance – and on the demand side, with electricity and transport."

Experts ascribe the high pollution levels in the Gulf to dependence on fossil fuels, and lax emissions standards and regulation with regard to fossil fuel-burning power plants, industries and vehicles. They say urgent action is needed given that 93 percent of the world's children live in places where air pollution levels are above WHO guidelines, nearly 3 billion people depend on burning solid fuels or kerosene to meet household energy needs, and air pollution is costing the global economy more than \$5 trillion every year in welfare costs.

The desert climate is also to blame for the Gulf's air pollution problem. Climate change will not only elevate temperatures to potentially unbearable levels in the region, but also spur an increase in atmospheric pollution, with worrying health implications.

"It's clear that air pollution is already one of the biggest threats for public health that we're confronting at the moment," said Dr. Maria Neira, director of public health, environment and social determinants of health at the WHO. "Globally, we have 7 million premature deaths that are attributable to air pollution. We have very hot areas in Asia and Africa where air pollution represents a huge problem," she added. "As for high concentrations of toxic air, we can observe across the world that some parts of the Middle East are among those most affected."

Neira underscored air pollution's link to sand and desert dust – transboundary factors that are likely to be accelerated by climate change, especially in areas with large concentrations of petrochemical industries and high volumes of shipping and vehicular traffic. "The linkages between exposure to air pollution and health problems have been very well established," she said.

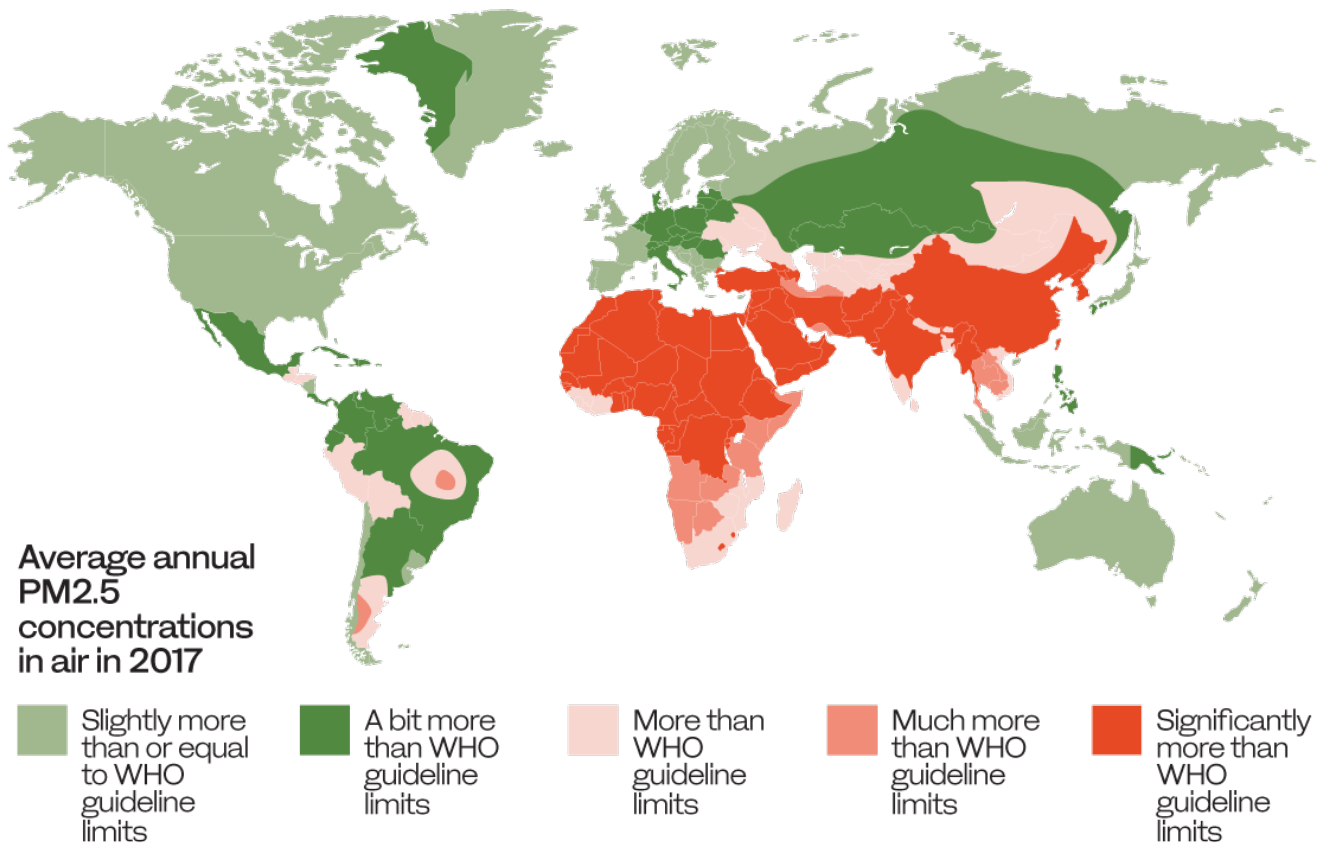
"Air pollution will be causing obstructive chronic respiratory diseases and lung cancer. Toxic air won't just go into the lungs but also the brain and heart, so we need to protect the population."

The State of Global Air Report 2019 identifies air pollution as the fifth leading risk factor for mortality worldwide.

It is responsible for more deaths than better-known factors such as malnutrition, alcohol use and physical inactivity, the report said.

Each year, more people die from air pollution-related diseases than from road traffic injuries or malaria, it added.

GLOBAL AIR QUALITY: THE 'PARTICULATE MATTER' THREAT



“In the six Gulf countries, ambient air pollution was responsible for 13,000 premature deaths in 2017, according to the Global Burden of Disease,” said Lauri Myllyvirta, senior analyst at the Greenpeace Air Pollution Unit. “This is a substantial increase over the 10,000 deaths in 2010.”

In most cases, high concentrations of particulate matter – fine particles from indoor and outdoor sources that are able to travel into the respiratory tract and reach the lungs – are to blame. The most harmful is PM2.5, tiny particles or droplets in the air that are two and a half microns, or less, in width.

According to the State of Global Air Report 2019, exposure to PM2.5 is extremely high in the Middle East, with Qatar ranking the highest, followed by Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Bahrain, Iraq and Kuwait. Average pollution exposure in these countries is well above average levels in China.

The findings show that more than 90 percent of people worldwide are exposed to pollution levels exceeding WHO guidelines for healthy air – some by five times – with more than half living in areas that do not even meet the organization’s least-stringent air quality standards.

Myllyvirta points to fossil fuel burning – particularly the burning of heavy oil in power plants, refineries and factories – as the leading cause of air pollution in the Gulf. “The second most important source is soil dust, which is in principle ‘natural’ but can increase with climate change due to drought and desertification,” he said. “Our global mapping of the sources of NOx pollution, one of the key ingredients of PM2.5, also pointed to oil-fired power plants and oil refineries, besides transportation, as key sources,” he added. “Alarmingly, the Gulf is one of the few regions in the world besides

South Asia where pollution levels are increasing. This is no surprise as oil consumption in the region rose 25 percent between 2010 and 2017, according to (oil company) BP.”

FASTFACT

- State of Global Air Report 2019 ranks Qatar highest, followed by Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Bahrain, Iraq and Kuwait in annual PM2.5 exposure in 2017 in the Middle East.
- Exposure to air pollution is blamed for 4.2 million deaths annually.
- 91% of the world’s population is exposed to pollutants exceeding WHO guideline limits.
- About 3 billion people are exposed to high indoor air pollution due to lack of access to clean cooking fuels and technologies.

Pointing to the Gulf’s abundant sunshine, Jreissati said the region’s true wealth lies in the sky, not underground.

“The region is one of the world’s sunniest,” he added. “In order to combat both local pollution and global climate change, it’s imperative that the Gulf countries initiate a fast transition to renewable energies, which are clean, cheap, and can provide jobs.”

Large-scale deployment of renewables has the potential to make a big difference to ambient air quality.

“This has started in the UAE with massive solar energy plants, some operational and others being constructed,” Jreissati said.

“There’s also a strong need to develop a transport system that puts the health of people, not polluting cars, at its center. This means more electrified public transport, more shared mobility and less internal-combustion-engine vehicles.”

Myllyvirta concurs, saying transitioning away from fossil fuels to renewable energy should be the Gulf’s main focus. “Fossil fuels currently receive massive subsidies that should be phased out rapidly. At the same time, oil-burning power plants and factories should be required to install proper emission-control devices to reduce the toll they’re taking on public health,” he said. “Similarly, emissions standards for vehicles – which are decades behind Europe and other advanced countries – should be upgraded.”

Saudi Arabia initiated steps to protect public health two years ago when its Ministry of Environment, Water and Agriculture launched an initiative to monitor air quality and emissions of pollutants. The measure required the Kingdom’s estimated 7,000 industrial facilities with chimneys to install units that



would measure pollution in real time at source.

“Air pollution is quite serious in the region,” said Tatiana Antonelli Abella, founder and managing director of the UAE-based green social enterprise Goumbook.

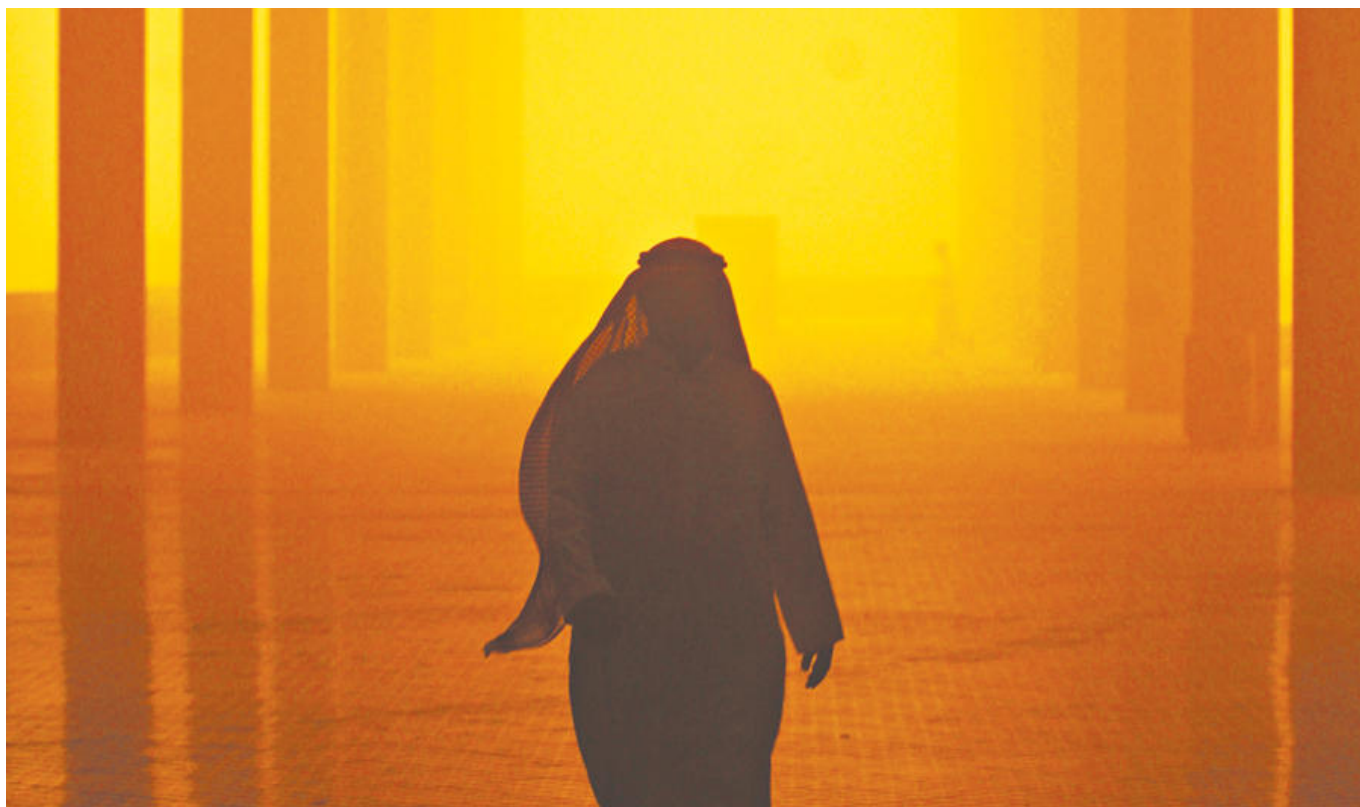
“This is a threat that exposes us to respiratory illnesses and other related diseases, but there’s more awareness now,” she added.

“We can reverse the path we’re on and have a positive impact with knowledge, dedication and determination.”

Ultimately, however, the cities of the future will have to change. “The measures needed to tackle the issue are particularly important in places where we have a high density of population and ... where we have massive urbanization,” Neira said. “Clearly, we need to reduce the sources of air pollution (linked to human activity) by applying technologies in industrial processes,” she added.

“We also need to promote more sustainable mobility. We can’t rely on private cars. We need to shift to electric vehicles, and be very conscious that the way our urban areas and cities will be planned, designed and organized for citizens – not just for cars – is extremely important from the standpoint of public health.”





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Children in South Asia hardest hit by air pollution, says study
London, Paris and Rome among air pollution hotspots in Europe