

# US urges Raisi to resume Iran nuclear talks in Vienna 'soon'

Author:

Thu, 2021-08-05 22:15

WASHINGTON: The United States on Thursday urged Iran to return to talks quickly on reviving a nuclear deal after the new ultraconservative president, Ebrahim Raisi, said he would seek a diplomatic way to end sanctions.

"We urge Iran to return to the negotiations soon so that we can seek to conclude our work," State Department spokesman Ned Price told reporters, repeating the US stance that the window for diplomacy would not stay open forever.

"If President Raisi is genuine in his determination to see the sanctions lifted, well that is precisely what's on the table in Vienna," he said. With the rise of Raisi, who took the oath of office on Thursday, all branches of power within the Islamic Republic will be controlled by anti-Western hard-liners loyal to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

"Our message to President Raisi is the same as our message to his predecessors .. the US will defend and advance our national security interests and those of our partners," Price said. "We hope that Iran seizes the opportunity now to advance diplomatic solutions."

He was referring to months of fruitless indirect talks in the Austrian capital on reviving the 2015 nuclear accord trashed by former president Donald Trump.

Iran has been negotiating with six major powers to revive the deal that was abandoned three years ago. The last round of talks in Vienna ended on June 20.

Price reiterated that the Biden administration, despite concerns with Iran, saw the accord as key to securing "permanent and verifiable limits on Iran's nuclear program."

Price said that the proposal to end sweeping sanctions in return for compliance with the deal would not last "indefinitely" and at some point the benefits of reviving the agreement will have been eroded by the advancements of Iran's nuclear program.

"For us, this is an urgent priority, knowing the issues that are at play," Price said. "We hope that the Iranians treat it with the same degree of urgency."

Iran began violating the pact, which gave it sanctions relief in return for curbing its atomic program, in 2019 by conducting nuclear activities that were barred under the deal, formally called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

Iran says its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes only.

*(With AFP and Reuters)*



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Iran swears in new hard-line president amid regional tension  
UK foreign minister Dominic Raab says door is 'ajar' for talks with Iran

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## [Iranian ex-deputy vice president slams regime over water crisis](#)

Author:

Thu, 2021-08-05 22:08

LONDON: The former deputy vice-president of Iran criticized Tehran over its mismanagement of natural resources in the country's Khuzestan province, blaming "excessive manipulation of the natural environment" for the country's

water bankruptcy.

In an op-ed published in The Guardian newspaper, Kaveh Madani said attempts by authorities to shift the blame toward climate change as the “sole cause of terrible (water) shortages let those in authority off the hook.”

Late last month, Iran’s Khuzestan province became the focal point for weeks of violent unrest spurred by a drought that left people without clean and safe drinking water. Those protests quickly spread across the country, including to the capital Tehran, morphing into anti-regime demonstrations.

Madani explained that water-rich Khuzestan should never have been subject to drought, but the construction of huge dams and the transfer of the province’s water to other parts of the country have left it in a state of water bankruptcy.

“Once you drain your checking account (surface water) and exhaust your savings account (groundwater), you are left with a lot of creditors (water rights-holders) whose demands cannot be satisfied,” Madani said. “Then you are water bankrupt and the dissatisfaction of the claimants can trigger major conflicts.”

He also said that this may be related to the institutional racism in Iran that excludes ethnic Ahwazi Arabs from the majority Persian state.

“The Khuzestan protests also have an important social justice element. Ethnic Arab populations are expressing their serious frustration with what they consider a ‘systematic’ or ‘intentional’ discrimination that has resulted in underdevelopment in their rich province,” Madani said.

“Khuzestanis are also questioning why ‘their’ water must be transferred to other regions while they are suffering from thirst.”

Madani warned about the potential consequences of water mismanagement for years, but rather than being listened to he was spied upon and detained.

“What Khuzestan and the rest of Iran are experiencing today is not unexpected,” Madani said. “Lots of experts, including me, have been warning about the national security risks of this situation for years.”

While he served in his role as deputy vice president, Madani was regularly detained by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and after he fled the country, he said he felt “lucky” not to have been imprisoned for a longer stretch.

Now, he is trying to prevent the regime from deflecting responsibility for its actions by invoking global climate change.

Well-intentioned environmental campaigners are correct about the devastating consequences of climate change, Madani said.

But the way that Iran has managed its natural resources means that “even if climate change stopped and Iran cut its carbon emissions by 100 percent right

now, its water bankruptcy and many other environmental problems would not be solved immediately.”

He concluded: “We must remember that local decision-makers are liable for avoidable failures of environmental management that result in the degradation and suffering we are now seeing in Iran.”



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Israel: Iran could acquire material to build nuclear warheads in 10 weeks

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**[How the coronavirus’ delta variant disrupted Middle East’s ‘return to](#)**

# normal' plans

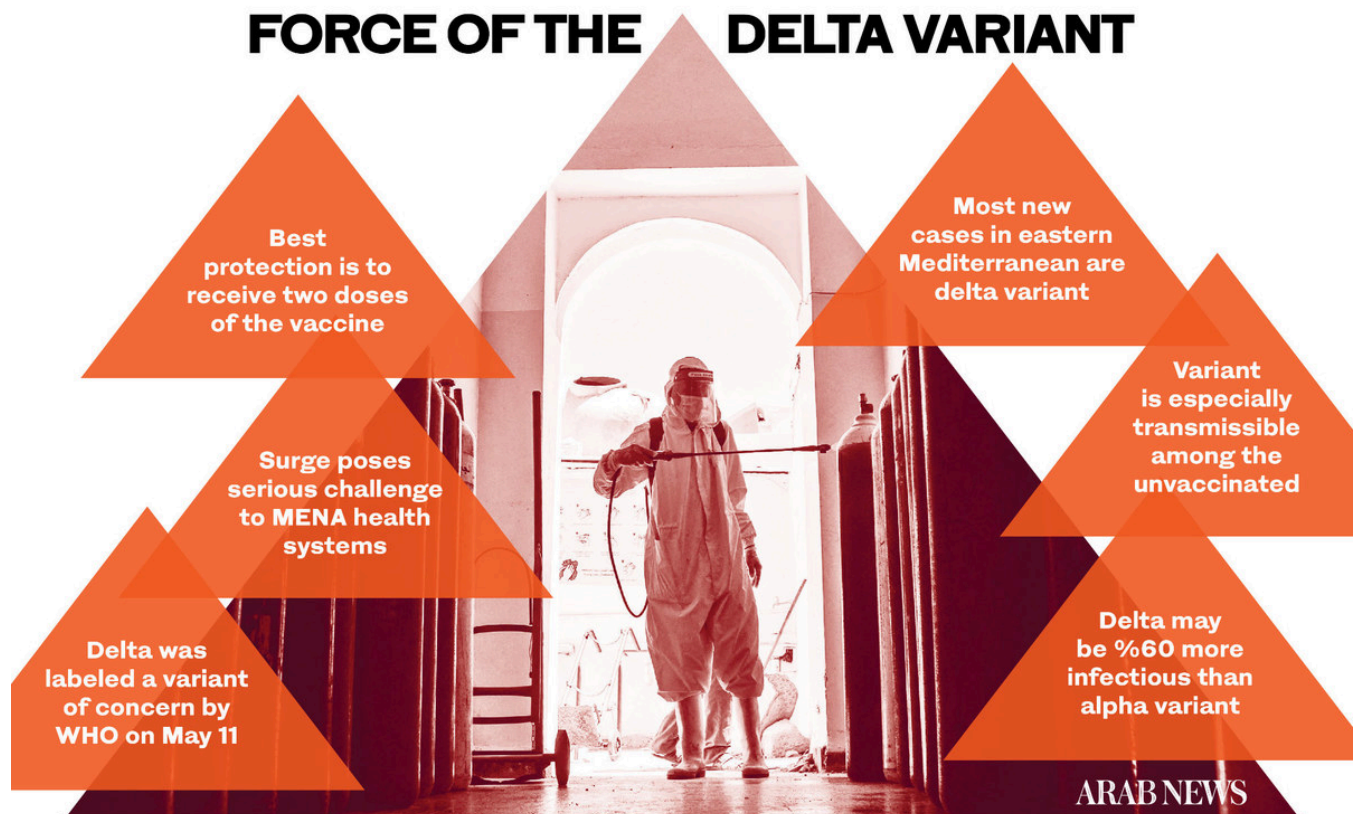
Wed, 2021-08-04 21:23

DUBAI: Countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region with low rates of vaccination against COVID-19 have been experiencing an explosion of new cases and fatalities linked to the spread of the highly transmissible delta variant.

The variant has been detected in at least 132 countries, prompting new waves of infection, the resumption of travel restrictions, and mounting concern over the availability and effectiveness of vaccines.

In the Gulf and eastern Mediterranean region, the variant has been found in more than a dozen countries including Kuwait, the UAE, Bahrain, and Qatar. Although Saudi Arabia has not yet reported any cases, it has reimposed a raft of travel curbs in additions to bans and penalties for violators.

## FORCE OF THE DELTA VARIANT



Countries of the Middle East and North Africa region grapple with a devastating surge of the highly transmissible strain

Also known by its scientific name B.1.617.2, the delta variant of the coronavirus was first detected in the Indian state of Maharashtra in October but was only labeled a variant of concern by the WHO on May 11.

Dr. Abdinasir Abubakar, head of the infectious hazards management unit at the WHO's Middle East and eastern Mediterranean regional office in Cairo, told Arab News: "It was very easy for delta to spread throughout the region due to the many migrant workers from South Asia living in the Gulf and North

Africa.”

The strain, itself the product of multiple mutations, is thought to be 60 percent more infectious than the alpha (or Kent) variant, an earlier mutation that emerged in southern England in November, and as contagious as chickenpox.

According to a confidential CDC document, picked up by US media in late July, delta is more transmissible than the common cold, the 1918 Spanish flu, smallpox, Ebola, MERS (Middle East respiratory syndrome) and SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome), has a longer transmission window than the original strain, and may make older people more ill – even those fully vaccinated.

US health officials said people infected with the delta variant could carry up to 1,000 times more virus in their nasal passages than other strains, resulting in higher transmissibility. The WHO predicted there could be at least 200 million new cases worldwide in a matter of weeks.

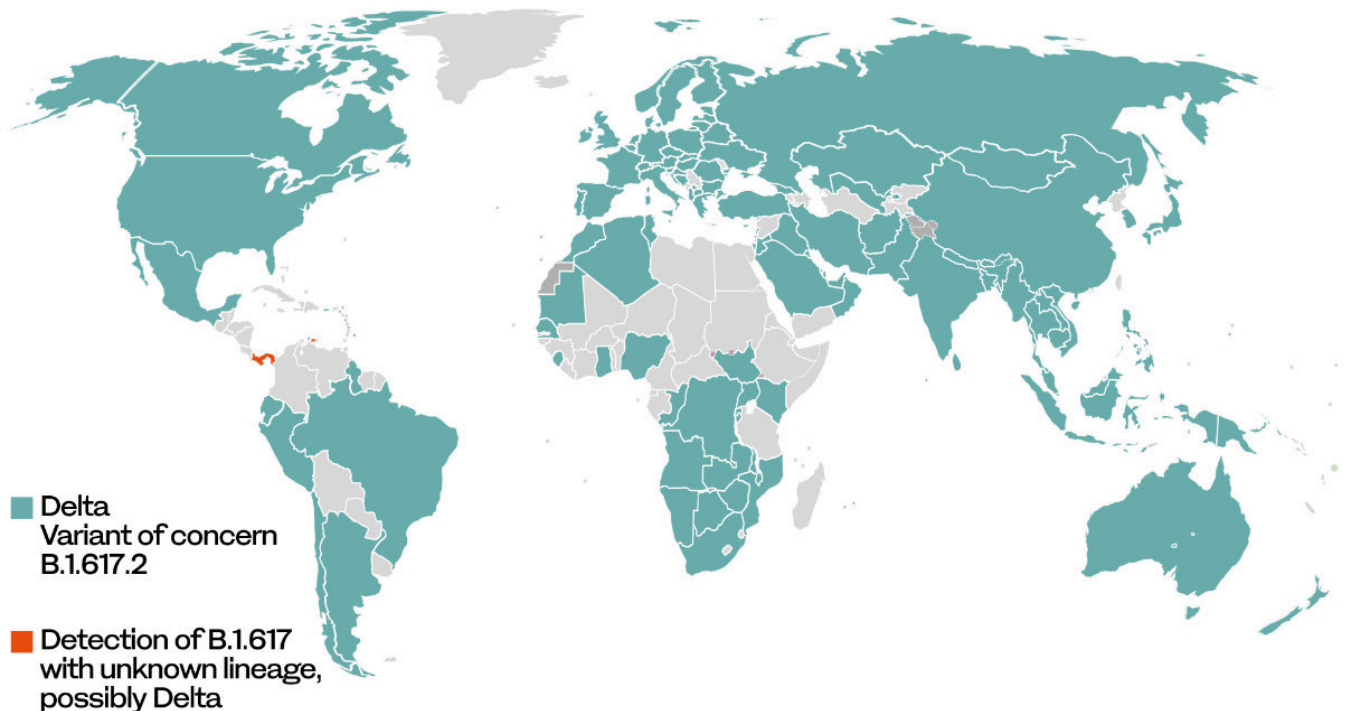
In many countries, including the UK, the delta variant has now become the dominant strain. In Israel, which has a very high rate of vaccination, delta makes up 90 percent of new infections.

What is perhaps most alarming for health professionals is the number of young people, many of them unvaccinated, who are becoming seriously ill with the variant.

# THE SPREAD OF THE DELTA VARIANT

Territories with the highly contagious coronavirus strain

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Source: WHO classification as of July 20, 2021

ARAB NEWS

Earlier iterations of the virus were considered more harmful to older demographics and people with underlying health conditions, groups that governments have tended to prioritize in vaccination drives.

Although it appears to cause more severe symptoms than its forerunners, there was currently not enough data to suggest delta was any more deadly.

More encouraging was the data on the effectiveness of vaccines. A study by Public Health England found that the Pfizer vaccine was 94 percent effective against hospitalization after one dose and 96 percent effective after two doses, while AstraZeneca was 71 percent effective after one dose and 92 percent effective after two.

On Sunday, the UK's Guardian newspaper reported that New York-based Pfizer and Germany's BioNTech "have tweaked their mRNA vaccine to target the delta variant and will begin testing it on humans" this month.

The global market for COVID-19 vaccines, valued at \$70 billion this year, could grow bigger as scientists debate whether people will need booster shots for the delta variant.

Owing to the slow rollout of vaccines in large parts of the developing world, there is limited protection for their populations against COVID-19.

In MENA countries, outbreaks of the delta variant of the coronavirus are adding to the pressure on hospitals, life-saving equipment, and even mortuaries.

Tunisia has been gripped by social unrest, attributable to a mix of political dysfunction, stretched healthcare systems, and mounting economic hardship.

## **FASTFACTS**

Delta was labeled a variant of concern by WHO on May 11.

Most new cases in eastern Mediterranean are delta variant.

Variant is especially transmissible among the unvaccinated.

Delta may be 60% more infectious than alpha variant.

Surge poses serious challenge to MENA health systems.

Best protection is to receive two doses of the vaccine.

In Iran, a country which has vaccinated just 3 percent of its population, around 35,000 new infections and 357 deaths were recorded on July 27 alone.

In conflict-ridden areas of the Middle East, namely Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, and Yemen, where immunization rates remain low, the surge in delta cases poses a serious challenge to already ailing health systems and fragile government structures.

Abubakar said: "We are extremely concerned about what will happen when the delta variant spreads to emergency countries like Syria and Yemen. Delta will reach all countries in the region. The WHO is trying to work with nations to prepare for the worst, like having more ICU (intensive care unit) beds, oxygen, vaccines, and amplifying our social messaging.

"No country is immune from delta. We cannot afford for other countries in the region to go through what Tunisia is going through right now," he added.

In Lebanon, for instance, a rise in COVID-19 cases would place an even greater burden on a cash-strapped country already blighted by electricity and fuel shortages.

Pierre Abi Hanna, head of the infectious disease division at Rafik Hariri University Hospital, told Arab News: "The numbers in Lebanon are increasing exponentially, and the majority of coronavirus cases circulating in Lebanon, from the samples taken, are from the delta strain.



“Over the last few weeks, we have also seen an increase in the number of hospitalized patients, all of whom are unvaccinated, as well as a small increase in the number of patients in ICU as well as those requiring mechanical ventilation.”

Patients were being hospitalized because they could not take oxygen at home due to Lebanon’s electricity shortages. Those hospitalized had tended to be younger than before and mostly unvaccinated.

“Some of them have received one shot, but the majority have received none. We are now seeing a higher number of cases in the younger population, aged 20 to 49. In the last three days, we have had an increase in the number of people needing ICU beds,” Abi Hanna said.



GCC countries have coped well with the delta wave largely because of high rates of vaccination and high levels of compliance with public health measures. (AFP)

On a brighter side of the battle, GCC countries have coped well with the delta wave thanks to high rates of vaccination, high levels of compliance with public health measures, and timely travel restrictions.

At the end of June, the UAE announced it was suspending flights from India after recording its first cases of the delta variant. Emirati authorities said the strain now accounted for around one-third of all new infections in the country.

Although it has not recorded any cases of its own, Saudi Arabia unveiled a raft of new measures on July 3 – including a ban on travel to and from the

UAE, the world's top international-transport hub.

Saudi citizens who visit countries on its red list – the UAE, Afghanistan, Egypt, Ethiopia, India, Lebanon, and Turkey – now face a three-year travel ban either directly or indirectly through states on the green list.

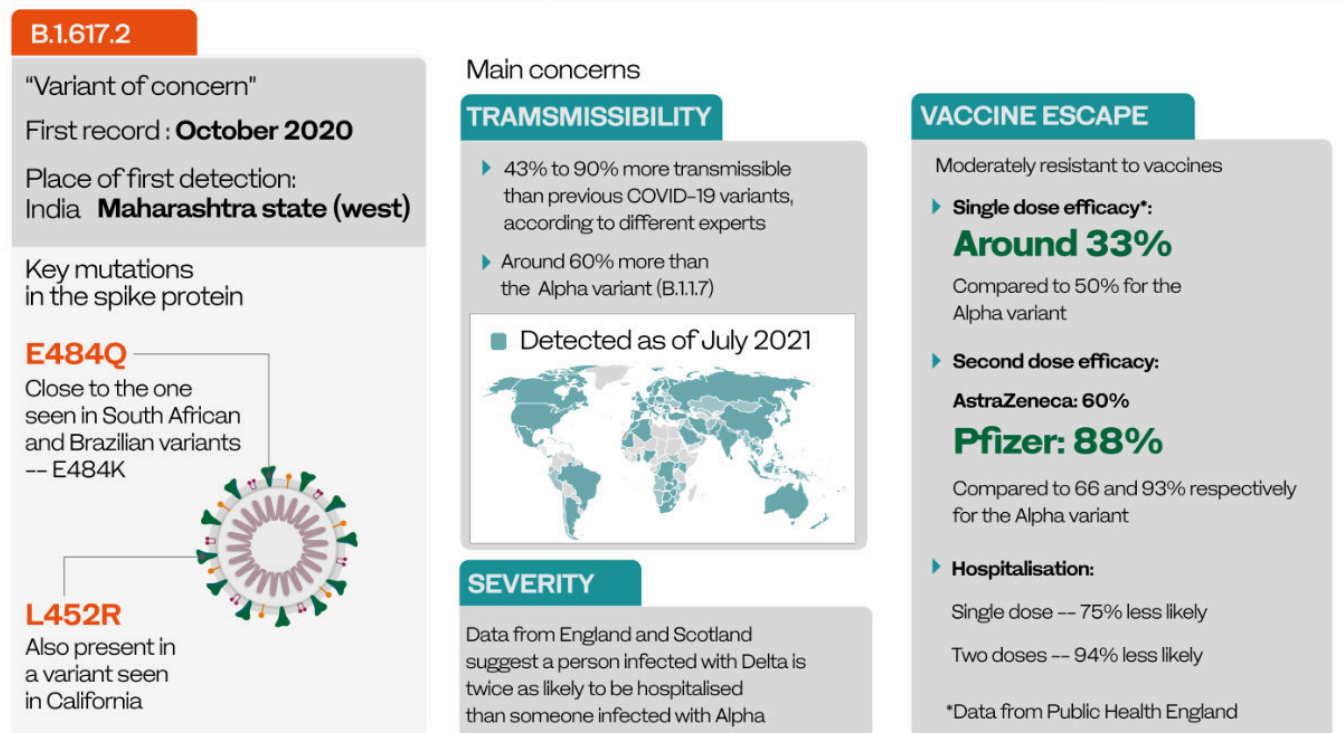
In addition to urging its citizens to continue wearing face masks and maintaining a safe social distance in public places, the Kingdom stressed that the best protection against the delta variant was to receive a second dose of vaccine.

Dr. Wail Bajhmoum, an infectious disease consultant and head of the internal medicine department at King Fahd Hospital in Jeddah, told Arab News: "Citizens should have the vaccines which have been provided by the government and the Ministry of Health free of charge and have been available for everyone in more than 587 centers all over the Kingdom.

"Researchers have shown that two doses of the vaccine will provide very good immunity against all variants of coronavirus, including delta."

## DELTA VARIANT AT A GLANCE

Key facts about the highly transmissible coronavirus strain



Sources: [sciencemediacentre.org](https://www.sciencemediacentre.org/)/[New Scientist](https://www.newscientist.com/)/[Nature](https://www.nature.com/)/[webmd.com](https://www.webmd.com/)/[bmj.com](https://www.bmj.com/)/[Public Health England](https://www.publichealthengland.org/) **ARAB NEWS**

The UAE, which has implemented one of the world's fastest vaccination campaigns, has issued a delta-detecting PCR test to help isolate the new outbreak. Cases rose at the end of June to more than 2,000 per day, contributing to a daily average of 10 deaths – the country's highest toll in a single day since March, according to Reuter's COVID-19 tracker.

The UAE's National Emergency Crisis and Disaster Management Authority said the increase in deaths was due to the spread of the alpha, beta, and delta

variants. Since then, cases have fallen, with 1,536 recorded infections and two deaths on July 27.

“Some countries are better prepared than others. Delta was confirmed earlier in the Gulf countries, but they have a better system in place to handle the variant. This helped limit the spread of the variant, supplemented by the high vaccination rate in Gulf countries.

“We have found that the impact of delta on Gulf countries is low compared with countries with low vaccination rates, notably Tunisia, Afghanistan, Iran, and Iraq,” Abubakar added.

The delta variant is only one of several mutations since the coronavirus first emerged in the Chinese city of Wuhan in late 2019 – and it will not be the final iteration.

“It is not the last variant that we will see. We have to be prepared for new variants as well,” Abubakar said.

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## Thousands demand justice on anniversary of port blast in Lebanon

Wed, 2021-08-04 23:17

BEIRUT: On a national day of mourning, thousands of Lebanese citizens joined victims' families and protesters on Wednesday to commemorate the inaugural anniversary of the deadly Beirut port blast.

Tensions escalated quickly as authorities shot off a water cannon and deployed tear gas at protestors who threw stones toward security forces near parliament. Some protestors even attempted to storm the parliament building in the heart of Beirut from the various entrances.

According to the Lebanese Red Cross, more than 50 people were injured in clashes between protesters and the authorities. The army said it arrested a citizen in the Zouk area, who was in possession of a weapon, ammunition, gas masks, and metal chains. They made six more arrests at the Awali checkpoint in Sidon as weapons, ammunition, and military equipment were confiscated.

The protesters called for justice and a swift investigation into who should be held responsible for the blast while a senior Christian cleric demanded to know why explosive chemicals had been stored in the capital.

On Aug. 4, 2020, a massive explosion – the country's worst peacetime disaster – destroyed a large section of the capital, killed at least 215 people, and injured more than 6,500. The blast destroyed entire residential neighborhoods and left at least 300,000 people homeless.

The forensic investigator into the crime has not yet issued an indictment to explain what happened but more details about the explosion continue to emerge.

The 2,750 tons of ammonium nitrate, which had been stored at the port for several years without proper safety precautions, arrived on a Russian-leased cargo ship that made an unscheduled stop in Beirut in 2013.

An FBI report seen by Reuters last week estimated around 552 tons of ammonium nitrate exploded in the blast, far less than the amount that had originally arrived.

The protesters on Wednesday demanded that the immunities for the defendants, which include acting ministers, representatives, and security officials be lifted so a proper investigation can be conducted.

"Justice is not just the demand of the families of the victims but of all Lebanese," Maronite Patriarch Bechara Boutros Al-Rai, Lebanon's most senior Christian cleric, said during Wednesday's memorial service.

"All immunities should be lifted. We want to know who brought in the explosives, who allowed for their unloading and storage, who removed quantities of it, and where it was sent."

French President Emmanuel Macron accused the entire Lebanese political class of having "contributed to the exacerbation of the crisis when it placed its interests above the interests of the Lebanese people."

Macron warned that individuals involved in corruption in Lebanon "should not doubt our determination to apply sanctions against them."

The Lebanese parliament is yet to decide on Judge Tarek Bitar's request to lift the immunity of three MPs accused in the Beirut port explosion: former Finance Minister Ali Hassan Khalil, former Public Works Minister Ghazi Zeaiter, and Former Interior Minister Nohad Machnouk.

Caretaker Interior Minister Mohamed Fahmy refused to lift the immunity of the defendant Abbas Ibrahim, director-general of the Lebanese General Security, last week.

Judge Bitar had previously charged the three MPs, and former minister Youssef Fenianos, with "negligence" and "possible intent to murder" because they were aware of ammonium nitrate "and did not take measures to spare the country the risks of an explosion."

Security services took strict measures on the roads leading to the heart of Beirut on Wednesday. They allowed only pedestrians to enter the area and prevented motorbikes and cars during the protests.

On Tuesday, civic groups indicated that attempts would be made during the commemorations to storm parliament, homes of ministers, MPs, and public institutions. They said sit-ins would be held until the parliament approved the lifting of immunity.

On the day of national mourning, flags were lowered over the presidential palace and public institutions as all facilities in the capital were closed.

Thousands of citizens gathered near the port in the afternoon waving Lebanese flags. Protesters came from Baalbek, Tripoli, Tyre, and Matn to express their anger at the authorities' attempts to put obstacles in the way of knowing the truth. Men and women were dressed in black while children and the elderly carried flags and chanted for justice.

The families of the victims carried pictures of their deceased loved ones as they recalled moments of sorrow and tears. They demanded to know why their relatives died.

"What is required is to prosecute all those whom the judiciary accuses of negligence and knowledge of the existence of these tons of deadly materials but did nothing," Hussein Nassar, a war veteran, told Arab News.

"This includes everyone from the top of the pyramid to the lowest ranking official. The revolutionaries are patient, and we will bring down this

parliament in the upcoming elections.”

Nadim Ezz El-Din said he came from Deir Qanoun En Nahr in the south to demand that the ruling authority appears before the judiciary: “I do not want to insult people, but criminals should be behind bars.”

A woman who went by “Lara” went to the Beirut Port to show solidarity with the victims’ families and traveled with her sisters from the Dbayeh area.

“We still believe in the homeland and the revolution, but we hate the parties that took power and brought us to where we are today,” she said. “We will stand in the face of this authority no matter how hard they try to suppress us.”

Elham Awad came with her friends from the Saadiyat region in the south. She said the firing of rockets from the south toward Israel on Wednesday was “an attempt to divert the attention away from the perpetrators of the Aug. 4 massacre.”

A virtual conference to support Lebanon on Wednesday concluded with participants pledging a combined \$370 million within the year to support a country ravaged by a failing government, economic collapse, and widespread living crises.



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Why the trauma does not end for Beirut blast survivors  
Lebanese authorities 'criminally negligent' over Beirut blast, Watchdog says

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## **Heroic Beirut nurse reunited with babies she saved from port explosion**

Wed, 2021-08-04 23:03

BEIRUT: A nurse hailed as a national hero for rescuing three premature babies from a hospital wrecked by the explosion at Beirut's port a year ago was reunited with them on Wednesday, the first anniversary of the blast. Pamela Zeinoun was working at St. George Hospital University Medical Center, less than a kilometer from the port, when the massive explosion sent a devastating shock wave through the city. Without knowing what had happened, she instinctively scooped up a twin brother and sister and a third baby from their cots in the damaged neonatal intensive care unit on the hospital's fourth floor and carried them to safety.

“I couldn’t believe what I was seeing,” Zeinoun told Arab News. “The feeling of holding again the babies who I had saved a year ago was indescribable – so warm and empathetic.”

The twins, Ali and Sidra, and the third baby, Noah, were brought by their families to the hospital, which was forced to close because of the damage caused by the explosion but has partly reopened, to meet Zeinoun. Noah’s family left Lebanon after the explosion

A photo of the reunion was taken at the spot where a news photographer captured one of the most enduring images of the disaster: a dust-covered Zeinoun clutching the three babies, cradling a phone with her neck.

“It was so heartwarming and emotional, especially when I tried to carry them in one go,” said Zeinoun who recalled how tiny they were 12 months ago and how they have grown since. “They looked so cute, funny and lovable to play with. I felt I was giving them the same warmth I had given them on Aug. 4 in 2020.”

She said it felt great to see the children are growing up healthily, safely and away from danger.

Zeinoun described the explosion as a “heartbreaking catastrophe” and said she sympathized with all the families and victims who lost loved ones. In her hospital alone, the blast killed 22 people.

“When I see the casualties’ families trying to find answers to what happened, I feel like their daughter ... I just wish that justice would prevail and we find out who is behind what happened,” she added.

Describing the scene inside her ward after the explosion, she said the ceiling had collapsed and the room was littered with debris, furniture and toppled medical equipment.

Amid the confusion, as she held the three infants she stopped to answer a ringing telephone in the emergency room, a moment that was captured by Lebanese photojournalist Bilal Jawich. His photo went viral worldwide, appearing on news sites and TV channels and social media platforms. A new father who was visiting his newborn baby on the day of the explosion, helped Zeinoun by lifting metal shelves that had fallen onto incubators so that she could rescue the infants. Despite all the damage, chaos and broken elevators, the nurse managed to carry the newborns down four floors and out of the hospital to safety. She then walked with them in her arms for nearly 5km through streets littered with rubble and wreckage before the driver of a car took them to another hospital. On Wednesday's anniversary, the people of Lebanon mourned those who were killed and injured in what was one of the most powerful non-nuclear explosions in history. More than 200 people died, more than 6,500 were injured and an estimated 300,000 were left homeless.



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Why the trauma does not end for Beirut blast survivors  
Lebanese authorities 'criminally negligent' over Beirut blast, Watchdog says