

Egyptian court adjourns Suez Canal ship-block case for further compensation talks

Mon, 2021-05-31 20:08

CAIRO: An Egyptian court has postponed a compensation case over the Ever Given container ship's blocking of the Suez Canal to allow more time for negotiators to agree a deal.

The next hearing in the matter was adjourned to June 20 on the request of lawyers representing the Suez Canal Authority and the owner of the giant cargo vessel that closed the waterway for six days in March after running aground.

Both sides have blamed the other for the Ever Given's grounding and the dispute centers on the amount of compensation the authority is claiming for salvaging the vessel.

Initially, the Suez Canal Authority had demanded \$916 million in compensation, an amount that was later lowered to \$550 million, head of the authority, Lt. Gen. Osama Rabie, said on TV on Sunday. The money would cover the salvage operation, costs of stalled canal traffic, and lost transit fees for the week the Ever Given blocked the channel.

The vessel's Japanese owner, Shoen Kisen Kaisha Ltd., and insurers disputed the claim having previously had a \$150 million compensation package offer rejected by the authority.

The Ismailia Economic Court adjourned the hearing after the ship's owner submitted a new offer to settle out of court, the Suez Canal Authority said in a statement.

Since it was freed, the Panamanian-flagged vessel, which carries cargo between Asia and Europe, has been ordered by authorities to remain in a holding lake mid-canal while compensation was agreed.

The canal's blockage disrupted global shipping with hundreds of vessels delayed and others forced to take the much longer route around the Cape of Good Hope at Africa's southern tip, requiring additional fuel and costs.

An estimated 10 percent of world trade flows through the canal, a pivotal source of foreign currency to Egypt, with 19,000 ships making the passage last year, according to official figures.

Announcing the court's adjournment of the case, Khaled Abu Bakr, the authority's adviser to the negotiating committee, said the Ever Given's owner had acknowledged the authority's professional handling of the crisis and negotiations over damages were still ongoing.

He pointed out that details of the talks and the amount of compensation would be kept private in order to preserve relations between the company and commercial agents.

Mohammed Al-Sayed, a member of the negotiating committee, said the authority had managed to refloat the Ever Given without causing any damage to the ship or its cargo.

However, he noted that the authority had incurred losses during the rescue operation including a boat which sank resulting in the death of one its crew.

Nabil Zeidan, legal representative of the Suez Canal Authority, said data from the ship's black box recorder had confirmed that the Ever Given's captain was at fault for the accident by exceeding canal speed limits and travelling at 22 knots (40.7 kilometers per hour).

He rejected allegations that the authority had been responsible for the incident by allowing the ship to sail in unfavorable weather conditions.

George Safwat, official spokesperson for the Suez Canal Authority, said the rescue operation had involved more than 600 authority personnel but that the worker who died belonged to a contractor's rescue team.



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Egypt plans rethink on claim against Ever Given Suez Canal Authority says door still open to negotiation with container ship owner

[UN nuclear watchdog chief 'concerned' over undeclared Iran sites](#)

Mon, 2021-05-31 20:15

VIENNA: Iran has failed to explain traces of uranium found at several undeclared sites, a report by the UN nuclear watchdog showed on Monday, possibly setting up a fresh diplomatic clash between Tehran and the West that could derail wider nuclear talks.

Three months ago Britain, France and Germany scrapped a US-backed plan for the International Atomic Energy Agency's 35-nation Board of Governors to criticize Iran for failing to fully explain the origin of the particles; the three backed off as IAEA chief Rafael Grossi announced fresh talks with Iran. "After many months, Iran has not provided the necessary explanation for the presence of the nuclear material particles at any of the three locations where the Agency has conducted complementary accesses (inspections)," a report by Grossi to member states seen by Reuters said.

It will now be up to the three European powers to decide whether to revive their push for a resolution criticizing Iran, which could undermine wider negotiations to revive the 2015 Iran nuclear deal at talks currently underway in Vienna. Grossi had hoped to report progress before the board meets again next week.

"The Director General is concerned that the technical discussions between the Agency and Iran have not yielded the expected results," the report said. "The lack of progress in clarifying the Agency's questions concerning the correctness and completeness of Iran's safeguards declarations seriously affects the ability of the Agency to provide assurance of the peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear program," it added.



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Exclusive: Iran's Reza Pahlavi pessimistic on nuclear deal but optimistic about future of ties with Saudi Arabia, Israel US officials monitoring two Iranian navy ships that may be headed to Venezuela: report

[Egypt lifts coronavirus restrictions from June 1, cabinet says](#)

Author:

Sun, 2021-05-30 21:29

CAIRO: Egypt will lift restrictions imposed to curb the spread of the coronavirus, including easing the early closure of shops and restaurants,

from Tuesday, the cabinet said.

Since May 6, stores, malls and restaurants had to close by 9 p.m. after a rise in infections.

Egypt imposed strict measures at the start of the pandemic, closing its airspace and setting nightly curfews to combat the spread of the virus, but it has remained largely open since June 2020.

As part of its efforts to save the tourism sector, it completed vaccinating workers in all hotels in Southern Sinai and Red Sea provinces and plans to vaccinate all residents of the two resorts of Hurghada and Sharm el-Sheik, the cabinet said on Sunday.

Tourism revenue, an important source of foreign currency for Egypt, plunged by 70 percent in 2020 due to the coronavirus pandemic. Tourism usually accounts for up to 15 percent of gross domestic product.

Egypt is optimistic about welcoming more visitors this year with numbers increasing steadily since January to around half a million tourists a month, Tourism and Antiquities Minister Khaled El-Enany told Reuters in May.

Egypt had officially confirmed 260,659 coronavirus cases including 15,001 deaths as of Saturday. However, officials and experts say the real number of infections is far higher, but is not reflected in government figures because of low testing rates and the exclusion of private test results.



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[Iran spying charge against French national 'incomprehensible': foreign ministry](#)

Sun, 2021-05-30 21:07

PARIS: Spying charges brought by Iran against Frenchman Benjamin Briere are “incomprehensible,” the foreign ministry in Paris said on Sunday. He was on holiday in the Islamic Republic, the ministry said, adding it “knew nothing likely to back up” the charges.

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[Jordan ramps up refugee vaccination drive](#)

Author:

Sun, 2021-05-30 20:58

AMMAN: Almost a third of the refugees eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine in Jordan have received their first dose, according to the UN refugee agency.

The UNHCR said that 13,455 of the 47,000 people living in Jordan's camps who were eligible for the jabs had now received at least one dose.

UNHCR Jordan said in a statement to Arab News that, by excluding children under 18 and pregnant women from the inoculation campaign, 47,000 out of the 120,000 living in the Zaatari, Azraq and Emirati-Jordanian camps were eligible to register and receive the jabs.

It said 1,558 refugees were vaccinated on May 25 in the sprawling Zaatari camp on Jordan's border with Syria. Two vaccination centers operate in the camp, which is home to around 80,000 Syrian refugees.



UNHCR said that 13,455 of the 47,000 people living in Jordan's camps who were eligible for the jabs had now received at least one dose. (Raed Omari)

It added that another vaccination center was operating at the Azraq refugee camp, which is home to around 37,000 Syrian refugees.

Located some 100 kilometers east of Amman, Azraq was set up in 2014 as the Zaatari camp started to run out of space.

According to the UNHCR, more than 20,000 refugees are currently registered on the government platform and are awaiting their vaccination appointment.

"UNHCR Jordan and partners are currently focusing on raising awareness among the remaining population about the benefits of taking the vaccine and encouraging them to register," the agency said.

The vaccination of Syrian refugees in the two UNHCR-operated camps is part of a wider inoculation drive for refugees that began a few days after the start of Jordan's nationwide campaign on Jan. 13.

Mohammad Hawari, the UNHCR spokesman in Jordan, told Arab News in early February that Jordan was the first country in the world to include refugees in its nationwide COVID-19 vaccination drive. "The vaccination center in

Zaatari is also the first in the world at a UN-administered refugee camp," he added.



UNHCR said that 13,455 of the 47,000 people living in Jordan's camps who were eligible for the jabs had now received at least one dose. (Raed Omari)

The agency said that refugees living outside of camps in urban areas and cities in Jordan had been receiving their shots independent of the UNHCR by approaching their local vaccination centers when they received an appointment.

Hawari said on Saturday that all vaccines were administered through the Ministry of Health, which provided the agency with "fair and equal" access to the vaccines that the government brought into the country. He added that the jabs given to refugees were Pfizer-BioNTech, Oxford-AstraZeneca and Sinopharm vaccines.

"The success of the vaccination campaign is very much connected to the government's decision to include all persons on Jordanian territory, nationals and refugees," said UNHCR Jordan representative Dominik Bartsch. "But we cannot stop here. We need to carry forward the momentum generated thus far to ensure that all eligible refugees are vaccinated. Our aim is to leave no one behind – nobody is safe until everyone is safe."

The government has said that everyone living on Jordanian soil, including refugees and asylum seekers, are entitled to receive the vaccine for free. It plans to immunize 20 percent of its 10 million population by the end of 2021.

"The inclusion of refugees within the national COVID-19 response plan and vaccination campaign has once again emphasized the generosity that Jordan has shown in hosting large numbers of refugees," the agency said. "The UNHCR Jordan continues to work closely with the ministry of health to ensure that refugees receive the vaccine on par with the local population."

Around 10 percent of Jordan's population are refugees, according to the UNHCR.

Among them are 655,000 Syrians, 67,000 Iraqis, 15,000 Yemenis, 6,000 Sudanese and 2,500 refugees from 52 other nations. More than 80 percent of them live outside refugee camps, in cities and towns.

This year, UNHCR Jordan is appealing for \$370 million to help refugees to cope with the additional challenges posed by the pandemic.

The government has previously announced that more COVID-19 vaccines are to arrive in the country under deals struck with manufacturers and the global COVAX initiative.

In its latest update on May 27, Jordan's National Center for Security and Crisis Management said that 1.39 million people had received their first dose while 490,562 people had received their second.

The total number of people registered on the government platform to be vaccinated is 2,305,248.



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Tears, relief, and gratitude as Jordan vaccinates Syrian refugees
Jordan starts 'world first' COVID vaccinations in refugee camp