

Egypt amps up power link with Iraq via Jordan

Sat, 2021-05-01 21:56

CAIRO: Egypt is seeking to strengthen its electricity exchange with neighbors as part of plans to become a regional energy hub, a top official said.

Egyptian Electricity and Renewable Energy Minister Mohammed Shaker said that electricity connection projects have an important role in enhancing energy security as well as increasing the use of renewable energy in the medium and long term.

Shaker also confirmed that a study into an electrical interconnection project with Iraq was underway.

He said that Egypt has power links with Jordan in the east, Libya in the west and Sudan in the south.

Egypt plans to export electricity to Iraq as part of a strategy to transform itself into regional hub for exchanging energy via its power connection with Jordan.

The Ministry of Electricity and Renewable Energy is considering raising the capacity of the electrical interconnection line with Jordan during the current year, with the aim of increasing power exports.

The two countries have been linked since 1999 through a line with a capacity of 400 MW.

In a press statement, Shaker said that electrical interconnection projects between countries offer technical, economic, environmental, social, political and legal benefits.

Work is underway to investigate raising the capacity of electrical interconnection with the countries of the Mashriq and the Arab Maghreb, he said.

A connection project with Saudi Arabia will link Egypt to the Gulf countries and Asia.

Shaker voiced hopes that power connections to Europe will absorb electricity output from renewable energy sources in Africa.

He said that Egypt is keen to support the efforts of African countries to access clean energy from renewable sources, especially since many African countries enjoy untapped renewable sources.

Egypt is expected to be one of the main hubs for the transfer of clean electrical energy to Europe.

The daily reserve in the Egyptian network reaches 15,000 MW, which allows it to expand electrical interconnection projects with all countries to take advantage of the reserve capabilities that are constantly increasing and attracting investors to Egypt.

A source at the Ministry of Electricity confirmed that all studies related to the electrical interconnection with Iraq will be completed by the end of 2021.

Egypt's huge reserve qualifies it as a major energy hub, while there is lack of electric power in some countries amid the collapse of networks in Syria and Iraq.



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UAE entrepreneur Mohamed Alabbar tells Egypt's Enigma magazine about his journey to success

Hopes for Iran nuclear breakthrough 'within weeks' but success 'not guaranteed'

Author:

By PHILIPP JENNE and KIRSTEN GRIESHABER | AP

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Sat, 2021-05-01 13:42

VIENNA: Parties to the Iran nuclear agreement on Saturday adjourned the third round of negotiations in Vienna aimed at bringing the United States back into the accord, with the Russian side expressing "cautious and growing optimism" and saying they hoped to achieve concrete results within three weeks.

A diplomatic source from the E3 powers of Britain, France and Germany said "we have yet to come to an understanding on the most critical points. Success is by no means guaranteed, but not impossible."

Iran's delegation head and Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, speaking to state broadcaster IRIB, said the negotiations had "reached a maturity."

"We have started writing texts and this is where the work actually progresses rather slowly, since working on the text requires accuracy and considering that some issues are still disagreed on, the work goes on slowly."

"Sanctions that are... sector-related ones such as sanctions on Iran's energy sector, which includes oil and gas, or sanctions on the auto industry, banking and finance, insurance and ports; based on agreements made so far, all these sanctions must be lifted. And there is agreement on it, too," he added.

The deal, which curbs Iran's nuclear program in exchange for sanctions relief, has been on life support since then US president Donald Trump bolted in 2018.

The remaining partners to the 2015 accord have been engaged in negotiations since early April to try to revive it.

The third round of talks started on Tuesday and, after several days of technical discussions between expert groups, delegations met on Saturday. Representatives of the parties still in the agreement (Iran, China, Russia, France, Germany, the United Kingdom) who met for just over an hour noted the "indisputable progress" achieved, Russian ambassador Mikhail Ulyanov said on Twitter adding that he was cautiously optimistic.

"It's too early to be excited, but we have reasons for cautious and growing optimism. There is no deadline, but participants aim at successful completion of the talks in approximately three weeks. Is it realistic? We will see," he wrote.

The delegations would return to their respective capitals and resume talks from next Friday, Iran's foreign ministry said in a statement.

"Considering the commission's previous decision regarding speeding up the talks process, this week's talks continued quickly in bilateral format and the sides tried to minimize disagreements regarding the texts" it said.

"The sides agree that the work must continue with more speed and seriousness

in the future round of talks.”

The E3 diplomatic source said the talks had taken place in a “serious and focused atmosphere despite outside turbulences.”

“As E3, we will redouble our efforts to make this deal possible,” the source said.

Earlier, a European diplomat said that the American, European, Russian and Chinese delegations held a joint meeting on Saturday morning, but without Iranian representation as Tehran has refused to negotiate with the US directly.

As well as bolting from the accord, Trump’s administration slapped sweeping sanctions on Iran, which in turn started ramping up its nuclear activities. New US President Joe Biden supports the JCPOA – the acronym for the agreement with which Iran was in compliance before Trump’s sanctions – but has called on Tehran to roll back its measures before Washington ends sanctions.



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Indirect talks on Iran nuclear deal in ‘unclear place’: US security adviser
Iran ‘toying with life’ of dissident filmmaker: Amnesty

Tunisian AI expertise to benefit Africans in need of artificial limbs

Author:

Fri, 2021-04-30 21:31

TUNIS: Mohamed Dhaouafi began researching prosthetics in 2016 as part of a university project. He swiftly realized there was a lack of readily available and affordable prosthetics, with artificial hands costing up to \$50,000.

After finishing his studies, Dhaouafi, 28, ran a startup incubator ZETA HUB at a private university to earn an income while continuing his work on prosthetics. He launched CURE Bionics in late 2018, going full time with his Sousse-based startup in 2019.

Having made multiple prototypes to perfect the design of its prosthetics, the five-strong team decided to launch its products commercially in the first half of 2021.

“We want people using our prosthetics to be satisfied and use it in a practical way – we want our patients to be able to rely on our prosthetics and to guarantee they will last,” said Dhaouafi, CURE’s CEO.

“We’re making some final improvements and will then launch a pilot. If that goes well, we’ll quickly launch in Tunisia before expanding abroad. Tunisia is a tough market, so if we succeed here, we can succeed elsewhere.”

In the developing world, only 5 percent of the 40 million people needing prosthetics have artificial limbs due to the high cost and limited availability. Among those who have received them, nearly 70 percent are dissatisfied and 52 percent reject them, a 2019 University of Nebraska study found.

“People generally feel comfortable wearing a prosthetic, but controlling it is very difficult and complicated. Ours are easy to use since they’re very intuitive,” said Dhaouafi.



Mohamed Dhaouafi, CEO of CURE Bionics. (Supplied)

The lightweight, 3D-printed artificial hands come with different functions depending on the task the patient wants to perform. The brain tells the limbs to move via electric signals transmitted through the nerves, instructing the appropriate muscles to contract or relax.

CURE's prosthetic hands deploy artificial intelligence (AI) to read these signals via sensors placed on the skin, which means no surgery is necessary to fit them.

"People suffer different traumas in losing their hands. Some were born without hands, so they never experienced what it means to open and close a hand – their muscle signals will be either weak or absent," said Dhaouafi.

"These differences can be problematic, so the AI algorithm learns and identifies what the muscle signal is about. By using AI, we can reduce the need for doctors and engineers in teaching patients how to use a prosthetic. If they have to intervene with every patient, we cannot scale the product fast. So we made the algorithm smarter."

CURE's patients will master the necessary movements through conscious repetition, imprinting them into their subconscious mind so that they can act without thinking – much like how one learns to ride a bike. To help its patients, CURE has developed a virtual reality training program.

"In the virtual environment, they can manipulate the virtual hand like a prosthetic, but in a gamified way to master the exercises while having fun," Dhaouafi said. "It's intuitive training. The doctor can provide therapy remotely without the patient having to visit them in person."

In developing countries, large swathes of the population lack reliable electricity. Consequently, prosthetics users may be unable to recharge the batteries in their artificial limbs, so CURE's products will come with a solar-powered wireless charger.

"By adding this feature, we can help more people," said Dhaouafi.

The prosthetic hands come in various predefined sizes, while the socket is fully customizable. They will likely cost between \$2,500-3,000, depending on the specific features the patient requests.

Outside Tunisia, CURE will sell its products through third parties that will conduct product measurement, 3D printing, assembly, fitting, and after-sales service.

"That's the best way for us to scale fast," Dhaouafi said.

The company is in negotiations with potential partners across Africa, with priority markets including Nigeria, South Africa, Morocco, Egypt, and Angola.

"I visited many of these countries and know people there," said Dhaouafi, who has participated in non-profit programs in the target markets. "It's about

finding the right partner.”

*** The Middle East Exchange is one of the Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum Global Initiatives that was launched to reflect the vision of the UAE prime minister and ruler of Dubai in the field of humanitarian and global development, to explore the possibility of changing the status of the Arab region. The initiative offers the press a series of articles on issues affecting Arab societies.**



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Saudi Arabia's KSR relief opens prosthetic limbs clinic in Aden

Turkish police seek to prevent being filmed at protests

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Fri, 2021-04-30 21:40

ANKARA: Turkish police have been instructed to prevent citizens from filming them while policing demonstrations, a prominent lawyers group has said, sparking criticism and fears the move could lead to increased human rights' violations.

The Progressive Lawyers Association posted on its Twitter account a document purporting to be a security department circular.

The document, dated April 27 and signed by national police chief Mehmet Aktas, argues that the filming of police officials amounts to a violation of their right to privacy and prevents them from carrying out their duties. It then instructs officers to prevent people from using their cellphones to record or film police during demonstrations, and calls on them to "take legal action" if needed.

There was no official confirmation of the instruction to police, which was also reported by several media outlets.

The main opposition Republican People's Party, or CHP, said Friday that the move could lead to increased police brutality and amounted to "authoritarianism at its finest."

"They will do whatever they want, bully as they please," said CHP spokesman Faik Oztrak. "They will step on the people with their knees placed on their heads, but people will not be able to shoot this with their cellphones."

He was referring to an image showing a Turkish police officer placing his knee on the back of a protester who was lying face down on the ground during an early May Day protest in the city of Izmir. The image was compared to those showing the arrest of George Floyd, whose death in the United States last year caused widespread protests and international condemnation.



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Turkish police detain 12 at Bogazici university protest, student group says

[Turkish whistleblower who leaked alarming pollution study acquitted in court](#)

Fri, 2021-04-30 19:47

ANKARA: Turkish academic and rights activist Bulent Şik has been acquitted of charges of “disclosing classified information” in an Istanbul court.

Şik, the former deputy director of a food safety center at Akdeniz University in Antalya, was accused of publishing the confidential findings of a research study commissioned by the Turkish health ministry on the connection between toxic pollution and high incidences of cancer in western Turkey.

The findings were published in the opposition daily Cumhuriyet in a four-part series in April 2018, and stirred a widespread debate about public health in Turkey and the link between toxic pollution levels and cancer.

Şik was involved in a scientific team that revealed dangerous levels of heavy metals and pesticides in several samples of water and food from western provinces.

He was handed a 15-month prison term in 2019, but appealed his conviction.

The Istanbul court ruled that the study could not be considered a “confidential document” due to the responsibility of the ministry to reveal all information about public health. The health ministry did not insert any confidentiality clause in the research document.

“The results of this survey interest millions of people. And no single public announcement was made so far about them since I disclosed them in my column three years ago. It is so important to inform the greater public on critical issues that interest public health and the environment,” Şik told Arab News.

According to the academic, government pressure pushes scientists into adopting ethical stances by making the public aware of negative trends that affect health.

“Therefore, I wrote these columns to inform and warn people about the health challenges they face in their daily lives and about the contamination of their water resources by toxic materials,” he said.

Last April, 614 scholars, world-renowned intellectuals and right activists, including Noam Chomsky, Robert Curl, Judith Butler, published an open letter expressing solidarity with Şik and demanding that the Turkish Court of Appeals reverse his conviction.

“We, the undersigned, express our solidarity with Dr. Şik, who acted as a responsible scientist defending public health. We encourage scientists and academics around the world to condemn the Turkish Ministry of Health and academic institutions in Turkey that deliberately target academic freedom and freedom of speech,” said the letter.

Şik said that the trial exposed the cancer study and made it “much more visible” in domestic and international spheres, with several activists lending support.

“I knew that I was right and telling the truth. It was giving me the strength to stand this trial. Even if there is another appeal to this acquittal, this injustice will turn to be much more visible,” he said.

The case was defined as a “travesty of justice” by Amnesty International.

Turkey’s rapid economic growth has often come at the cost of environmental safety and public health.

Last year, urban water in a district of western Turkey was revealed to

contain levels of arsenic 350 times greater than World Health Organization standards. The rate of arsenic in drinking or utility water in the city was ranked number one in the world.

Cancer-related deaths in the region are three times higher than average rates elsewhere.

“The reality still stands there. Millions of people keep living in these areas where toxicity threatens their lives,” Şik said.



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