

El-Sisi holds meeting on prosthetics production in Egypt

Mon, 2021-04-19 21:07

CAIRO: Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi met with a number of ministers and officials to advance plans to set up an integrated system for the production of prosthetics in Egypt.

The president was briefed on the efforts made to develop the prosthetic factory affiliated to the Rheumatology and Rehabilitation Military Center.

He was given details on the establishment of an industrial complex for prosthetics, devices, and movement aids, with the team taking advice from experts in the field.

The government is planning to acquire a new prosthetics production capability using high-quality raw materials. It is also aiming to develop qualification programs for training in the use of the products.

The president directed that the national capacity for the production of prosthetics should train technical cadres towards scientific, technical, and academic qualifications.

El-Sisi stressed the importance of retaining the manufacturing processes within Egypt to guarantee the provision of first-class prosthetics care to people in need.

The president also directed the preparation of a comprehensive database of the system, which should record medical cadres, technical workers, and requests for prosthetic limbs, with relevant authorities using resources from the Decent Life initiative.



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[Food stampedes in Turkey fuel fears over rising poverty levels](#)

Mon, 2021-04-19 21:50

ANKARA: Images showing desperate Turkish citizens scrambling to grab free handouts of potatoes have stoked an ongoing debate over chronic poverty in the country.

The government recently began distributing potatoes and onions to needy people in some of Turkey's poorest provinces.

But despite strict measures on large gatherings, brought in to stop the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), recent footage has shown crowds of people stampeding for the vegetables, some even picking up loose potatoes from the ground.

And members of Turkey's main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) claim

the situation has only served to further highlight growing concerns over mass poverty, social injustice, and soaring food prices.

Under allocations, those requiring food aid were to receive 10 kg of onions and 20 kg of potatoes purchased by the government from farms.

“The image of crowds piled up for free potatoes and onions, as their only source of diet, has been the clearest picture of the Turkish economy right now,” Serkan Ozcan, an economist and founding member of the breakaway Future Party, told Arab News.

Turkey recently saw 250,000 people added to its jobless total, taking the figure for February to 4.23 million, an unemployment rate of 14.1 percent. In the same month, official statistics showed the annual inflation rate running at 15.61 percent.

“Since 2016, Turkey’s national income per capita decreased by one-quarter, and it is the worst record among its peers in emerging markets. When people are so desperate for potatoes and onions, it means that the government is not able to govern the country,” Ozcan said.

“Farmers are obliged to sell their excess products at cost, and people need to pile up in the streets because they cannot find jobs to feed their families.”

Food has become extremely expensive in Turkey, with annual consumer prices jumping to 15 percent, second only to Argentina among emerging market peers.

Separately, Turkish opposition parties have been pushing the government to account for money they claim has gone missing from Central Bank reserves.

In a tweet, Kemal Kilicdaroglu, the leader of the CHP, said: “We are asking about the money of the poor, those in need, and orphans.”

Worries about paying bills and putting food on tables have become major priorities for Turks under the economic deterioration in the country as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

A recent survey in Turkey by international market research firm Ipsos revealed that 40 percent of Turks were concerned about poverty and social inequality, while 47 percent had fears about unemployment.

“People are suffering not only because of the pandemic but also due to income loss and rising living costs,” said Seren Selvin Korkmaz, executive director of the Istanbul Political Research Institute.

“In addition to increasing food prices the costs of basic services such as rent, electricity, and water have contributed to poverty. As a result, the economic downturn is evident in the crowds gathered around the potato trucks.”

Despite the possibility of several short-term financial support measures, Korkmaz said that the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) had no

expertise in health or economic crisis management.

“I think the current presidential system without independent institutions based on good governance and expertise cannot provide viable solutions for the economic problems of the country.

“Hence, the economic situation might hit the current government in the next election if the opposition can provide viable economic policy vision to the voters,” she added.

More than 100 musicians in Turkey have committed suicide since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic after having lost their jobs and received no state support.

The government’s wage support program for employees of companies that have been hit by the pandemic also ended this month, leaving millions of people deprived of the scheme.

Korkmaz said: “Inequalities in the country are exacerbated by the AKP’s agricultural policy, education, and healthcare policies, as well as acute poverty during the pandemic. As a result, it can take years to recover from the effects in society.”



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[Britain commits \\$4.2m to aid Iraqi fight against COVID-19](#)

Mon, 2021-04-19 22:06

LONDON: In partnership with the UN, the UK has committed £3 million (\$4.2 million) in funding to help the Iraqi government respond to the coronavirus pandemic.

Iraq has been grappling with its worst spike yet in COVID-19 infections, and experts have warned that its vaccination program is woefully ill-equipped.

“Containing the coronavirus outbreak is the government of Iraq’s top priority, particularly with the second wave of infections countrywide,” said Zena Ali Ahmad, resident representative for the UN Development Programme (UNDP).

“The UNDP is on the frontline, supporting Iraq’s national healthcare system to tackle the outbreak,” she added.

The UK’s “generous contribution enables us to boost our support even further as we collectively fight this pandemic.”

The UNDP said the money will be used to strengthen Iraq’s health sector in response to the pandemic, improve access to isolation wards and medical equipment, increase public awareness of COVID-19 symptoms and prevention measures, and provide personal protective equipment to healthcare workers.

With this contribution, the UK has joined 11 other countries – including the US, Japan, Germany and Canada – in financially supporting the UNDP’s work against COVID-19 in Iraq.

The UK supports Iraq’s government in its fight against COVID-19, “which continues to cause such challenges in both of our countries,” said British Ambassador Stephen Hickey.

“We are pleased to make available this funding through the UNDP to strengthen Iraq’s national health response and help manage the ongoing outbreak.”

Omar Ebeid, project coordinator in Baghdad for Doctors Without Borders, said Iraq’s inability to access vaccines, and its relatively large population, mean that “the end of COVID is hard to see.”

In late March, he said the war-ravaged country had received just 386,000 vaccine doses – a “totally inadequate” number given its 40 million inhabitants.

“The country should be considered one of the priorities globally for vaccination efforts, and a priority in the Middle East, where it has been one

of the hardest-hit nations,” Ebeid added.

“With a health system weakened by years of conflict and its associated ills, and an economy struggling in the wake of the crash in the price of oil, the government will struggle to vaccinate all those who need it without substantial assistance from other countries in the procurement of vaccines and other international organizations in their distribution,” he said.

“Even when this wave recedes, it will not be the end unless Iraqis get the vaccines they so desperately need.”



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[How Middle East public attitudes have evolved, 1 year into COVID-19 pandemic](#)

Sun, 2021-04-18 22:15

DUBAI: On March 11, 2020, just a matter of months after it first emerged in the Chinese city of Wuhan, outbreaks of the novel coronavirus were reported from multiple continents – marking the start of an unprecedented health emergency and an abrupt change in daily habits.

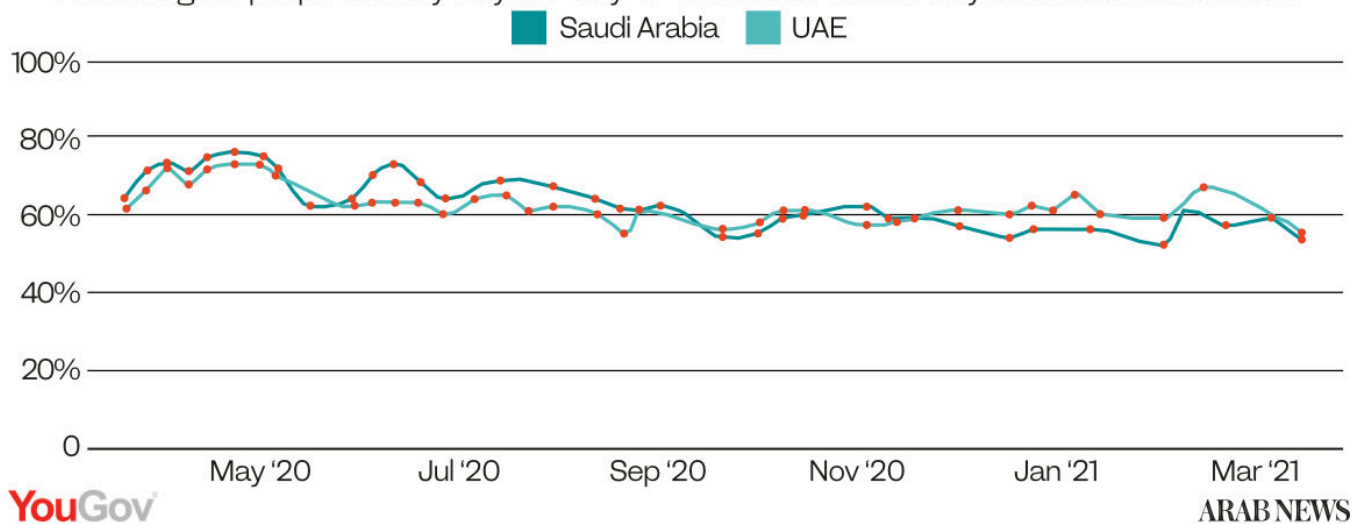
After the World Health Organization (WHO) decision to raise its alert from a scattering of localized epidemics to a full-blown pandemic, governments in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) area were quick to respond.

Mandatory nationwide closures were put in place, schools and workplaces emptied, front-line workers mobilized and households ordered to stay home. Few could remember a time of such disruption or ever seeing their streets so empty.

Data collected by British polling agency YouGov found that in April 2020, at the outset of the pandemic, some 75 percent of respondents across Saudi Arabia and the UAE felt “somewhat” or “very scared” of contracting the virus. This fear has generally fallen as the pandemic has worn on.

HOW FEAR OF CATCHING COVID-19 HAS CHANGED OVER TIME

Percentage of people who say they are “very” or “somewhat” scared they will contract coronavirus



To curb the spread of COVID-19, governments placed much of the onus on the general public to abide by new personal hygiene and social distancing guidelines.

In the same YouGov poll, 78 percent of Saudi and UAE respondents said they had improved their personal hygiene (frequently washing their hands and using hand sanitizer), while 80 percent said they had avoided public places and 70 percent said they had started wearing face masks in public.

COVID-19 spreads primarily through contact with infected individuals when airborne particles are expelled through coughing and sneezing. It can also be spread by touching contaminated surfaces and transferring particles to the eyes, nose and mouth.



A Saudi police officer inspects a motorist's permit to travel during the lockdown in the Kingdom in April 2020 to fight the spread of COVID-19. (SPA file photo)

The combination of lockdown measures and ubiquitous public health messages has had a profound effect on people's daily lives, running the gamut from how they work and study to how they travel and socialize.

It has also highlighted the significant role that widespread community uptake of hygiene and social distancing rules can play in successfully containing outbreaks.

During the first six months of the pandemic, YouGov data showed rates of mask wearing were high in the GCC. Some 80 percent of UAE respondents and 69 percent of Saudi respondents said they were consistently wearing face masks during this period.



Throughout the pandemic, at-risk groups, including the elderly and those with underlying health conditions, have been urged to be extra vigilant. In August 2020, 80 percent of Saudi respondents over the age of 45 reported having avoided public places, whereas just 58 percent of 18-24-year-old Saudis said they took the same precautions.

In the same month in the UAE, 81 percent of people aged over 45 reported wearing a face mask in public, while just 66 percent of 18-24 year olds said they were complying with the mandatory mask rule.

Although men and women are equally susceptible to catching coronavirus, medical data suggests men are more likely to suffer from severe symptoms and ultimately die from the disease.



In August 2020, four out of every five Saudi respondents over the age of 45 reported having avoided public places. (Reuters file photo)

And yet, despite WHO advice to the contrary, YouGov data found that male Saudi and UAE residents were less likely to improve their personal hygiene, less likely to wear face masks, less likely to avoid crowded places and less likely to avoid touching potentially contaminated surfaces.

Since the pandemic began, nearly 142 million people have been infected worldwide and more than 3 million have died. The UAE has seen about 500,000 COVID-19 cases, while Saudi Arabia's total is approaching the 405,000 mark.

Compared with many European states, where governments were slower to react to the pandemic, the outbreak in the GCC has been relatively mild, with a much lower death rate. But even here, as vaccines are rolled out and restrictions are gradually eased, things feel a long way from normal.

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- [Study finds growing acceptance in the Middle East of coronavirus 'new normal'](#)

"What's happening to us may seem to so many people to be alien and unnatural, but plagues are not new to our species – they're just new to us," writes

social epidemiologist Dr. Nicholas Christakis in his book “Apollo’s arrow: The profound and enduring impact of coronavirus on the way we live.”

And just like the great epidemics of the past, writes Christakis, the COVID-19 pandemic will eventually pass, bringing with it a brighter period in which people seek out long-denied social interactions.

The Yale professor even predicts a second “roaring 20s” similar to the decade of prosperity and cultural resurgence that followed the Spanish influenza pandemic of 1918.



But in order for this to happen, people must be safe – and feel safe. Annual vaccinations, improved treatments and vaccine passports are all possible tools to get societies and economies back on track.

Until then, the behavior of those least at risk will continue to impact those most at risk. Therefore, getting “back to normal” will depend not only on medical science, but on the actions of the community as a whole.

Without a widespread uptake of vaccines and containment measures, the virus will enjoy a stronger foothold and a greater chance of mutating, allowing it to become more transmissible and its symptoms more severe.

“When a virus is widely circulating in a population and causing many infections, the likelihood of the virus mutating increases,” according to the WHO’s “Vaccine Explained” series. “The more opportunities a virus has to spread, the more it replicates – and the more opportunities it has to undergo changes.”

INNUMBERS

83% Saudi respondents who believe the pandemic situation is improving.

14% UAE respondents who believe the pandemic situation is getting worse.

70% Saudi and UAE respondents who say they will continue avoiding crowded places.

Source: *YouGov COVID-19 Public Monitor, March 2021*

A major factor in uptake is the trustworthiness of the vaccines on offer.

In early December last year, the UAE became one of the first countries to approve the Chinese-made Sinopharm vaccine for emergency use. YouGov's polling data at the end of that month found that just 56 percent of UAE respondents felt comfortable taking the vaccine or had already done so. In Saudi Arabia, that figure was only 42 percent.



An Emirati man gets vaccinated against COVID-19 at al-Barsha Health Centre in Dubai on December 24, 2020. (AFP file photo)

Since the national vaccination program was launched in Saudi Arabia, more than 2 million doses have been administered at 500 centers across the Kingdom. In the UAE, which has one of the highest vaccination rates per head of the population in the world, more than 10 million have been administered.

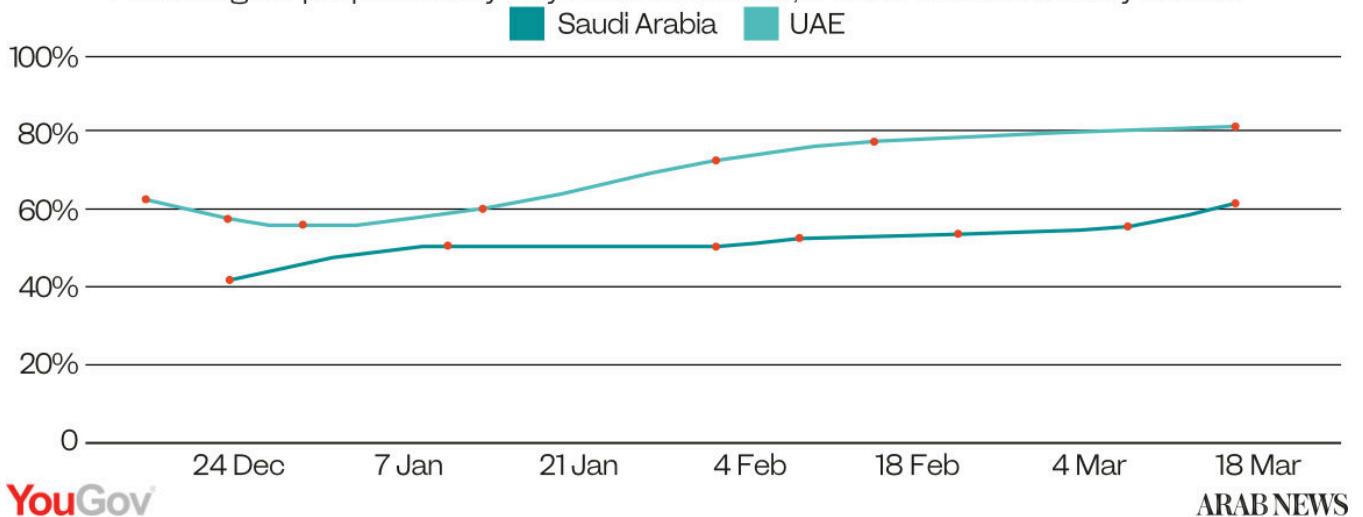
Since the December 2020 poll, confidence in the safety and efficacy of the

new crop of COVID-19 vaccines has grown. Data from the YouGov COVID-19 Public Monitor in March 2021 showed an increase in willingness to take the vaccine by 20 percent of respondents in Saudi Arabia and 26 percent in the UAE.

Now the vast majority of respondents in the UAE (82 percent) and in Saudi Arabia (62 percent) say that they have either received a vaccine, or are willing to take one.

HOW WILLINGNESS TO TAKE A COVID-19 VACCINE HAS CHANGED OVER TIME

Percentage of people who say they will take a vaccine, or those who have already done so



In other findings, 83 percent of Saudi respondents believe the pandemic situation is improving; only 14 percent UAE respondents believe the pandemic situation is getting worse, while but 70 percent of Saudi and UAE respondents intend to continue avoiding crowded places.

None of this is surprising given that scientists still have a lot to learn about COVID-19, its mutations, spread patterns, long-term symptoms and its ability to outmaneuver the vaccines and treatments doctors throw at it.

Mask wearing, hand sanitizing and social distancing might therefore be requisite behaviors for some time yet to come.







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Saudi Arabia administers 7 million COVID-19 vaccine doses 'We must cooperate' to curb virus, avoid tough measures, Saudi Ministry of Interior warns

[Deputy commander of Iran's Quds Force dies from 'heart condition'](#)

Author:

Sun, 2021-04-18 22:27

RIYADH: The deputy commander of Iran's military wing that oversees its foreign proxy militias has died from a "heart condition."

Brig. Gen. Mohammad Hejazi's death was announced by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), Iranian media reported. No further details were given about his death.

He was a senior figure in the Quds Force, the overseas arm of the IRGC, whose overall commander Qassem Soleimani was killed by a US airstrike in January 2020.

The statement said Hejazi, who was 65, was involved in operations in Lebanon where Iran supplies and funds Hezbollah.

The Quds force is considered a terrorist organization by the US, Europe and many countries in the Middle East.



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