

Iraq starts vaccinations with jabs gifted from China

Author:

Wed, 2021-03-03 02:21

BAGHDAD: Iraq began coronavirus vaccinations on Tuesday, inoculating medical staff hours after a military plane brought in 50,000 Sinopharm jabs donated by China.

The campaign was launched as Iraq battles a second wave of COVID-19 infections, with more than 4,600 new cases a day, and ahead of a three-day visit by Pope Francis from Friday.

"The vaccines arrived overnight and we immediately distributed them to health centers and began the vaccinations," Health Minister Hassan Al-Tamimi said at Baghdad's Medical City hospital compound.

"We will be carrying out more vaccinations tomorrow in the provinces and remote areas."

Aside from health workers, security forces and the elderly will be first to receive the free-of-charge vaccine, his ministry said on a citizens' registration platform which, however, was not functional.

The public health infrastructure in Iraq, a country of 40 million, has been severely worn down by decades of war, under-investment and corruption.

The Health Ministry has said it agreed with the Chinese ambassador in Baghdad to purchase another 2 million Sinopharm doses, but provided no details on the cost or the timing. Iraqi authorities said in January they had approved three vaccines for use, but there have been repeated delays and contradictory statements from health authorities.

The ministry said it was expecting to receive a total of 16 million jabs through the global Covax scheme, through which wealthy nations are meant to allocate vaccines for poorer countries.

SPEEDREAD

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That figure appeared to be based on Covax's pledge that, subject to funding, it could help poorer countries vaccinate 20 percent of their populations – or 8 million people in Iraq.

The ministry has also said it would receive 3 million AstraZeneca jabs, but the World Health Organization has only approved the distribution of 2 million of those doses to Iraq through Covax.

The ministry also says it has secured funding from the World Bank for 1.5 million jabs from Pfizer/BioNTech, but the deal requires a parliamentary vote which has yet to be held.

Sinopharm affiliate the Wuhan Institute of Biological Products says its

vaccine has an efficacy rate of 72.51 percent, behind rival jabs by Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna, which have 95 percent and 94.5 percent rates respectively.



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Saudi Arabia, Iraq hold talks to boost ties
Land route to link Egypt, Iraq, Jordan

[Hezbollah gunmen fight off bid to arrest Rafik Hariri's killer](#)

Author:

Wed, 2021-03-03 01:56

BEIRUT: Gunfire broke out in south Beirut on Tuesday night when Hezbollah fought off an apparent attempt by Lebanese security forces to arrest the man convicted of assassinating former prime minister Rafik a.

Information circulating on social media said officers tried to raid a house thought to be the hideout of Salim Ayyash, 57, who is wanted by the Lebanese state at the request of the International Tribunal for Lebanon. Hezbollah fighters opened fire, surrounded the security patrol, and detained its

members and their vehicles.

Amateur video footage on social media shows shots being fired and a Hezbollah fighter shouting: "Attack them and disarm them."

An activist close to Hezbollah told Arab News: "The security patrol wanted to arrest wanted suspects accused of a crime, it is not true that there was a clash with Hezbollah."

Rafik Hariri died in a suicide bombing of his car in Beirut in February 2005. The Special Tribunal tried Ayyash in his absence, and sentenced him to life imprisonment in August 2020 for conspiracy to commit a terrorist act. Hezbollah has said it will never hand him over.



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Hezbollah should have no role in Lebanon's future, says Bahaa Hariri, son of Rafik Hariri

Saudi Arabia urges UN Security Council to hold Houthis accountable for threat posed to global peace, security

Wed, 2021-03-03 01:45

NEW YORK: Saudi Arabia urged the UN Security Council (UNSC) on Tuesday to shoulder its responsibility and hold the Iran-backed Houthi militias in Yemen accountable for the threats they pose to international peace and security. The Houthis' terror activities continue to jeopardize UN efforts to reach a comprehensive solution in Yemen, and undermine the credibility of UNSC resolutions, Abdallah Al-Mouallimi, Saudi Arabia's permanent representative to the UN, wrote in a letter seen by Arab News.

He alerted the council to the continued military hostilities committed by the Houthis against the Kingdom. "Among these hostilities towards civilians and civilian objects, some of the scattered debris of a ballistic missile launched by these militias resulted in material damage to one house in Riyadh on February 27th 2021, after being intercepted and destroyed," Al-Mouallimi wrote.

"Moreover, the fall of a military projectile (on Monday) launched by these militias towards one of the border villages in Jazan Region injured five civilians as a result of flying shrapnel. It also damaged two houses, a grocery store and three civilian vehicles."

The letter was addressed to US Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield, who is assuming the rotating presidency of the UNSC this month. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres was copied in.

"Although the Security Council strongly condemned the continuation of Houthi attacks on Saudi Arabia and called for an immediate cessation of attacks without preconditions in its resolution 2564 (2021) that was adopted on 25 February 2021, the Houthi militias continue their behavior in ignoring and violating Security Council resolutions and International Humanitarian Law," the top Saudi envoy wrote.

"It is an obvious response of the Houthi militias to the ... calls and appeals (of the UNSC and international community) for a political solution to the crisis in Yemen, and it proves once again that these militias only believe in terrorist behavior to reach their narrow political aims."

Al-Mouallimi reiterated that Saudi Arabia reserves its full rights "to safeguard its citizens, residents and territories in accordance with its commitments under international law." He asked Thomas-Greenfield to circulate the letter as an official document.



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Arab coalition intercepts Houthi drone targeting Saudi Arabia
US sanctions two Houthi leaders over attacks on Saudi Arabia

[Egypt becomes first MENA country to launch Closing the Gender Gap Accelerator](#)

Author:

Tue, 2021-03-02 03:49

CAIRO: Egypt has launched the Closing the Gender Gap Accelerator, the first institutional cooperation between Cairo and the World Economic Forum, which will advance women's economic empowerment efforts.

In a statement, Minister of International Cooperation Rania Al-Mashat said that the partnership enables Egypt to use the forum's global presence to tell development stories, promote the empowerment of women, and exchange ideas with international partners.

She said that Egypt is the first country in Africa and the MENA region to launch the Closing the Gender Gap Accelerator. The initiative will focus on

achieving the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) concerned with gender equality to enhance women's economic empowerment.

It will reduce the gender gap in the labor market and change stereotypes surrounding women.

The ministry has dedicated \$82 million for about 13 projects to achieve the SDGs associated with the empowerment of women. The dedicated SDGs fund will also spend \$3.3 billion implementing 34 projects to close the gender gap in various sectors such as education and health.

Al-Mashat said that the launch of the bridging the gender gap incentive reflects government efforts and the country's commitment to take measures that ensure women play their role in development.

The minister said that several sectors of Egyptian society are working on a three-year time frame to reduce economic gaps between the genders and empower women.

The executive plan includes supporting the representation of women at senior levels of company management, reducing the difficulties women face in balancing their work with childcare responsibilities, and providing women with skills, experiences and scholarship opportunities in fields where they are typically underrepresented.



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Egypt offers \$820m worth of treasury bonds
Egypt opens online registration for COVID-19 vaccination

[US urges Houthis to 'match Saudi commitment to ending Yemen war'](#)

Tue, 2021-03-02 02:28

NEW YORK, AL-MUKALLA: Saudi Arabia is “committed and eager” to find a way to end the war in Yemen and Iran-backed Houthi militias should do the same, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Monday.

“The necessary first step is to stop their offensive against Marib, a city where a million internally displaced people live, and to join the Saudis and the government in Yemen in making constructive moves toward peace,” Blinken said.

Speaking after a visit to the region by his Yemen envoy Tim Lenderking, Blinken told a UN humanitarian aid conference: “He reports that the Saudis and the Yemen government are committed and eager to find a solution to the conflict. We call on the Houthis to match this commitment.”

Monday’s donor conference raised \$1.7 billion, less than half the \$3.85 billion the UN was seeking for 2021 to avert a large-scale famine. Among the commitments were \$430 million from Saudi Arabia, \$191 million from the US, \$230 million from the UAE and \$240 million from Germany.

“Millions of Yemeni children, women and men desperately need aid to live. Cutting aid is a death sentence,” UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said. “The best that can be said about today is that it represents a down-payment. I thank those who did pledge generously, and I ask others to consider again what they can do to help stave off the worst famine the world has seen in decades.”

The amount raised “does not solve the problem,” UN humanitarian chief Mark Lowcock said. “It’s going to be impossible with such limited resources to prevent a large-scale famine.

“We are at a crossroads with Yemen. We can choose the path to peace or let Yemenis slide into the world’s worst famine for decades. An adequately funded aid operation will prevent the spread of famine and create the conditions for lasting peace. If you’re not feeding the people, you’re feeding the war.”

In Yemen, local health officials said they hoped the new funds would be directed to the health sector.

Dr. Ahmed Mansour, a health official in the southern city of Taiz, told Arab News that health facilities were in desperate need of funds and medical supplies to fight off a new wave of coronavirus.

“We are in need of ventilators, drugs and personal protective equipment, and renovating health buildings,” he said.



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US envoy to Yemen Lenderking meets Kuwaiti foreign minister Saudi Arabia pledges \$430m to UN's Yemen response