

UAE confirms 3,962 new COVID-19 cases, 7 deaths amid UK travel ban

Author:

Sat, 2021-01-30 00:46

LONDON: The UAE has been informed of the United Kingdom's decision to place travel restrictions on flights coming from the country, the foreign ministry said on Friday.

It also said the Emirates "affirms that it will continue to maintain its role as an important travel and logistics hub in accordance with the highest health and safety standards."

Thousands of people have been left stranded or had their travel plans disrupted after the British government introduced a total ban on flights arriving from the UAE.

Hind Al-Otaiba, director of the Strategic Communication Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, said, "the cornerstone of fighting the pandemic is the polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test and the UAE scored the highest per capita test rate in the world."

She also said: "in light of the new changes taking place in the world, the UAE has intensified its efforts to mitigate these risks."

Al-Otaiba said the new measures include requiring incoming travelers to submit a negative PCR test, imposing restrictions on places of entertainment and gatherings, and implementing awareness campaigns continuously with high transparency.

"We are confident in our ambitious vaccination program, which ranks second in the world in the total number of vaccine doses distributed in relation to the number of individuals, and we have full confidence in the medical infrastructure and frontline workers."

She also said that the UAE will extend visit visas, without any additional fees, for British travelers affected by this decision, in light of the current circumstances.

Meanwhile, the UAE on Friday recorded 3,962 new coronavirus cases and seven virus-related deaths.

Officials from the Ministry of Health and Prevention (MoHAP) said the total number of cases since the pandemic began had reached 297,041, while the death toll rose to 826.

It also said that 2,975 people had recovered from the virus over the past 24 hours. The total number of recoveries is 269,999.

MoHaP also said that more than 3 million doses of the vaccine have now been administered as part of the Emirate's national inoculation campaign, which aims to immunize 50 percent of the population by April.

Health minister Abdul Rahman Al-Owais said the vaccine centers across the country witnessed increasing turnout, adding that the recovery phase is approaching.

Dubai Municipality announced it had intensified its inspection campaigns. It said two businesses were ordered to close, six were fined and warnings were issued to 37 for not complying with precautionary measures.

Dubai Municipality has carried out half a million inspections since March 2020, during which 6,500 establishments were either fined, warned or closed for not adhering to the precautionary measures against Covid-19. [@DMunicipality pic.twitter.com/TkzhF93pP9](https://pic.twitter.com/TkzhF93pP9)

– Dubai Media Office (@DXBMediaOffice) [January 29, 2021](#)

The authority also said it carried out half a million inspections since March 2020, during which 6,500 establishments were either fined, warned or ordered to close down for not adhering to the coronavirus precautionary measures. Dubai Tourism also said it closed 23 establishments and fined 238 others during January, for not adhering to the precautionary measures. Elsewhere, Kuwait reported 658 new cases of COVID-19, raising the total in the country to 164,108. The death toll remained 958 after no additional deaths were reported in the past 24 hours.

تعلن [#وزارة_الصحة](#) عن تأكيد إصابة 658 حالة جديدة، وتسجيل 516 حالة شفاء، ولم تسجل أي حالة وفاة جديدة بـ [#فيروس_كورونا_المستجد](#) COVID-19 ، ليصبح إجمالي عدد الحالات 164,108 حالة pic.twitter.com/b9pyS0eImi

– (@KUWAIT_MOH) [January 29, 2021](#) وزارة الصحة – الكويت

In Bahrain the death toll stands at 372 after no new deaths were reported. The number of confirmed cases in the country increased by 468.

Out of 13535 COVID-19 tests carried out on 29 January 2021, 468 new cases have been detected among 198 expatriate workers, 265 new cases are contacts of active cases, and 5 are travel related. There were 284 recoveries from [#COVID19](#), increasing total recoveries to 97948 pic.twitter.com/UZtA5FVj5I

– (@MOH_Bahrain) [January 29, 2021](#) وزارة الصحة | مملكة البحرين



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Saudi Arabia announces 2 more COVID-19 deaths
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[The Cairo-trained violinist who wants Saudis to pursue their musical](#)

ambitions

Sat, 2021-01-30 00:00

DUBAI: Elyas Yaseen is unlike other men his age from Yanbu, a small port city on Saudi Arabia's Red Sea coast. He is a gifted musician, known for his proficiency at playing the violin, the oud and the qanun. The young Saudi talent also has an aspiration: to establish, with the government's help, a music school in his coastal hometown so he can teach others to play and allow more young Saudis like him to realize their potential.

In the absence of specialist academies and music in the Kingdom's national curriculum, most Saudi musicians are self-taught, relying on platforms like YouTube to pick up the basics. Others look to friends or family for private lessons, limiting their scope for development. But with the country's social-reforms programs taking hold, this is beginning to change.

Yaseen, the youngest of six, has been interested in music since the age of eight when he first fell in love with string instruments. "I was raised among musicians," Yaseen told Arab News. "My older brother, who played the qanun, and my father, who was one of the musical pioneers here and played Yanbu's local instrument – the simsimiyya – are musicians and both of them gave me the passion to play. This is how I started."



Following a few rudimentary lessons from his father and brother, Yaseen spent the next decade mastering the instrument at home. (Supplied)

Born and raised in Yanbu, Yaseen attended his local university before realizing his true calling lay in music. After learning to play the *simsimiyya*, a traditional lyre instrument, he discovered his passion for the violin.

Following a few rudimentary lessons from his father and brother, Yaseen spent the next decade mastering the instrument at home. He was largely self-taught – until an unmissable opportunity presented itself to study abroad.

“I went to Egypt and met a very famous violinist called Abdo Dagher and I took many classes with him at the Cairo Opera House to improve my skills on the violin,” he said. “I knew by then that I wanted to play the violin professionally and that I wanted to be a professional musician in Saudi Arabia.”

Opportunities to study and perform music in Saudi Arabia were limited until fairly recently. Now the Ministry of Culture has started issuing licenses for the Kingdom’s first musical training institutes. Once it begins accepting online applications in the coming months, a vibrant domestic music industry is sure to follow.

The liberalization of music culture is part of a broader effort to promote the entertainment and leisure sectors in Saudi Arabia, aimed at creating jobs and weaning the country off its economic dependence on oil, while also sharing its homegrown talents with the world.



Yaseen is seeking support from the Saudi government to establish his own music academy in Yanbu. (Supplied)

Now Yaseen is seeking support from the Saudi government to establish his own music academy in Yanbu, offering classes in the gamut of instruments to students of all ages.

"We don't have that yet, but I really hope we will achieve it," he said. "For now, I provide private classes to my friends, the youth and children who are interested in learning the violin and the oud."

As a Saudi whose training in Egypt enabled him to reach standards of musicianship that most people can only aspire to, Yaseen hopes the Ministry of Culture will heed his call.

"We have to go through many processes. There's a lot of bureaucracy. But there's a lot of demand from young Saudis who want to play instruments, and I receive many requests daily from both men and women," he said.

"It's a passion for them too and they want me to teach them, but I don't have a place that is large enough to teach everyone. I just want to help others in their musical journey because it's enjoyable for me."

FASTFACTS

Music in the Kingdom

- * Saudi Arabia granted licenses for two music colleges in Dec. 2020.**
- * The institutes will offer cultural and artistic training programs.**
- * Licenses to be granted for theater, music, literature, publishing, translation and museums.**
- * Licenses for music practitioners will cover musicians, acoustics and production.**

Some of Yaseen's earliest musical inspiration came from Egyptian singer and actress Umm Kulthum, one of the best-selling Middle Eastern artists of all time, whose songs he set to the violin. "They're not easy to play by a young person like myself," Yaseen said.

However, it was Yanbu's distinctive culture that truly captured his imagination.

"We have traditional music here, which includes special songs for locals, describing their life, from the old generation to the young generation. And from that, I created a new genre on my own," he said.

Even as his musical proficiency grew under Dagher's mentorship, Yaseen never lost sight of these early influences. Progressing in leaps and bounds, he soon graduated from Helwan University's Faculty of Music Education in Cairo with an outstanding grade.

He still feels a deep debt of gratitude to his teacher. "I feel very grateful to him," Yaseen said. "He is the main reason I am where I am today. We are still in touch. We talk regularly and we still have a strong friendship."



As a Saudi whose training in Egypt enabled him to reach standards of musicianship that most people can only aspire to, Yaseen hopes the Ministry of Culture will help others follow in his footsteps. (Supplied)

Returning to his home city three years ago, Yaseen quickly made a name for himself. Agencies were getting in touch with him with requests for appearances in Jeddah and Riyadh. Before long, he had a certain amount of name recognition thanks to clips of his performances shared on social media.

In 2019, Yaseen received a reward from famed Saudi singer and composer Abadi Al-Johar for an outstanding solo performance in Dammam. A year later, he received an award from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry in Riyadh for his rendition of the Saudi national anthem.

"Music is like therapy for me," Yaseen said. "My favorite moments are spent playing music. It relaxes me. Music is my soulmate and I feel well when I play the violin or any other instruments. I spend most of my day playing it."

Thus, when the coronavirus pandemic forced the closure of concert venues across the region last year, Yaseen was grateful for the free time to practice at home.

"The lockdown was great for me because I didn't feel it," he said. "Music gives me a sense of freedom that no lockdown can ever take away."



Cairo Opera House's National Arab Music Ensemble (AME) performing at the King Fahd Cultural Centre in Riyadh in 2018, the first event of its kind in the Saudi capital. (AFP/Saudi General Culture Authority/File Photo)

Yaseen nevertheless hopes someday to perform internationally. "I want to be the first Saudi who represents Saudi Arabia as a violinist in the world," he said. "I fell in love with the instrument, which is why I dedicated my life to it."

He hopes other young Saudis will pursue their musical ambitions, no matter how daunting the challenges.

"I encourage them to learn music and to keep going because there are no music

academies so far. We need to help each other as much as we can,” Yaseen told Arab News.

“For all young Saudis who want to pursue their passion in music or play an instrument, I would tell them to not give up because I’ve already seen many of my friends give up. Keep pursuing your goals and passion, and always expect good things. It’s important not to put yourself down when you’re on this journey and believe you will move forward.”



Yaseen is especially grateful for Saudi Arabia’s Vision 2030 reform plan, which has made it a national priority to support the Kingdom’s youth and promote the arts and culture. (Shutterstock)

Yaseen is especially grateful for Saudi Arabia’s Vision 2030 reform plan, which has made it a national priority to support the Kingdom’s youth and promote the arts and culture. The importance of the ongoing social and cultural changes became especially obvious to him during the pandemic.

“Everything is changing in the new Saudi Arabia. It’s not as we have known it before. It’s changing for the better and I’m happy to see all these shifts,” he said.

“I just hope the government will answer my call to support a large, dedicated music education center and the teachers needed for people to learn.

“I have so many ideas that are ready to be implemented. I want to get the ball rolling as soon as possible.”

Twitter: [@CalineMalek](https://twitter.com/CalineMalek)



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Music business: Is musical talent the new commodity? Saudi R&B star Hamza Hawsawi premieres music video

[UN condemns Iran execution spree, worried about minorities](#)

Author:

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1611952221831661000

Fri, 2021-01-29 18:35

DUBAI: The United Nations human rights office on Friday condemned an alleged spree of 28 executions in Iran, including several prisoners from minority groups, and called on Tehran to halt the hanging of an ethnic Baluchi man. Iran has often faced criticism from world bodies and Western human rights group for its rights record and high number of executions – the world's highest after China, according to Amnesty International. Tehran has dismissed the criticism as baseless and due to a lack of understanding of its laws. “#Iran: We strongly condemn the series of executions – at least 28 – since mid-December, including of people from minority groups,” the UN human rights office said on Twitter.

“We urge the authorities to halt the imminent execution of Javid Dehghan, to review his and other death penalty cases in line with human rights law,” it added.

There was no immediate official Iranian reaction to the UN statement on Friday, the weekend in the country.

Dehghan was sentenced to death after being convicted “following a grossly unfair trial” of belonging to an armed group and involvement in an ambush that killed two Revolutionary Guards, Amnesty International said.

“The court relied on torture-tainted ‘confessions’ and ignored the serious due process abuses committed by Revolutionary Guards agents and prosecution authorities during the investigation process,” Amnesty said.

Iran's Sistan-Baluchestan province borders on Afghanistan, the world's biggest producer of opium, and Pakistan. The area has long been plagued by unrest from drug smuggling gangs and separatist militants. The population of the province is mostly Sunni Muslim, while the majority of Iranians are Shi'ites.

On Thursday, state media said an Iranian member of Daesh was executed in southwestern Khuzestan province, home to many of Iran's ethnic Arabs, for taking part in an attack that killed two paramilitary Basij militiamen.



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Turkey hopes US will rejoin Iran nuclear deal

[Tripoli burns while officials swap accusations](#)

Fri, 2021-01-29 21:53

BEIRUT: The riots that have accompanied the protests in Tripoli for several days, and which led to the burning of the municipal building on Thursday night, have shocked the Lebanese public and officials., but not enough to force politicians to cooperate on forming a new government.

Rioting escalated on Thursday night, when protestors launched Molotov cocktails, hand grenades and stones at the security forces, who attacked protesters with tear gas and rubber and live bullets.

People in Tripoli awoke on Friday morning to the damage caused by overnight clashes. The Lebanese Army Command said: "Three people have been arrested, including a Syrian, for participating in acts of vandalism and starting a fire. Another two were arrested for participating in the riots and keeping the civil defense firefighters from getting to the building."

Protesters have been in the streets since Sunday to oppose the extension of the country's lockdown which was introduced without compensation for those affected by the closures.

Tripoli has a population of over 750,000, with 23 percent living on less than two dollars a day.

Fears prevailed that these riots would spread to other cities and drag the army into mobile clashes, that have already killed one man in Tripoli and wounded scores of protestors and Internal Security Forces (ISF) members.

The Ottoman period municipal building was stormed, looted and set ablaze following a sit-in earlier on Thursday to denounce the deployment of the armed forces to the city.

Tripoli's Mayor Riad Yamaq said: "Those who were behind the riots came from outside Tripoli."

A security source ascertained that "security forces have photos of the people who threw the hand grenades at the building and those people have certain political affiliations."

A political figure in Tripoli told Arab News: "There is an attempt to hold the army responsible for what happened, and that is a huge mistake. The protesters who were in the streets are from poor neighborhoods, have never been to school, do not have jobs and cannot be controlled, regardless of whether they were politically motivated or were spontaneous in their riots. What happened in the city cannot be seen in other cities across Lebanon because these extremely poor neighborhoods only exist in Tripoli."

The source, preferring anonymity, said that "what happened on Thursday night can be avoided in the future if strict measures are imposed by the security forces to deter and suppress protesters without violence, and riots might stop as a result of fear of prosecution."

Riots in Tripoli coincided with a \$246 million loan agreement signed between Lebanon and the World Bank to fund the country's social safety nets, to be later referred to Parliament by the government as a draft decree.

Former Prime Minister Najib Mikati, who is from Tripoli, urged the army on Friday "to control the situation in Tripoli in the next 48 hours. Otherwise, we are going somewhere extremely dangerous."

Prime Minister-designate Saad Hariri described the events as “an organized crime. Every single person who plotted to jeopardize the stability of the city, burn its institutions and occupy its streets should be held responsible for these events,” he said.

Hariri added that those who burned the city were “criminals who do not belong to the city.”

“Why did the army stand still on Thursday night and do nothing about the burning building? Who would protect Tripoli if the army did not?” he asked

Hariri refused, however, to entertain notions of the “old Kandahar story,” referring to allegations of extremist infiltrators in the city in the previous incidents of social unrest.

“If there was a plan to infiltrate extremism into the city, who is opening the doors for it?” he said.



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Lebanon launches online platform for vaccine registration
Violent lockdown protests wound dozens in northern Lebanon

'Secretive' Hamas elections spark internal party row

Fri, 2021-01-29 21:32

GAZA CITY: Secret Hamas internal elections have become the subject of a growing rift in the party amid calls for greater openness and representation ahead of Palestine's general elections scheduled for May.

The General Shoura Council of Hamas rejected a request by the political leadership to postpone internal elections for one year in order for the party to devote time to legislative elections, in which Hamas can maximize its political clout.

Hamas, which will celebrate its 34th anniversary this year, is looking to new leadership to lead the party over the next four years, but internal disputes are surfacing, bucking the trend of secrecy and traditionalism within the movement.

An official Hamas source said that if the Cairo-hosted inter-Palestinian dialogue on general elections proves successful, Hamas will immediately begin internal elections, provided they finish in two months instead of six.

Hamas conducts its elections in complete secrecy in three regions – the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and the diaspora – once every four years in order to choose its leadership. Positions up for grabs range from leadership of sub-regions, Shoura Council spots and Political Bureau posts, which represent the highest “executive authority” in the movement.

The Political Bureau consists of 15 members, distributed evenly across Gaza, the West Bank and the diaspora. They are chosen by the Shoura, Hamas' highest regulatory authority, which maintains an anonymous member count.

The last internal elections were held in 2017 and saw Ismail Haniyeh become head of the Political Bureau – the first time a Gaza-based leader was elected to an executive position.

According to widely circulated information, Haniyeh is not guaranteed to remain in his post for a second term in light of Turkish-Qatari support for the return of former chief Khaled Mashaal, who, according to procedural rules, can become president again.

Haniyeh, who comes from a refugee family, has lived abroad for more than a year, moving between Ankara and Doha, while Mashaal, who was born in Kuwait, has resided permanently in Doha since Hamas left Syria following disputes with the Bashar Assad regime.

Last month, Hamas held elections for new leadership of the High Commanding

Authority in Israeli prisons. Salama Al-Qatawi, a detainee, was appointed chief, detainee Abdel Nasser Issa his deputy, while 13 other prisoners were granted membership of the movement.

The anonymous Hamas source told Arab News that Hamas prisoners are dissatisfied with the leadership positions and their perceived lack of power in decision-making.

The source added that the prisoners are calling for prisons to be adopted as a fourth region in elections, their leader made a member of the new Political Bureau, and his deputy made a member of the Shoura Council.

If their campaign proves successful, the prisoners will have a representative in the Political Bureau for the first time in years.

Wasfi Qabha, a prominent Hamas leader in the West Bank and former minister of prisoners, defended the right of the prisoners to be represented in the Political Bureau.

He expressed dissatisfaction with prisoner and West Bank representation in the last election, adding: "It is not acceptable for the prisoners not to have a representative, and those who represent the West Bank have members residing outside it."

The West Bank is represented in the Political Bureau by exiled ex-prisoners and leaders who have settled in the region, which has led to accusations that its leadership lacks authenticity.

"The principle is that whoever leaves the West Bank is counted on the quota of abroad, and leaves the representation of the West Bank to its people. The West Bank is not a minor child in need of guardianship," Qabha told Arab News.

West Bank elections are supervised by Saleh Al-Arouri, deputy head of the Political Bureau, who has lived abroad following his deportation in 2011 that came after his release from an Israeli prison as part of the Gilad Shalit prisoner exchange.

Hamas' internal system relies on secrecy. It forbids members from directly running for any of its leadership bodies. Rather, it is based on the principle of endorsement, whereby figures are selected to compete for leadership vacancies – from the lower level to the upper.

Recently, new voices have emerged within Hamas calling for a change in the traditional pattern of elections to keep pace with developments and to face both internal and external challenges.

These include Ghazi Hamad, head of the Ministry of Social Development in Gaza, who wrote the article "Hamas elections – between traditional stereotypes and the required renewal," in which he argued that it is time to "break the tradition and adopt change, frankness, boldness and qualitative action."

Hamad addressed the Hamas base, saying that it is wrong to limit the elections of a great movement with a history, popularity and national presence to purely partisan walls.

He added that some people want elections to remain “traditional, stereotypical and secret,” denying members the ability to communicate and revise leadership, and limiting choices only to certain geographic areas.

Khalil Al-Hayya, a member of the Political Bureau, said in an interview with Hamas’ Aqsa TV that the movement took its decision to conduct internal elections as per the scheduled dates, adding that elections will be conducted “smoothly and in a friendly atmosphere.”





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