

[UAE reports 1,590 new COVID-19 cases, 5 deaths](#)

Sun, 2021-01-03 22:14

DUBAI: The UAE on Sunday recorded 1,590 new coronavirus cases and five virus-related deaths.

Officials from the Ministry of Health and Prevention (MoHAP) said the total number of cases since the pandemic began had reached 213,231. The death toll is 679.

It was also announced that 1,609 people had recovered from the virus in the past 24 hours. The total number of recoveries is 189,709.

Officials at the Abu Dhabi Public Health Center (ADPHC), the Department of Education and Knowledge (ADEK), and the Biogenics Laboratory, a member of G42 – one of the leading artificial intelligence companies – discussed efforts to develop rapid testing methodologies that reduce burdens on school children and their families, including conducting COVID-19 saliva tests, which produce fast and accurate results and are more child-friendly.

مسؤولون في مركز أبوظبي للصحة العامة ودائرة التعليم والمعرفة ومختبر بيوجينكس، إحدى شركات مجموعة "جي 42"، يتحدثون عن جهود تطوير منهجيات فحوصات سريعة تخفف الأعباء على أطفال المدارس وعائلاتهم، ومنها إجراء فحوصات "كوفيد-19" باستخدام اللعاب. pic.twitter.com/ItAWXANR4L

– مكتب أبوظبي الإعلامي (@admediaoffice) [January 3, 2021](#)

The three bodies have already performed saliva testing for more than 2,000 children in Abu Dhabi schools, "in order to adopt effective and advanced examination methodologies for COVID-19 and (for) maintaining a healthy learning environment."

"Saliva testing was offered for students aged four to 12 across 25 schools" in December, the Abu Dhabi media office said, adding that "the rollout comes after completing phase one of saliva testing in October."

Tariq Al-Ameri, director of the Licensing and Education Compliance Department at ADEK, said: "The health and safety of the school community in Abu Dhabi remains our top priority, and in line with our efforts to continue maintaining a healthy environment in private and charter schools in the emirate of Abu Dhabi, we were keen to conduct periodic COVID-19 checks for all school personnel as of the beginning of the academic year, while requiring all students over the age of 12 to submit a negative test result before returning to school."

Ashish Koshy, CEO of G42 Healthcare, said: "Regular COVID-19 checks have become a part of our lives, and we at G42 Healthcare and Biogenix Labs are eager to continue advancing additional innovation in COVID-19 testing for the wider community."

Meanwhile, Abu Dhabi Department of Economic Development said it has permitted licensed restaurants, cafes and tourist service facilities across the emirate

to provide shisha (hookah) services, and that the move conformed with precautionary measures to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Elsewhere, Kuwait reported 269 new coronavirus cases, raising the total number to 151,343. The death toll remained at 937 after no coronavirus-related deaths were reported in the previous 24 hours.

تعلن [#وزارة_الصحة](#) عن تأكيد إصابة 269 حالة جديدة، وتسجيل 281 حالة شفاء، ولم تسجل أي حالة وفاة جديدة بـ [#فيروس_كورونا_المستجد](#) COVID-19 ، ليصبح إجمالي عدد الحالات 151,343 حالة pic.twitter.com/fhk200K3S5

- وزارة الصحة - الكويت (@KUWAIT_MOH) [January 3, 2021](#)

Oman's Health Ministry said that its total number of cases had reached 129,404 and the death toll was 1,501.

[#Statement](#) No. 258
January 3, 2021 pic.twitter.com/kcwcw3bm0w

- وزارة الصحة - عُمان (@OmaniMOH) [January 3, 2021](#)

In Bahrain, zero deaths was reported, keeping the death toll to 352, while 294 new infected cases were confirmed.

Out of 10515 COVID-19 tests carried out on 3 January 2021, 294 new cases have been detected among 149 expatriate workers, 127 new cases are contacts of active cases, and 18 are travel related. There were 128 recoveries from [#COVID19](#), increasing total recoveries to 90686 pic.twitter.com/6DnX4TDcT5

- مملكة البحرين | وزارة الصحة (@MOH_Bahrain) [January 3, 2021](#)



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[Ashish Koshy](#)

Saudi Arabia records major decline in virus tally since March UAE reports 1,856 new COVID-19 cases, record increase for 6th straight day

In Somalia, COVID-19 vaccines are distant as virus spreads

Mon, 2021-01-04 01:44

MOGADISHU: As richer countries race to distribute COVID-19 vaccines, Somalia remains the rare place where much of the population hasn't taken the coronavirus seriously. Some fear that's proven to be deadlier than anyone knows.

"Certainly, our people don't use any form of protective measures, neither masks nor social distancing," Abdirizak Yusuf Hirabeh, the government's COVID-19 incident manager, said in an interview. "If you move around the city (of Mogadishu) or countrywide, nobody even talks about it." And yet infections are rising, he said.

It is places like Somalia, the Horn of Africa nation torn apart by three decades of conflict, that will be last to see COVID-19 vaccines in any significant quantity. With part of the country still held by the Al-Qaeda-linked Al-Shabab extremist group, the risk of the virus becoming endemic in some hard-to-reach areas is strong – a fear for parts of Africa amid the slow arrival of vaccines.

"There is no real or practical investigation into the matter," said Hirabeh, who is also the director of the Martini hospital in Mogadishu, the largest treating COVID-19 patients, which saw seven new patients the day he spoke. He acknowledged that neither facilities nor equipment are adequate in Somalia to tackle the virus.

Fewer than 27,000 tests for the virus have been conducted in Somalia, a country of more than 15 million people, one of the lowest rates in the world. Fewer than 4,800 cases have been confirmed, including at least 130 deaths. Some worry the virus will sink into the population as yet another poorly diagnosed but deadly fever.

For 45-year-old street beggar Hassan Mohamed Yusuf, that fear has turned into near-certainty. "In the beginning we saw this virus as just another form of the flu," he said.

Then three of his young children died after having a cough and high fever. As residents of a makeshift camp for people displaced by conflict or drought, they had no access to coronavirus testing or proper care.

At the same time, Yusuf said, the virus hurt his efforts to find money to treat his family as "we can't get close enough" to people to beg.

Early in the pandemic, Somalia's government did attempt some measures to limit the spread of the virus, closing all schools and shutting down all

domestic and international flights. Mobile phones rang with messages about the virus.

SPEEDREAD

Fewer than 27,000 tests for the virus have been conducted in Somalia, a country of more than 15 million people, one of the lowest rates in the world.

But social distancing has long disappeared in the country's streets, markets or restaurants. On Thursday, some 30,000 people crammed into a stadium in Mogadishu for a regional football match with no face masks or other anti-virus measures in sight.

Mosques in the Muslim nation never faced restrictions, for fear of the reactions.

"Our religion taught us hundreds of years ago that we should wash our hands, faces and even legs five times every day and our women should take face veils as they're often weaker. So that's the whole prevention of the disease, if it really exists," said Abdulkadir Sheikh Mohamud, an imam in Mogadishu.

"I left the matter to Allah to protect us," said Ahmed Abdulle Ali, a shop owner in the capital. He attributed the rise in coughing during prayers to the changing of seasons.

A more important protective factor is the relative youth of Somalia's people, said Dr. Abdurahman Abdullahi Abdi Bilaal, who works in a clinic in the capital. More than 80 percent of the country's population is under age 30.

"The virus is here, absolutely, but the resilience of people is owing to age," he said.

It's the lack of post-mortem investigations in the country that are allowing the true extent of the virus to go undetected, he said.

The next challenge in Somalia is not simply obtaining COVID-19 vaccines but also persuading the population to accept them.

That will take time, "just the same as what it took for our people to believe in the polio or measles vaccines," a concerned Bilaal said.

Hirabeh, in charge of Somalia's virus response, agreed that "our people have little confidence in the vaccines," saying that many Somalis hate the needles. He called for serious awareness campaigns to change minds.

The logistics of any COVID-19 vaccine rollout are another major concern.

Hirabeh said Somalia is expecting the first vaccines in the first quarter of 2021, but he worries that the country has no way to handle a vaccine like the Pfizer one that requires being kept at a temperature of minus 70 degrees Celsius.

"One that could be kept between minus 10 and minus 20 might suit the Third World like our country," he said.



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Death toll rises to 16 in overnight Somalia suicide bombing
Suicide bomb attack targeting Somalia prime minister's visit kills at least 15

[Kuwait's ambassador to Saudi Arabia highlights importance of upcoming GCC summit](#)

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Sun, 2021-01-03 00:02

LONDON: Kuwait's ambassador to Saudi Arabia stressed the importance of the upcoming 41st Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Summit in light of developments in the region.

There is a "fraternal and positive atmosphere" among GCC leaders "which reflects the spirit of responsibility and sincere belief in the importance of strengthening Gulf solidarity in facing common challenges and establishing

peace and stability for the benefit” of the council, Sheikh Ali Al-Khaled Al-Sabah said.

Sheikh Ali added that “the Gulf faces major economic, development and political issues and challenges,” and that GCC leaders will discuss all of these issues and challenges with one vision that stems from their belief in a common destiny and their keenness to preserve the interests of the region’s countries and their peoples.



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Saudi Arabia’s King Salman welcomes participation of Gulf leaders in GCC summit
King Salman invites Emir of Qatar to GCC Summit

[UN eyes bigger role for creative economy in promoting sustainable](#)

development

Sat, 2021-01-02 23:35

NEW YORK CITY: COVID-19 has plunged theaters into darkness, thrown down the shutters on art galleries, and canceled innumerable concerts, exhibitions and book signings. According to the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the cancelation of public performances alone has cost authors roughly 30 percent of their royalties worldwide, while the global film industry has reported a revenue loss of \$7 billion.

By disrupting cultural life, the coronavirus pandemic has brought to light the chronic volatility of the creative industries. Many artists were already struggling to make ends meet, often working part-time under precarious contracts. For some, lockdown measures introduced to contain the outbreak were the final straw.

And yet, at the same time, COVID-19 has revealed the industries' immense potential. Beside their therapeutic effects, arts and culture are also drivers of social cohesion, inclusion, innovation and growth, not only for small businesses but for the broader economy. This potential, to a great extent, remains untapped.



Beside their therapeutic effects, arts and culture are also drivers of social cohesion, inclusion, innovation and growth, not only for small businesses but for the broader economy. (AFP/File Photo)

Marisa Henderson, UNCTAD's Geneva-based head of the Creative Economy Program, says she sees this potential everywhere she turns, from the Arabic calligraphy she has seen in Dubai, to the jewellery designers she has met in Doha, and the women she has seen telling children's stories in Gulf libraries.

"Women have been the engine of the creative economy, doing it without even noticing: Sewing, for example, or designing a piece of clothing, or embroidering and telling stories," Henderson told Arab News.

It is with this in mind that the UN placed women and girls at the heart of its resolution to make 2021 an International Year of Creative Economy for Sustainable Development, recognizing the need to promote inclusive economic growth, foster innovation and provide opportunities and empowerment for all.

Indonesia was the main sponsor of the proposal, which was presented by a global grouping of more than 80 countries.



With so many urgent global challenges to contend with, the arts have often found themselves pushed down the pecking order. (AFP/File Photo)

Marking a watershed for the creative industries, resolution 74/198 singled out the creative economy as an important tool on the path to achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals – a comprehensive set of universal targets to eradicate poverty in all its forms, protect the planet and improve lives. The 17 goals were adopted by all UN member states in 2015 as part of the 2030 Agenda.

With so many urgent global challenges to contend with, the arts have often

found themselves pushed down the pecking order. This is changing, however, in part thanks to technological advances, which have upended old categories and definitions, giving rise to new, hitherto undefined artforms, making the creative industries more accessible to audiences and consumers, and more profitable for investors.

“We have goods that we’ve never heard of before,” said Henderson. “3D music: How do you classify that in the creative services? How do you count and sell it?”

“Technology is affecting the way artists sell jewelry, toys, arts and crafts, paintings, and musical instruments. Visual arts are creative goods, too. But now they’re being sold online, so there’s a service component involved.”

INNUMBERS

Creative industry

*** 30m – People employed worldwide in cultural and creative sectors.**

*** 10% – The sectors’ projected contribution to global GDP.**

Redefining creative industries and improving the way data is collected is a top priority for UNCTAD, as the agency gears up for a busy year. “We need to know so we understand what we’re talking about,” said Henderson.

“This is important for policymakers and governments who are trying, for example, to regulate downloads. How much money does the platform get versus what the creative gets? This is usually done through Google and Spotify, but the government has a role of facilitating it.

“Generally, we don’t have that kind of information in developing countries.”

UNCTAD’s Creative Economy Program helps developing countries maximize their gains from these industries to generate employment and reduce poverty.

The agency’s help is demand-driven. While countries mobilize their own funds, they come to UNCTAD with their own particular set of problems, seeking the UN agency’s data-driven insight to help carve out a space for their creative industries.



Dancers of the Palestinian Jafra Dabke Team perform a traditional dabke dance while wearing latex gloves and surgical masks for people confined due to a COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic lockdown in the village of Tarqumia northwest of Hebron in the occupied West Bank, on April 15, 2020. (AFP/File Photo)

Henderson offers the example of Omani music, which she recently discovered. "It was very traditional, but it also had very modern elements to it that are different from what you conceive of as Arabic music. I thought, 'this music is a creative industry.' In Oman, they have so much potential, it's incredible."

UNCTAD helps countries identify their so-called "leakages," where their specific needs lie, but also their trade potential: How can they attract investments? What are the legal instruments that need to be in place for implementation? Then a national conversation follows, involving artists and all other stakeholders.

UNCTAD helps draft a plan of action, the execution of which relies on cooperation between different ministries and agencies. "We make sure that the infrastructure is not imposed. It has to be one that is created for their benefit," Henderson said.

While the main problem in developing countries remains the lack of infrastructure, countries who do have a strategy, such as Malaysia, have a difficult time implementing it.

"And I understand why it's hard. This is not an industry that can be managed by a single ministry. For the creative industries, you have to bring together

the ministries of culture, trade, technology, intellectual property, and foreign affairs,” Henderson said.

“UNCTAD perceives creative economy as a circle. It is not just art. You need to make use of these industries to capture investment, have a production cycle, create employment, and hopefully be able to export. It’s a creative circle.”



Sherazade Mami, a 28-year-old Tunisian professional dancer and performer at the Caracalla dance theatre and a teacher at the Caracalla dance school, practices while wearing a surgical mask on the roof of her apartment building in the suburb of Dekwaneh on the eastern outskirts of Lebanon’s capital Beirut on April 4, 2020. (AFP/File Photo)

At the first World Conference on Creative Economy in Bali in 2018, an informal group of governments, private stakeholders and NGOs came together under the moniker “Friends of creative economy,” injecting momentum into a nascent movement that believes in sharing experiences as part of the engine of creative economy.

The UAE took the floor in Bali and offered to host the next round, which will take place in December.

“Arab states in general are really pushing this,” said Henderson. “The Emiratis realize there are a lot of things, like gaming and apps, that are not necessarily related to culture as we think about it but are in fact industries. And the driver, the petrol, the main commodity behind these

industries is creativity.

“The Emiratis realize that the creative economy is beyond making money, even beyond culture. It is about social change. They know that by encouraging creativity, they will bring about change for so many in society, including young people and women.”

She added: “They know they can buy very precious art and put it in a museum. But they want something different: They are looking to inspire people. They want to integrate creativity into their culture and bring it to a new level.



A painting by a Palestinian artist is seen during an exhibition entitled “Corona and the art” organized by the Arts & Crafts Village, a centre that helps promote artists and their work in an attempt to maintain and preserve the Palestinian heritage, in Gaza City on November 12, 2020. (AFP/File Photo)

“But they are also very wise economically. They see the importance of creative economy in terms of economic growth.”

The program of activities to implement the International Year of Creative Economy kicks off on Jan. 25. The event includes the launch of a new book, co-prefaced by Henderson.

“What could be more fitting entering a new era than a dedicated focus on creativity and the role it can play in helping us achieve the Agenda for Sustainable Development 2030?” she said.

“More than ever we need creative thinking, innovation and problem-solving to imagine ourselves out of the furrow we have been in. The creative industries,

which are the lifeblood of the creative economy, are well placed to help.”

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



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Lebanese creative fashions traditional tableware from Beirut blast's broken glass
Major boost for Saudi creative industries at Misk Global Forum

Sudan says Nile dam talks to resume Sunday

Author:

AFP

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Sat, 2021-01-02 18:57

KHARTOUM: Sudan is to join a new round of talks with Egypt and Ethiopia Sunday in a bid to resolve a long-running dispute over a huge Ethiopian dam on the Blue Nile, state media reported.

The three countries have held multiple rounds of talks since Ethiopia broke ground on the project in 2011 but they have so far failed to produce an agreement on the filling and operation of the vast reservoir behind the 145-meter (475-foot) tall dam.

The last, held by video-conference in early November, broke up without making any headway.

Late last month, Egypt called in Ethiopia's charge d'affaires after its foreign ministry spokesman claimed the dam dispute had become a welcome distraction from domestic problems for the Cairo government.

Sudan's state news agency SUNA said that officials from current African Union chair South Africa would be involved in the new round of talks.

Citing an unnamed official, SUNA said Sudan would propose granting African Union experts a "bigger role" in the negotiations for a binding agreement on the dam's filling and operation.

Cairo has expressed fears that the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam will severely reduce the Nile's flow, with devastating effects for the more than 97 million Egyptians dependent on it.

Ethiopia says the hydroelectric power produced at the dam is vital to meet the power needs of its even larger population.

It insists downstream countries' water supplies will not be affected.

Sudan, which suffered deadly floods last summer when the Blue Nile reached its highest level since records began more than a century ago, hopes that the new dam will help regulate the river's flow.

The Blue Nile, which meets the White Nile in the Sudanese capital Khartoum, provides the great majority of the combined Nile's flow through northern Sudan and Egypt to the Mediterranean.



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Egyptian officials: Roadside bombing in Sinai kills 2 police 'Our children die in our hands': Floods ravage South Sudan