

Egyptian presidency: Spread of COVID-19 will be higher in second wave

Author:

Wed, 2020-11-25 22:27

CAIRO: Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi revealed the approximate date for the availability of a vaccine for the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), as well as that of contracting to obtain the necessary share of vaccinations.

During a speech, President El-Sisi said the vaccine would not be available before the middle of next year, explaining that during the coming days, a contract would be made to obtain Egypt's share of the vaccine.

He said Egypt has had a specialized scientific committee that has been managing the crisis since December of last year and that would now be dedicated to studying the most appropriate vaccines.

Egypt has taken many measures at the economic level, including an EGP100 billion (\$6.4 billion) initiative to confront the first wave of the virus.

El-Sisi said that during the management of the first wave, the state was forced to take measures that should not be repeated again.

"This will only happen with your cooperation and eagerness and by taking the matter seriously. We had to partially isolate and close universities, schools, restaurants and tourist facilities during the first wave, and we do not want to repeat this," he said.

He urged citizens to avoid sitting in closed spaces, to respect social distancing and to wear face masks to reduce the chances of contracting the virus. He also called on companies, factories and public transportation companies to continue to enforce the use of face masks, also calling on the prime minister to provide greater quantities of face masks in schools and universities.

Bassam Rady, spokesman for the Egyptian presidency, confirmed that the president's speech came as a result of the increased number of new COVID-19 cases.

"During today's meeting, it became clear that COVID-19 infections have increased all around the world, especially with the approach of December, which confirms that the second wave will be different from the first, as the symptoms differ with a wider spread of the disease," Rady said.

Egyptian Minister of Higher Education Khaled Abdel Ghaffar said that the occupancy rate of intensive-care beds in university hospitals is at 38 percent and that the virus is still under control. The government is expecting an increase in the number of cases during the months of December and January.

COVID-19 cases in Egypt continue to rise, as 361 new cases and 13 deaths were recorded on Tuesday night.



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Egyptian authorities confirm second wave of COVID-19
Egypt sets shop opening hours as second coronavirus wave approaches

[Turkey announces asymptomatic coronavirus case numbers for first time since July](#)

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Wed, 2020-11-25 18:29

ISTANBUL: Turkey recorded 28,351 new coronavirus cases in the last 24 hours, including 6,814 with symptoms, Health Minister Fahrettin Koca said on Wednesday, the first time since July Ankara has included asymptomatic cases

in the total.

The total was by far the highest reported by the government since the outbreak began. The previous daily high, which only included symptomatic cases, was 7,381, recorded on Tuesday.

Ankara had only been reporting symptomatic cases since the summer, which critics said masked the true scale of the outbreak.

During a news conference on Wednesday, Koca unexpectedly said Ankara would begin announcing the total numbers.

"In line with requests from our people, we plan on including positive cases that do not show symptoms in the daily table," he said, adding that around 80% of people who test positive were asymptomatic or lightly symptomatic.

Health Ministry data on Wednesday showed 168 people had died due to COVID-19 in the last 24 hours, the most since the beginning of the outbreak, raising the death toll to 12,840.

Symptomatic patients totaled 467,730 as of Wednesday, data at the ministry's website showed. While the case total was not announced, Koca said it would be included in the table in coming days.

Separately, he said Turkey had signed a contract to buy 50 million doses of COVID-19 vaccine from China's Sinovac Biotech Ltd.

"The important thing here for us to start using vaccines which are known to be effective and reliable. ... I think the vaccination calendar could start on Dec. 11," Koca said.

Sinovac's experimental COVID-19 vaccine CoronaVac triggered a quick immune response, but the level of antibodies produced was lower than in people who had recovered, preliminary trial results showed.



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Turkey, Russia discuss involving other countries in Nagorno-Karabakh cease-fire efforts
Debate rages over Turkey's surging pandemic numbers

Sweden urges Iran to call off execution of medical researcher

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Tue, 2020-11-24 18:06

STOCKHOLM: Sweden's foreign minister Ann Linde said Tuesday she had spoken to her Iranian counterpart to formally object to the planned execution of an Iranian-Swedish professor sentenced to death on spying charges.

Linde, who announced the call on Twitter, said she had been in touch with Iranian foreign minister Mohammad Javad Zarif following reports that Iran was preparing to carry out the execution of Ahmadreza Djalali, a specialist in emergency medicine.

"Sweden denounces the death penalty and is working to not have the sentence against Djalali carried out," Linde wrote in a post to Twitter.

Djalali, formerly based in Stockholm where he worked at the Karolinska Institute, a medical university, was arrested during a visit to Iran in April 2016.

He was subsequently found guilty of passing information about two Iranian nuclear scientists to Israel's Mossad intelligence agency that led to their assassinations.

While imprisoned he was granted Swedish citizenship in February 2018, only months after his death sentence was confirmed by Iran's Supreme Court.

Djalali has claimed he is being punished for refusing to spy for Iran while working in Europe.

His lawyers also claimed they were blocked from presenting submissions ahead of the Supreme Court hearing.

Djalali's death sentence has been widely condemned by rights groups including Amnesty International and by UN rights experts.

The imprisoned academic's wife told news agency TT on Tuesday that her husband had informed her that he was being moved to another prison where he would await his sentence in isolation, indicating an execution was imminent.



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Iran sentences British lawyer to 10 years in jail for spying
Iran executes man convicted of spying on US-slain general

[Survey sheds light on hopes, expectations of Arab region's college students](#)

Tue, 2020-11-24 23:31

DUBAI: Conflict and turmoil may be the defining features of the past decade in the Middle East and North Africa, yet polling data suggests that those among the Arab region's largest demographic – the youth – who are getting a college education are optimistic about the future.

Such a conclusion can be drawn from a research project entitled “What about

youth?" that surveyed the opinions of students in Arab countries where people under the age of 25 account for more than 35 percent of the population.

The study, conducted by Dubai International Academic City, KPMG and The Talent Enterprise, was carried out over a period of 24 months, concluding in March 2020 at the onset of the coronavirus pandemic. The findings represent the views of more than 153,000 students from countries such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE, with Emiratis accounting for more than half of all regional nationals surveyed.



Arab governments could share more locally relevant labor market intelligence about future jobs, says Radhika Punshi. (AFP)

The findings show that almost eight out of 10 students are excited about what the future holds, while 88 percent believe the best is yet to come. A follow-up study is underway to examine whether the COVID-19 crisis, which has devastated the job market and wage growth across the Arab region, has dampened the optimism reflected in the survey.

Those who took part in the survey are keenly aware of the challenges they face when they enter the global job market. The majority of students (72 percent) are confident the skills they are learning at university, together with their personal attributes, will enable them to get a job anywhere in the world.

Their main concern, however, is that universities do not provide sufficient career guidance and professional support.

Marketa Simkova, director of KPMG's People and Change practice, said that although students are more aware of what kinds of careers are open to them in the age of information, they still want personal guidance.

"A missing piece is an awareness of their personal aptitude and preferences, and an understanding of which careers will be most meaningful and gratifying for them," Simkova told Arab News.



Radhika Punshi, an organizational psychologist, human capital expert and managing director of Dubai-based The Talent Enterprise

Radhika Punshi, an organizational psychologist, human capital expert and managing director of Dubai-based The Talent Enterprise, said the survey shows students feel “personally confident about their own capabilities and skills,” but lack formal and informed guidance.

“This is evident from the finding that only 48 percent of students would study the same course again, and only 49 percent would study in the same university again, if given a choice,” she said.

Putting this trend into even sharper relief, a majority of students in the survey (over 60 percent) said they depend on family and friends for career advice, while just 3 percent said they rely on a career-guidance counsellor.

“Even with the best intentions, family or friends are not going to be fully

aware of all the various career possibilities and future jobs that exist,” Punshi said. “There is also familial pressure, where kids of doctors are expected to be doctors, kids of engineers expected to be engineers and so on.”

In her line of work, Punshi often meets students who are scared to have “courageous career conversations” with their families.

“One thing that would help is for youth to have an objective assessment of their strengths, skills and interests, both towards the end of their school years, and mid-way through university to steer their future career decisions,” she said.

Only then will students feel prepared to have career-focused discussions at home.

Simkova said one way to remedy this is for universities to partner up with employers to immerse students in their preferred career paths through access to internships and alumni mentorship programs.



A majority of students in the survey (over 60 percent) said they depend on family and friends for career advice. (AFP)

“This will help provide them with a comprehensive view of the kinds of careers they can craft for themselves,” she said.

Additionally, universities could hire career counselors and employer engagement teams with extensive networks of potential employers, Simkova

suggested. Through these channels, students could be given access to corporate presentations that allow employers to explain what they have to offer and what they are looking for in future hires.

Not only could this facilitate the hiring process – it could also provide job seekers with reliable options that offer career assessments based on their personality, skills and preferences, she said.

For her part, Punshi said the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries and other Arab governments could share more locally relevant labor market intelligence about future jobs and skill demands to help to better align talent supply and demand.

“There is a huge need for a regionally relevant career guidance qualification program to train career guidance counsellors through a curriculum that addresses local socio-cultural issues and the labor-market landscape,” she said.



Universities could hire career counselors and employer engagement teams with extensive networks of potential employers, says Marketa Simkova. (AFP)

At the same time, employers must be incentivized to engage more with education and to offer internships and work study programs.

Another interesting finding in the survey was that women (14 percent) are more likely than men (12 percent) to hold out for their dream job.

“The data indicates that women tend to be more selective in their choice of a dream job and are willing to wait longer to shape a career that fits their

aspirations,” Simkova said.

While more data is needed to explore the reason for this gap, she felt this could be bridged by building a gender-inclusive culture and allowing a conversation about diversity to influence how organizations recruit and develop their staff.

Separate research indicates women and girls in the Arab region on average tend to underestimate their abilities and performance.

“There is a significant confidence gap,” said Punshi. “For example, women are more likely to apply for a promotion only if they believe they meet 100 percent of the criteria, where men will apply even if they meet 50 percent of the requirements.”

Research conducted by Carnegie Mellon University found that men initiate salary negotiations four times as often as women, and that when women do negotiate, they ask for just 30 percent of the money that men request.

The “What about youth?” survey echoes these findings – that girls are more likely to compromise on salary than boys.

“There are many reasons for this – societal, socio-cultural, familial – with deep-rooted beliefs and stereotypes all over the world, and a lot more needs to be done, right from the early years, into higher education, into employment, to really shift the game around gender inclusion,” said Punshi.

Like many experts in her field, she believes that although the region continues to make significant strides in gender equality in the workplace, especially with growing labor force participation among women in Saudi Arabia and equal pay regulations in UAE, “we can always do more.”

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Youth hold key to global future, experts tell Riyadh G20 summitY20 summit gives platform for voice of global youth

[Judge files charges against 2 over Lebanon port blast](#)

Author:

Associated Press

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BEIRUT: A Lebanese prosecutor filed charges Tuesday against current and former customs officials over the massive blast at Beirut's port in August, including a former customs chief who was reportedly the point man for the militant Hezbollah group at the facility.

State prosecutor Ghassan Khoury charged senior customs official Hani Hajj Shehadeh and former customs chief in Beirut, Moussa Hazimeh, on Tuesday, according to state-run National News Agency. The report didn't reveal the charges or give additional details.

Hazimeh was reportedly the point man for Hezbollah at the Port of Beirut when nearly 3,000 tons of highly explosive fertilizer were stored there more than six years ago.

The 2,750 tons of ammonium nitrate blew up Aug. 4, killing more than 200 people, injuring thousands and causing damage worth billions of dollars, mostly in nearby neighborhoods.

Beirut's port is considered one of the most corrupt institutions in the country, where ruling political factions including Hezbollah have divvied up positions and created fiefdoms.

National News Agency said that in charging Shehadeh and Hazimeh, the number of those now charged in connection with the explosion reached 33, of whom 25 are under arrest. None of the charges have been made public and the process has been highly secretive.

Riad Kobaissi, an investigative reporter with Al Jadeed TV, has followed corruption at the port and within the customs authorities since 2012. He said all the political factions in the country benefited from using the port as patronage, and most overlooked dubious dealings. He said many people knew of the initial warning about the danger of the stored ammonium nitrate in 2014 by a customs official. He said that includes Hazimeh, who Kobaissi described as Hezbollah's former point man at the port.

NNA said the new cases were referred to Judge Fadi Sawwan, who is probing the blast. It said Sawwan had questioned the two earlier as witnesses but they will be questioned again as suspects.

The report comes amid complaints the investigation is moving too slowly.

Families of the victims are desperate to know what triggered the blast, one of the largest non-nuclear explosions in history.



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