

Lebanon pins economic hopes on talks with Israel

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BEIRUT: The first session of US-mediated Lebanese-Israeli talks under UN auspices will kick off on Oct. 14 in the Lebanese border town of Naqoura. The negotiations aim to demarcate the disputed maritime border and, later, the land border. Lebanon is hoping that successful talks will provide an appropriate security environment for oil and gas companies to do exploration work off its coast.

The first session will have low-level representation, with military and Energy Ministry officials representing Lebanon.

The UN-demarcated land border between Lebanon and Israel – the Blue Line – includes several points that are disputed by the two sides.

Lebanon signed in 2018 its first offshore oil and gas exploration and production contracts with three companies – France's Total, Italy's Eni and Russia's Novatek – to explore Block 4 and Block 9 in the Mediterranean. The latter block is disputed by Israel.

Successful exploration would provide a lifeline for Lebanon's ailing economy. The contracts signed between Lebanon and the consortium obligates the drilling of an exploration well before the end of 2020.

These companies have two options: Either proceed with the drilling despite the Israeli-Lebanese dispute, or negotiate with Beirut to postpone the exploration.

"Negotiating with Israel has important political and security results as it will lead to reducing current tensions," said Muhannad Al-Hajj Ali, a researcher at the Carnegie Middle East Center.

He added that demarcating borders would remove the justification of the Lebanese Shiite militia Hezbollah for possessing weapons.

"Lebanon is entering a new phase. It's possible to negotiate a final solution to the Lebanese-Israeli conflict, and then weapons will be included in Lebanon's internal formula and, through a gradual phase, in a military strategy," he said.

"The Lebanese Army, therefore, becomes the umbrella, and Hezbollah's cadres may be integrated into the army or be a stand-alone wing under the army's command, in return for a political gain that doesn't violate the balance and parity. There's talk of making the army's command Shiite."



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Lebanon announces local lockdowns as COVID-19 cases rise
Lebanon, Israel to hold maritime border talks

[Yemen kills three Al-Qaeda militants, captures two in raid in Mahra](#)

Author:

Fri, 2020-10-02 22:10

AL-MUKALLA: Yemeni security forces, backed by the Arab coalition, killed three Al-Qaeda militants and captured two others in a raid on their hideout on Friday in Al-Ghaydah city, the capital of the western province of Mahra, local media and residents said.

Large explosions rocked many districts in the city of Al-Ghaydah on Friday morning as security forces raided a building, triggering a gunfire battle.

“The explosions began shaking the city at nearly 2.30 a.m. and lasted for

nine hours," a resident who preferred to remain anonymous told Arab News by telephone, adding that security authorities sealed off the area, preventing people from leaving their homes.

Army troops and security forces also intensified security measures and checkups at the province's main entrances. Local media said that when security forces were about to storm the building, an Al-Qaeda militant blew up his explosive-laden belt, killing himself and two others.

Two other militants surrendered during the raid, local media reported. Mohammed Ali Yasser, the governor of Mahra, did not answer Arab News calls.

Al-Qaeda in Yemen, also known as Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula or AQAP, has suffered fatal blows since early 2016 when Arab coalition-backed Yemeni forces pushed them out of their main strongholds in southern Yemen after killing a large number of their operatives. In 2015, the militants cashed in on the anarchy and security vacuum that ensued from the earlier military expansion of the Iranian-backed Houthis to seize control of the main cities in southern Yemen, including the city of Al-Mukalla, the capital of the southeastern province of Hadramout.

Prisoner swap

The internationally recognized government and pro-independence Southern Transitional Council (STC) on Thursday swapped dozens of prisoners who were captured during fighting this year.

A local army officer told Arab News that the army released 21 separatists in exchange for 37 army soldiers, including Brig. Sayf Al-Ghoufesh, the commander of 115 Brigade in Abyan. "The prisoner swap took place in Sheikh Salem area in Abyan following a successful mediation," the officer said.

In May, a major offensive by army troops triggered heavy fighting with STC forces in the southern province of Abyan and led to the death of dozens of troops on both sides. Despite the heavy fighting, neither the army nor the separatists managed to make any major military breakthrough. A Saud-led military committee is currently in the contested areas in Abyan to monitor a cease-fire agreed under the Riyadh Agreement.

Determination

Yemeni Defense Minister Lt. Gen. Mohammad Ali Al-Maqdashi said on Thursday that army troops and allied tribesmen were determined to foil Iranian designs in Yemen and put an end to the Houthi coup against the internationally recognized government.

Inspecting liberated areas in the northern province of Jouf, Al-Maqdashi thanked the Arab coalition for its military support to the Yemeni army, adding that tribesmen in Marib, Jouf and Al-Bayda have shored up army troops in their continuing battle against the Houthis.

"Today we are more confident that our people will prevail and the Houthis and the Iranian project will not survive," Al-Maqdashi said, according to the official news agency SABA.



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Saudi project clears 1,250 more mines in Yemen

[Russia to send 25m doses of coronavirus vaccine to Egypt, sources say](#)

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Fri, 2020-10-02 19:50

CAIRO: Russian sources claim that their country will deliver 25 million doses of the Sputnik coronavirus (COVID-19) vaccine to Egypt. The Egyptian government has not confirmed the claims.

Russia's sovereign National Wealth Fund (NWF) said it had approved the delivery of 25 million doses of its potential vaccine to Egypt via FARCO-

PHARMA, which it described as a “pioneering pharmaceutical company” in Egypt. In a report published in the Lancet medical journal, Russian scientists said that those who were injected with the Sputnik vaccine had developed COVID-19 antibodies without showing any dangerous side effects. Russia licensed the vaccine for domestic use in August, becoming the first country to take such a step.

Egypt’s Ministry of Health and Population spokesman Dr. Khaled Megahed said a number of companies in different countries had submitted reports to the ministry to conduct clinical research on COVID-19 vaccines and that some of those companies had expressed a desire to cooperate with Egypt in manufacturing the vaccine. However, he said that none of those requests has been approved and all are pending further reviews.

The Ministry of Health is currently conducting third-phase clinical testing on two COVID-19 vaccines in cooperation with the Chinese companies SINOPHARM and Sinovak.

So far, 103,198 cases of COVID-19 have been recorded in Egypt, with 96,494 recoveries and 5,930 fatalities.

A number of countries have already purchased the Sputnik vaccine, including India, which has signed a deal with the NWF for the delivery of 100 million doses. India has recorded the second-highest number of cases of COVID-19 in the world.

Brazil reportedly purchased 50 million doses of the vaccine and will start testing it in October on 10,000 volunteers. Mexico purchased 32 million doses, Uzbekistan 35 million, and Nepal 25 million.

Egypt’s Minister of Health Hala Zayed took part in the third phase of a clinical trial two days ago as part of the G42 package and the For Humanity initiative, a cooperative project between the Chinese government and Emirates Healthcare Group, which includes research into potential COVID-19 vaccines as well as cooperation in manufacturing any successful vaccine. Zayed said Egypt is taking part in the third phase of two clinical trials – along with 100 other countries.

The For Humanity initiative, in cooperation with the Chinese government, involves trials in four Arab countries: Egypt, the UAE, Bahrain and Jordan.



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Saudi Arabia announces 29 more deaths from COVID-19
Dubai announces amendments to COVID-19 travel rules

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

Fri, 2020-10-02 19:39

DUBAI: At a time when coronavirus cases are rising worldwide, fear of contracting COVID-19 is actually falling, surveys in Saudi Arabia, the UAE and several Western countries suggest.

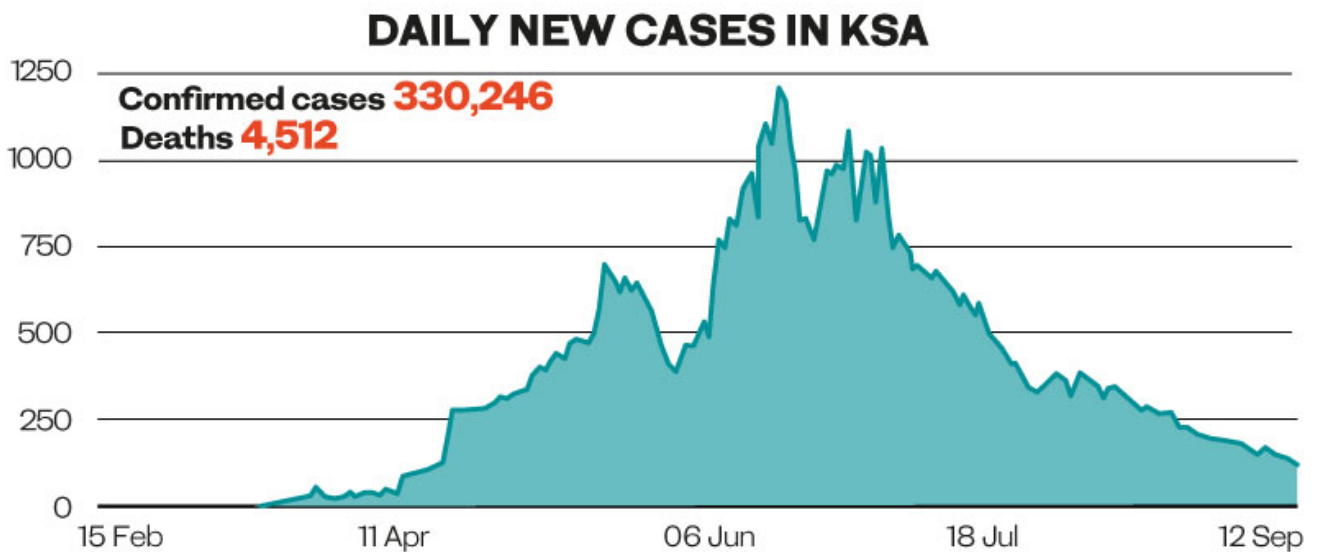
Since the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the pandemic on March 11,

almost 32 million people have been infected and almost a million have died, according to Johns Hopkins University data.

The virus has thrown the world economy into turmoil, pushing many countries into recession. Experts believe a properly tested vaccine is still months away, forcing governments to tread a fine line between boosting the economy while keeping new infections at bay.

The virus and lockdown measures have fundamentally changed working habits, social interactions and even family life.

Over the past six months, the online research firm YouGov has been tracking public attitudes and behaviors surrounding the pandemic, using its global research panel of more than 8 million respondents.



A review of its latest data shows that emotions surrounding COVID-19 are far more complex than they were at the outset of the pandemic. In many key markets, fear of catching the virus is now lower than it was six months ago.

As many countries, including France and the UK, impose new lockdown measures in response to the long-anticipated second spike, YouGov's data shows that consumer reactions to the pandemic are more muted, and that fear of catching the virus has fallen since March.

Sociologists attribute this to a growing acceptance of the "new normal." After an initial wave of anxiety, a new pace of life has emerged. Meanwhile, governments and medical officials continue to urge the public to take precautions.



Health workers wearing protective jumpsuits, carry the body of a 62-year-old displaced Syrian man who died of the COVID-19 disease, to be buried in the town of Salqin, in the northwestern Syrian Idlib province on September 17, 2020. (AFP/File Photo)

On Sept. 20, the WHO reported a record one-day rise in global COVID-19 cases, with 307,930 new infections. The biggest increases were detected in the US, India and Brazil.

To date, at least 7.5 million people in the US have contracted the virus and more than 213,000 have died.

The Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation at the University of Washington has forecast a further 400,000 to 600,000 deaths in the US by January 2021. Despite these warnings, fear of catching the virus was higher in the US in March than in September.

INNUMBERS

Coronavirus

* In March, 71 percent of Saudi residents said they were “very” or “somewhat” scared of catching the virus.

* By September the figure had fallen to 61 percent.

* In September, 51 percent of UK residents said they were “somewhat” afraid

of catching the virus.

*** Number of US residents taking additional hygiene measures has fallen 8 percent since June.**

According to Johns Hopkins University, the US is the worst-hit country in the world, with about 620 deaths per million population.

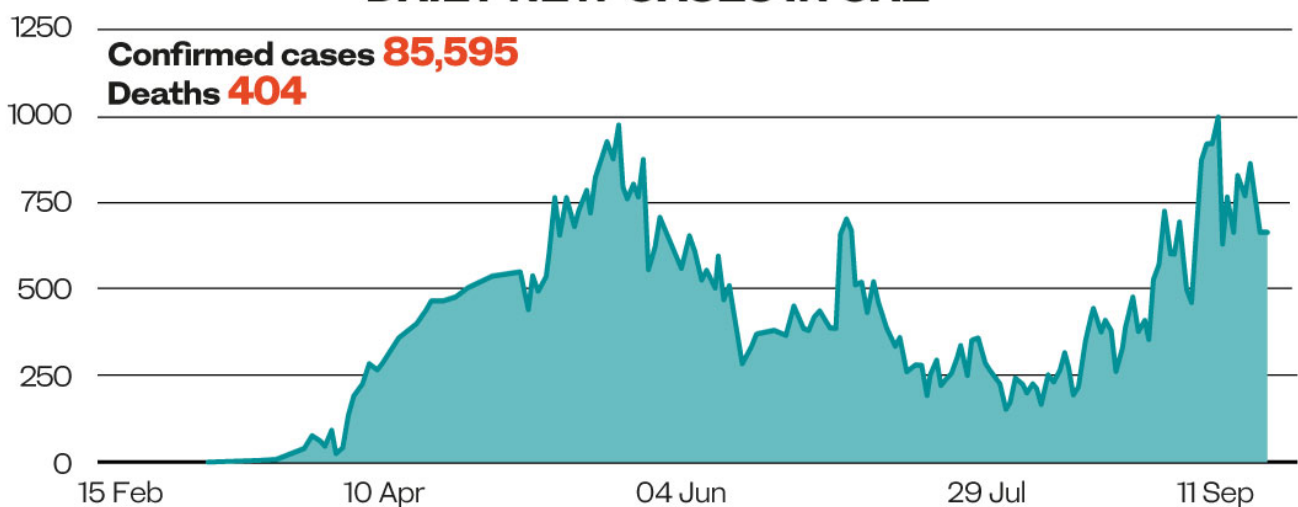
By contrast, in Vietnam, where 81 percent of residents reported being “very” or “somewhat” scared of catching the virus, the death rate per 1 million people is just 0.4.

These changing attitudes are having an impact on public behavior, including willingness to return to work.

In its COVID-19 Global Impact Study, published on Sept. 2, US insurance company Cigna revealed that the prospect of returning to workplaces is creating new anxieties among employees.

The study, carried out across 11 countries, found that 42 percent of respondents were concerned about catching the coronavirus during the commute, face-to-face meetings or in common work spaces. However, the drive to return to the workplace has been met with a mixed response globally.

DAILY NEW CASES IN UAE



According to YouGov’s data, just 8 percent of French respondents said they are now working from home. Meanwhile, 27 percent in Saudi Arabia are choosing to avoid the office, and 23 percent in the UAE.

The data also indicates Saudi Arabia and UAE residents are more likely to adopt social-distancing measures than people in France, Britain and the US.

Since the UAE recorded the Middle East’s first four cases of the new coronavirus on Jan. 29, GCC governments have taken swift measures to reduce the impact of the virus on the region.

Saudi and UAE resident say they are more likely to avoid crowded places than

those in France, the UK and the US. Among those surveyed, 72 percent of Saudi residents said they are avoiding crowded spaces compared with 63 percent of UK residents.



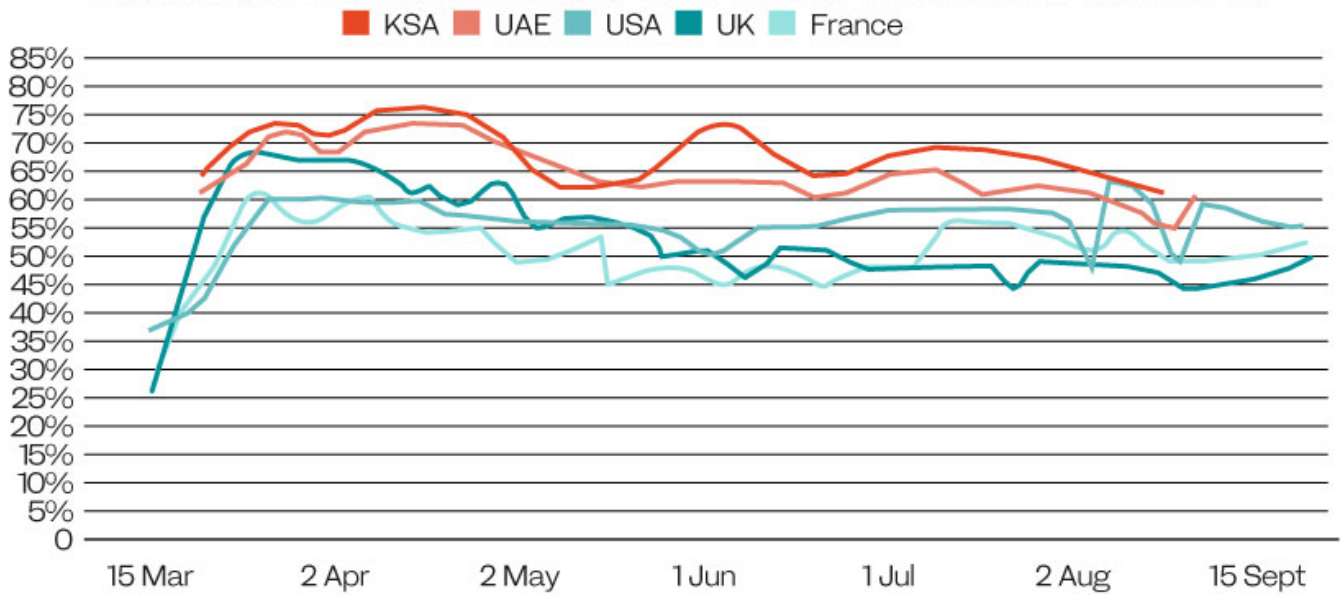
World Health Organization (WHO) Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus attends a press conference organised by the Geneva Association of United Nations Correspondents (ACANU) amid the COVID-19 outbreak on July 3 at the WHO headquarters in Geneva. (AFP/File Photo)

In June, when face masks were not yet mandatory in the UK, just 31 percent of UK residents reported wearing one in public places. By comparison, 80 percent of UAE residents reported wearing a face mask during the same month.

Following a change in UK government guidelines, the percentage of residents wearing face masks rose to 76 percent in September.

About 59 percent of Saudi residents say they avoid touching objects in public places compared with 42 percent of French residents, while 68 percent of UAE residents have improved their personal hygiene in response to the pandemic, compared with 58 percent of UK residents.

YUOGOV BEHAVIOR TRACKER: FEAR OF CATCHING COVID-19



Poor adoption of social-distancing measures in northern hemisphere countries, which are fast approaching the winter influenza season, will be a marked cause for concern as medical facilities come under further strain. Indeed, the data indicates a trend toward public complacency at the very moment that cases are rising quickly.

Social-distancing measures have helped countries across the world reduce the number of new coronavirus infections from one day to the next – also known as flattening the curve. Yet self-reported YouGov data for the KSA and UAE clearly show people are becoming less vigilant regarding specific health and safety measures.

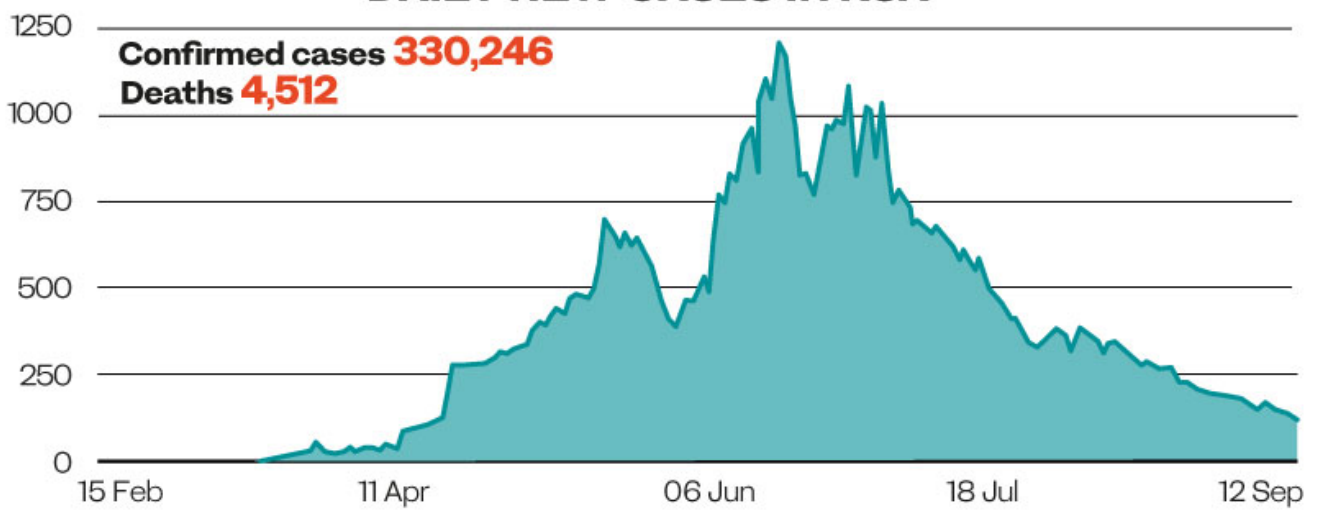
Mask use was down by 5 percent between June and September in Saudi Arabia and the UAE, while adoption of personal hygiene measures fell by 6 percent in both countries over the same period.

With mobility up across both nations, schools reopening and international travel increasing, the pandemic is an evolving situation. Authorities say complacency must not catch on or coronavirus will catch up.

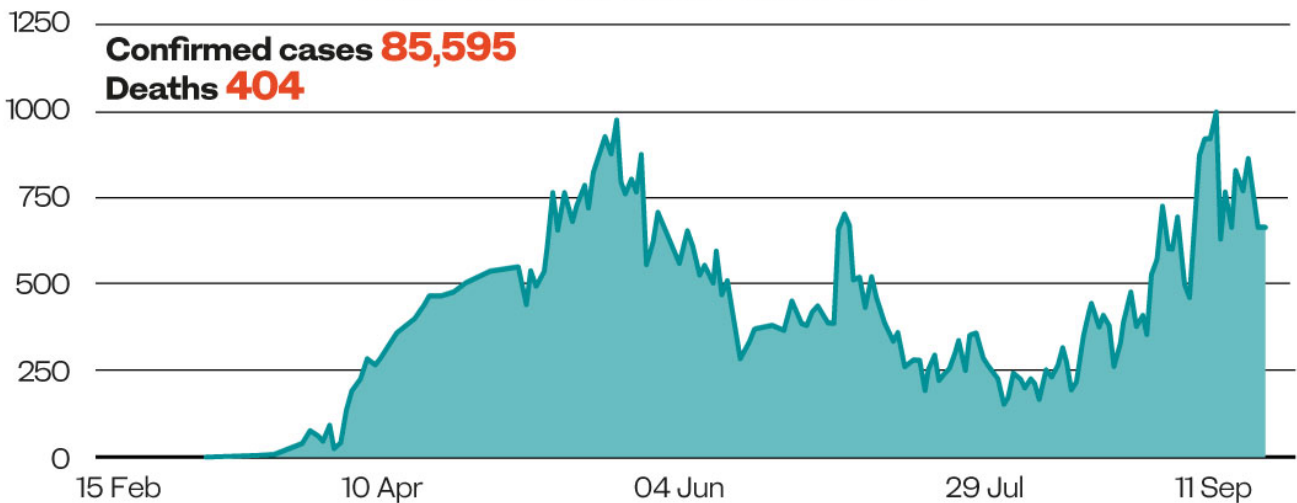




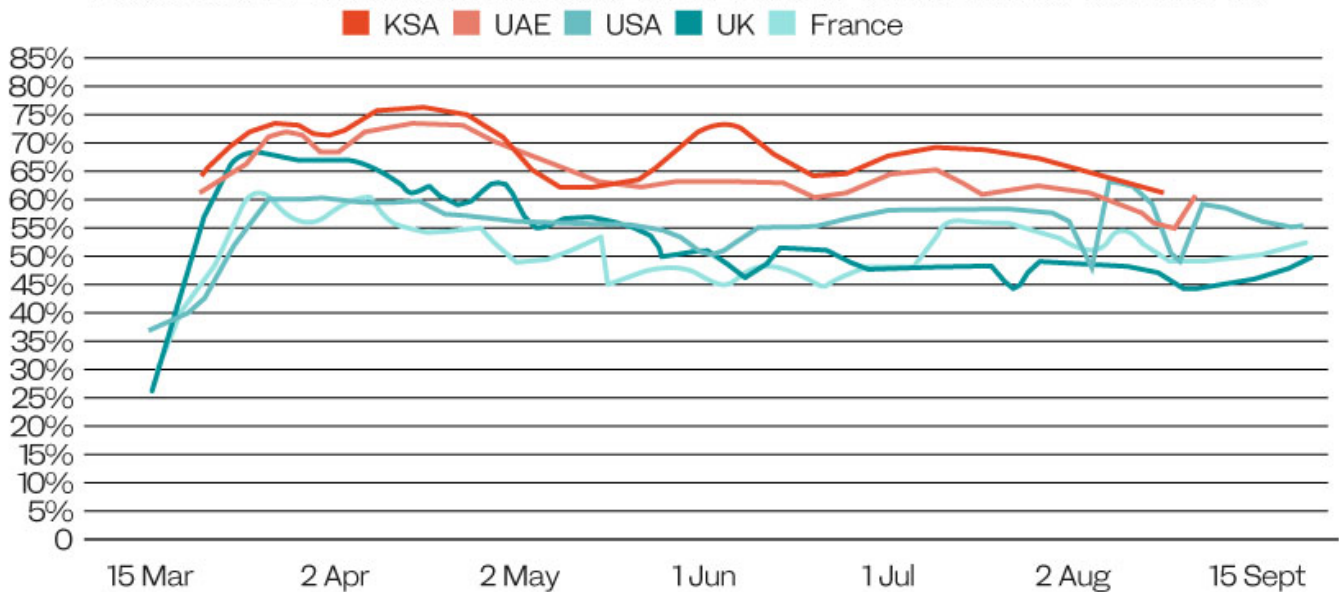
DAILY NEW CASES IN KSA



DAILY NEW CASES IN UAE



YUOGOV BEHAVIOR TRACKER: FEAR OF CATCHING COVID-19



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[Cities pivotal to overcoming](#)

challenges of global change: Saudi U20 summit leader

Fri, 2020-10-02 18:23

RIYADH: The world's urban centers are, more than ever, pivotal to fostering global change, the vice chair of a G20-linked Saudi summit has claimed.

Cities now consume more than two-thirds of the world's energy and account for at least 70 percent of global CO2 emissions.

Since 1950, the urban population of the world has grown from 75.1 million to 4.2 billion. With 90 percent of urban areas situated on coastlines, cities are highly vulnerable to the effects of climate change, including rising sea levels and storms.

Hosam Al-Qurashi, vice chair of the U20, told Arab News: "The U20 (the urban track of the G20 organization that has been meeting in Riyadh) is about voicing the issues that cities and their inhabitants around the world are experiencing.

"We want to make sure that these voices reach the leaders of the G20 so that they implement solutions and initiatives that guarantee the resilience and sustainability of these cities for the long term."

Al-Qurashi noted the U20 pillars of collaboration, consensus, evidence and scientific-based outcomes.

He said the grouping was composed of more than 40 cities and 30 knowledge partners that were collaborating to find solutions to some of the challenges facing urban centers around the world.

The U20 Mayors Summit has been taking place under the shadow of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic with all its associated socio-economic uncertainties.

"COVID-19 gave us an X-ray and showed us that we are not as strong and resilient a species as we thought. Accordingly, there is now a global direction to re-invest in science, wellbeing, and healthy living," Al-Qurashi added.

In the midst of the pandemic the U20 formed a special working group on COVID-19 – a sub-product of the U20 that was chaired by Rome and Buenos Aires.

The group has shared 32 case studies and best practices for dealing with the health crisis and also commissioned a survey to gather data from cities

together representing more than 75 million residents.

The accumulated policy recommendations of all the special working groups will be combined in a communique for delivery to the G20 leadership.

Al-Qurashi said: "The process is so multilateral and so fair, and every city had equal say and contribution in the development of this communique. It has been built on consensus and full collaboration of all of the participating cities."

He pointed out the speed at which the U20 had reacted in the middle of the pandemic.

"We could not meet. The working team had to quickly adjust to the needs of this common threat that humanity is currently facing. The group was created in order to develop policy recommendations on how to recover from the pandemic and how to prepare for future shocks," he added.

Cities and their transportation networks were coming under increasing pressure as growing numbers of people moved to urban areas, he said.

"In the future a public transportation network is definitely going to adopt standard operating procedures to deal with pandemics so that people will automatically react to future pandemics and calamities by being more resilient, capable, and ready to face these shocking events that we were not prepared for in the past.

"I believe that Saudi's presidency over the G20 has raised the bar quite high in the way we handled it and managed these sessions and the way we involved people that was so collaborative and so inclusive and open.

"Importantly, COVID-19 did not impact the deliverables of the summit. We are proud of the legacy that we are leaving behind and for the other cities to build on," Al-Qurashi added.

The aim of the U20 was to build resilience for the present and future of the world through cities, he noted.

"Innovation is at the heart of these special working groups: Innovating new solutions, themes, new forms of economy, of improving the climate and safeguarding the planet.

"This was about innovating urban solutions to address the challenges of cities across the world. That was what the U20 was all about."



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[U20](#)

Circular economy takes center stage at Riyadh U20 panel discussion
U20 Mayors Summit: Reimagining the city in the age of COVID-19