

Lebanon finds four bodies after deadly sea crossing

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Mon, 2020-09-21 11:21

BEIRUT: Lebanon has retrieved the bodies of four people including a child after they tried to flee the crisis-hit country by sea on an overloaded dinghy, the civil defense said Monday.

A week ago, UN peacekeepers retrieved one body and rescued 36 people from a boat in trouble in international waters off the Lebanese coast.

Families of the survivors said the boat had been adrift without food or water for around a week, during which time several passengers had died or jumped overboard to find help.

The bodies are presumed to be from the same ill-fated crossing.

Since Friday, "we have retrieved four bodies – belonging to two Lebanese, one of whom was a child, a young Indian man and a Syrian man," Samir Yazbek, the head of the civil defense's sea rescue unit, told AFP.

The bodies were found in four separate locations off the north and south coasts of the country, and the search was ongoing, he added.

The UN refugee agency said last week that 25 Syrians, eight Lebanese and three people of other nationalities had been rescued from the boat.

It is unclear how many men, women and children originally clambered aboard the dinghy, and therefore how many are still missing.

On Saturday, the navy said it would step up its searches within and outside Lebanon's territorial waters to find any other victims.

Relatives of those who went missing from the impoverished north Lebanese city of Tripoli say the people smuggler involved in the crossing has dropped off the radar since the tragedy.

They have filed three legal complaints against the man, who they say is a well-known figure in the community.

A military source on Saturday said a person acting as an intermediary between passengers and the boat owner had been arrested.

In recent weeks, dozens of Lebanese and Syrians have tried to make the perilous sea journey from Lebanon to the Mediterranean island of Cyprus, authorities on both sides say.

The Republic of Cyprus, a European Union member, lies just 160 kilometers (100 miles) away.

Lebanon is in the throes of its worst economic crisis in decades, compounded since February by the novel coronavirus pandemic.

It is also reeling from a monster blast at Beirut's port last month that killed more than 190 people, ravaged large parts of the capital and reignited public anger against the political class.



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[Lebanon suffers another record in COVID-19 cases](#)

Author:

By Associated Press

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1600625220454401800

Sun, 2020-09-20 17:56

BEIRUT: Lebanon registered a record 1,006 cases of COVID-19 over the past 24 hours, the government announced Sunday, amid a sharp increase in infections and deaths due to the new coronavirus.

Health Minister Hamad Hassan recommended a total lockdown for two weeks to stem the alarming rise in daily detected infections, but authorities will find it difficult to impose another lockdown amid an unprecedented economic collapse.

The new cases registered by the Health Ministry bring the overall number of confirmed cases in Lebanon to 29,303, while deaths have reached 297 since the first case was reported in the country in late February.

It was the third consecutive record-breaking day of confirmed virus cases. The rise began after a lockdown was eased and the country's only

international airport was reopened in early July. The surge continued after the massive Aug. 4 explosion in Beirut's port that killed 193 people, injured at least 6,500 and devastated much of the city. The blast also overwhelmed Beirut's hospitals and badly damaged two that had a key role in handling virus cases.



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Lebanon army surveys 85,000 building units post-Beirut blast
Lebanon's Maronite patriarch calls for all parties to adopt 'active neutrality'

[Russian jets strike Syrian rebel-held bastion in heaviest strikes since cease-fire](#)

Author:

Reuters

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1600621739783900100

Sun, 2020-09-20 15:39

AMMAN: Syrian opposition sources said Russian jets bombed rebel-held northwestern Syria on Sunday in the most extensive strikes since a Turkish-Russian deal halted major fighting with a cease-fire nearly six months ago. Witnesses said the warplanes struck the western outskirts of Idlib city and that there was heavy artillery shelling in the mountainous Jabal al Zawya region in southern Idlib from nearby Syrian army outposts. There were no immediate reports of casualties.

"These 30 raids are by far the heaviest strikes so far since the cease-fire deal," said Mohammed Rasheed, a former rebel official and a volunteer plane spotter whose network covers the Russian air base in the western coastal province of Latakia.

Other tracking centers said Russian Sukhoi jets hit the Horsh area and Arab Said town, west of the city of Idlib. Unidentified drones also hit two rebel-held towns in the Sahel Al-Ghab plain, west of Hama province.

There has been no wide-scale aerial bombing since a March agreement ended a Russian-backed bombing campaign that displaced over a million people in the region which borders Turkey after months of fighting.

There was no immediate comment from Moscow or the Syrian army who have long accused militant groups who hold sway in the last opposition redoubt of wrecking the cease-fire deal and attacking army-held areas.

The deal between Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan and Russia's President Vladimir Putin also defused a military confrontation between them after Ankara poured thousands of troops into Idlib province to hold back Russian-backed forces from new advances.

Western diplomats tracking Syria say Moscow piled pressure on Ankara in the latest round of talks on Wednesday to scale down its extensive military presence in Idlib. Turkey has more than ten thousand troops stationed in dozens of bases there, according to opposition sources in touch with Turkish military.

Witnesses say there has been a spike in sporadic shelling from Syrian army outposts against Turkish bases in the last two weeks. Rebels say the Syrian army and its allied militias were amassing troops on front lines.

Two witnesses said a Turkish military column comprising at least 15 armored vehicles was seen overnight entering Syria through the Kafr Lusin border crossing in the direction of a main base in rural Idlib.



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US military strengthens deployment in Syria UN warns of possible 'war crimes' in Turkish-controlled Syria

[US to impose 'snapback' sanctions on 24 targets linked to Iranian weapons](#)

Sun, 2020-09-20 19:36

WASHINGTON: The United States on Monday will sanction more than two dozen people and entities involved in Iran's nuclear, missile and conventional arms programs, a senior US official said, putting teeth behind UN sanctions on Tehran that Washington argues have resumed despite the opposition of allies and adversaries.

Speaking on condition of anonymity, the official said Iran could have enough fissile material for a nuclear weapon by the end of the year and that Tehran

has resumed long-range missile cooperation with nuclear-armed North Korea. He did not provide detailed evidence regarding either assertion.

The new sanctions fit into US President Donald Trump's effort to limit Iran's regional influence and come a week after US-brokered deals for the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain to normalize ties with Israel, pacts that may coalesce a wider coalition against Iran while appealing to pro-Israel US voters ahead of the Nov. 3 election.

The new sanctions also put European allies, China and Russia on notice that while their inclination may be to ignore the US drive to maintain the UN sanctions on Iran, companies based in their nations would feel the bite for violating them.

A major part of the new US push is an executive order targeting those who buy or sell Iran conventional arms that was previously reported by Reuters and will also be unveiled by the Trump administration on Monday, the official said.

The Trump administration suspects Iran of seeking nuclear weapons – something Tehran denies – and Monday's punitive steps are the latest in a series seeking to stymie Iran's atomic program, which US ally Israel views as an existential threat.

"Iran is clearly doing everything it can to keep in existence a virtual turnkey capability to get back into the weaponization business at a moment's notice should it choose to do so," the US official told Reuters.

The official argued Iran wants a nuclear weapons capability and the means to deliver it despite the 2015 deal that sought to prevent this by restraining Iran's atomic program in return for access to the world market.

In May 2018, Trump abandoned that agreement to the dismay of the other parties – Britain, China, France, Germany and Russia – and restored U.S. sanctions that have crippled Iran's economy.

Iran, in turn, has gradually breached the central limits in that deal, according to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), including on the size of its stockpile of low-enriched uranium as well as the level of purity to which it was allowed to enrich uranium.

"Because of Iran's provocative nuclear escalation, it could have sufficient fissile material for a nuclear weapon by the end of this year," the official said without elaborating except to say this was based on "the totality" of information available to the United States, including from the IAEA.

The Vienna-based agency has said Iran only began significantly breaching the 2015 deal's limits after the US withdrawal and it is still enriching uranium only up to 4.5%, well below the 20% it had achieved before that agreement, let alone the roughly 90% purity that is considered weapons-grade, suitable for an atomic bomb.

"Iran and North Korea have resumed cooperation on a long-range missile project, including the transfer of critical parts," he added, declining to say when such joint work first began, stopped, and then started again. Asked to comment on the impending new US sanctions and the US official's other statements, a spokesman for Iran's mission to the United Nations dismissed them as propaganda and said they would further isolate the United States.

"The US' 'maximum pressure' show, which includes new propaganda measures almost every week, has clearly failed miserably, and announcing new measures will not change this fact," the mission's spokesman, Alireza Miryousefi, told

Reuters in an email.

"The entire world understands that these are a part of (the) next US election campaign, and they are ignoring the US' preposterous claims at the UN today. It will only make (the) US more isolated in world affairs," he said. The White House declined comment in advance of Monday's announcements.

"Snap back" of UN sanctions?

The US official confirmed Trump will issue an executive order that would allow the United States to punish those who buy or sell conventional arms to Iran with secondary sanctions, depriving them of access to the US market. The proximate cause for this US action is the impending expiration of a UN arms embargo on Iran and to warn foreign actors – US entities are already barred from such trade – that if they buy or sell arms to Iran they will face US sanctions.

Under the 2015 nuclear deal the UN conventional arms embargo is set to expire on Oct. 18.

The United States says it has triggered a "snap back," or resumption, of virtually all UN sanctions on Iran, including the arms embargo, to come into effect at 8 p.m. on Saturday/0000 GMT on Sunday.

Other parties to the nuclear deal and most UN Security Council members have said they do not believe the United States has the right to reimpose the UN sanctions and that the US move has no legal effect.

On Friday, Britain, France and Germany told the Security Council that U.N. sanctions relief for Iran – agreed under the 2015 nuclear deal – would continue beyond Sunday, despite Washington's assertion.

In letters to the Security Council on Saturday, China's UN Ambassador Zhang Jun and Russia's UN Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia both described the US move as "illegitimate" and said the UN sanctions relief for Iran would continue.

Also on Saturday, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres told the Security Council he cannot act on the US declaration that UN sanctions had been reimposed because it was not clear whether they had snapped back.

"It is not for the Secretary-General to proceed as if no such uncertainty exists," he said.

Targets include Iran's nuclear, missile and arms groups

The new executive order will define conventional weapons broadly as any item with a potential military use, meaning it could cover such things as speed boats that Iran retrofits to harass vessels in international waters, the US official told Reuters.

It would also apply to conventional circuit boards that can be used in ballistic missile guidance systems, he added.

The more than two dozen targets to be hit with sanctions on Monday include those involved in Iran's conventional arms, nuclear and missile programs, the official said, saying some of the targets are already sanctioned under other US programs.

That could prompt criticism that the US move is redundant and designed for public relations purposes to look tough on Iran, a charge critics have made about past US sanctions actions.

Among the targets will be Iran's "most nefarious arms organizations," about a dozen senior officials, scientists and experts from Iran's nuclear complex, members of a procurement network that supplies military-grade dual-use goods

for Iran's missile program, and several senior officials involved in Iran's ballistic missile program, the US official said.

The official declined to name the targets, saying this would be made public on Monday, and stressed that the United States wants to deter foreign companies from dealing with them even if their governments believe this is legally permitted.

"You might have a split in some countries where a foreign government may claim that the UN sanctions don't snap back but their banks and companies will abide by US sanctions because they want to make sure they are not a future target," he said.



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US says all UN sanctions on Iran restoredIran dismisses US efforts at UN sanctions as currency drops

UAE reports 674 new COVID-19 cases, a decrease from the previous day

Sun, 2020-09-20 19:06

DUBAI: The UAE on Sunday recorded 674 new cases of COVID-19, bringing the total to 84,916.

The Ministry of Health and Prevention said 761 people recovered from coronavirus over the previous 24 hours, bringing the total to 74,273, while the death toll stands at 404.

Dubai Economy, in cooperation with Dubai Sports Council, said it closed three sports facilities, issued nine fines and gave 35 warnings to a number of fitness centers, clubs, academies and sporting events for not adhering to anti COVID-19 measures.

While 728 businesses found compliant.

Dubai Economy emphasizes on the importance of following the precautionary measures and report any violation through the Dubai Consumer app. [#UAE](#) [#Dubai](#) [#DubaiEconomy](#) [#DubaiDED](#) [#DED](#) [#DepartmentOfEconomicDevelopment](#) [#We_Are_All_Responsible](#) <pic.twitter.com/03NPEGDuNQ>

– اقتصادية دبي (@Dubai_DED) [September 20, 2020](#)

Dubai Economy also issued fines to 10 other establishments, including shops and a gym, and issued warnings to seven more.

Sharjah Police said it had arrested a person who was infected with the virus and knowingly broke isolation rules.

Elsewhere, Kuwait recorded 385 new COVID-19 cases and three deaths, bringing the total numbers to 99,434 and 584 respectively.

تعلن [#وزارةالصحة](#) عن تأكيد إصابة 385 حالة جديدة، وتسجيل 670 حالة شفاء، و 3 حالات وفاة جديدة بـ [#فيروسكورونا_المستجد](#) COVID-19 ، ليصبح إجمالي عدد الحالات 99,434 حالة <pic.twitter.com/jIfEiM2P6>

– وزارة الصحة - الكويت (@KUWAIT_MOH) [September 20, 2020](#)

The health ministry said that 670 cases have recovered from the virus, totalling 90,168 cases.

In Oman, the total number of COVID-19 cases reached 93,475, the death toll stood at 846, and recoveries reached 85,418.

[#statement](#) No. 189

September 20, 2020 <pic.twitter.com/qaHm2jA9RD>

- عُمان - وزارة الصحة (@OmaniMOH) [September 20, 2020](#)



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UAE reports 809 new Covid-19 cases, health minister begins vaccine trial
UAE grants scholarship to children of coronavirus frontline workers