

Libyan Air Force destroys mercenary convoy near Egyptian 'red line'

Wed, 2020-08-12 22:16

CAIRO: The Libyan Air Force has bombed an armed convoy of suspected Turkish-backed mercenaries affiliated with Fayez Al-Sarraj, prime minister of Libya's Government of National Accord (GNA) in Wadi Bey area west of the city of Sirte, close to the so-called "red line" drawn by Egypt.

Libyan sources said that the group, backed by Turkish mercenaries, was trying to infiltrate the city, but that it had been destroyed, without providing details on the numbers involved or of casualties.

Official authorities did not comment on any operations targeting Wadi Bey, which is considered a strategic point given its proximity to Sirte and Al-Jufra on the northwestern edge of the Libyan National Army's (LNA) defense line.

The airstrike came a day after the Coastal Defense Forces targeted a boat, which infiltrated the maritime interdiction before the Ra's Lanuf coast.

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi had claimed in an earlier speech: "Sirte and Al-Jufra are considered a red line for Egypt's security. We will not allow anyone to come near it."

He added: "Libya will be defended only by its people and we will support them."

The significance of Sirte lies in its location, which is 1,000 kilometers from the Egyptian border, between the Libyan capital Tripoli and Benghazi on the coast.

Controlling Sirte would open the way for controlling oil ports in the western area known as the Oil Crescent, which contains the country's biggest oil inventory.

The strategically significant Al-Jufra Airbase lies south of Sirte, meanwhile, and is only separated from it by a 300 kilometer road.

Al-Jufra is one of Libya's biggest airbases, known for its recently strengthened infrastructure to host state-of-the-art weaponry. It also serves as a major operation room for the LNA.

Meanwhile, LNA spokesman Ahmed Al-Mesmari said that Turkey had not halted its transfer of military equipment and mercenaries into Libya.

Al-Mesmari added in an interview with Sky News Arabia that Ankara had taken over "a number of camps in the west (of Libya). Such camps are under the direct commandment of Turkish officers."

Al-Mesamri added that Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan did not care about the arms embargo imposed on Libya, and stressed that Ankara was continuing to transfer weapons into Libya.



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Libyan parliament calls on Egypt to protect Sirte, Al-Jufra from attacks
Battle looms for Sirte as Erdogan accused of targeting 'oil crescent'

[Education in GCC region seeks a 'new normal' as coronavirus crisis drags on](#)

Wed, 2020-08-12 21:48

DUBAI: For over a billion students around the world, something as mundane as going to school has been abruptly excised from their daily schedule for much of the academic year.

Following the spread of the coronavirus in early 2020, most countries closed their schools and other educational institutions in an effort to protect communities from the pandemic.

In February, Bahrain and Kuwait became the first Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries to announce school closures. By mid-March, Saudi Arabia, Oman and the UAE had suspended all educational institutions until further notice.

According to UN, 1.5 billion children and young people in 165 countries – or 87 percent of the world's student population – were affected by such closures in March.

The challenge was even greater in the Arab region, where conflicts had already driven 13 million children and young people out of school. Global monitors confirmed that school closures caused by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) affected more than 100 million learners across the region.

Five months later, with no specific COVID-19 medicine or vaccine around the corner, this grim situation persists. As schools remain closed for the summer holidays, there are clear differences of opinion over whether to reopen them for the new academic year in September.

“All schools exist to serve a community,” said Darren Gale, principal of Horizon International School in Dubai, adding “there is no right or wrong” when it comes to making this decision.

Gale believes that schools are much more than their buildings and divisions. “Whilst aspects of the physicality of school may look slightly different, the culture, ethos and expectations will remain the same,” he said.

Governments in the Middle East continue to work together with educational institutions to determine an optimal strategy on reopening schools and universities. A decision to welcome back students or to continue virtual education will be based mainly on the strict measures and protocols in place by the end of summer.



A picture taken on March 15, 2020 shows school buses parked outside a closed school in Dubai. (AFP/File Photo)

After all, one thing all parties seem to agree on when determining education's "new normal" is that safety comes first.

"At the forefront of any school's decision to open fully or as part of a blended model will be community health and safety, the ability to manage and suppress the possibility of transmission, and the ability to give as meaningful learning experience as possible within the context of a school's campus," Gale told Arab News.

What children will need in September is "strength in relationships," he said. "The only new in the 'new normal' will be arrivals, movement through the school, drop-off and some groupings for lessons."

Considering children's adaptive nature, activities such as repeatedly washing hands, good hygiene and wearing a mask are no longer novel, but part of the daily routine when leaving the house, he said.

"We should be reassuring children what will remain the same rather than solely focusing on what will be different. There needs to be a balance if we are going to be role models to children of how to effectively manage change."

FASTFACT

GCC Education and COVID-19

- 87% Portion of world's student population affected by school closures.
- 100m Students in Arab region affected by closures in March 2020.
- 50% Reduction in class size in many GCC schools due to reopen.

Expressing a view common among the region's educators, Gale pointed out that schools should not be seen "as a standalone solution or the sole risk" to new outbreaks. Instead, schools are part of a community strategy to suppress the transmission of COVID-19, he said.

Bharat Mansukhani, managing director of International Schools Partnership (ISP) Middle East, says schools owned and operated by his group in the region have conducted school-specific risk assessments in preparation for the new year. Those assessments have been cross-checked against their schools in the US, Spain and Malaysia that have already reopened.

"There will be visible changes as the schools adhere to the guidelines provided by the authorities which will include, but not be limited to, temperature checks, masks for teachers and children aged 6 and above, smaller class cohorts, physical distancing, reduced bus capacity and an increased emphasis on washing hands and environment sanitization," Mansukhani told Arab News.

ISP schools in the UAE and Qatar will focus on maximizing the time children can spend on-site while offering the broadest curriculum possible through a variety of flexible learning models, Mansukhani said.

"While our aim is to have all students on campus every day, our priority remains a healthy and safe environment for our entire community where learning is continuous and uninterrupted."



A picture taken March 18, 2020 shows school buses parked in an open area after closure of schools in Riyadh amid measures to combat the novel COVID-19 coronavirus disease. (AFP/File Photo)

A similar mentality pervades nurseries catering to smaller age groups. Shaun Robison, governor of IDEA Nursery in the UAE, said the decision to reopen nurseries should be consistent with all other sectors in the country, noting that childcare centers, camps and hotel playgroups have reopened.

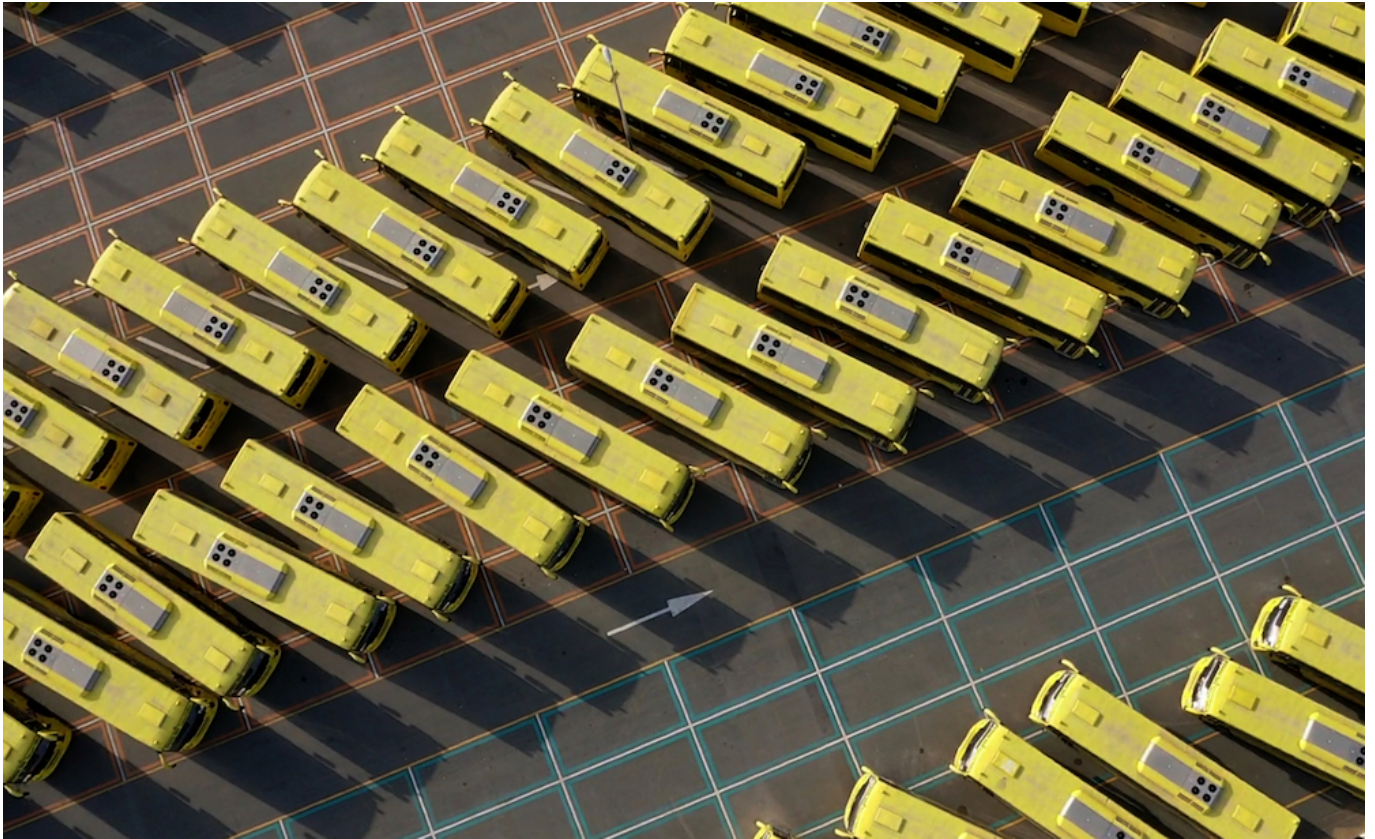
“Nurseries are an important function for a thriving economy that encourages dual-income households, and a female workforce,” he said. “Everyone is ready, and prepared to reopen.”

The same cannot be said of other GCC countries. While Saudi Arabia’s Ministry of Education has announced that schools will reopen on August 30, the decision depends on the health conditions in each of the country’s regions and communities closer to the start of the school year.

Each area will be issued a red, orange or green evaluation to indicate one of three scenarios: Full in-person attendance, a combination of in-person and online learning, and full-time virtual learning.

Class size will be reduced to 50 percent in various parts of the country depending on the number of COVID-19 cases in the community.

Tatweer Educational Transportation services Co., the ministry’s school transport provider, has urged students attending public schools that require their services for the upcoming school year to apply for seats ahead of time due to limited availability



A drone image taken on April 27, 2020, shows school buses parked in a lot in the Emirate of Dubai, during the coronavirus pandemic. (AFP/File Photo)

However, some parents would like distance learning to continue. “I really don’t think it’s a good idea right now when the world hasn’t yet found a cure. I’m not sure if I’ll be sending my son to school,” Amal Turkistani, a Saudi mother, told Arab News. “I would prefer that they continue schooling remotely, or part-time.”

Her view was seconded by another mother, Reham Al-Mistadi, who said: “It is difficult to have children attend school. They’re just kids, unaware of the importance of social distancing and using sanitizers.”

Meanwhile, Oman, which has reported the highest number of COVID-19 cases in the GCC bloc, has not settled on whether to open schools or continue remote learning. A national survey was launched on July 12 to monitor the immunity levels of residents in order to help the government reach an informed decision on reopening schools, colleges and other facilities.

While governments continue to search for an appropriate solution in the next few weeks that ensures a smooth start to the new academic year as well as the safety of young people, many schools are prepared to jump on the virtual train to learning once again, if needed.

“The flexible education models that we have planned for at each of our schools ensures that we can adapt to any change in guidance, as well as any change in the overall situation related to COVID-19, without disrupting the delivery of the high-quality education our schools are known for,” said Mansukhani.

“We believe that if our school communities work together and adhere to the protocols put in place, then we will all be in a good position to minimize the risk of infection.”

As for concerned parents in Dubai, the Knowledge and Human Development Authority released a statement giving private schools and parents the power to determine the best educational model for the new year. The options are physical attendance of all students, scheduling lessons in staggered shifts or to continue part-time or full-time distance learning.

Only time will tell what the outcome will be.

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Abu Dhabi's education dept sets rules for private schools' reopening

Egypt, Iraq move 'hazardous materials' amid safety drive

Author:

Wed, 2020-08-12 02:16

CAIRO: Egyptian authorities have said that all hazardous substances stored at airports will be moved to safe storage to avoid the risk of a similar explosion to the devastating Beirut blast.

The move comes as countries around the world reevaluate safety protocols for storage of hazardous materials in the wake of the disaster in Lebanon.

Egypt's Minister of Civil Aviation Mohamed Manar said a high-level committee will examine all shipments in storehouses and containers in the cargo areas of airports in the country, including Cairo.

The investigation will help to ensure the safety of employees and visitors at Egypt's airports, he said.

The committee's precautionary measures will include immediately moving hazardous materials to safe storage areas away from airports and residential areas.

Manar said that the committee will carry out a comprehensive evaluation of all measures applied in storage areas in order to provide the highest standards of safety and security in accordance with the instructions of the International Civil Aviation Organization.

The minister said that the decision aims to counter risks and protect all civil aviation employees.

Iraq Border Management and Migration Control Authority also announced that "extremely hazardous substances" were moved from Baghdad International Airport.

The authority said that the products were safely transferred from the airport's air cargo department to warehouses operated by the Military Engineering Directorate.

The directorate, affiliated with the Ministry of Defense, carried out the move. However, the authority did not reveal the nature of the substances or provide further details.

Meanwhile, Arab League Secretary-General Ahmed Aboul Gheit highlighted the danger posed by a floating oil tanker near the Houthi-controlled Yemeni coasts. The ship is carrying 1 million barrels of oil.

Aboul Gheit said that the devastating impact of the Lebanon explosion "reminds us of the hazards posed by this oil tanker."

The tanker has not undergone maintenance since the civil war began in 2015, he said. Aboul Gheit called on the UN Security Council to intervene so a UN team could carry out essential maintenance.

An Arab League Secretariat official said that "the main reason behind the lack of maintenance is the procrastination practiced by the Houthis to prevent to the UN team from accessing the ship. The UN Security Council held a special session to discuss the ship issue in mid-July."

He warned that water had leaked into the tanker's engine, increasing the risk

of the vessel sinking or exploding.

Although a temporary repair was carried out, the UN confirmed that this could lead to a disaster, with devastating effects on marine life in the Red Sea.



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Analysis: Lebanon government steps down. So what?

[Egypt fears second wave as COVID-19 cases climb](#)

Author:

Wed, 2020-08-12 02:09

CAIRO: Egypt has warned of a second wave of coronavirus in the country following a recent spike in infections.

The warning dashes hopes of an end to the outbreak after a promising drop in case numbers over the past week.

On Monday, the Egyptian Ministry of Health reported 174 new cases and 26 new deaths from the disease, a consecutive day-by-day increase.

Many fear a second wave, especially as health precautions and face mask guidelines are being ignored. Malls, cafes, restaurants and beaches are witnessing huge crowding across the country.

"We cannot say that we entered a second wave of the coronavirus because the current wave has not ended," Presidential Health Adviser Muhammad Awad Tajuddin said.

"Case numbers have fallen, but there has been an increase over the past few days. We expected this because the same thing happened during Eid Al-Fitr due to large gatherings on coasts and beaches," he added.

In an interview on TV channel Al-Mihwar, he said a second wave is expected in the fall because of lower temperatures and the disease's similarity to seasonal influenza.

The adviser added that isolation hospitals are ready in case of an increase in intensive care cases.

On Sunday, Minister of Health and Population Hala Zayed urged Egyptians to follow preventive measures, especially after Eid Al-Adha celebrations.

The ministry recently reopened many isolation hospitals that were closed several weeks ago as part of a strategy to deal with the spike.

Khaled Mujahid, media adviser to the Ministry of Health, said the hospitals will treat moderate to severe cases of coronavirus, while people with minor cases of the illness follow self-quarantine guidelines.

He urged anyone over the age of 60 or those suffering from chronic diseases, including diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, chronic lung disease, cerebrovascular disease, chronic kidney disease and pregnant women to avoid gatherings.

Warnings of a second wave in Egypt were a trending topic on Twitter and "the second wave" was the most-tweeted phrase.

Hussam Hosni, head of the Scientific Committee to Combat Coronavirus at the Ministry of Health, said that the return of high case numbers was due to precautionary measures being ignored, but added that the country has yet to enter a second wave of the pandemic.

He said Egypt had the pandemic under control in the first phase and called on people to follow precautionary measures.

As of Monday, the number of coronavirus cases in the country since the beginning of the outbreak totaled 95,666, including 53,779 recoveries and 5,035 deaths.



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Egypt COVID-19 cases could be '10 times higher' than reported figures
Egyptian doctors call for more facilities to handle pandemic

[Sudan asks for delay in Renaissance Dam talks](#)

Author:

Wed, 2020-08-12 01:57

CAIRO: The tripartite negotiations over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam have been postponed for a week at Sudan's request.

The Sudanese Ministry of Water Resources and Irrigation said it had asked for the postponement to consult over recent developments and the change in the negotiation agenda to include matters relating to water sharing among the Nile Basin countries.

It was agreed to push back the meeting by a week, provided that the ministers consulted over the agenda and the level of participation in the next meeting. The Egyptian Ministry of Water Resources and Irrigation announced that Egypt participated in the last meeting on Monday to negotiate the rules for filling and operating the Grand Renaissance Dam.

It said that at the beginning of the meeting the Egyptian side expressed its readiness to resume negotiations on the basis of the mini-African summit held on July 21, as well as the ministerial meeting on Aug. 3 over a binding agreement on the rules for filling and operating the Renaissance Dam.

FASTFACT

Egypt has rejected any unilateral action by Addis Ababa and called for Ethiopia to adhere to the principles of international law.

The Ethiopian Ministry of Water Resources and Irrigation issued a statement that the negotiations were to be completed within two weeks, based on the recommendations of the African Union, but Egypt and Sudan requested a delay. Egypt has rejected any unilateral action by Addis Ababa and called for Ethiopia to adhere to the principles of international law.

Former Egyptian Minister of Irrigation Mohamed Nasr Allam said the Ethiopian was claiming that it had completed the construction of the dam and filled its first stage, and that Egypt and Sudan must accept the Ethiopian negotiating offer or surrender. He said that the aim of these claims is to raise Ethiopian morale.

He rejected Ethiopian claims over the condition of the Ethiopian people and their lack of services and water, and its assertions that Egypt floats on reservoirs of groundwater, which are based on the statements of "Egyptian scholars." "The whole world knows that it is not true," he said.

Allam said that Egypt is committed to achieving a peaceful agreement that serves the interests of the three countries.



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[Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam \(GERD\)](#)

Sudan says Nile dam talks delayed for 'consultations'