

Iranian fuel shipment reaches Venezuelan waters

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CARACAS: The first of five tankers carrying much-needed Iranian fuel and oil products entered Venezuelan waters on Saturday, a Venezuelan government official said.

"The ships of the sister Islamic Republic of Iran are in our exclusive economic zone," Venezuelan oil minister Tareck El-Aissami wrote on Twitter after the arrival of the first tanker, named Fortune.

The fleet is carrying about 1.5 million barrels of gasoline according to media reports, and arrives amid tensions between Tehran and Washington, which has imposed sanctions on Venezuelan oil exports and Iran.

Venezuela had said its navy and air force would escort the tankers after Tehran warned of "consequences" if the US stopped the ships from reaching their destination.

According to shipping tracker MarineTraffic, as of at 9:00 p.m. local time (0100 GMT Sunday) Fortune was near the coast of Sucre state in northern Venezuela after passing off Trinidad and Tobago.

It plans to sail to the El Palito refinery in Puerto Cabello in northern Carabobo state, according to the state-run television station.

The rest of the Iranian ships – the Forest, Petunia, Faxon and Clavel – will arrive in the next few days, according to state television.

Relations between Caracas and Tehran have become close since former Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez took power in 1999.

Iran has repeatedly expressed its support for Nicolas Maduro, his successor, who is also supported by Russia, China, Turkey and Cuba.

The United States calls Maduro a "dictator," however, and has leveled a battery of economic sanctions against his administration, including an oil embargo that came into force in April 2019.

The fuel from Iran comes at a time when the shortage of gasoline, chronic for years in some parts of the country, has worsened in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Venezuela has the largest oil reserves in the world, but its production is in freefall, a collapse that experts attribute to failed policies, lack of investment and corruption.



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Iran warns US not to interfere with Venezuela oil shipment
Iran summons ambassador over possible US measures against Venezuela shipment

[Contagion risk in Turkish prisons feared](#)

Author:

Sun, 2020-05-24 01:43

ANKARA: The death of a Turkish prisoner from COVID-19 in Istanbul's Silivri Prison on Friday has put the health conditions of Turkish prisons under the spotlight again, with inmates under increased risk.

The number of infected inmates in the prison has risen to 82. Four inmates have lost their lives in the pandemic, according to the official figures.

Many reports are coming about confirmed positive test results for COVID-19 nationwide.

Human rights activists and opposition politicians have called on the authorities to release prisoners during the outbreak. As a first step, they suggest releasing on bail those who are not sentenced yet, prisoners who have a serious disease and those who are above 60 years of age, postponing the enforcement of their sentences.

A prisoner release bill was adopted by Turkish parliament last month to ease overcrowding in jails and protect detainees from any contagion, but it was criticized for leaving behind bars journalists and dissident activists jailed on political charges and freeing 90,000 inmates, including mafia bosses. Hygiene, access to medical services and nutrition are the main concerns that are raised.

In a series of parliamentary questions on May 22, Feleknaş Uca, a parliamentarian from the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), said that inmates in the southeastern Bayburt Prison were reportedly provided with one surgical mask between eight of them.

The lack of hot water for the past two months in the prison and the insufficient cleaning of the cells are also cited as a source of concern, especially in a period where strict hygiene precautions are essential.

NUMBER

82 – the number of infected inmates in the Turkish prison.

Murat Yılmaz, a human rights lawyer in Ankara, said the public authorities have not disclosed official data about the outbreak risk in the prisons in a transparent way.

“Turkish jails, where 20 people are in a cell designed for eight, are overpopulated, with limited access to bathrooms. The restrooms are shared. The wardens are in constant contact with the outside world and they can bring the virus into the prisons. It is impossible to protect these vulnerable inmates once one of them contracts the virus because they stay in a closed environment with limited opportunities to take fresh air,” he told Arab News. Yılmaz, who monitors the situation in Turkey's prisons closely, said inmates with chronic diseases such as cancer and high blood pressure are also kept in jail. Being in the risk group, they are highly vulnerable.

“The number of prison infirmaries and doctors is very insufficient. There are disruptions in the referral of the patients to the hospitals. People who are behind bars for a long time are already deprived of sunlight and they are not sufficiently nourished,” he said.

After the failed coup attempt in 2016, the total number of prisoners in Turkey rose to about 300,000, the second largest prison population in Europe, according to the data from Council of Europe. Around 50,000 people are locked up on terror charges.

Gamze Akkus İlgezdi, a lawmaker for the main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP), said that in the last two weeks of April COVID-19 cases in the jails increased by 606 percent.

“Urgent precautions must be taken in the prisons. Otherwise, the

responsibility of the deaths will fall on the government and the bureaucracy,” she told Arab News.

Ilgezdi also emphasized the need to protect 3,100 child inmates, along with 780 children who stay with their mothers in prisons, as they are also vulnerable to the risk of contagion.

Last month, the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) of the Council of Europe urged all member states to apply alternative practices to detention whenever possible and without discrimination.



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[Hadi vows to thwart attempts to divide Yemen](#)

Author:

Sat, 2020-05-23 21:54

AL-MUKALLA: Yemen’s President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi has vowed to keep the country united and to confront all internal and external attempts to divide the country.

In a televised speech to mark the 30th anniversary of the unification between north and south Yemen on May 22, Hadi said that his country was facing serious challenges that threatened its unity, and a wave of diseases that had

overwhelmed the country's fragile health system.

"We will defeat all who try to harm our homeland, culture, history, geography and the aspirations of our people. We will not allow anyone to drag the country into chaos, violence and terrorism," he said.

Hadi reiterated his government's willingness to comply with peace initiatives that could end the war in Yemen. Hadi's speech comes as his forces battle two rebellions in the north and south of Yemen.

The Iranian-backed Houthis seized control of Sanaa in late 2014, forcing Hadi to call for military intervention from Arab countries. In the south, the separatist South Transitional Council (STC) declared self-rule in Aden and other southern provinces, blocking the return of the internationally recognized government.

Vowing to face all challenges, the president said: "We are making every effort to restore the state and end the coup and rebellion in the north and south of the country. We have dealt positively with all peace calls and all humanitarian initiatives," he said.

Hadi ordered his forces positioned in Abyan on May 11 to push toward Aden to drive separatists out of the strategic city and other provinces, triggering heavy fighting with separatists. Over the past couple of days, Yemen's army has dispatched heavy equipment and military forces to Abyan to reinforce the government's troops battling to break the military impasse.

Residents in Abyan reported seeing a convoy of flatbed trucks carrying tanks, armored vehicles and heavy machine guns heading to Abyan's Shouqra.

Hadi said that separatists seized control of state bodies in Aden, obstructed the return of the government, blocked the implementation of the Riyadh Agreement and attacked army troops in the southern provinces, stressing that his government was still willing to implement the agreement.

"We affirm that the Riyadh Agreement is still, to date, an available option that offers solutions for these problems," he said.

Coronavirus cases

The number of coronavirus cases in government-controlled areas has increased to 193 with 13 new cases in Aden, Hadramout, Shabwa and Taiz. Three deaths have also been reported, the Aden-based national coronavirus committee said in a statement. Yemen recorded its first case of coronavirus on April 10 in the province of Hadramout.

Yemeni Health Minister Dr. Nasser Baoum has urged western envoys to Yemen to send medical teams to the port city of Aden to help local health authorities investigate the causes of hundreds of deaths reported since early last month.

At a meeting with European ambassadors to Yemen, the minister said that the deteriorating health situation in Aden required urgent intervention from international health care experts. Health officials and international non-

government organizations working in Aden say that malaria, dengue and chikungunya, coronavirus and other diseases have killed hundreds of people in the city since early last month.



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UN: Yemen's health system 'has in effect collapsed' as COVID-19 spreads
Aden labs run out of reagents as Yemen reports new virus cases

[Trump's Israel-Palestine plan doomed: Baker Institute](#)

Author:

Sat, 2020-05-23 21:41

LONDON: The White House's peace plan all but assures the denial of Palestinian statehood, and may further alienate Israel from the international community, according to a new report by the Baker Institute for Public Policy.

Under the plan, "Palestinian statehood is conditioned upon a compilation of unreasonable and impractical thresholds," wrote Gilead Sher, fellow in Middle

East peace and security at the institute and a former Israeli government official.

“Given the total absence of Palestinian involvement in planning and implementing the deal, the current deal has no way of serving as a driver to resolving the conflict,” he said.

“Instead, it will further blur the borders between two states, as the Israeli right wing looks to ensure a continued presence in Judea and Samaria (the West Bank).”

The US plan, unveiled by President Donald Trump on Jan. 28, envisions a disjointed Palestinian state that turns over key parts of the West Bank to Israel.

The plan also sides with Israel on key contentious issues including borders, the status of Jerusalem and Jewish settlements.

The proposal offers Palestinians “little more than they already have,” and could “lead Israel down a perilous path to international demonization and social upheaval,” Sher wrote.

The plan not only creates problematic borders, but creates friction by “further entangling mixed populations,” he added.

Though the plan abandons the parameters of previous Israeli-Palestinian negotiations and lacks coherent policy, Sher believes it will continue to sit on the table for years to come.

But, he said, it will fail without significant Israeli restraint, complete resequencing and resourceful Palestinian initiative.

The Palestinian Authority, the Arab League and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation have all rejected the plan.



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Former European leaders slam Trump peace plan
Pope appears to give thumbs down to Trump's Middle East peace plan

[Tears as UK shooting victim Aya Hachem's body returns to Lebanon](#)

Sat, 2020-05-23 20:23

BEIRUT: Amid heart-wrenching scenes, Ismail Hachem and his family bid farewell to their 19-year-old daughter Aya, who was killed a week ago in a shooting in Blackburn in the north of England.

A coffin containing Aya's body was flown to Beirut aboard a Middle East Airlines flight early on Saturday. Aya's father, mother and two brothers accompanied the coffin, while a third brother is expected to return from

Australia.

Relatives and friends in Qlaileh in southern Lebanon, 95 km from Beirut, joined the grieving family. Aya's mother insisted on staying by the coffin's side. "It is the last time I see her before bidding her farewell," she said.

Residents of the town are mourning the young woman's death, with pictures of a smiling Aya on display in people's living rooms and in cars in a show of solidarity with the devastated family.

Aya's mother told Arab News: "I do not have much time. I have to say goodbye to my daughter Aya."

She said that moments before the fatal shooting, Aya had sent her photographs, saying that she was fasting and wanted to make a date cake.



In a heart-wrenching scene, Ismail Hachem and his family bid farewell to their 19-year-old daughter Aya Hachem who was killed a week ago in a shooting in Blackburn, northern England. (Firas Haidar/AN Photo)

Aya went to a nearby supermarket to buy ingredients for the cake. "Aya was killed while she was hungry. She left the house and did not come back. I waited for an hour. I received a call from my husband who told me helicopters were flying over the area. I told him to rush to the supermarket to search for Aya," she said.

Aya's father tried to go to the market, but police cordoned off the area and he was not allowed to enter.

The mourning mother said: "I checked on Google and found out that there was a shooting incident and that a woman was shot, and that was when I got more anxious."



In a heart-wrenching scene, Ismail Hachem and his family bid farewell to their 19-year-old daughter Aya Hachem who was killed a week ago in a shooting in Blackburn, northern England. (Firas Haidar/AN Photo)

She added: "I realized that something terrible had happened to my daughter, but I did not expect that the two officers who knocked on our door would tell us that Aya had been killed. I fell down at their feet shouting, crying, and telling them that they were either wrong or joking, this cannot be true.

"I do not know if she died instantly or if she suffered before she died. This hurts me a lot because I did not know what happened and because I could not see her body. I am a mother in pain. I lost my daughter whom I tried to save from Lebanon. We thought that living abroad would protect our children. Now all I ask for is justice. I want to see her murderer suffer in prison as Aya suffered before she died."



In a heart-wrenching scene, Ismail Hachem and his family bid farewell to their 19-year-old daughter Aya Hachem who was killed a week ago in a shooting in Blackburn, northern England. (Firas Haidar/AN Photo)

She confirmed that her family “has no problems with anyone – instead it has many friends, and we have moved as refugees to Blackburn.”

The Hachem family left Lebanon on Nov. 24, 2011 on a family visit to Aya’s paternal uncle, who lives in the UK. Aya’s father applied for asylum for himself and his family. Aya’s mother said that before applying for asylum “we moved from one region to another on the request of British authorities, before being granted a residence visa valid for two and a half years.”

Aya’s father is still in shock. “I saw in Aya the embodiment of my dreams and wishes,” he told Arab News.

“She was an ambitious and passionate girl, studying law at the University of Salford. I used to tell her that one day she would become Britain’s prime minister. Aya was a smart girl, always ready to help people, and worked with charities all over London, Manchester and Burnley for nine years.



In a heart-wrenching scene, Ismail Hachem and his family bid farewell to their 19-year-old daughter Aya Hachem who was killed a week ago in a shooting in Blackburn, northern England. (Firas Haidar/AN Photo)

“Aya was two meters from the supermarket. She was killed by mistake. The police arrested 13 people and five appeared in court today.

“More than 150 police officers rushed to the scene of the crime. The shooting has nothing to do with terrorism or racism. It was the result of a personal dispute. Aya was the victim of this dispute, as the shooter reportedly meant to target another person,” he said.

Hachem said that he did not regret seeking asylum in England.



In a heart-wrenching scene, Ismail Hachem and his family bid farewell to their 19-year-old daughter Aya Hachem who was killed a week ago in a shooting in Blackburn, northern England. (Firas Haidar/AN Photo)

“I escaped the meaningless and absurd wars in my country, but it was the destiny of my daughter to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. This crime could have occurred anywhere. But the Blackburn region is small, quiet and safe. Everybody showed me sympathy and the whole country condemned the crime. I want justice to take its course and for the criminals to be punished.”

Hachem said he would return to England with his family when Beirut airport reopens.

“Life there is comfortable and there is safety, but fate wanted to take Aya’s life,” he said.



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Aya Hachem, student killed in UK shooting, to be buried in Lebanon
Three more arrested over killing of UK student Aya Hachem