

# Sudan to establish police force to protect health workers

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Sat, 2020-05-23 15:13

CAIRO: Sudan's transitional authorities are working to create a police force to protect health facilities, the prime minister's office said Saturday, as attacks against health workers and hospitals increase amid the coronavirus pandemic.

The move came after doctors across the country threatened Thursday to go on strike to pressure authorities to provide protection for health workers and facilities.

Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok met with representatives of doctors on Friday to find "decisive and strict solutions" to "the phenomenon of repeated attacks on health workers," his office said in a statement.

The government will introduce a draft bill to provide protection to health workers, the statement said.

At least two dozen attacks on health care workers and facilities have taken place in the past two months across the country, according to a tally by the Sudan Doctors' committee. The group is part of the protest movement that last year helped oust longtime autocratic president Omar al-Bashir.

In one instance last month, a riot erupted at a hospital in the city Omdurman, across the Nile River from the capital, Khartoum, when a rumor spread that it would take coronavirus patients. Police arrested several people who tried to attack the building.

On Thursday alone, there were at least three attacks on health workers and facilities in Khartoum that led to a temporary suspension of services at a hospital there, the committee said.

Sudan has reported at least 63 deaths from COVID-19 among around 3,380 confirmed cases of the coronavirus, which causes the disease.

Sudan's health care system has been weakened by decades of war and sanctions. The country is still reeling from last year's uprising that toppled al-Bashir.

Meanwhile, a handful of young people took to the streets in Khartoum on Saturday on the first anniversary of the deadly dispersal of a protest camp in in the last days of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan last year. The protesters torched tires but there were no clashes reported between protesters and security forces.

Footage circulated online showed some protesters practicing social distancing or wearing face masks as a precautionary measure against the virus.

The violent break-up last year of the protest camp outside the military's headquarters in Khartoum was an alarming turn of events in the standoff between the military and civilian protesters. The protesters had been holding a sit-in to pressure the military council to hand power over to civilians after al-Bashir ouster.

The protesters say at least 128 people were killed and hundreds wounded during the sit-in dispersal and the subsequent crackdown. However, military-backed health authorities say only 87 died, including security forces. Later, the generals and the protesters reached a power-sharing deal that established a joint military-civilian sovereign council that would lead Sudan toward elections.



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## [Easing of restrictions intensifies COVID-19 cases in Lebanon](#)

Sat, 2020-05-23 01:07

BEIRUT: A crackdown on any gatherings on Eid has been announced in Lebanon

after 26 new COVID-19 cases were recorded during the past 24 hours, raising the total number of cases in the country to 1,086.

Lebanese Interior Minister Mohammed Fahmy has blocked the reopening of malls, entertainment and sports gatherings, and gyms, playgrounds and parks will also stay shut. Dar Al-Fatwa sources confirmed to Arab News that Eid prayers "will be held in mosques but with adherence to social distancing. The central Eid prayer in Beirut will be attended by Prime Minister Hassan Diab."

Lebanon had eased its restrictions, calling for the population to adhere to preventive measures. But the scenes of people crowding into markets in Beirut and other regions without using face masks or adopting social distancing raised concerns.

In the markets popular perceptions of the need for wearing personal protection equipment varied hugely.

Saleh, a young man from the North Bekaa, said: "We do not have any infections. People live their lives naturally. Cafes opened and people smoke the forbidden hookah. Some people do not believe this disease exists."

A woman in her 50s, who was following up a personal matter at the social security office and does not wear a mask, said: "Do you believe that there is corona disease? Do you know anyone who got it? I don't know anyone. I think they are lying to us."

Amid this state of denial, on Friday Health Minister Hamad Hassan visited Majdal Anjar, the border town with Syria which recently recorded an unprecedented increase in the number of COVID-19 cases.

## **FASTFACT**

**Lebanon had eased its restrictions, but the scenes of people crowding into markets in Beirut and other regions without using face masks or adopting social distancing raised concerns.**

Hassan said: "If we do not take responsibility, then there is no doubt that the coronavirus will be disastrous. Overcrowding and social mixing cause a rapid spread of infection."

The security forces cordoned off Majdal Anjar, together with the town of Mazboud in the province of Al-Kharoub on Mount Lebanon, because the number of infections had increased there.

Lebanon had also resumed returning Lebanese expatriates, especially students. Seven flights arrived from Istanbul, Riyadh, Dammam, Paris, Dubai and London. The Minister of Health also said that "returning expatriates do not have the right to break the home quarantine imposed on them for 14 days and cause a danger to the country and its citizens." He pointed out that "the cases that do not show symptoms are those that lead to the spread of the pandemic, and constitute the real danger."

Hassan suggested that "we may go for herd immunity, but in a calm manner, and we may close the country completely when the number of beds in hospitals becomes insufficient, but the immunity tests that have been carried out do not indicate an outbreak or spread of the pandemic yet and we will not witness a second wave if we are careful and responsible."

Dr. Abdul-Rahman Al-Bizri, an infectious diseases specialist and member of the Health Ministry's crisis committee, said that "what is happening now is the result of lack of seriousness in dealing with this."

He told Arab News that "The roots of the problem are clear. The return of people from abroad was mishandled. At first, there was discipline and things were acceptable. But later, we did not see good organization. When the authorities opened the country internally, it did not work to protect the interests of people by stressing the application of prevention measures. And the most dangerous group which the authorities ignored is foreign workers who live in crowded places where it is easy to transmit infection between them and to others."

Al-Bizri stressed the importance of "re-organizing things before resuming flights from abroad to stop the current chaos."

Information Minister Manal Abdel Samad confirmed after a session of the Council of Ministers on Thursday that "there is currently no decision to reopen Beirut airport, and the last flight for returnees will be on the 27th of this month. As for the resumption of flights, it is suspended indefinitely."



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Morocco prisoners make masks for fellow inmates The activation of Turkey's Ilisu Dam is likely to complicate relations with Baghdad

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# Morocco prisoners make masks for fellow inmates

Sat, 2020-05-23 01:03

RABAT: Prisoners in Morocco are doing their bit in the country's fight against the spread of coronavirus – by making thousands of face masks for fellow inmates.

"We feel like we are contributing to the collective effort, even if it's from behind prison walls," 40-year-old Khalid, wearing a white coat and a face mask, told AFP during an interview in the presence of prison management. An inmate at Casablanca's Ain Sebaa prison – the kingdom's most crowded jail, with some 8,000 inmates – Khalid leaves his cell every day for the sewing workshop, passing through long corridors that reek of disinfectant. He finishes off the masks while others cut the fabric or pack the protective items into plastic bags for distribution to some 80,000 prisoners across the country.

The North African kingdom has officially declared 7,300 coronavirus infections, including 197 deaths.

It has extended its lockdown until June 10, and anyone going outdoors requires authorization and must wear a mask.

Police checks are frequent, and those caught risk up to three months in prison and a fine of up to 1,300 dirhams (\$130) for violating the rules. One of the aims of the pilot program, launched at Ain Sebaa prison at the start of May, is to "foster a spirit of citizenship" among detainees and "help them to manage their detention during the lockdown," prison management said.

## **SPEEDREAD**

**The North African kingdom has officially declared 7,300 coronavirus infections, including 197 deaths.**

Since Morocco declared a medical state of emergency in mid-March, prison visits and any activities that require outside intervention have been halted. Hospital visits are limited to emergencies, while court attendance has also been suspended, with hearings held via video conference.

Over 300 virus cases have been recorded among inmates in the country's prisons, with about a quarter of infections among personnel, according to official figures.

Rights groups have urged authorities to release some detainees to limit the risk of infection among the country's notoriously overcrowded prisons.

At the start of April, King Mohammed VI pardoned more than 5,600 prisoners.

No cases have been registered at the Ain Sebaa facility, which has "rigorously" applied preventive measures, director Abderrahim Kerrari said. Disinfectant has been installed at the main entrance and in areas leading to the cells, and sanitizing gel stands on every table in the workshop.

Some of the mask-makers, like 54-year-old Mustafa, worked in the clothing industry before their arrest. He said he was happy to be “useful to society,” while fellow inmate Wafaa, 37, said he’d signed up to develop skills and gain experience. The program also aims to “prepare inmates for reintegration into society by instilling in them values such as solidarity,” Kerrari said. Those taking part were already involved in the prison’s sewing workshops, and received two days of training on mask-making. Participants are paid for their efforts, based on the number of days worked, although the amount was not disclosed. The administration chose them for their “good conduct,” giving priority to inmates serving shorter sentences, Kerrari added. Collectively, some one hundred prisoners in around 20 Moroccan facilities are making 20,000 masks a day – just a drop in the ocean when compared to the 10 million produced daily in local factories repurposed in the fight against the pandemic. But in the workshop of the women’s wing, 35-year-old Meriem expressed a sense of satisfaction in taking part. “I am very happy to be doing a job that’s useful for our people during the pandemic,” she said. “I feel I am doing my duty, even if it’s just a modest contribution.”





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Easing of restrictions intensifies COVID-19 cases in Lebanon  
The activation of Turkey's Ilisu Dam is likely to complicate relations with Baghdad

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## [The activation of Turkey's Ilisu Dam is likely to complicate relations with Baghdad](#)

Sat, 2020-05-23 00:11

ANKARA: Turkey's controversial, decades-long Ilisu Dam project reached a milestone on Tuesday when its first turbine began generating power.

When fully operational the dam, on the river Tigris in the southeastern Mardin province, is expected to generate 4.1 billion kilowatt hours of electricity a year.

However, in addition to ongoing criticism of the displacement of 80,000 people whose homes were flooded, there are concerns about the possibility that the \$2 billion dollar project will reduce water flow to neighboring, water-scarce Iraq.

"The Ilisu dam adds another twist to the already complicated relationship between Iraq and Turkey," said Dr. Muhanad Seloom, an assistant professor of security studies at the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies.

"The shares of Tigris water have been present in almost all high-level diplomatic, commercial and security meetings between the two sides. Iraqi officials accuse Turkey of using water shares to further its economic interests, and to force the Iraqi government to attack and eventually expel the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) from its territories."

Seloom said the partially-formed government of Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhimi has neither the capacity nor the mandate to negotiate with Turkey about mitigating the effects of the dam on Iraq's water supply and agriculture.

"Iraq will most likely issue another rhetorical statement voicing concern and calling on Turkey to respect its obligations under international water-shares treaties," he said.

Geopolitical analyst Bashdar Ismaeel said that water is such an important issue for drought-susceptible Iraq, and its agricultural sector in particular, it is imperative that agreements are reached with Turkey that guarantee requirements are met.

"Agriculture provides a means of livelihood for more than a third of Iraq's population, and 80 per cent of the country's water goes to agriculture, so you can see its reliance on water," he said. "If Iraq gets sufficient rainfall, then concerns over water supply from Turkey can be papered over, but any semblance of drought and Iraq will suffer greatly."

The problem, he added, is that Ilisu is just the latest in a number of dams that have given Turkey control over Iraq's water supply. As a result, Iraq is at the mercy of Turkey.

"In case of any water shortages, does Turkey put its own interests first or those of Iraq?" Ismaeel wondered.

Ilisu Dam is 140 kilometers from Iraq, and experts warn that that it could easily be used as a "regional weapon" in any dispute between the neighbors.

"Iraq's vast oil resources give it strategic and political advantage in the region, so in a similar vein, Turkey can (argue it has the right to control) strategic water resources that emanate from its lands," said Ismaeel.

"If relations are cordial, it is unlikely that Iraq and Turkey would fall out over water. But with the sensitive sociopolitical and economic landscape in the region, it would not take much for tension or disagreements to arise.

"Future tit-for-tit measures might mean Iraq could also try to undermine Turkey's interests, through proxies or direct means, if Turkey threatened to cut off water supplies."



Baghdad has expressed many concerns about the building of dams in Turkey. Even if the Iraqi government reaches a compromise with Turkey, Ismaeel said, it would face a massive backlash from the public if there are any water shortages.

“The Iraqi government cannot afford more mass protests and social and political chaos,” he added. “If it appears the Iraqi PM is appeasing Ankara at the expense of the welfare of ordinary Iraqis, then can you imagine the reaction from the public?”

Ankara has not made any statement about legal guarantees that might be given to Baghdad about the operation of the Ilisu Dam.

“With the dam set to produce a huge amount of electricity, there could yet be a trade off, economically, for Iraq,” said Ismaeel. “Even if water flow is reduced, Iraq could benefit in other ways.

“If Iraq gets sufficient rainfall, water-flow rates might not be problematic and Iraq’s resistance to the dams might be more muted – but this is a dangerous tactical approach.”



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Morocco prisoners make masks for fellow inmates

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# Murder of student in UK shocks Lebanese

Author:

Fri, 2020-05-22 20:28

LONDON: The murder of Lebanese student Aya Hachem in a drive-by shooting in the UK on Sunday has shocked her compatriots worldwide.

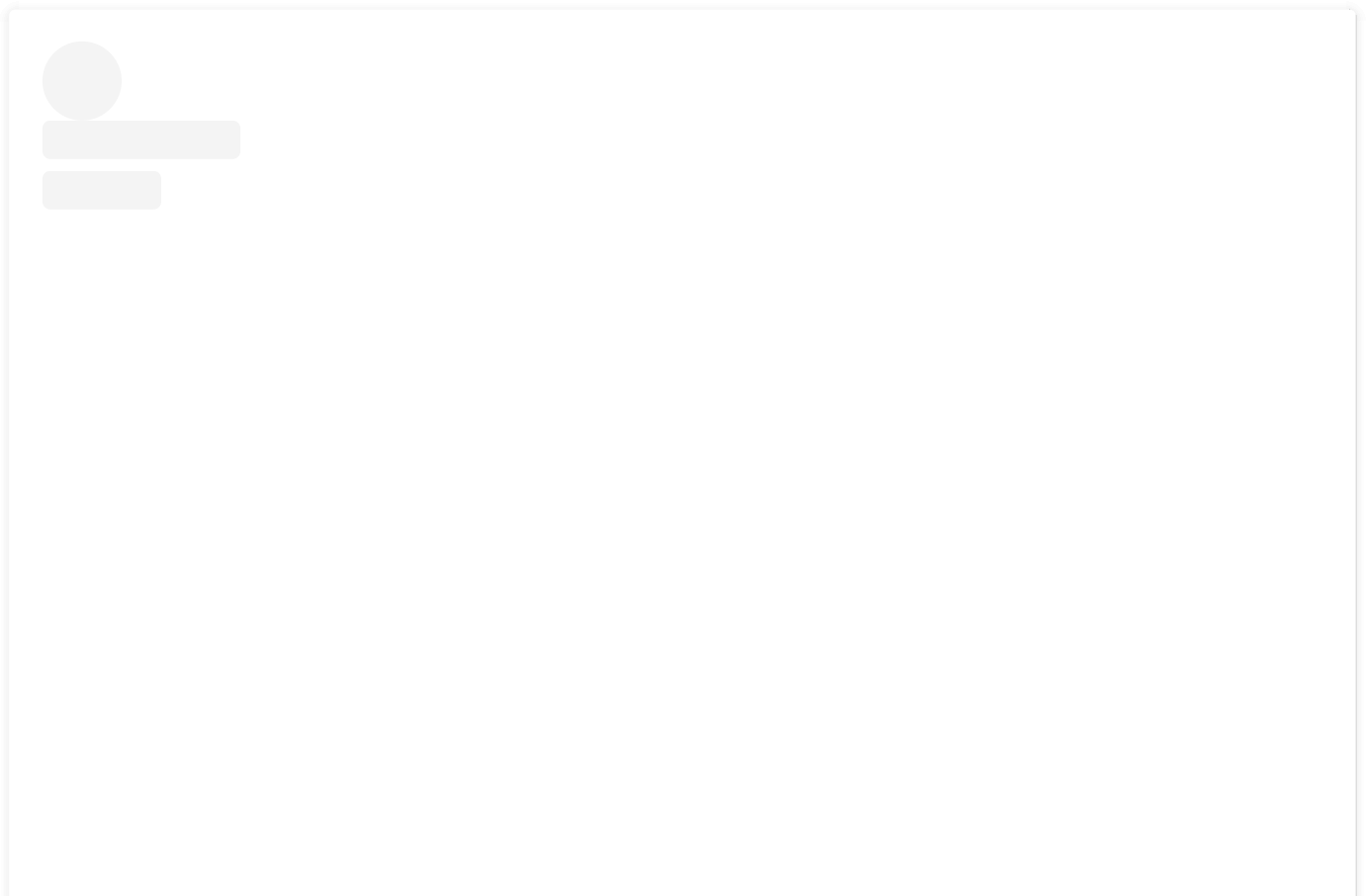
“Honestly, it hit really close to home,” Gabreille Antar, a student at London’s School of Oriental and African Studies, told Arab News. “A Lebanese student my age died walking to the supermarket. It’s worrisome.”

Hachem, 19, succumbed to her wounds after she was shot from a car in Blackburn, Lancashire, outside a supermarket in broad daylight.

Authorities believe that the law student was not the intended target, and have appealed to the public for help with the investigation.

Kuwait-based Lebanese illustrator Nour Flayhan created a memorial illustration in Hachem’s name.

The artwork, which was uploaded onto Flayhan’s Instagram page, has garnered over 8,000 likes.



[View this post on Instagram](#)

A post shared by nourie (@nouriflayhan) on May 20, 2020 at 8:14am PDT

"I wanted to honour her death as a Lebanese young woman who had a bright future ahead of her," Flayhan told Arab News.

According to Hachem's family, her body will be flown to Lebanon on Saturday, with the burial taking place the same day.

"Regardless of whether Aya was the intended target or not, justice needs to be served for her and her family," pharmaceutical saleswoman Nour Safieddine told Arab News.

"Such a brutal, inhumane act is unacceptable and unbearable. Extremely sad news. My heart goes out to all her loved ones. May God be with them."

Police have arrested 11 people as part of the investigation into the killing, eight of whom are suspected of Hachem's murder.

Lancashire Police said in a statement: "Detectives are aware of a number of videos circulating across social media and are asking people to report them to the police. We would also ask people not to share these videos out of respect for Aya and her family."

Detective Chief Constable Terry Woods said his officers would "not be going away until we've got justice for Aya and her family," adding that "it's now time for the criminal fraternity to come forward."



AYA HASHEM

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Three more arrested over killing of UK student Aya Hachem  
Three arrested in connection with murder of Lebanese student Aya Hachem