

# [UAE announces 150 new cases of coronavirus, two deaths](#)

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DUBAI: The UAE announced 150 new cases of coronavirus in the country on Wednesday and two deaths.

Both patients who died had underlying health problems. One of them was a 62-year-old Asian man and the other was a 78-year-old Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) citizen.

Eight people have died of coronavirus in the UAE to date, with 814 recorded cases.



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UAE completes 39 evacuations of citizens from abroad amid coronavirus crisis  
More online stores added to shopping list in UAE amid coronavirus pandemic

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# Egypt's health sector races to scale up coronavirus readiness

Author:

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Wed, 2020-04-01 17:05

CAIRO: Egypt has ramped up efforts to fight the coronavirus, ordering manufacturers to channel medical protective equipment to public hospitals and announcing 1 billion Egyptian pounds (\$64 million) in extra funding for its health services.

But the capacity of the public health system to cope with an acceleration of cases in the country of 100 million, where population density could increase the chances of quick contagion, remains a concern, some of its doctors say. Decades of underinvestment left many of Egypt's public hospitals dependent on donations for some services and supplies. Poor quality in primary health care facilities and public hospitals means that in recent years more than half of patients have sought private medical care, according to the World Bank.

At Boulaq public hospital in Cairo, the first major renovation for decades began a few months ago after a social media campaign, two medics there said. As other public hospitals are cordoned off to create isolation wards, those like Boulaq that remain open for normal services are feeling the strain.

"Things are not good. We feel the pressure increasing every day," said one male doctor, who asked not to be named. "We are suffering from years of accumulating (problems). We have shortages of medical equipment, devices and supply."

Egypt had allocated 125 billion pounds from its 1.6 trillion pound 2019/20 budget to the health sector. The health minister told parliament in January that 150 million Egyptian pounds had been assigned for renovations at Boulaq, but more was needed, according to state newspaper Al-Ahram.

There was no immediate response from the health ministry to calls seeking comment on Egypt's coronavirus preparedness.

## MORE TESTING CENTRES

Egypt is not alone in feeling the strain of the coronavirus, which has killed more than 43,000 people worldwide. From Japan to Italy, Spain, Britain and the United States, health experts have accused governments of initially downplaying the pandemic or failing to take swift enough action.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has praised Egypt's efforts but has also said they can be scaled up in some areas.

Jean Jabbour, head of the WHO's Egypt office said the government's response had so far been prompt. There are 2,000 beds allocated for COVID-19 treatment, half of which are in intensive care units and 600 with ventilators, while 400,000 test kits have been delivered, his office told Reuters.

"This is ready to increase ... whenever there is a surge in the number of cases of COVID-19," Jabbour said.

Egypt reported its first coronavirus case on February 14. The number of confirmed cases has steadily risen to 710, including 46 deaths.

There are about 50 coronavirus testing centers, up from one at the start of the outbreak, and eight isolation and treatment hospitals. Medical staff have received the promise of a modest bonus from the president.

For the moment, officials say they are able to contain the virus by testing, tracing, isolation and treatment, along with restrictive measures including a nighttime curfew and the closure of mosques, schools and tourist sites.

But once the number of cases surpasses 1,000, the tracing would become harder, the health minister has said.

"If we're very lucky we can shut down transmission like they did in China. If we're not so lucky we can delay at least the stage three or community wide transmission," WHO official Yvan Hutin said at a press briefing on Monday.

"If we're not lucky or if we don't work hard enough then it could come faster than we can cope."

(\$1 = 15.7700 Egyptian pounds)



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Snakes or animal genitals? Chinese BBQ pictures spark row in coronavirus-affected Egypt

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## Trump warns Iran of 'heavy price' in case of attack on US troops

Wed, 2020-04-01 20:08

WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump warned Iran on Wednesday of a "heavy price" if it or its allies in Iraq attack US troops stationed there. "If this happens, Iran will pay a very heavy price, indeed!" Trump tweeted. The US president also wrote: "Upon information and belief, Iran or its proxies are planning a sneak attack on US troops and/or assets in Iraq." It was not clear whether Trump meant Washington actually has intelligence of such a plan.

Upon information and belief, Iran or its proxies are planning a sneak attack on U.S. troops and/or assets in Iraq. If this happens, Iran will pay a very heavy price, indeed!

– Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump) [April 1, 2020](#)

The United States and Iran are in a tense battle for influence in Iraq, where Tehran has powerful allies, including among armed militias, and Washington has close ties to the government.

Some 7,500 foreign troops are in Iraq as part of the US-led coalition helping local troops fight militant groups, but those numbers are being significantly drawn down this month.

The alliance is temporarily bringing some trainers home as a precautionary measure against the coronavirus pandemic and is also leaving some Iraqi bases altogether.

Those bases and foreign embassies, particularly the American mission, have been targeted in more than two dozen rocket strikes since late October. The attacks, which the US has blamed on an Iran-backed armed group, have prompted fears of a proxy war on Iraqi soil.



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Iran general visits Baghdad, tries to forge political unity  
Iran warns US after Patriot deployment to Iraq

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## [Lebanese govt approves plan to fly home expats trapped abroad by virus](#)

Author:

Wed, 2020-04-01 00:36

BEIRUT: The Lebanese Cabinet on Tuesday approved plans for special flights to bring home expatriates trapped abroad by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak.

Ministers agreed the repatriation initiative as Lebanon recorded 17 new cases of infection, taking the total to 463. One COVID-19 patient in his 40s with underlying health issues was reported to have died. Twelve people in the

country have now lost their lives after contracting the virus.

During the Cabinet session, proposals were passed to “repatriate Lebanese expatriates wishing to leave their countries of residence due to the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. This would allow an exceptional opening of the airport for Middle East Airlines (MEA) flights to organize the repatriation process.”

The flights will take place as soon as medics have received newly ordered COVID-19 test kits which will allow them to check if returnees have been infected.

The Lebanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs is currently finding out how many individuals want to return to Lebanon at their own expense.

With Lebanon now into the third week of restrictions on movement to help prevent the spread of COVID-19, reports were emerging of shops reopening and traffic returning to the streets in regions outside of the capital Beirut.

In the northern city of Tripoli there were demonstrations outside the office of the Tripoli and north mufti, Sheikh Malek Al-Shaar, against the deterioration of living conditions. Protesters waved banners stating, “people are hungry but are not begging.”

With many businesses closed and people forced to stay at home under government orders, some Lebanese have found other methods of making money. Omar Hijazi, the owner of a large sanitaryware store in Beirut, set up a vegetable stall in front of his shop after being told to shut. He told Arab News that he needed to provide food for his family and had “to pay for loans, rent, and expenses to support his little child.”

## **HIGHLIGHTS**

- **During the Cabinet session, proposals were passed to ‘repatriate Lebanese expatriates wishing to leave their countries of residence due to the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. This would allow an exceptional opening of the airport for Middle East Airlines (MEA) flights to organize the repatriation process.’**
- **The flights will take place as soon as medics have received newly ordered COVID-19 test kits which will allow them to check if returnees have been infected.**

He said Lebanese security forces had imposed measures on him to allow him to sell the vegetables which included covering and sterilizing them.

“The merchandise in my store is worth \$100,000, yet by the end of the month I am not able to pay \$100. Two days ago, I started selling vegetables, which is not my profession. I am totally devastated yet selling vegetables will procure food and beverages for my family until the crisis is over,” he added. However, many people in Lebanon have been supporting health workers, with TV campaigns seeing generous donations for Rafik Hariri University Hospital’s medical and nursing teams, and also toward the Lebanese Red Cross.

Municipalities, and political and public figures have also been working to distribute aid to families in need.

However, the Consumer Protection Association warned that poor people in the

country could soon have no choice but to leave their homes to make money regardless of the dangers of contracting COVID-19. Association head, Dr. Zuhair Berro, said: "The poor do not care about the coronavirus. They are more concerned with their livelihood. We are witnessing a deterioration in living standards."



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Lebanon's coronavirus crisis spurs race to tackle looming ventilator shortage  
Lebanese break social distancing rules

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## [Godfather of the Assad regime takes Rafik Hariri secrets to the grave](#)

Author:

Wed, 2020-04-01 00:24

PARIS: The warning from Abdul-Halim Khaddam to Lebanese prime minister Rafik Hariri was unequivocal: "Beware of these crazy people ... they can harm you."

As the man who served for 30 years in the upper echelons of the Syrian state under President Hafez Assad and then his son Bashar, Khaddam knew what he was

talking about; in February 2005, Hariri was assassinated in Beirut by terrorists linked to the Syrian regime.

Khaddam, the former Syrian vice president who died from a heart attack early on Tuesday at the age of 88, recounted the story to Saad Hariri when the murdered man's son visited him in his Paris residence a few months after the assassination.

In May 2015 Khaddam openly accused Hezbollah and Syrian regime members of the assassination. Officials from the tribunal investigating Hariri's murder also visited Paris to question Khaddam.

For three decades in Syria, no one was closer to the Assad family than Khaddam, the Sunni Syrian Baathist from a middle-class family in the Mediterranean resort town of Baniyas.

Once seen as a possible successor to Hafez, instead he helped Bashar tighten his grip on power after he took office in June 2000.

In the days following the elder Assad's death, Khaddam pushed through decrees elevating Bashar's military rank to general and making him commander of the armed forces – key moves in the uncertain process of succession.

A lawyer by training, Khaddam was foreign minister for 14 years before becoming vice-president in 1984. He also took part in shaping Syrian policy in Lebanon. A former French ambassador to Syria, Jean Claude Cousseran, told Arab News Khaddam was the hard-line politician closest to Assad's father, and a hard-liner also on the Lebanese question. Many Lebanese detested Khaddam because he represented the Syrian occupation and all its tragic consequences.

Yves Aubin de la Messuziere, another former French ambassador who headed the Middle East desk at the French Foreign Ministry, told Arab News he remembered Khaddam accompanying Bashar Assad on a state visit to Paris in 2000, when president Jacques Chirac had invited him after the death of his father.

De la Messuziere, an Arabist, recalled waiting in a side room of the Elysee Palace with an angry and impatient Khaddam while the two presidents had their one-to-one meeting. "Why is it taking so long, what are they doing?" he asked, in a loud voice.

In 2005, Khaddam was a vocal critic of both the Hariri assassination and Syria's foreign policy in general, and he resigned from the Baath party.

Khaddam moved to Paris in December 2005, claiming that he needed medical treatment, and established a residence on the exclusive Avenue Foch, where his home was guarded round the clock by French police.

In 2011 he became one of the most prominent opponents of Bashar Assad and his war against his own people. From his Paris base, Khaddam tried to carve out a role in the opposition to Assad but struggled to win the trust of other dissidents because of his decades of work in the Baath party.

As the uprising continued, Khaddam said Syrians would have to take up arms in self-defense unless the world intervened to protect them, and he accused Assad and his family of instigating sectarian strife.



Khaddam's presence in Paris was not popular with French public opinion, and criticized by many French officials who opposed his policy in Lebanon. Nevertheless, his vocal opposition to Bashar Assad had to some extent rehabilitated him.

Khaddam will be buried in France, where his funeral will be organized by the Paris municipality. His son Jihad is stranded in Turkey by the coronavirus pandemic, and his other son Jamal is recovering from open heart surgery in Paris.



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Hezbollah names Beirut street after Rafiq Hariri assassin  
Iran militias assassinated Lebanon's Rafik Hariri: Saudi Deputy Defense Minister