

# Iran worst hit as more coronavirus cases reported across Mideast

Sat, 2020-03-07 23:34

TEHRAN: The Middle East is in the grip of coronavirus as more cases were reported on Saturday and the death toll in Iran jumped to 145 with 21 more deaths, including a politician who became the 8th official to succumb to the disease.

The virus, which was first recorded in China in December, has spread across the Middle East and beyond. Most cases in the Gulf Arab states are among people who either traveled to Iran personally, or were infected by people who had visited Iran.

The World Health Organization (WHO) on Saturday offered help to Iran as more than 1,000 new cases were reported in 24 hours in the Islamic Republic, bringing the total to 5,823. The number of people dead rose by 21, to 145.

Health Ministry spokesman Kianoush Jahanpour said more than 16,000 people were in hospital under observation as possible cases.

He added that 1,669 people who were sick with the COVID-19 illness have recovered.

The capital Tehran remains the worst-hit city in the country, with 1,539 confirmed cases.

More than 300 of the new cases reported on Saturday were in Mazandaran province, a popular tourist destination north of Tehran on the Caspian sea. "Mazandaran is at the top of the list because the necessary limitations (on domestic traveling) were not imposed," Jahanpour added.

The WHO's representative in Iran, Christoph Hamelmann, said the organization was ready to help, "mainly through assistance with procurement and supply of essential medicines."

Among those reported dead from the virus on Saturday was Fatemeh Rahbar, 55, a conservative member of parliament from 2004 to 2016 who was re-elected in February.

Seven other politicians and government officials have died in Iran's outbreak, including Mohammad Mirmohammadi, a member of the powerful Expediency Council. Deputy Health Minister Iraj Harirchi and another member of parliament, Mahmoud Sadeghi, have also been infected.

Iran has closed schools and universities until early April, and suspended major cultural and sporting events.

## **Cases also rising in Gulf**

The number of coronavirus cases in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has risen to 45 from 30. Kuwait recorded three new cases bringing its infection tally to 61, while Qatar reported its 12th case on Saturday.

Saudi Arabia reported two new cases on Saturday, a woman coming from Iran, via Bahrain, and another one from Iraq, via the UAE, bringing the total number of infections in the Kingdom to seven, according to a statement from the Health Ministry.

Kuwait has suspended flights to and from Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Bangladesh, the Philippines, India and Sri Lanka for a week, and has banned the entry of foreigners who have been to those countries in the past two weeks.

Dubai-based Al-Arabiya TV cited Bahraini health officials saying on Saturday six new cases of coronavirus were confirmed in the Gulf state, bringing its total number of infections to 62.

The UAE, a major air transit center, business and tourism hub, has advised citizens and residents against traveling abroad and all schools are closed for a month from Sunday.

Events across the country have also been canceled or postponed.

Saudi Arabia has closed its land borders with the UAE, Kuwait and Bahrain, with an exception for commercial trucks, and is only permitting flights from those countries to three of its airports.

Dozens of Saudis have come forward after authorities called on Friday for people who had been in Iran during the last two weeks to inform officials, the Saudi Press Agency (SPA) reported on Saturday, citing the Health Ministry.

The SPA said 95 Saudis have come forward to say they are currently in Iran, while 26 said they had returned from Iran. Another seven said they were in a third country after having visited Iran, SPA said.

For the first weekend since the outbreak began, sport was heavily affected. Saudi Arabia banned spectators from competitions, and Al-Faisaly played Al-Nasr on Saturday in an empty stadium.

A full program of Serie A football matches in Italy, which has Europe's largest number of virus cases, will be played on Sunday behind closed doors.

In the UK, a meeting will take place on Monday between the government, sports bodies and broadcasters to discuss a ban on spectators.

*(With AP & Reuters)*



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Lebanon on alert as coronavirus cases reach 28 Saudi Arabia announces 2 new cases of coronavirus coming from Iran, Iraq

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# Lebanon on alert as coronavirus cases reach 28

Sat, 2020-03-07 22:46

BEIRUT: The number of coronavirus cases in Lebanon has reached 28, health officials in the country said on Saturday.

Meanwhile, the Ministerial Committee for Combating Coronavirus has decided to extend the closure of schools and universities until March 14, and to close all entertainment centers such as gyms, nightclubs, cinemas, exhibitions and conferences for a week. It is also urging people to avoid crowded places and gatherings.

The ministries of interior, tourism, economy, culture, and youth and sports will follow up on implementation of these measures.

"Lebanon is weak in the face of the virus because of the great administrative deterioration in the Health Ministry and the public health sector, particularly in public hospitals, accompanied by a severe economic crisis," Ismail Sukariya, a gastroenterologist at the American University of Beirut Medical Center, told Arab News.

"Since the arrival of the first plane from (the Iranian city of) Qom, the (Lebanese) health minister should've taken strict measures. The decision was political, and we can't stop Lebanese citizens from coming home," Sukariya said.

"Lebanon will see dozens of infections by the end of the month ... The virus might stay active until summer, just like the World Health Organization announced on Saturday."

The Justice Ministry has extended the suspension of hearings until March 13, and Beirut Arab University (BAU) is continuing to suspend classes and replace attendance with online courses.

The head of the Supreme Islamic Shiite Council, Sheikh Abdul-Amir Qablan, has urged people to reduce gatherings at mosques and abide by the directives of the Health Ministry and medical bodies.

He has also urged those who have the virus to report it to ensure their safety and that of their families.

Health Minister Hamad Hassan ordered all university hospitals to start conducting coronavirus tests because the number of suspected cases is increasing and will soon exceed the capacity of the laboratory of Rafik Hariri University Hospital. Those who test positive will be quarantined at that hospital.

Municipalities have started to organize mandatory courses for police personnel on how to deal with suspected cases and immediately intervene in case someone dies, so as to prevent further infections.



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Lebanon's financial prosecutor freezes assets of 20 banks

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[Iraq's leaders 'old, bitter, 50-plus](#)

# males,' says singer ahead of Arab women artists festival

Author:

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1583605839205341500

Sat, 2020-03-07 21:19

LONDON: An Iraqi singer, who fled her native country for Sweden, has used a London festival performance to condemn Iraq's leadership, describing its political elite as "old, bitter, 50-plus males with extremely dusty beliefs." Iraqi-Egyptian Nadin Al-Khalidi, a founder member of the Tarabband group, accused Baghdad politicians of squandering Iraq's potential, saying her dream is to "see my homeland blooming again."

The singer said that she is hoping for a "miraculous turning point" in Iraq. "I hope to see young Iraqi men and women finally claiming their right to lead society with their ideas, dreams, ambition and talents," Al-Khalidi told Arab News.

"I would love to see young women and men with their liberal, free, honest, transparent and non-scary visions sailing this ship forward without a bloodbath," she said.

"There should be no more old, bitter, 50-plus males sitting in their chairs with extremely dusty beliefs, ideas and visions about how to rule the country."

Al-Khalidi was speaking before taking the stage with her band at the Arab Women Artists Now (AWAN) festival on Saturday ahead of International Women's Day.

Formed in Malmo, Sweden, in 2008, Tarabband is a six-member group founded by Al-Khalidi and Swede Gabriel Hermansson, who began as a duo playing Arabic, Persian, Spanish and Italian music.

Al-Khalidi, who grew up in Iraq and Egypt, and sought refuge in Sweden with her sister in 2001, is the band's lead vocalist and lyricist, and plays the Algerian mandole and Turkish saz, both stringed instruments.

Politics, identity, love, peace and cultural tolerance are common themes in her songs.



The singer said that she felt honored to be part of the AWAN festival, which highlights talented female artists from the Arab world.

“It’s an honor to represent Arab women, and to inspire and be inspired by our audience in London. We look forward to playing in the UK more often,” she said. “I hope to bring music, joy and a deep connection with the audience.” Al-Khalidi told Arab News that even the band’s name is cross-cultural, and is formed of the Arabic word “tarab,” which means the rapture caused by music, and the English word “band.”

The singer said that the idea for the name came while she was eating at an Arab restaurant and listening to legendary Lebanese singer Fairuz.

A waiter made a remark about the song being “real tarab” and suddenly she thought of calling the duo “Tarabband.”

She said that at a time of growing far-right sentiment against refugees in Europe, “singing is a symbolic way of inspiring and empowering other people.” “Tarabband’s audience in Sweden is made up mainly of Swedes, so I am creating a cultural bridge here, a free zone where people with different cultural, political and religious backgrounds can meet for 60-90 minutes and discover that we all have a lot in common.”

Al-Khalidi said that her work with refugees in her adopted home helps her cope with the guilt she feels for “not actively making a difference” in Iraq. “When you look at the young men and women, and even the elderly, who are protesting in Tahrir Square in Baghdad, the only thing they are saying is that they want to have a decent life, and fair wages, working hours and opportunities.

“There is a lot of money in Iraq and lots of potential – it’s horrible to see young men and women who have an education that doesn’t even secure them bread or a meal in their daily lives.”







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Iraq's Abdul Mahdi says will walk away from caretaker PM role  
Passionate Saudi musicians Jwa ready to take the world by storm

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## [Lebanese Army debunks reports of virus among soldiers](#)

Author:

Sat, 2020-03-07 02:16

BEIRUT: The Lebanese Armed Forces Command on Friday debunked reports about soldiers being quarantined, after they were reportedly found to be infected with coronavirus

"There are no corona reports in the military ranks, and the necessary preventive measures are in place," the army leadership confirmed.

The statement came after social media and local online news sites reported about the virus being infected by military personnel.

The government has meanwhile decided to extend the closure of schools until the date of March 14. At a meeting held on late Friday, the committee on coronavirus also decided to close entertainment and sports centers, like sports clubs, nightclubs, cinemas, exhibitions, theaters and conferences, and has asked all the citizens to avoid crowded places.

The number of people infected with coronavirus in Lebanon has increased to 22.

A Lebanese woman who came from the UK was found to have contracted the virus, according to the Ministry of Health, which reiterated its call on all "individuals coming from countries experiencing cases of infection with the virus to confine themselves in their homes and to contact the ministry's hotline designated to this matter upon exhibition of any symptom related to infection with coronavirus."

Health officials fear that Lebanon might move from containing the virus to dealing with the spread of the disease.

Minister of Health Hamad Hassan said coronavirus had "not yet reached the stage of spreading."

However, a surveillance official at the ministry said it "needs more health monitors to carry out the task of monitoring arrivals to the country, specifically on land crossings."

On Wednesday, the first case of infection was detected in a Lebanese

businessman coming from Egypt. He was transferred to a Lebanese medical center in Jbeil. His arrival sparked panic in the region.

Another case was recorded in the town of Chakra in southern Lebanon. A man who was in Iran and returned to Lebanon last week contracted the virus. Medical sources told Arab News: "The fact that the number of infected people reached 16 does not mean that the virus has gone out of control. Lebanese people must adhere to the preventive measures broadcast on all media including social media."

## **NUMBER**

### **22 – people have been found infected with coronavirus in Lebanon.**

Rafik Hariri University Hospital in Beirut, which is designated to receive cases of coronavirus, said its emergency department received 74 suspected cases on Thursday.

It added that they were all examined, and that 25 cases were confined in the hospital; the others were asked to abide by home confinement.

The hospital's report added that out of the 52 cases subjected to laboratory tests, only one proved positive.

The report indicated that 19 people who were in confinement in the hospital have already left after laboratory tests proved them negative, however, they were recommended to home confinement, and that there are 19 other cases who are still in confinement in the hospital.

The Iranian patient remains in a critical condition, "while the others who contracted the virus are in stable condition and are receiving the necessary treatment in the confinement area."

People in the streets are covering their faces with masks. Banks, public institutions and private companies have provided sterilization dispensers. Flights at Beirut-Rafic Hariri International Airport witnessed a decline during February. The Lebanese National News Agency reported the "negative impact of health and economic conditions on overall flights."

The number of passengers decreased by 14 percent compared to the same period last year. The number of flights to and from Lebanon decreased in January and February by 14.3 percent.

UAE Ambassador to Lebanon Hamad Saeed Al-Shamsi and Beirut District Governor Judge Ziad Shbib launched early on Thursday the "UAE Humanitarian Initiative" to sterilize places of worship, gathering places and streets in Beirut to contain the virus.

Clergymen have implemented measures in churches and mosques to prevent transmission. A representative from the Media and International Affairs Department of Dar Al-Fatwa, Khaldoun Kawas told Arab News that masks and sterilizers had already been made available to worshippers in mosques in preparation for Friday prayers and that no decision was taken to suspend them.



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## [Virus hits 100,000 cases as it upends lives, livelihoods](#)

Sat, 2020-03-07 01:56

BANGKOK: Crossing more borders, the new coronavirus hit a milestone on Friday, infecting more than 100,000 people worldwide as it wove itself deeper into the daily lives of millions, infecting the powerful, the unprotected poor and the vast masses in between.

The virus, which has killed nearly 3,400 people, edged into more and more US states, popped up in new countries and even breached the halls of the Vatican. It forced mosques in Iran and beyond to halt weekly Muslim prayers. It brought Israeli and Palestinian authorities together to block pilgrims from Jesus' birthplace in Bethlehem. And it upended Japan's plans for the Olympic torch parade.

"Who is going to feed their families?" asked Elias Al-Arja, head of a hotel owners' union in Bethlehem in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, where tourists have been banned and the storied Church of the Nativity shuttered. Questions swirled around whether Iran could control its outbreak, as the

number of reported infections jumped beyond 4,700 on Friday, with 124 deaths. Iran planned to set up checkpoints to limit travel, urged people to stop using paper money and had firefighters spray disinfectant on an 18-km length of Tehran's most famous avenue.

"It would be great if they did it every day," grocery store owner Reza Razaienejad said after firefighters sprayed outside his shop. "It should not be just a one-time thing."

The 100,000 figure of global infections is largely symbolic but dwarfs other major outbreaks in recent decades. SARS, MERS and Ebola affected far fewer people but had higher mortality rates.

The economic impact grew along with the number of infected people. World stocks and the price of oil dropped sharply again Friday.

A sharp drop in travel and a broader economic downturn linked to the outbreak threatened to hit already-struggling communities for months to come.

The head of the UN's food agency, the World Food Programme, warned of the potential for "absolute devastation" as the outbreak's effects ripple through Africa and the Middle East.

India scrambled to stave off an epidemic that could overwhelm its under-funded and under-staffed health care system, with not nearly enough labs or hospitals for its 1.3 billion people.

Yet even as COVID-19, the disease caused by the virus, reached new territory, it was retreating in China, where it first emerged late last year, and slowing in South Korea, another major epicenter.

More than half of those who contracted the virus have now recovered, and US health officials said they expect a far lower death rate than the World Health Organization's international estimate of 3.4 percent – a high rate that doesn't account for mild cases that go uncounted.

## **HIGHLIGHTS**

- **First cases of virus reported in several new countries.**
- **Virus breaches the halls of the Vatican City in Italy.**
- **China reports 143 new cases on Friday, the same as a day earlier.**

The fear and the crackdowns that swept through China are now shifting westward, as workers in Europe and the US stay home, authorities vigorously sanitize public places and consumers flock to stores for household staples. "The Western world is now following some of China's playbook," said Chris Beauchamp, a market analyst at the financial firm IG.

The spectacle of a cruise ship ordered to stay at sea off the California coast over virus fears replicated ones weeks ago on the other side of the globe in which hundreds of people were infected on a ship even during a quarantine.

Thailand on Friday blocked a separate cruise ship from docking, worried that it carried dozens of passengers from Italy, the center of Europe's epidemic, which has 148 virus deaths. No one on that ship was known to be infected. In the US the number of cases passed 230 people scattered across 18 states.

President Donald Trump canceled a trip to the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta even as he prepared to sign a \$8.3 billion bill for vaccines, tests, potential treatments, and to help state and local governments.

China reported 143 new cases Friday, the same as a day earlier and about one-third what the country was seeing a week ago. Just a month ago, China was reporting several thousand new cases a day. The problem has now flipped, with the outbreak moving to Europe – where Italy, Germany and France had the most cases – and beyond.

South Korea reported 505 additional cases on Friday, down from a high of 851 on Tuesday.

The new virus has spread to about 90 countries. The Netherlands reported its first virus death Friday while Serbia, Slovakia, Peru and Cameroon announced their first infections. Even Vatican City was hit, with the tiny city-state confirming its first case Friday but not saying who was infected. The Vatican has insisted that 83-year-old Pope Francis, who has been sick, only has a cold.

The new coronavirus is known to affect the elderly more than other groups. And in the United States, officials in Washington state are so concerned about having space to care for the sick they were expected to close a \$4 million deal Friday to take over a roadside motel. The plan to turn the 84-room EconoLodge into a quarantine facility was not sitting well with everyone, including the police chief.

To the south, cruise passengers awaited test results aboard the Grand Princess ship. The vessel, with 3,500 aboard, was ordered to stay at sea after a traveler from its previous voyage died of the coronavirus and at least four others were infected. The cruise line said samples were collected from 45 passengers and crew members and results were expected later Friday. The Grand Princess is operated by the same line as the Diamond Princess, which was quarantined at a Japanese port last month. More than 700 people on board were infected.

In a sign of hope, a woman infected with the virus gave birth to a girl in Qom, the Iranian Shiite holy city particularly hard-hit by the virus.



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Twitter moves to protect conversations on COVID-19 in MENA region  
Egypt registers 12 new coronavirus cases on Nile cruise ship