

# [UAE's daily Covid-19 cases drop below 400](#)

Author:

Mon, 2022-03-07 15:07

DUBAI: The UAE recorded 386 new Covid-19 cases on Monday, the lowest daily tally reported in weeks.

The new cases bring the total number of recorded cases in the UAE to 883,270.

One person also died due to COVID-19 complications, the report added, bringing the total number of deaths in the country to 2,302.

It also noted that an additional 1,203 individuals had fully recovered from COVID-19, bringing the overall number of recoveries to 844,308.



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# Gas queues in Lebanon as fears mount over food security

Author:

Sun, 2022-03-06 22:36

BEIRUT: Hour-long queues outside gas stations have returned to Lebanon, as supplies of cooking oil and flour in shops dwindle amid mounting fears of a food security crisis.

Citizens told Arab News: "We saw on social media that a new crisis is underway. We arrived at the supermarket to find people fighting over cooking oil and flour.

"We do not trust the promises made by the ruling authority and we have previously run out of basic foodstuffs and medicines," they said.

"We fear this could happen again, especially since Ramadan is approaching," they added.

Lebanon lost important wheat silos in the Beirut port blast in 2020. The facilities used to store about 120,000 tons of wheat.

Today, the country stores much of its wheat in warehouses in the north, which are stocked after supplies are unloaded in the port of Tripoli.

But Lebanon still lacks sufficient storage space, and is dependent on regular imports to secure its monthly demand for wheat, which is about 50,000 tons.

In 2020, Lebanon imported more than 630,000 tons from Ukraine, which represented 80 percent of its total imports. Russia supplied 15 percent of the remainder, while 5 percent came from other countries.

And in 2021, Lebanon imported 520,000 tons from Ukraine and the rest from Russia.

Lebanon's remaining stockpile is estimated to last a little more than a month, especially if the Central Bank fails to transfer money for wheat shipments that Lebanese mills have ordered.

Economy Minister Amin Salam said the government is seeking to reach agreements with several countries to import wheat at reasonable prices and secure reserves of up to two months.

"But the problem remains in the source and price, in addition to the speed of delivery of supplies before our stock runs out," he added.

As a result of the financial collapse and currency devaluation, Lebanon's purchasing power has significantly declined, meaning its economy is almost

entirely dependent on imports.

The prices of commodities, foodstuffs and services are now intertwined with global markets, and any international events, such as the Ukraine conflict, have direct effects on the Lebanese public.

Lebanon's annual imports from Ukraine total about \$500 million.

Head of the Syndicate of Food Importers in Lebanon Hani Bohsali said: "Lebanon imports 100,000 tons of oils per year, 90,000 tons of which are sunflower oils, and 60 percent of sunflower oil comes from Ukraine, 30 percent from Russia, and 10 percent from Turkey, Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Ukraine is currently no longer exporting, while Russia may encounter problems with the SWIFT system, which will disrupt imports."

While the government seeks alternative countries to supply wheat, Bohsali warned that there were no alternatives to source cooking oils or the raw materials needed to produce them.

On Sunday, members of the State Security Directorate carried out inspections on gas stations that closed on Saturday, claiming that they had run out of supplies. Authorities forced them to reopen if they had remaining stock.

Queues at gas stations returned on Saturday following rumors of a fuel crisis.

The official prices of fuel surged on Thursday, with a 20-liter canister of gasoline costing more than 400,000 Lebanese pounds (\$20). A 20-liter canister of diesel reached 375,000 Lebanese pounds.

However, Energy Minister Walid Fayad denied that there was a crisis on Sunday.

Ships carrying gasoline supplies are at sea and will soon unload their cargo, he added. "It seems that fuel suppliers want to issue a daily price schedule to keep pace with the global markets," Fayad said.

The General Directorate of Petroleum is expected to issue a new table of fuel prices to take into account surging global fuel prices.

Georges Brax, a member of the gas station owners' syndicate, called on citizens to avoid panicking and stockpiling gasoline.

"It is true that the quantities arriving in Lebanon are now less than before due to the global crisis, but what we receive is sufficient for local needs," he said.

Brax called on the Central Bank to speed up the prepayments for ships to unload their cargoes in order to avoid a crisis, especially since the situation could worsen in the future.

Acting Information Minister Abbas Al-Halabi said: "Lebanon is in communication with international companies to address the issue of food

security.”

Many countries are experiencing difficulties in exports and imports amid concerns over the war in Ukraine, he added.

Prime Minister Najib Mikati’s government will soon prevent the export of foodstuffs produced in Lebanon until the crisis caused by the Ukraine crisis subsides, and afterward will limit the export of wheat and flour to maintain domestic bread supplies.

The Economy Ministry will also work to prevent monopolisation and price gouging.

During his Sunday sermon, Maronite Patriarch Bechara Boutros Al-Rahi called for an end to wars that “lure fighters to practice barbarism against one other.”

He said: “We pray that the war stops, as a mercy to the innocent. We pray for an end to the destruction, killing and displacement.

“We pray anger and hatred would subside. We pray that the parties to the conflict could sit down and resolve their conflict peacefully. We emphasize the need to adopt a neutrality policy.”



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## [15 Syrian army troops killed in Daesh attack on military bus near Palmyra](#)

Author:

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Sun, 2022-03-06 16:14

BEIRUT: Fifteen soldiers died Sunday in an Daesh group attack on an army bus in the central Syrian desert, a war monitor said, as state media reported a “terrorist attack.”

Despite the fall of Daesh’s “caliphate” in 2019, the group continues to launch deadly attacks from hideouts in the Syrian desert, which extends from the outskirts of the capital Damascus to the Iraqi border.

Daesh cells “attacked a military bus” in the Palmyra desert, “killing 15 soldiers and wounding 18 others,” the British-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

State news agency SANA had reported 13 dead “including officers” and 18 wounded in a “terrorist attack” on a military bus on Sunday afternoon.

The Observatory, which relies on a network of sources across the country, said the death toll could rise as most of the soldiers were “seriously wounded.”

Daesh did not immediately claim responsibility for the attack.

Sunday’s violence came after three regime soldiers died Friday east of Palmyra when the vehicle they were traveling in came under attack, the Observatory added.

So far this year 61 pro-regime soldiers and Iran-affiliated militiamen had been killed in Daesh attacks in the desert of Syria, it said.

About half a million people have been killed and millions have been displaced since the Syrian conflict erupted in 2011, after nationwide protests against the government were met with a brutal crackdown.

It escalated into a devastating war that drew in regional and international powers.

Daesh leader Abu Ibrahim Al-Hashimi Al-Qurashi blew himself up in early February during a raid by US forces on his house in Syria's northwest region of Idlib, Syria's last major opposition bastion.

Qurashi had taken over with Daesh weakened by years of assaults by US-backed local forces and the loss of its self-proclaimed "caliphate" in Syria and northern Iraq.

Daesh ruled with brutality over the "caliphate" which it had proclaimed in 2014.

The majestic ancient city of Palmyra, a World Heritage site, became the scene of public executions, where Daesh also blew up ancient monuments and looted other treasures.

In January Daesh fighters launched their biggest assault in years, attacking a prison in the Kurdish-controlled northeast Syrian city of Hasakah, aiming to free fellow extremists.

Almost a week of intense fighting left more than 370 dead, according to the Observatory.

Earlier in January, nine Syrian soldiers and allied fighters were killed in an attack on a military convoy in Syria's east, while in November last year, the Observatory said another eastern Syria attack left a general and four soldiers dead.

Two bombs planted on an army bus in central Damascus killed 14 people in October last year, SANA had reported.

That was the deadliest attack in the capital since a bombing claimed by Daesh targeted the Justice Palace in March 2017, killing at least 30 people.



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Syrian war monitor says Israeli strike near Palmyra kills 9 Pro-Iran militias  
warn of 'very cruel' response after Israeli strike on Palmyra

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## [Houthis agree to allow UN to offload decaying oil tanker in Red Sea](#)

Sun, 2022-03-06 18:59

AL-MUKALLA: The Iran-backed Houthis have agreed to allow the UN to empty the rusting Safer oil tanker in the Red Sea which threatened to cause a major catastrophic disaster, a leader from the terrorist group said.

After years of reluctance and unfulfilled promises, Mohammed Ali Al-Houthi, head of the Houthi movement's supreme revolutionary committee, said on Saturday that they signed an agreement with the UN that would allow the international body to offload the floating tanker.

"A memorandum of understanding has been signed with the United Nations for the Safer tanker," the Houthi leader said on Twitter.

In New York, Farhan Haq, a deputy spokesman for Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, told Arab News that the UN's official resident in Yemen, David Gressly, is currently discussing the deal with the Houthis in Sanaa: "Discussions continue on the SAFER. David Gressley is in Sana'a right now, discussing the matter with the authorities there."

Anchoring with its cargo of over 1 million barrels of crude oil off Yemen's western city of Hodeidah, the four-decades-old floating tanker has not undergone regular upkeep since early 2015 when the Houthis tightened their grip on the country's western coasts, prompting international engineers to flee the country.

The rust has eaten out parts of the tanker, allowing seawater to leak into the ship's sections. Local and international organizations have long warned of a major environmental disaster in the Red Sea if the tanker exploded or leaked oil.

"The abandoned tanker, with its toxic cargo of crude oil, poses a grave threat to the communities and environment of the Red Sea," Ahmed El-Droubi, campaigns manager at Greenpeace MENA, said in January.

Yemeni government officials believe that the Houthis are using the tanker as a bargaining chip to extract concessions from the Yemeni government and the international community. Local reports said that the Houthis are seeking to replace the decaying tanker with a new one and receive the cargo's sales.



The internationally-recognized government of Yemen also demanded that the sales are used to pay government salaries in Houthi-controlled areas, warning that the Houthis would use the money to fund their deadly military operations across the country.

Separately, unidentified armed men kidnapped on Saturday two workers of the international medical organization Medecins Sans Frontieres in the southeastern province of Hadramout, the organization and media reports said.

In a brief email sent to Arab News, the charity confirmed it had lost contact with some of its staff in Yemen, without giving more details.

"Out of concern for the safety of our colleagues we cannot share more details at this point," the organization said.

Local media said that the armed men set up an ambush for the workers in a desert area called Khoushem Al-Ain between Seiyun city and Al-Aber.

The Aden-based Al-Ayyam daily newspaper reported on Sunday that the armed men wore a military uniform and set up a fake checkpoint and asked the Yemeni and foreign workers to leave their car.

At nearly 6 a.m. on Saturday, the workers were blindfolded and taken on a pickup truck to an unidentified location in the desert, the paper said, adding that the Yemeni workers were released six hours later.

Local government officials did not respond to Arab News requests for comment.

Last month, suspected Al-Qaeda militants kidnapped five UN workers in the province of Abyan and are still holding them in a mountainous area in the province's Moudea district.

Local tribal leaders and social dignitaries have failed to convince the kidnapers to release the workers as they insist on swapping them with militant prisoners in Aden. They are also demanding a ransom of hundreds of thousands of dollars.

A local official told Arab News last month that the militants threatened to execute the hostages if the army or security services attempted to use force to release them.



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Houthis condemned for storing weapons in housing complex as blasts kill residents  
Houthis pay a heavy price as coalition airstrikes hit convoy

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## [Egypt and EBRD launch new country cooperation strategy](#)

Sun, 2022-03-06 18:03

CAIRO: A new country cooperation strategy has been launched between the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and Egypt for the period 2022 to 2027.

The minister of international cooperation in Egypt, Rania Al-Mashat,

announced the launch in the presence of the EBRD's deputy director Mark Bowman and government ministers during a conference in Cairo.

Al-Mashat said the new strategy was based on three main axes that were in line with the country's priorities and plans to achieve sustainable development.

The first axis was to support Egypt's efforts to achieve comprehensive economic and sustainable growth. The second was to accelerate the country's green transformation, and the third was to enhance competitiveness, increase growth rates, and stimulate the role of the private sector in development.

Egypt's total agreements with the bank during 2021 amounted to more than €1 billion (\$1.17 billion) for the public and private sectors.

They included funds for the implementation of an energy efficiency improvement program at the Suez Petroleum Manufacturing Company, supporting the first development phase of the first line of the metro, and a project developing the Abu Qir railway to convert it into an electric metro.

They also included the financing of the 6th of October Dry Port project, supporting startups to enhance Egypt's entrepreneurial environment, and implementing solar power plants for the private sector.

Al-Mashat said the new EBRD partnership was based on the innovative foundations and rules established by the ministry to enhance development cooperation through transparency, inclusiveness and integration, with the aim of maximizing the benefits and results of development finance to serve the priorities of the Egyptian economy.

The EBRD has invested more than €8.7 billion in Egypt since 2012, supporting 145 projects. More than 76 percent of these projects were in the private sector.

Egypt topped the bank's list as the largest country of operations in the southern and eastern Mediterranean region during 2020 and 2021. It was also the bank's largest country of operations in 2018 and 2019.

The new cooperation strategy took into account the presidential initiative "A Decent Life," the National Human Rights Strategy, the National Sustainable Energy Strategy 2035, and the National Strategy To Empower Egyptian Women, as well as the government's actions and plans to enhance competitiveness and digital transformation.

During the past year, the ministry implemented a roadmap for preparing the new EBRD strategy with the participation of more than 20 national bodies as well as the private sector and civil society.



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[European Bank for Reconstruction and Development \(EBRD\)](#)

[Rania Al-Mashat](#)

[Mark Bowman](#)

[Egypt-EBRD Country Strategy 2022-2027](#)

Egyptian minister discusses clean energy plans with EU bank VPEgypt received \$5.5bn from EBRD during 2017-2022