

Some 50 Iranian MPs test positive for COVID-19 as Omicron rages

Author:

Sun, 2022-02-06 01:13

TEHRAN: Some 50 members of Iran's 290-seat parliament have contracted COVID-19, a senior MP said on Saturday as the omicron variant spreads unabated across the county.

MP Alireza Salimi, speaking to YJC, a news agency linked to Iran's state TV, said this week's parliamentary session would be held in accordance with health regulations.

Parliament was suspended for two weeks last April due to an outbreak among MPs. In the early days of the pandemic, several lawmakers died from the virus.

Iran has seen a surge in cases after a brief respite following mass vaccinations. In recent days it has reported an average of more than 30,000 new infections a day. However, the number of cases over the previous 24 hours was 23,130, the Health Ministry said on Saturday.

Iran, with a population of about 85 million, has reported more than 6.5 million infections and more than 132,500 coronavirus-related deaths since the pandemic began.

More than 50 million people have received two doses of coronavirus vaccine, and more than 19 million have received three doses.



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Iran: US sanctions move 'good but not enough' US grants sanctions relief to Iran as nuclear talks remain in balance

Iran: US sanctions move 'good but not enough'

Author:

Sun, 2022-02-06 00:56

TEHRAN: US steps on lifting sanctions are "good but not enough," Iran's foreign minister said on Saturday, hours after Washington announced it was waiving sanctions on Iran's civilian nuclear program.

The US action came as talks to restore a 2015 deal between Tehran and world powers over its nuclear program reached an advanced stage, with the issue of sanctions relief a major issue.

"The lifting of some sanctions can, in the true sense of the word, translate into their good will. Americans talk about it, but it should be known that what happens on paper is good but not enough," Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian was quoted as saying by ISNA news agency.

The US State Department on Friday said it was waiving sanctions on Iran's civilian nuclear program in a technical step necessary to return to the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA.

Former President Donald Trump withdrew from the pact in 2018 and reimposed crippling sanctions on Iran, prompting the country to begin pulling back from its commitments under the deal.

The waiver allows other countries and companies to participate in Iran's civilian nuclear program without triggering US sanctions on them, in the name of promoting safety and nonproliferation.

Iran's civilian program includes increasing stockpiles of enriched uranium.

Amir-Abdollahian reiterated that one of the "main issues" in the JCPOA talks is obtaining guarantees that the US will not withdraw from the 2015 deal again. "We seek and demand guarantees in the political, legal and economic sectors," he said, adding that "agreements have been reached in some areas."

The Vienna negotiations, which include Iran, the United States, Britain, China, France, Germany and Russia, are at a stage where the sides have to make important "political decisions," different parties to the negotiations

said last week.

“Our negotiating team in the Vienna talks is seriously pursuing obtaining tangible guarantees from the West to fulfil their commitments,” Amir-Abdollahian said.

Earlier on Saturday, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh said: “Naturally, Tehran is carefully considering any action that is in the right direction of fulfilling the obligations of the JCPOA,” local media reported.

Mikhail Ulyanov, Moscow’s ambassador to the UN in Vienna, on Saturday called the US waiver decision “a move in the right direction.”

“It will help expedite restoration of #JCPOA and mutual return of #US and #Iran to compliance with 2015 deal. It also can be seen as an indication that the #ViennaTalks have entered the final stage,” he said on Twitter.

Talks on reviving the nuclear deal were halted last week and the negotiators returned to their capitals for consultations. Experts say the JCPOA talks could resume next week.



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US grants sanctions relief to Iran as nuclear talks remain in balance
Opposition says Iran created mercenary naval unit for attacks

[Egyptian FM, Palestinian PM hold talks](#)

Author:

Sun, 2022-02-06 02:29

CAIRO: Egypt's Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry held talks with Palestinian Prime Minister Muhammad Shtayyeh on the sidelines of the African Union Summit, which began on Saturday.

The spokesman for Egypt's Foreign Ministry tweeted that Shoukry affirmed Cairo's support for the Palestinian cause, and the importance of reviving negotiations in pursuit of the establishment of an independent Palestinian state.

At the AU Summit in Ethiopia, Shoukry spoke about the state of peace and security in Africa. The summit's theme is: "Strengthening resilience in nutrition and food security on the African continent."



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Abu Dhabi crown prince, Egyptian president meet China's Xi Jinping in Beijing
Palestinian PM urges African Union to withdraw Israel's observer status

[Coalition strikes targets in Yemeni capital](#)

Author:

Arab News

ID:

1644014697156165300

Sat, 2022-02-05 01:44

RIYADH: The Coalition to Restore Legitimacy in Yemen has struck targets in Yemen's capital, Al Ekhbariya reported on Saturday.

The coalition said it had hit Sanaa and a number of other provinces.

The operation had been taken to safeguard against threats to civilian lives, the coalition said.

The Iran-backed Houthi militia often use drones to attack the southern regions of the Kingdom.

The Houthis have also been condemned for attacking the UAE in recent weeks. Three expatriate workers, two from India and one from Pakistan, were killed in a Houthi drone and missile attack on Abu Dhabi's oil storage facilities and airport on Jan. 17, triggering a salvo of deadly air- strikes in retaliation.



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[Palestine's Expo 2020 Dubai pavilion takes visitors on a multi-sensory tour of Jerusalem](#)

Author:

Alexandra Draycott

ID:

1644011342415965700

Sat, 2022-02-05 00:48

DUBAI: Palestine's pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai is as eye-catching as it is groundbreaking.

The pavilion, situated in a prime location along the main concourse of the Opportunity District, may not have an ornate exterior, but its simple, yet dignified, design stands out easily, especially when one considers Palestine's geographical size and diplomatic status.

With some of the expo's biggest pavilions nearby, including those of Saudi Arabia, Morocco and Egypt, the Palestinian pavilion gives off an air of understated grandeur and is close to the Al-Wasl dome, giving it enviable visibility in the Arab world's first world expo.



The sand-colored stones are the same that pave the streets of Jerusalem's Old City and were brought from Palestine to adorn the pavilion. (Twitter)

On entering the pavilion, visitors are transported to an authentic Jerusalem street scene. Most guests experience the pavilion in small, guided groups of about 20 people, who are offered an informative, albeit occasionally crowded, tour of the pavilion's displays.

Its stone-tiled floors are an immediate focal point. The sand-colored stones are the same that pave the streets of Jerusalem's Old City and were brought from Palestine to adorn the pavilion.

According to pavilion staff, some visitors remove their shoes and kneel on the stones to be as close as possible to a land considered sacred by many.

Also paying homage to the city's ancient architecture are modern replicas of its famous archways, floor-to-ceiling photos of the picturesque alleyways that snake through the Old City, and atmospheric audio of the city's soundscape.

The overall sensation is immersive and hints at the pavilion's theme – See, Hear, Touch, Smell and Taste – creating an experience of Palestine that employs all five senses.

From the entrance, visitors follow a path lined with the same latticework and mashrabiya designs that call to mind the balconies and doors of houses in Jerusalem.

The back wall features an elevator and a remarkable panoramic image of the city, looking out over the buildings and surrounding landscape.



Some visitors remove their shoes and kneel on the stones to be as close as possible to a land considered sacred by many. (Supplied)

From here, visitors enter the first exhibit: "See." A brief video plays, highlighting the natural beauty of rural Palestine, its industry, economy and welcoming culture. The video ends with an exhortation to create a "new perception of Palestine."

From "See," visitors move on to "Hear." To amplify sensory perception, the "Hear" corridor is cast into darkness, with nothing on the walls but a few

minimalist light drawings that help identify the sounds emanating from the speakers.

Along the corridor are different sound bubbles. In one, there is a call to prayer, followed by ringing church bells, evoking the proximity of the major religions in Jerusalem. In another, a poem about Palestine is recited in English and Arabic.

In a third, street sounds predominate, with cars and people speaking, bringing to life a typical Jerusalem street. In the last area, the sounds are of traditional Palestinian musical instruments, including the oud.



Hopes for statehood recognition. (AFP)

Walking through the next corridor, visitors arrive at "Touch." Again, as with "Hear," perceptions beyond the focal sense are limited. In this case, mysterious objects are placed in hidden compartments within white columns, stretching from floor to ceiling. Screens guide visitors through the process of feeling inside the column and guessing what the items are inside.

In some cases, the objects are emotionally charged. One is a large metal key, easily recognizable by touch. A screen informs the visitor that the key is a symbol of the dream to return to homes left behind in 1948, when nearly half the Arab Palestinian population was exiled in an event known as the Nakba, or catastrophe. Many displaced families have preserved the keys to their homes in Palestine.

Another easily discernible shape is a many-pointed star, symbolizing the star of nativity. This star was found in 1717 in Bethlehem, and is said to mark the place of Jesus Christ's birth. A screen informs visitors that the Church of the Nativity was the first UNESCO World Heritage site to be listed under

the name of "Palestine."

Moving on through another corridor filled with mashrabiya shadows, visitors arrive at "Smell." The smell of Palestine is represented through roses, sage, guava, oranges and olive oil soap. Each has a clay pot, which emits the scent, followed by a description of its significance.

Roses, for instance, represent the rose of Jericho, which wilts in the desert heat, but springs back to life with the first sign of moisture – a resilience believed to be synonymous with the people of Palestine.

Next is sage, or maramiya, a popular tea ingredient in Palestine, consumed after meals as a digestive aid. In the pavilion's words, it is "a quintessentially Palestinian pleasure."



Images of luscious olives, lemons, rice, meat and spices are projected from above on to empty white plates. (Supplied)

Olive oil soap, which has been used in the region for millennia, is also featured, its strong and refreshing fragrance lingering on the nostrils as visitors move on to the next exhibit: "Taste."

Somewhat surprisingly, there is nothing to eat in the Taste exhibit, although the pavilion's cafe, Mamaesh, is nearby. Instead, images of luscious olives, lemons, rice, meat and spices are projected from above on to empty white plates set on a table in the center of the room, while a short film about Palestinian cuisine is projected on an adjacent wall.

The film features tantalizing close-up shots of zaatar, falafel and kunafa, while also lingering on the people preparing these dishes. Rather than simply focusing on the cuisine, the exhibit leaves visitors with a taste of Palestine's warmth and hospitality.

Once visitors have experienced all five senses, they are brought to a room and handed virtual reality headsets. In this immersive experience, the full sensory experience is brought together on a journey through Jerusalem's top historical sites, from the Dome of the Rock to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher.



Palestinian pavilion does not focus solely on the future, nor does it dwell excessively on the past. (Supplied)

Unlike many other Arab offerings at Expo 2020 Dubai, the Palestinian pavilion does not focus solely on the future, nor does it dwell excessively on the past. Rather, everything about the pavilion, not least the channeling of perception through the five senses, creates a feeling of immediacy and connection.

Indeed, in the video from the pavilion's "See" exhibit, a line references the "pulsation of the present." A visit to the Palestinian pavilion creates a shared moment in the here and now, which is both unique and irreplaceable, much like Palestine itself.



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Saudi pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai receives 2 million visitors