

Crops at Beirut port silos to be composted, burned after insect infestation found

Author:

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BEIRUT: Tons of wheat, corn and barley stored at the Port of Beirut since the devastating explosion that rocked the city 16 months ago are to be disposed of as they are no longer fit for consumption, it has been found.

As temperatures change, mold, weevils and other insects have made it impossible to reach the contents of silos at the site without protective equipment; according to the World Health Organization, mold produces mycotoxins "which can cause a variety of adverse health effects and pose a serious health threat to both humans and livestock ... ranging from acute poisoning to long-term effects such as immune deficiency and cancer."

Before the blast, the port's silos contained about 45 tons of wheat, barley and corn, most of which was lost during the explosion. Minister of Environment Nasser Yassin said that six to seven tons remain at the site.

Lab tests run on samples of wheat in cooperation with the ministries of economy, agriculture and environment, the American University of Beirut, Saint Joseph University, and the French Embassy, which brought in experts to assist, showed that the crops "are suitable for neither human nor animal use."

In August, a year after the explosion, the remaining grains were removed from their silos and stored in the open air to reduce the risks of accidental fires in the hot weather, but resulted in hastening the demise of the crops as fit for consumption.

A committee formed under the government of former Prime Minister Hassan Diab failed to reach a solution.

Yassin told Arab News: "We decided to ferment these quantities and turn them into compost to be distributed to farmers for free, or turn them into industrial firewood to be given to the Lebanese Army to heat its units in the high mountains, or donate them to needy families living in cold areas."

He added: "Turning them into compost allows us to avoid any procedure that produces heavy metals, and we started with this process with the help of MAN Group, which obtained funding from France to treat organic waste resulting from the explosion, and had signed the contract with the Lebanese state in May."

The grain is set to be moved to the municipality of Zahle, which has a landfill site able to treat waste and transform it into compost and firewood.

Yassin noted: "We seek to produce 3,000 tons of compost and 3,000 tons of industrial firewood. We have so far been able to produce 500 tons of compost, which is an organic fertilizer and will be distributed free of charge to farmers and we have finished producing 1,000 tons of industrial firewood through special presses.

"Indeed, this type of firewood does not last long while it burns, but we hope that it will alleviate the distress of people who cannot buy diesel for heating during winter, and curb the phenomenon of cutting trees to secure firewood for homes as an alternative to diesel."

The silos at the port absorbed about 20 percent of the blast wave, which resulted from storing 1,750 tons of ammonium nitrate at the port alongside seized explosives. Over 220 people died, more than 6,500 were injured and the city's waterfront was destroyed.

Experts who initially examined the site stressed that the wheat silos, which were severely damaged, would need to be demolished because they were on the verge of collapsing.

Former Economy Minister Raoul Nehme said in November 2020: "The government will demolish the silos due to public safety concerns."

However, the Lebanese authorities are yet to take action.

The wheat silos are made up of a giant 48-meter concrete structure built between 1968 and 1970, with a huge storage capacity of over 100,000 tons.

Once considered a key element in Lebanon's food security, the silos have today become a symbol of the catastrophe.



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[Air defence test sparks loud blast near Iran nuclear site](#)

Sat, 2021-12-04 21:06

TEHRAN: An air defence test triggered a loud explosion near Iran's Natanz uranium enrichment facility Saturday as nuclear talks with major powers stumble.

The explosion was heard in the skies over the Iranian city of Badroud, just 20 kilometres (12 miles) from the nuclear plant, the official IRNA news agency reported.

"Badroud residents heard the noise and saw a light which showed an object had just blown up in the skies over the city," a witness told IRNA.

But the air defence commander for the Natanz region told state television

there was no cause for concern.

“An hour ago, one of our missile systems in the region was tested to assess the state of readiness on the ground, and there is nothing to fear,” the commander said.



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Sat, 2021-12-04 20:59

CHICAGO: Senior US State Department officials accused Iran of not taking negotiations on limiting nuclear technology seriously and using the revival of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action as an excuse to expand its nuclear program.

The officials conceded in a teleconference with news outlets including Arab News Saturday that although President Joe Biden views Iran's conduct as "not acceptable," the administration is focused on reviving talks rather than pursuing tougher measures or an expansion of sanctions.

During the past five-and-a-half months, they said, while telling JCPOA negotiators in Vienna that they are "getting ready," Iran was instead preparing to double their enriched uranium capacity and nuclear capabilities.

"We have been waiting patiently for five-and-a-half months. The Iranian government said that it needed time to resume the talks on a mutual return to compliance of the JCPOA, and I think what we have seen over the last week or so is what 'getting ready' meant for them," one official said.

"It meant continuing to accelerate their nuclear program in particularly provocative ways, and their latest provocation as reported by the IAEA Wednesday, while we were still in the middle of talks, was to prepare for the doubling of their production capacity of 20 percent enriched uranium at Fordo.

"What 'getting ready' meant was to continue stonewall the IAEA despite efforts by all of the P5+1, (and) constructive efforts to find a way forward between Director General Grossy and Iran."

The P5+1 refers to the UN Security Council's five permanent members – China, France, Russia, the UK and the US, plus Germany.

Iran is seeking to "walk back" all past compromises during the unproductive six rounds of talks, while asking for more concessions, he said.

"In other (words), not come back with a serious proposal about how we could resume mutual compliance with the JCPOA but raising issues that go beyond the JCPOA," the official said.

Although US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken has said in the past that Biden will not "accept the situation in which Iran accelerates its nuclear program and slow walks its nuclear diplomacy," the State Department outlined no plans to step up pressure to force Iran to take the talks seriously.

He said he is unsure when JCPOA talks in Vienna will resume, adding: "The date of those talks, the date of that resumption, matters far less to us than whether Iran will come with a serious attitude prepared to negotiate seriously. If they are, they will find a very serious counterpart on the other side, which is the United States, but we will have to wait and see if they take that position. But so far, what we have seen in Vienna in their

nuclear program and in their dealings with the IAEA unfortunately suggest the opposite.”

The State Department official brushed aside questions regarding China, which has violated the sanctions by purchasing Iranian crude oil.

“If Iran kills the JCPOA, then other sanctions would come into effect,” he said, declining to detail those actions.

Asked if Biden needed to “calm” the concerns of Israel, which has a huge cache of nuclear weapons, or if there are concerns Israel might respond with a military strike to any Iranian increase in activity, the official said: “We don’t view our job as to calm Israel down ... Our job is to work together towards our common objective.

“Israel is sovereign country and makes its own decisions, but we think we are stronger when we act together.”



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Europeans ‘disappointed’ over ‘back-tracking’ at Iran nuclear talks‘No cause for optimism’ on Iran nuclear deal: US

Libya's foreign minister slams European migration policy

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Fri, 2021-12-03 22:37

CAIRO: Libya's foreign minister on Friday criticized a system of deterring migrants from reaching European shores that she argued fails to address the root of the problem and has so far only served the interest of EU states. Her comments are the latest stab at EU policies that fund forces such as the Libyan coast guard, which intercepts migrant boats and brings them back onshore and detains them.

Foreign Minister Najla Mangoush spoke via video call at the Mediterranean dialogues, a conference hosted by the Italian government, in a session titled "Dealing with Migration."

"Please do not push the problem in our lap and please do not point your fingers at Libya and portray us as a country which abuses and disrespects refugees," she said. "We are tired of beating around the bush, and all these superficial solutions being offered, it's time to state the problem and face it, instead of ... keep repeating it again and again."

The European Union, which has come under fire for its support of Libya's domestic efforts to stem migrant crossings in the past, has supported the country's coast guard, which regularly intercepts vessels carrying migrants. Many migrants are then placed in brutal detention facilities, held indefinitely in appalling conditions, or held for ransom in exchange for payoffs, according to migrants who have made it out.

The European Union sends funds to the detention centers indirectly through aid agencies.

In her speech, Mangoush did not directly address the abuse accusations. Libya has emerged as the dominant transit point for migrants fleeing war and poverty in Africa and the Middle East, hoping for a better life in Europe. Each year, thousands of migrants and refugees from Africa, the Middle East and South Asia attempt the deadly Mediterranean Sea crossing to Europe on overcrowded and often unseaworthy boats.

More than 1,300 men, women and children have died so far in 2021 trying to cross the Central Mediterranean from Libya and Tunisia to Italy and Malta, according to the UN migration agency.

The EU has sent 455 million euros to Libya since 2015, largely channeled through UN agencies and aimed at beefing up Libya's coast guard, reinforcing its southern border and improving conditions for migrants.

Libya has been at war and split for years between rival administrations in the east and west, each backed by armed groups and foreign governments. After years of UN-led talks, the country is set to hold national elections later this month.

Mangoush said that what Libya needs is better policing system at its southern borders to control the influx of migrants, to address the root of the issue. She said the solution of simply providing money to Libya would never be enough, calling past initiatives “just for the cause of serving the agenda of the EU and the perspective of the EU.”



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[Tunisia records first case of omicron variant](#)

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Fri, 2021-12-03 21:33

TUNIS: Tunisia recorded its first confirmed case of the omicron variant of the coronavirus in a Congolese man who arrived from Istanbul, the health minister said Friday.

Ali Mrabet said the 23-year-old man tested positive and all fellow travelers on his flight from Turkey were contacted by Tunisian authorities to be tested as well.

The omicron variant was first announced by South Africa but has since been discovered to have been present earlier in Europe.

It has prompted governments around the globe to reimpose travel restrictions, despite warnings from the World Health Organization this could do more harm than good.

On Friday, the WHO said it had not seen any reports of deaths related to the new omicron variant.

The WHO has said it will take several weeks to get a full picture of the transmissibility and severity of omicron, and to assess how vaccines, tests and treatments hold up against the new variant.



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WHO chief scientist says omicron 'quite infectious', must not panic
Nine confirmed COVID-19 cases of omicron variant currently on mainland France