

Iran's meddling in affairs of other countries threatens regional security: GCC chief

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1627144827532430100

Sat, 2021-07-24 19:39

LONDON: Iran's intervention in the internal affairs of other countries is a threat to the region and a matter of concern, the chief of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) said on Saturday.

Iran's nuclear program, ballistic missiles, and its support for militias, must also be included in ongoing talks in Vienna and they should not be limited to reviving the nuclear deal, GCC Secretary-general Nayef bin Falah Al-Hajraf said at a virtual Gulf Research Meeting.

Representatives of Iran and the five world powers still party to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action have been meeting in the Austrian capital since April, with US envoys participating indirectly. An agreement has yet to be reached.

Al-Hajraf added that the current situation in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Yemen represents a clear and direct threat to the security and stability of the Middle East.

The GCC chief said that economic integration is on the list of priorities for the council, as is strengthening the leading position of GCC countries in the region and the world.

He said Saudi Arabia holding the G20 presidency in 2020, the UAE hosting Expo 2020 from October, and Qatar's hosting of the 2022 FIFA World Cup are examples of this effort.

Al-Hajraf added that the national visions and development plans in GCC countries are creating the appropriate momentum to focus on the future and exploit opportunities.



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[GCC Secretary-general Nayef bin Falah Al-Hajraf](#)

Brussels keen to resume GCC trade talks under appropriate legal framework, says EU official
Saudi rights chief, GCC head discuss human rights coordination between member states

[Lebanese man dies in accident waiting in gas station queue](#)

Sat, 2021-07-24 19:00

BEIRUT: A man killed in a queue at a gas station on Saturday was the latest victim of the unprecedented crisis in Lebanon. Mahmoud Delbani, a 27-year-old Lebanese citizen, was waiting to fill his car with gasoline at 2.30am when an inattentive truck driver crashed into several vehicles lined up at the Coral Petrol Station on the Beirut-South Lebanon highway, an Internal Security Forces traffic officer told Arab News. Three people were also injured in the accident.

For more than two months the deteriorating economic crisis has caused enormous fuel shortages in Lebanon, with queues kilometers long outside gas stations leading to unprecedented congestion on roads and horrific accidents. The lines at stations have become known as 'the queues of humiliation and shame' due to the long hours that drivers spend waiting to fill their cars. Local media reported that the 27-year-old man had been looking forward to catching up with his friends after filling his car with fuel.

Hussein, a friend of Delbani from Tyre, in southern Lebanon, said: "He left us too early. What a tragically unexpected and humiliating end to such a loveable and smiley character. I cannot accept what happened! Why did he have to leave that way?"

Tarek, another friend of Delbani, mourned him on Facebook, writing "RIP Mahmoud you will be missed ... too early dear but our destiny in Lebanon ... innocent people die and stupid politicians have a long life..."

The traffic police have reported a number of recent accidents in petrol queues.

Petrol stations have been running low on subsidized petrol for months, but shortages worsened in June and July as people's fears of rationing and shortages intensified, leading to a large number of petrol station closures. A number of fights, heated arguments and shootings have taken place and a petrol station owner was shot dead by an angry customer in north Lebanon.



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Lebanon signs deal to sell Iraqi fuel in move to ease crisis
Lebanon can't handle next COVID-19 wave, warns hospital chief

Jordan to vaccinate children aged 12 years and older against COVID-19

Author:

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1627138849702143400

Sat, 2021-07-24 18:03

BEIRUT: Jordan will start vaccinating children aged 12 years and older against COVID-19 from Sunday, the state news agency said on Saturday. Children can be given the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine with the approval of a guardian with no prior appointment necessary, the agency quoted the health ministry as saying.

The decision comes as Jordan lifted most restrictions at the start of July, reopening gyms, pools and night clubs at hotels after cases dropped from a peak in March when several thousands of new cases were recorded daily. Total active cases reached 7,489 on Friday with 331 new cases and four deaths.

Since the start of the pandemic, Jordan has recorded a total of 763,437 cases and 9,933 deaths.

Several other countries in the region are vaccinating children, including Israel, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia.



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Cure for cancer the next target for Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine inventor Ugur Sahin
Pfizer-BioNTech to seek authorization for 3rd Covid shot: statement

[France starts supply bridge to help Tunisia cope with virus](#)

Sat, 2021-07-24 01:17

PARIS: France has established a “maritime bridge” to provide COVID-19 vaccines and medical oxygen to Tunisia, which is in the midst of one of Africa’s worst coronavirus outbreaks.

In the past five days, France has flown 1.1 million vaccine doses to the North African country, French Tourism Minister Jean-Baptiste Le Moyne told France-Info radio.

The French navy shipped three huge containers of badly needed oxygen on Thursday, the minister tweeted.

Of the vaccines, 800,000 doses came from French stocks, but Paris is also using the COVAX mechanism, the UN-backed program to provide shots to poorer countries, Lemoyne said.

He did not specify which type of vaccines were sent.

The sea shipments are expected to continue until mid-August, bringing in equipment, masks and other needed material to help Tunisia cope with a sharp rise in infections and hospitalizations.

Other countries in Europe and elsewhere are pitching in to help Tunisia pull out of its health crisis.

FASTFACT

The French navy shipped three huge containers of badly needed oxygen on Thursday, Tourism Minister Jean-Baptiste Le Moyne tweeted.

Tunisia has reported more deaths per capita in the pandemic than any African country and among the highest daily death rates per capita in the world in recent weeks.

The country, which has a population of less than 12 million, has recorded more than 18,000 virus-related deaths in all, according to the Health Ministry.

Tunisian President Kais Saied ordered the military on Wednesday to take over management of the national response to the pandemic.

Last week, Prime Minister Hichem Mechichi ordered governors of nine regions to requisition private hospitals for COVID-19 patients when public hospitals run out of oxygen, the TAP news agency reported. Tunisian hospitals have faced acute shortages of oxygen, staff and intensive care beds, and less than a tenth of the population are fully vaccinated.

In Tunisia's Mediterranean resort of Sousse, exhausted medics struggle to stem surging coronavirus deaths, desperately monitoring oxygen supplies beside patients' beds, while on the beach tourists relax in the sun.

"When you are told, 'in three hours, there is no more oxygen', it is stressful," said Khaled Ben Jazia, head of intensive care at the hospital in Sousse, southeast of the capital Tunis.

"Two days ago, there was only an hour of oxygen left. Can you imagine the disaster if we ran out? I've never been so stressed ... we were all with bottles at the bedside of patients just in case."

At the hospital, medics waited anxiously for the truck fetching fresh oxygen bottles to return.

"When we heard the siren of the escort accompanying the truck, it was such a relief," Ben Jazia said.

After more than a year of intense work coping with the pandemic, medical staff are worn out.

On Wednesday, the prime minister's announcement that hospital staff would not be able to take any leave sparked anger.

"We are holding up, but the situation is precarious, given the lack of human resources and logistical support," said Zied Mezgar, head of the emergency department in Sousse hospital.

"The disaster will not come from the influx of patients, but from the exhaustion of caregivers."

Despite the crisis, the country remains open to visitors and there is no quarantine for people – vaccinated or not – arriving with tour operators.

At the Bellevue Park hotel in Sousse, life at the Mediterranean resort seems to be going on almost as normal.

"I had my two jabs," said Doris Brecking, a 71-year-old German tourist tanning by the pool.

"In the hospital, there are sick people, but here at the hotel, everything is fine with the health rules ... I am not afraid."

France, where many tourists come from, has placed Tunisia on its travel "red list," but allows people who have been double vaccinated to go there.

"The urge to come back here was too strong," said French tourist Stephanie Wilmert, a beautician from Luxembourg.

She has been vaccinated, but said she was still cautious.

"We sometimes say, 'it's good, it's over', but no, it's not over at all."

Away from the crisis of the pandemic, Tunisia is trying to support the crisis in tourism, a economic pillar making up around a tenth of GDP.

"We must adapt," said Nizar Marghli, director of the Bellevue Park hotel, where turnover has been slashed by a third.



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Anger in Tunisia at 'criminal' response to virus Italy sends medical aid to Tunisia to combat COVID-19

[Iran is 'water bankrupt', says former regime environment official](#)

Author:

Sat, 2021-07-24 00:53

LONDON: Iran is "water bankrupt" due to years of mismanagement by the regime, according to an exiled member of Tehran's environmental ministry. The result is the severe water shortages that have triggered days of unrest and violence.

Scientist Kaveh Madani, Iran's former deputy environment minister, told *The Times* newspaper that all sources of water are running dry, including rivers, reservoirs and groundwater.

The collapse of these essential systems even prompted Supreme Leader Ali

Khamenei to admit that the protesters might have a point. “We cannot really blame the people,” he said of the thousands of Iranians who have taken to the streets in Khuzestan Province in recent days to protest against the shortage of clean drinking water. At least eight protesters have been killed in the regime’s crackdown on the demonstrations. It has been reported that a police officer was also killed.

According to Madani, who now lives in the US, the crisis is of the regime’s own making.

“The system is water bankrupt when consumption is more than renewable water availability,” he said, adding that years of regime mismanagement is to blame.

In particular, he said, the availability of cheap fuel has proved to be more of a curse than a blessing in its effect on the water industry. With the cost of energy so low, cheap electricity has been used to pump huge amounts of groundwater to help expand the country’s agriculture sector.



Iranian citizens burn tires and wood to block roads as they protest against water shortages in the southwestern province of Khuzestan on July 17, 2021.
(Screengrab from video shared on social media)

This has had a devastating effect on water reserves. Groundwater levels are now so low they are having an effect observable from space: NASA has said the loss of the weight of so much water has affected the region’s gravitational field.

In addition, since the 1979 Iranian Revolution, the Islamic Republic has built about 600 dams across the country, mainly to provide hydroelectricity for the country’s 80 million or so inhabitants. This energy comes with a hidden cost. Experts told The Times that reservoirs in hot and arid parts of Iran lose so much water to evaporation – about 2 billion cubic meters a month – they are a significant part of the problem.

Combined with what has been the driest year in half a century, these factors have caused “irreversible” damage to Iran’s water infrastructure, according

to Madani.

“Iran cannot fully restore its wetlands, aquifers and rivers in a short period of time,” he said. “So, it has to admit to water bankruptcy and stop denying that many of the damages have become irreversible.”

Madani was an academic at Imperial College London when he was recruited in 2017 to be the deputy head of Iran’s Department of Environment. His appointment offended hard-line elements within the regime, however, and he was detained by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, accused of spying, and eventually forced to leave the country.



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Iran’s Khuzestan protests: Water was the trigger, anti-Arab discrimination is the reason Iran’s Rouhani says water protesters have ‘right’ to demonstrate