

Egypt to produce up to 80 million Sinovac vaccine doses annually

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CAIRO: Egypt has agreed with China's Sinovac Biotech Ltd. to manufacture its COVID-19 vaccine domestically, and could produce up to 80 million doses a year, the health ministry said on Thursday.

The agreement could provide a major boost to vaccination efforts in Egypt, which has a population of 100 million and has thus far received just 1.5 million doses.

Egypt's cabinet and presidency approved a joint manufacturing agreement to make the vaccines that will be distributed in Egypt and to other African countries, Zayed said.

One production facility can produce 20 million doses annually, while another could produce 60 million, the health ministry said in a statement.

Egypt has so far received 854,400 doses of the vaccine produced by AstraZeneca as well as another 650,000 of the Chinese vaccine developed by China National Pharmaceutical Group (Sinopharm). The number of Sinopharm doses received would soon rise to 1 million, Zayed said.

Egypt began vaccinating frontline medical staff against COVID-19 on Jan. 24 and expanded its roll-out on March 4 to include the elderly and people with chronic diseases.



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Egypt will make 'all possible efforts' to help resolve crisis in Lebanon
Egyptian puppet Abla Fahita poses for sportswear giant Adidas

[Lebanese parties abate public anger with ration cards, resilience calls](#)

Author:

Thu, 2021-04-08 22:17

BEIRUT: While the official ministerial committee in Lebanon continues to ponder the allocation of ration cards to 800,000 families before lifting subsidies on basic goods, parties have rushed to absorb their supporters' resentment.

Hezbollah has issued ration cards for its supporters and partisans. "Alsajjad cards" enable their holders to get more than 50 percent off on food items, consumables, cleaning materials, and other goods from certain stores. The

cards were severely criticized on social media by the party's opponents.

Other parties have relied on wealthy supporters to secure financial aid for the needy through their private foundations. Other politicians have bought vaccines to inoculate their families and supporters.

The Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) told its supporters: "Difficult times are ahead, and chaos might prevail. We must remain patient and must not abandon our positions."

The pressure has increased on non-partisan funds and associations, municipalities, and village committees to meet the needs of non-partisan people.

Political parties are aware of the importance of keeping their communities under control as the decision to lift subsidies comes closer, which will almost certainly lead to anger and violent protests.

Dr. Nasser Yassin, professor of policy and planning at the American University of Beirut, told Arab News: "When the economic collapse worsens, people start focusing on securing their biological needs: Food. And when food security becomes threatened, people might resort to any entity that can provide it.

"This is when parties become a safety source, regardless of people's convictions. Political leaders also become a safety net for these people and new funders might emerge to secure people's needs in such circumstances."

He added: "However, this kind of security will not be enough to cover the needs when subsidies on basic items are lifted. No one can replace the state."

Yassin said that "helping the Lebanese through the state in a transparent manner is the only way that would preserve their dignity," fearing that the aid provided to the people now will later be exchanged for political favors.

He said: "Urging people to remain patient and resilient in the coming period will not be enough after lifting subsidies, where people will lack access to medicine, heating, and even bread amid the dramatic increase of prices."

Activist Tony Nasrallah, a former FPM partisan, told Arab News: "Political parties are living in denial. They do not understand that the problem is structural and is not only about securing some vaccines here and some oil bottles there."

He said: "In the speech he delivered on Wednesday about the forensic financial audit, the Lebanese President Michael Aoun was seeking to reassure his supporters as no government has been formed to implement the needed reforms.

"The majority of the FPM's supporters are from the middle class, which has been severely affected by the financial collapse. The FPM partisans believe in every promise made by Aoun and FPM leaders."

Nasrallah added: “However, FPM supporters have begun doubting and questioning these promises, when in fact the only solution they see is immigration.”

MP Osama Saad, head of the Popular Nasserist Organization, said that “leaders have led the country to the humiliation of ration cards,” adding: “but the people know how to defend their dignity.”



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Coronavirus and financial deterioration strip Lebanon's Easter of joy
Lebanon's President Aoun holds central bank responsible for crisis

[Turkey and EU blame each other in 'sofagate' scandal](#)

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Thu, 2021-04-08 18:56

ISTANBUL: Turkey and the EU blamed each other on Thursday for seating arrangements that left European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen without a chair during a meeting with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

The Turkish leader came under a torrent of criticism after images went viral of his Tuesday meeting with von der Leyen and European Council president Charles Michel in Ankara.

Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi even suggested that the episode showed that Erdogan was a "dictator".

The room where the three leaders were hosted had only two chairs arranged next to the corresponding EU and Turkish flags.

Erdogan and Michel quickly seated themselves while von der Leyen – whose diplomatic rank is the same as that of the two men – was left standing.

"Ehm," she said, spreading her arms in wonder and looking directly at Michel and Erdogan.

Official images later showed her seated on a sofa opposite Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu.

"The seating arrangements were made in line with the EU suggestion. Period," he said in the first public statement by a Turkish official on the episode.

"We would not be revealing this fact had accusations not been made against Turkey," Cavusoglu told reporters.

But Michel's European Council said its protocol team had been denied advance access to the meeting room where the three leaders first sat down for talks.

"If the room for the tete-a-tete had been visited, we would have suggested to our hosts that, as a courtesy, they replace the sofa with two armchairs for the President of the Commission," the protocol team said in a letter.

The diplomatic faux pas was instantly branded "sofagate" on Twitter and became the dominant talking point of the first Turkey-EU summit in a year.

The three leaders had been trying to set a more positive tone to relations after months of spats.

But the talks ended with European officials throwing accusations of male chauvinism at Turkey that they linked to Erdogan's withdrawal a month earlier from the Istanbul Convention against gender-based violence.

Draghi threatened to escalate the dispute to a another level by accusing Erdogan – who already has a running feud with French President Emmanuel Macron – of being a tyrant.

"I am very sorry for the humiliation that the president of the Commission had to suffer with these, let's call them for what they are, dictators, but with whom we need to cooperate," Draghi told reporters.

The Turkish government issued no immediate comment.

Yet many also questioned why Michel was so quick to take a seat.

The European Council president broke nearly a full day of silence by acknowledging on Facebook that the episode made him look "oblivious" to von der Leyen's discomfort.

But he blamed a "protocol blunder" by Turkey that he and von der Leyen decided to overlook at the time.

The episode came with the European Union's leadership under mounting pressure over the bloc's slow coronavirus inoculation effort and strains emerging between the 27 member states.

Several European Parliament groups demanded an investigation into how von der Leyen was left standing while Michel took a seat.

“The setting for this meeting does not seem to be based on order of precedence... but rather by a male-chauvinist way of representation of an autocrat,” Belgian European Parliament member Assita Kanko wrote in a formal question to Michel.

The conservative EPP grouping’s leader Manfred Weber told Politico the trip to Ankara had become “a symbol of disunity” between the EU’s top officials. And French far-right leader Marine Le Pen called the entire visit a bad idea because it showed the bloc “lying down before a hostile” Erdogan.

Von der Leyen’s spokesman meanwhile refused to be drawn on speculation that none of this would have happened had the European Commission followed the European Council’s example and sent a protocol team to Ankara.

“President (von der Leyen) simply wishes that these questions be analysed so that we do not face the same types of questions on our next mission,” Eric Memer told reporters.



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Italian PM calls Turkey’s Erdogan a dictator Turkey’s chair snub riles EU chief as she defends women’s rights

[Blinken reaffirms US support for Jordan during call with king](#)

Thu, 2021-04-08 22:02

LONDON: Jordan's King Abdullah II received a phone call from US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken on Thursday, where he reaffirmed Washington's full solidarity with the kingdom.

"The Secretary reaffirmed the US commitment to its strategic partnership with Jordan and commended King Abdullah II for Jordan's steadfast leadership promoting peace and stability in the Middle East," said Ned Price, State Department spokesman.

During the call, Blinken also emphasized the strong strategic partnership between the US and Jordan.

"The US deeply values the strong bilateral cooperation and longtime friendship between our two countries," Price added.

The king received a call from President Joe Biden on Wednesday, where he said Washington stood by Jordan and voiced support for all measures and decisions taken to safeguard the kingdom's security and stability



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Prince Hamzah 'in my care' at his palace: Jordan King Abdullah IISaudi leadership reiterates support to Jordan King Abdullah II, Crown Prince

[US and Iraq agree to training and advisory mission for US and coalition forces](#)

Wed, 2021-04-07 20:00

LONDON: The US has agreed to redeploy remaining combat forces from Iraq after talks in Washington on Wednesday.

Any American troops left in the country will focus on training and advisory tasks, a joint statement from Iraq and the US said, adding the Iraqi military had made substantial progress.

The two countries "reaffirmed their mutual intention to continue bilateral security coordination and cooperation," the statement said.

The announcement came after a US-Iraq Strategic Dialogue held on Wednesday chaired by Secretary of State Antony Blinken and his counterpart Fuad Hussein.

The timing of the withdrawal would be decided in upcoming technical talks, the statement said.

"The transition of US and other international forces away from combat operations to training, equipping, and assisting the ISF reflects the success of their strategic partnership and ensures support to the ISF's continued efforts to ensure Daesh (Daesh) can never again threaten Iraq's stability," it said.

The announcement comes as Shiite paramilitary factions linked to Iran continue to launch attacks on US forces stationed in the country almost on a daily basis.

During the talks, Iraq reaffirmed its commitment to protect the personnel, convoys, and diplomatic facilities belonging to members of the Global Coalition to Defeat Daesh.

The discussions also covered security, counterterrorism, economics, energy and the environment.

Washington expressed its support for Iraq's efforts to reform its power sector and "both countries affirmed their support for Iraq diversifying its sources of energy by building greater ties to its neighbors in Jordan and in the GCC, including by moving forward with electric grid interconnection projects."

The two sides pledged to work closely together as Iraq commits to implementing reforms to diversify its economy, improve the business climate, and help create a more vibrant private sector, the statement added.

The two countries also discussed greater cooperation to combat the COVID-19 pandemic and the management of water resources.



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US and Iraq will hold strategic dialogue in April -White House
Two rockets hit near Iraq air base hosting US soldiers