

# World Bank fury as Lebanon MPs jump vaccine queue

Author:

Tue, 2021-02-23 21:52

BEIRUT: Lebanese politicians have been accused of jumping the queue for the coronavirus vaccine, with the World Bank on Tuesday joining a chorus of condemnation and threatening to suspend its multi-million-dollar backing for the country's vaccination drive.

The controversy erupted after some MPs secretly received the COVID-19 jab in the parliament building – despite not being in priority groups.

Allegations of favoritism mounted after it was revealed President Michel Aoun and his wife were inoculated last Friday by a medical team sent to the Baabda Palace.

The claims added to widespread frustration among Lebanese over delays and breaches of the vaccination campaign.

World Bank regional director Saroj Kumar Jha tweeted that if the allegations were shown to be true, "it would be a breach of the national plan."

He warned that the bank may suspend financing for vaccines and support for the country's coronavirus response.

"I appeal to all, I mean all, regardless of your position, to please register and wait for your turn," Jha added.

The World Bank's reallocation of \$34 million has enabled Lebanon to receive its first two batches of about 60,000 Pfizer-BioNTech doses this month. The bank had said it would monitor the vaccine rollout and warned against favoritism.

A number of MPs are believed to have received the vaccine inside the parliament building in breach of an established plan that requires individuals to register through a dedicated platform and then wait for a hospital appointment.

The first stage of vaccination rollout, which entered its 10th day on Tuesday, includes doctors, nurses and paramedics treating virus patients, as well as those over 75 years of age.

The MPs' breach sparked a furious public response on social media under the hashtag #NoWasta (no favoritism).

Dr. Abdul Rahman Bizri, head of the National Committee for the Administration of the Coronavirus Vaccine, threatened to resign in protest at the breach, but later said he would wait on an official explanation by Wednesday.

Less than two hours later, information was leaked to local media that Aoun, along with his wife and 16 people from his presidential team, was given the vaccine last Friday.

Jha tweeted: "This is not in line with the national plan agreed with (the) World Bank, and we would record it (as a) breach of terms and conditions agreed with us for fair and equitable vaccination. Everyone has to register and wait their turn."

A leaked list of MPs who secretly received the vaccine showed that many were not in the priority groups.

Among politicians who sought to justify receiving the jab, Anis Nassar said he had registered through the platform and received a phone call from parliament.

"I was not aware of any of violation, and if a violation has taken place, I apologize profusely. Despite that I am not responsible for what happened."

Parliament Secretary-General Adnan Daher claimed that the vaccinations were supervised by a team from the Ministry of Health and the Lebanese Red Cross.

He claimed the aim was to "help hospitals avoid overcrowding."

However, the Red Cross said that it had no supervisory or operational role in the vaccination campaign.

"Our teams are present in all vaccination centers exclusively to assist or aid citizens of the age group 75 and over in the event of an emergency," it explained.

Bizri later told a press conference: "What happened is a terrible thing and must be explained. The World Bank has said there will be consequences. The Ministry of Health committed this mistake and must explain it."

He added: "This is discrimination."

Doctors' Syndicate chief Sharaf Abu Sharaf said that the vaccination rollout "has been slow, chaotic and far from transparent."

He warned that without an improvement in the rollout, Lebanon "faces a great disaster."

"We must accelerate the vaccination plan to reach herd immunity," Abu Sharaf said.



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Lebanon MPs bicker over World Bank loan for the poor  
Crisis-hit Lebanon kicks off COVID-19 vaccinations

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## [El-Sisi meets with head of US Central Command](#)

Author:

Tue, 2021-02-23 21:37

CAIRO: Egypt's President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi and visiting Commander of US Central Command Kenneth McKenzie on Monday explored ways to strengthen military, security and counterterrorism cooperation.

El-Sisi said Egypt looks forward to developing bilateral cooperation in all areas in the face of common challenges in the region.

McKenzie said the US will continue to coordinate with Egypt on regional issues, and praised Cairo's efforts against terrorism and extremism.

They reviewed the latest regional developments, particularly in the Middle East, Africa and eastern Mediterranean.

Mohamed Farid, chief of staff of Egypt's Armed Forces, also met McKenzie and

his accompanying delegation.

Tamer Al-Rifai, spokesman for Egypt's Armed Forces, said: "The meeting dealt with the exchange of visions on a number of regional and international issues ... to achieve common interests in establishing security and stability."

He added: "The delegation confirmed the depth of Egyptian-American relations, and expressed its pride with partnerships that link the armed forces of both countries."



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Islamic anti-terror coalition welcomes visitors from US Central Command  
El-Sisi warns Arab intelligence officials over 'foreign intervention'

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[Yemeni army calls for urgent action to](#)

# retrieve bodies of Houthi fighters

Author:

Tue, 2021-02-23 21:41

AL-MUKALLA: The Yemeni army has urged the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to help retrieve the bodies of Houthi fighters abandoned on battlefields in the central province of Marib and the northern province of Jouf.

Military spokesman Abdu Abdullah Majili told Arab News on Tuesday that dozens of corpses of Houthi fighters have been left in conflict zones in Jouf and Marib as the Iran-backed militia presses ahead with a major offensive to recapture the oil and gas-rich city of Marib.

"We demand the International Committee of the Red Cross mount pressure on the Houthis to retrieve the bodies of their dead fighters. The bodies are scattered in mountains and deserts of Marib and Jouf," Majili said.

Army soldiers and tribesmen battling the rebels in two provinces warned of the spread of disease among combatants as dozens of abandoned bodies were left to rot.

"Serwah is the worst front in terms of health. The attacks of mosquitoes and flies are more intense than the attacks of the Houthis because of the corpses of the Houthi militia," Mohammed, an army soldier in Marib, said on Twitter.

Responding to the army's demands, the ICRC office in Sanaa said it has not received an official request from warring factions in Yemen to retrieve bodies of dead fighters, adding that a halt to hostilities would be necessary before any evacuation could take place.

"Once we receive an official request by concerned parties to the conflict, we are ready to support such an initiative provided that all parties to the conflict provide the necessary security guarantees that will allow this mission to be carried out by the ICRC and Yemen Red Crescent Society (YRCS)," Basheer Omar, ICRC spokesperson in Yemen, told Arab News on Tuesday.

Fighting raged on Tuesday on main battlefields in Marib and Jouf as the Yemeni army and allied tribesmen, backed by massive air support and military logistics from the Arab coalition, fought off relentless attacks by the Houthis who sought to advance toward Marib city, the Yemeni government's last bastion in the northern part of the country.

Majili said that hundreds of rebel fighters have been killed since earlier this month when the Houthis resumed a major offensive to seize control of Marib.

"What I can tell you is that the national army and the tribesmen have pushed back the Houthi militia's attacks in Marib and Jouf and inflicted heavy defeats on them," he said.

Tuesday's fighting focused on mountainous areas in Serwah, Al-Makhdra, Murad, Al-Karsara to the west and north of Marib city, and in Al-Khanjer, Al-Aqsha and Al-Duhydha in the province of Jouf.

In the Houthi-controlled areas in northern Yemen, militia leaders continue to call for financial support and mobilization of young people for the offensive on Marib, claiming that the aim is to seize gas and oil facilities.

At a meeting with supporters in the province of Dhamar, Mohammed Al-Bukhaiti, a Houthi leader, said the movement declared "jihad" against government forces in Marib to recapture oil and gas fields, and break an embargo on their territories.

At the same time, local and international aid bodies said that thousands of people have been forced from their homes in Marib during the latest surge in fighting in the province.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) said that more than 8,000 people have been displaced in recent weeks, adding that 14 displacement sites that host 30,000 displaced people in Serwah district have been affected by the raging fighting.

"Displacement sites should be refuges. All civilians, including displaced people, must be afforded protection from the fighting. The local community in Marib has long welcomed vulnerable displaced people, but today the situation is far beyond something they can manage alone," John McCue, the IOM's deputy chief of mission, in Yemen said in a statement.

The government's Executive Unit for IDPs Camps said the fighting in Marib had led to the displacement of 12,005 people from different camps in the province from Feb. 6 to 21.





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## [Egypt establishes fund to support medical staff](#)

Author:

Tue, 2021-02-23 21:23

CAIRO: The Egyptian Ministry of Health has announced the establishment of a fund to support medical staff after their efforts fighting the coronavirus disease (COVID-19).

“Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi has been keen to protect medical crews especially when they are fighting COVID-19,” said Hala Zayed, minister of health and population.

“The fund aims to grant benefits to them in cases of death or injuries resulting in a total or partial paralysis,” said Khaled Mujahid, the ministry’s spokesman.

He added: "Compensation for medical crews and their families have been considered since the beginning of the pandemic, under the directives of El-Sisi."

Mujahid said "the ministry has developed executive procedures to activate the fund. Space for the permanent headquarters of the fund has been allocated in the new administrative capital."

He added that the ministry has shared a proposal with the board of directors in preparation for its submission to the prime minister.



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## [Mob storms south Iran governor office after border violence](#)

Author:

By ISABEL DEBRE | AP

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1614104161775261100



Tue, 2021-02-23 16:43

DUBAI: An angry mob has stormed a district governor's office in southeastern Iran on Tuesday, footage widely circulating on social media showed, a day after shootings at the border with Pakistan left at least two dead and six wounded.

Following two violent incidents near the border, dozens of protesters descended on the Iranian governors' office in Saravan, one of the major cities in Sistan-Baluchestan, a desert province that is one of the most restive and least developed parts of Iran.

People are furious in [#Saravan](#) city in [#SistanBaluchestan](#). After Revolutionary Guards killed dozens of crossborder workers yesterday they took to the streets to protest. People are suffering from poverty and all they received from the regime in Iran is live bullets. [pic.twitter.com/C4WkF8I0ba](https://pic.twitter.com/C4WkF8I0ba)

– Masih Alinejad (@AlinejadMasih) [February 23, 2021](#)

Videos showed the men screaming "Allahu Akbar" as they punched through glass doors, yanked out air-conditioning units and smashed office furniture against the walls. Once inside, protesters waded through piles of overturned chairs and shattered glass, throwing objects all over the place.

The Associated Press verified the footage based on geographic data.

February 23 – Saravan, southeast [#Iran](#)

Footage of protesters seizing the local governorate office.

It is worth noting that the IRGC continued its oppressive measures yesterday and opened fire on innocent locals. [#IranProtests](#)  
[pic.twitter.com/u6j7Bdeti0](https://pic.twitter.com/u6j7Bdeti0)

– People’s Mojahedin Organization of Iran (PMOI/MEK)  
(@Mojahedineng) [February 23, 2021](#)

Mohammad Hadi Marashi, deputy governor of the Sistan and Baluchestan province, told Iranian state TV on Tuesday that the outrage at the governors’ office stemmed from the shooting of several fuel smugglers on the Pakistani side of the border near Saravan the day before. Marashi pointed a finger at Pakistan, saying its forces had opened fire on a gathering of fuel smugglers that had been trying to cross back into Iran, killing one and wounding four.



Photo: National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI)

Following the shooting, violent clashes erupted Monday at a police station in Saravan, according to Marashi. Iranian border guards opened fire at fuel smugglers trying to storm the station, wounding several. They were taken to nearby hospitals, he added, without providing further details.

Feb. 23 – [#Saravan](#), SE [#Iran](#)

The state security forces are using tear gas to disperse Baluch residents who came to the streets after after the IRGC attacked Baluch “fuel carriers” killing and wounding dozens. [#IranProtests](#)  
[pic.twitter.com/MFcjPw5e0r](https://pic.twitter.com/MFcjPw5e0r)

– IRAN HRM (@IranHrm) [February 23, 2021](#)

Pakistani officials reported that one smuggler was killed and several more wounded in what they called a “firing incident” at the border town of Taftan in southwestern Baluchistan. None of the wounded were taken into Pakistan, they said, speaking on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak to media.

Feb. 23 – [#Saravan](#), SE [#Iran](#)

Another video of the state security forces using tear gas to disperse Baluch residents. [#IranProtests](#) [pic.twitter.com/Dq4cd1BTw6](https://pic.twitter.com/Dq4cd1BTw6)

– IRAN HRM (@IranHrm) [February 23, 2021](#)

Taftan is a well-worn smuggling route, mostly for subsidized diesel fuel from Iran to Pakistan. The impoverished province has seen occasional clashes between Iranian forces and militants, drug traffickers and small separatist groups.





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