

Yemen's health system another victim of the conflict – UN health agency

23 February 2017 – Acute shortage of critical medicines, limited fuel for electricity and specialized medical staff such as intensive care doctors and nurses having left Yemen have put innocent lives in danger, the United Nations health agency has warned.

According to the UN World Health Organization (WHO), only 45 per cent of the country's health facilities remain fully functional and accessible and at least 274 have been damaged or destroyed during the conflict.

On top of this, drastic budget cuts have left health facilities without funds for operational costs and health care workers without regular salaries since September 2016.

One such example is the 320-bed Al-Thawra Hospital, the main functioning health facility in Al-Hudaydah (Yemen's third largest city) and neighbouring governorates. Many health facilities in the area have already closed.

Staffed by more than 1,200 employees – many of whom have not received their salaries for the past five months – the hospital provides care to some 1,500 people every day. This is a five-fold increase over the numbers in 2012 due to the influx of people displaced by ongoing conflict.

Most of the patients who arrive are unable to pay the minimal fees for hospital services.

RELATED: Cut off by fighting, thousands of Yemenis urgently need aid and protection – UN official

Despite this, no one is turned away from Al-Thawra Hospital and medical staff provide care to everyone, regardless of whether they can afford to pay, noted the WHO news release. Recently, however, the hospital had to stop providing food for inpatients due to lack of funds.

But there are fears that recent arrivals of thousands of displaced women, men and children in the governorate could overburden the already weakened health facilities and vulnerable host communities.



A severely damaged health facility in Taiz, Yemen. Photo: WHO Yemen

“The World Health Organization (WHO) assists us by providing fuel and medicines for emergency interventions, and supporting the hospital's therapeutic feeding centre,” said Khaled Suhail, Director of Al-Tharwa Hospital.

“However, with no funds for operational costs, we never know if we will still be open one month from now,” he added.

A collapsing health system

With more than 14.8 million people lacking access to basic health care, the current lack of funds means the situation will get much worse, WHO Acting Representative in Yemen

According to WHO, since the escalation of the conflict in March 2015, health facilities across Yemen have reported more than 7,600 deaths and close to 42,000 people injured.

Malnutrition rates are also rising: almost 4.5 million people in Yemen, including 2 million children, require services to treat or prevent malnutrition, a 150 per cent increase since late 2014.

Of special concern are almost 462 000 children suffering from severe acute malnutrition and at risk of life-threatening complications such as respiratory infections or organ failure, said WHO.

RELATED: Yemen: As food crisis worsens, UN agencies call for urgent assistance to avert catastrophe

And with severely limited budgets, things might get worse.

“With more than 14.8 million people lacking access to basic health care, the current lack of funds means the situation will get much worse,” said Nevio Zagaria, WHO Acting Representative in Yemen.

Responding to the crisis, the UN agency has established 15 therapeutic feeding centres in seven governorates, and plans to open 25 more as the numbers of malnourished children increases across the country, but its efforts are challenged by lack of funds.

“We are asked to fill gaps created by the collapsing health institutions,” noted Dr. Zagaria, adding: “[however] last year, [we] received less than half of the \$124 million required.”

In 2017, UN agencies in the country and non-governmental organizations have appealed for \$322 million to support health care in Yemen, of this amount WHO has requested \$126 million.

“We urgently need resources to help support the health system as a whole, and are calling on donors to scale-up their support before more innocent lives are lost unnecessarily,” underscored Dr. Zagaria.

ID tags issued to troops in PLA units

Servicemen and women with the People's Liberation Army are being issued personal identification tags to improve personnel management as well as battlefield logistics and medical support.

Thirteen units across the Navy, Air Force and Rocket Force have been given the tags, which consist of two parts—a metal tag engraved with the bearer's name, rank, blood type and military member code and an auxiliary metal tag with a quick-response code and a built-in microchip with their health information.

Troops have also been issued wristwatches that can measure the wearer's heart rate and send distress signals, according to PLA Daily, the military's official newspaper.

Officers and medical professionals with the units were given a cellphonelike device that can receive signals from soldiers, scan a tag bearer's QR code and record emergency and medical situations.

Development of the tags and auxiliary instruments began in November 2013, and the first products were tried out by a brigade of the 27th Group Army, the paper reported, adding that the equipment has proved effective in battlefield medical efforts during combat exercises.

The newspaper quoted an unnamed official from the Central Military Commission's Logistic Support Department as saying that users from the 13 units will test the devices' reliability and usage. Users are also told to check whether the tags and wristwatch can work well with other logistics and medical equipment, and whether their electronic frequencies are compatible with those of weapons, the official said.

The official also said the introduction of identification tags will help improve the database of military members' personal information and logistic and medical services during combat or emergencies.

However, a PLA officer who did not want to be named told China Daily that he has found some problems with the wristwatch, such as its buttons being too big. He urged the military to solve the problems.

Zhou Yuan, a commentator for PLA Daily, has called for tests on whether enemies can be prevented from using the devices and whether the devices' signals will expose bearers' location to an enemy.

Currently, militaries in more than 30 nations including the United States, Russia, Germany and Japan use such identification tags.

Square dancers in Beijing may face punishment for public disturbance

Starting next month, square dancers in Beijing could risk legal repercussions if they are deemed to be disturbing the peace, Chinanews.com reported.

Beijing's newly revised regulation on the national fitness program stipulates that fitness activities should not disturb the public order, and violators will be subject to penalties or even criminal prosecution at the hands of public security departments.

With public square dancing becoming increasingly popular among Chinese citizens, and especially among senior citizens, disputes between dancers and residents have been on the rise, as the dancing is usually accompanied by loud music.

Places including Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region and the cities of Xi'an and Nachong have already formulated regulations controlling fitness activities in public places. These regulations, however, do not designate specific departments to oversee square dancing.

Beijing's new regulation demonstrates the government's commitment to solving the problems caused by square dancing, and is a good example of resolving disputes through law, the report noted.

Deadly fire was 'human error'

A fatal blaze at a foot massage parlor in eastern China was caused by an electrical fault in a steam room, China's top work safety watchdog said on Wednesday.

Flames engulfed Zuxintang Foot Massage in Tiantai, Zhejiang province, at 5:26 pm on Feb 5, killing 18 people and injuring 18 others.

A preliminary investigation showed the fire started after the steam room's heating system malfunctioned, causing rising temperatures that ignited some flammable objects, according to the State Administration of Work Safety.

"It was an accident caused by human error," Su Jie, a spokeswoman for the watchdog, said at a news conference on Wednesday.

The management of the parlor—which occupied the first and second floors of a six-story building in a downtown community—and the relevant local government department should take the blame, Su said.

However, she added that an investigation into the case is ongoing.

Police in Tiantai detained four people in connection with the incident on Feb 7, local media reported.

At the news conference on Wednesday, the State Administration of Coal Mine Safety also provided an update on its investigation into an explosion at Zubao Coal Mine in Lianyuan, Hunan province, on Feb 14 that killed six people and left four others missing.

Yang Fu, deputy director of the agency, said the authorities are looking into whether the mine covered up the death of a miner in the accident, which happened when 29 people were underground.

He said rescuers are trying to find the missing workers and that local authorities have formed a work group to investigate the cause of the blast.

“Investigators have found traces of a coal dust explosion in the shaft after entering the mine several times,” Yang said, adding that the watchdog will punish those responsible if any cover-up is discovered. Police have detained a manager at the mine, surnamed Liu, who is suspected of covering up the miner’s death, Xinhua News Agency reported.

Three officials are also under investigation, including two vice-mayors of Lianyuan and the local production safety chief, according to the report.

[Press release: £229 million of industrial strategy investment in science, research and innovation](#)

- Greg Clark announces Industrial Strategy investment for UK research and development.
- Funding of £126 million announced for a world class research centre at the University of Manchester for development of advanced materials.
- Government confirms investment of £103 million in Rosalind Franklin Institute (RFI), creating a new national centre of excellence for life and physical sciences.

Business and Energy Secretary Greg Clark has today (Thursday 23 February 2017) announced £229 million worth of investment in the development of cutting-edge advanced materials and a new centre of excellence for the life and physical sciences as part of the government’s modern [Industrial Strategy](#).

Included in the investment is £126 million in grants for the Sir Henry Royce Institute for Advanced Materials, supporting the creation of a world-leading

research centre at the University of Manchester, with satellite centres at the Universities of Sheffield, Leeds, Liverpool, Cambridge, Oxford and Imperial College.

As an international beacon for UK expertise, the Royce Institute will encompass nine key areas of materials research including graphene and proposed research areas will be grouped into four themes – energy, engineering, functional and soft materials.

Greg Clark has also announced £103 million Government investment in a new national centre of excellence for life and physical sciences, at the Rosalind Franklin Institute (RFI), located at Harwell Science and Innovation Campus, Oxford. The centre will build on the UK's world-leading reputation in these fields and effectively bring together academia and industry.

Business and Energy Secretary Greg Clark said:

“Research and development has a proven track record of making our economy more competitive and creating new products, services and better ways of doing business. For these reasons, we've placed the UK's strengths in science, research and innovation at the core of our modern Industrial Strategy.

“Government investment in these two centres for advanced materials and life and physical sciences will support growth across a range of sectors, provide the skills and training to grow our expertise in these cutting-edge fields, and facilitate positive collaboration between industry, academia and Government.”

Chief Executive Officer of AstraZeneca Pascal Soriot said:

“As a long-standing investor in UK science and partnerships with academia, we believe the creation of vibrant geographic areas of excellence would truly catalyse discovery and innovation. Supported by transport and housing infrastructure that facilitate collaboration and attract the best talent, these clusters would boost the knowledge economy and anchor industrial activity throughout the UK.”

Building on today's announcements, Ministers from the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy will be visiting businesses and universities across the East of England and Midlands today to hear and discuss the views of businesses, workers and academics on the Government's vision for an Industrial Strategy.

Climate Change and Industry Minister Nick Hurd is going to the Advanced Propulsion Centre in Coventry while Small Business and Consumer Minister Margot James visits John Lewis and River Island distribution centres in Milton Keynes.

Lord Prior of Brompton will be visiting Resonate in Derby to see signalling and traffic management systems that are delivering capacity increases on Network Rail routes.

The Business Secretary and Ministers will then be hosting an evening reception with business leaders, start-ups and local leaders in Birmingham at the Innovation Birmingham Campus; home to 170 businesses that employ approximately 1,100 staff in total.

The government published its Industrial Strategy green paper in January, inviting industries, businesses and consumers to visit the GOV.UK website and [respond to the consultation](#).