

COVID-19 Rages in Middle East

BEIRUT (Dispatches) – Lebanon, a nation of nearly seven million people, has been witnessing a spike in COVID-19 cases in recent days.

Last week, the total number of infections exceeded half a million, while the death toll from the virus reached 6,778.

The pandemic has hit the country while the economic situation in the country has been deteriorating since 2019, pushing thousands of Lebanese citizens onto the streets. Back then, it was estimated that Lebanon needed \$20-\$25 billion to re-emerge from its fiscal crisis.

Then came the deadly Beirut explosion of August 2020 that shattered what had already been a fragile situation, while the raging coronavirus and the restrictive measures taken to curb its spread resulted in high rates of unemployment and poverty.

Meanwhile, the Gaza Strip recorded its highest-ever daily toll of coronavirus deaths, authorities said Sunday, as the Israeli-blockaded



For Palestinians living in the occupied West Bank and Israeli-blockaded Gaza, the situation is becoming worrisome day by day.

territory struggles with a dearth of vaccines.

The Palestinian enclave, hemmed in by a large concrete barrier, the Egyptian border and the Mediterranean Sea, had been largely spared by the Covid-19 illness for much of last year.

But in August, cases were record-

ed in its densely-populated refugee camps. They have sky-rocketed in recent weeks, forcing a curfew and other health measures.

On Sunday, the Strip's health ministry announced "23 deaths in the past 24 hours", taking its toll to 761 deaths since the start of the pandemic.

"It's the largest number of deaths" in one day, said Mutassim Salah, a senior health official, adding that 305 people were hospitalized with the disease.

Egypt is witnessing a third coronavirus wave, a top official has said. Ashraf Hatem, head of the health affairs committee in the Egyptian Parliament and a member of the supreme committee for respiratory viruses of the Ministry of Higher Education, indicated that the number of coronavirus cases at university hospitals is once again increasing daily.

He said that citizens must adhere to precautionary measures, respect the rules of social distancing and wear their protective face masks, as well as avoiding family visits.

He advised of the need to follow proper nutritional habits and eat foods that contain nutrients that boost the immune system.

Hatem said that the number of coronavirus cases is directly related to how far citizens follow precautionary measures.

Dozens Injured After Train Derails in Egypt

CAIRO (Dispatches)—Ninety-seven people have been injured after a train derailed in Egypt's Qalioubia province north of Cairo, the health ministry said in a statement.

58 ambulances rushed to the site and moved the injured to three hospitals in the province, it said.

Egypt's health minister Hala Zayed is heading to Qalioubia province to check up on those injured in the incident.

The train departed Cairo at 1:20 P.M. and was due to arrive in Mansoura at 5:00 P.M.

At least 20 people were killed and nearly 200 were injured in March when two trains collided near Tahta in Sohag province.

Egypt's railway system has a history of badly maintained equipment and poor management. Official figures show that 1,793 train accidents took place in 2017 across the country.

In 2018, a passenger train de-

railed near the southern city of Aswan, injuring at least six people and prompting authorities to fire the chief of the country's railways.

In the same year, President Abdel-Fattah el-Sisi said the government lacks about 250 billion Egyptian pounds, or \$14.1 billion, to overhaul the run-down rail system.

El-Sisi spoke a day after a passenger train collided with a cargo train, killing at least 12 people, including a

child.

A year earlier, two passenger trains collided just outside the Mediterranean port city of Alexandria, killing 43 people. In 2016, at least 51 people were killed when two commuter trains collided near Cairo.

Egypt's deadliest train crash took place in 2002, when over 300 people were killed when a fire erupted in a speeding train traveling from Cairo to southern Egypt.

Anti-Netanyahu Protests Continue in al-Quds

WEST BANK (Dispatches) – Protesters gathered outside Zionist prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Jerusalem residence on Saturday night to demonstrate against him, the Times of Israel reported.

As demonstrators attempted to block traffic, police closed several roads, according to the report.

The demonstrations took place as Netanyahu's corruption trial ramped up to three hearings a week, and as the head of the Li-

kud party struggles to form an administration after four elections in two years.

With the March election results maintaining the political gridlock of the previous three elections, it is uncertain if either the pro-Netanyahu bloc or the anti-Netanyahu bloc will be able to form a coalition.

As could be seen on videos from the protests shared online, the demonstrators carried inflatable

submarines as usual, a symbol of the last year's ongoing protests against the corruption of the prime minister.

Last Saturday, demonstrations were also held outside Netanyahu's residence in al-Quds and his private house in the occupied city of Caesaria.

For months, protesters have been conducting weekly demonstrations against Netanyahu, demanding that he resign in the

wake of his bribery, fraud, and breach of trust trial. Netanyahu denies wrongdoing and says the indictments are part of a campaign to oust him from office by political opponents.

On March 20, in what was the last mass rally before the recent Knesset elections, one of the biggest protests to date took place. On that Saturday evening, tens of thousands of protesters assembled in al-Quds, according to reports.

Gazan Man Winning Hearts by Donating Traditional Food in Ramadan

GAZA CITY (Arab News) – Muhannad Al-Heiqi was unaware of jarisha before tasting it last Ramadan after receiving a plate from his neighbor Walid Al-Hattab, who cooks it voluntarily for the people of the Shejaiya neighborhood in Gaza.

But after discovering the "comfortable" taste of the dish, Al-Heiqi is ensuring that jarisha is present at the iftar table during this year's Ramadan.

Jarisha is made from roasted crushed wheat with added salt and spices. It is placed in a bowl over low heat and stirred well until it reaches a firm consistency. It is usually served with lamb cooked with yogurt.

Younger generations in Gaza have never encountered the traditional Palestinian food that was popular before the Nakba.

But some Palestinian families in al-Quds and West Bank are leading a revival, and now prepare it for Ramadan and wedding celebrations.

Al-Heiqi, 36, said that his 67-year-old father was "very happy" when presented with a dish of jarisha. He told Al-Heiqi that he

had not tasted it for 30 years.

When Al-Hattab, 59, first cooked jarisha and distributed it to the poor during the month of Ramadan in 2018, he did not expect to receive great approval and demand.

Now in his fourth year of cooking the dish for Ramadan, Al-Hattab said: "The story began with me by chance and without planning, but today I am happy that I am a source of happiness for many, and I will maintain this habit every Ramadan for the rest of my life."

Discussing his first time making the traditional food, he said: "It was a small quantity, not exceeding 3 kilograms of wheat. I did not know how to distribute it or whether it would satisfy people. However, I was surprised by a great turnout upon its completion, and it was sufficient at that time to feed 10 families."

In Ramadan the following year, Al-Hattab came more prepared, filling a large container with enough jarisha to feed 100 families. The year after that, he fed 220 families. He also delivers meals sufficient for iftar and suhoor to 100 people in elderly households,

and bears all the costs.

Words of praise and approval have motivated Al-Hattab to develop his charitable idea.

"I felt overjoyed when Al-Heiqi told me that his father was happy and that he had been longing to taste jarisha for a long time, but that his family could not make it," he said.

Because it is "a dish from the time of the grandfathers," Al-Hattab said that he is keen to encourage a revival and bequeath knowledge of the dish to his sons and daughters. He described jarisha as a nutritious and comfortable meal that is beneficial for people fasting during Ramadan.

Al-Hattab has three children who share the task of cooking jarisha and distributing it to poor residents in the neighborhood. They work daily from afternoon until iftar.

Due to high rates of poverty and unemployment, many initiatives have sprung up to encourage charitable acts in the past few years, with the most popular being preparation of traditional varieties of Palestinian food for donation.

Nowruz... (Continued From Page One)

Tehran says it has received more than 400,000 of 2 million Sputnik V vaccines on order from Russia, and that it is awaiting delivery of 4.2 million AstraZeneca shots.

It has also received 250,000 doses of China's Sinopharm vaccine and part of an order of 500,000 doses of India's COVAXIN.

With a population of 83 million, Iran had hoped to secure over 2 million vaccines by March 20 to vaccinate mainly healthcare workers. It is developing at least four local vaccine candidates, one in cooperation with Cuba, which are expected to reach production in a few months.

U.S. Must... (Continued From Page One)

are necessary in order to examine how serious Washington is in its claim about being willing to return to and fully honor the JCPOA, and to check whether it fits Iran's declared policy," he said, using the official acronym of the nuclear agreement.

Gharibabadi, a top negotiator who is currently engaged in the multi-lateral talks in Vienna, said Iranian negotiators act in accordance with the Islamic Republic's principles as set out by Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei.

The Iranian negotiators regularly report the results of the talks to senior officials for consideration and decision-making, the top diplomat added.

Within the format of the JCPOA Joint Commission meetings in Vienna, two expert-level working groups have been set up to remove the U.S. sanctions against Iran and coordinate Tehran's return to full compliance with its nuclear obligations under the deal.

Mikhail Ulyanov, the Russian ambassador to international organizations in Vienna, said on Sunday that the working groups continued to work "on sanctions lifting and nuclear issues in the afternoon yesterday and today."

"Their tasks are not easy but the process is going on," Ulyanov said via Twitter.

Iran... (Continued From Page 2)

According to the MoU, Iran and Serbia would expand cordial relations based on the principles of equality, sovereignty, territorial integrity, non-interference in internal affairs, mutual respect and common interests.

Tehran and Belgrade also agreed to make joint efforts to solve regional and global crises through political and diplomatic ways.

The Serbian foreign minister said the MoU would play an effective role in the expansion of relations given the two countries' high capacities, particularly in economic and industrial sectors.

Speaker... (Continued From Page 2)

that Iran has started the process of enriching uranium to 60 percent fissile purity at Natanz.

Yadlin said Iran's nuclear energy program is "much more fortified and dispersed", making it hard to attack.

"Iran has learned from what we have done," Yadlin said, claiming that the occupying regime of Israel had also learned from what it had done and had "more capabilities" for new sabotage acts.

CNBC cited the options that the Zionist regime's military planners had against Iran's nuclear program, including "covert attacks, clandestine actions and cyberattacks".

"In essence, try everything short of war," the network said of the "five strategies to stop Iran", adding the last resort was bombing Iran's nuclear program or pushing for regime change.

On Saturday, Iran named a suspect in the latest attack on Natanz, saying he had fled the country "hours before" the sabotage happened. National television named the suspect as 43-year-old Reza Karimi and showed an Interpol "red notice" seeking his arrest.

The report said "necessary actions" are underway to bring Karimi back to Iran through legal channels. The Interpol "red notice" listed his foreign travel history as including Ethiopia, Kenya, the Netherlands, Qatar, Romania, Turkey, Uganda and the United Arab Emirates.

The report also showed centrifuges in a hall. "The sound that you are hearing is the sound of operating machines that are fortunately undamaged," the reporter said, the high-pitched sound of the centrifuges heard in the background.

"Many of the centrifuge chains that faced defects are now under control. Part of the work that had been disrupted will be back on track with the round-the-clock efforts of my colleagues," an engineer speaking to the network said.

Iranian... (Continued From Page 2)

The plane was shot down by Iran's air defenses, which mistook the aircraft for a military target amid tensions between Tehran and Washington following the US assassination of top anti-terror commander Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani in Iraq days earlier.

Elsewhere in his remarks, the Iranian security official explained that Kiev also wanted to evade accusations regarding its role in the downing of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 (MH17) over eastern Ukraine on July 17, 2014.

Therefore, he said, Ukraine sought to blame both the MH17 and PS752 crashes on a problem in the Tor-M1 battery.

The official further stressed that Kiev wanted to increase pressure on Moscow amid the conflict in Crimea.

Relations between the two sides deteriorated when the Black Sea peninsula of Crimea rejoined Russia following a referendum in 2014. More than 90 percent of the participants in the referendum voted in favor of that unification.