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USD	01	GBP	01	INR	1000	PKR	1000	EUR	01	IRR	1000	AED	01
AFN	78.59	AFN	108.90	AFN	1065	AFN	500	AFN	93.90	AFN	0.37	AFN	21.22

'Vaccine or jail?': Duterte warns as COVID's Delta variant surges

Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte has threatened to send people to prison for refusing to get vaccinated against the coronavirus, as the government placed the country's border controls on "heightened alert" over new cases of the Delta variant.

"You can choose: you get the vaccine or I will send you to jail," Duterte said in Tagalog during a pre-recorded address on Monday night.

The Philippines began its vaccination programme in March but there have been reports of low turnouts at several vaccination centres in the country, although people are also reportedly scrambling to get the limited supply of the Pfizer BioNtech jabs.

Admitting that he is growing exasperated by "these fools", who refused to get vaccinated, Duterte then threatened to inject them "with shots intended for pigs".

Duterte has also previously threatened to shoot Filipinos found violating lockdown restrictions during the pandemic. Since that threat, there have been several cases of alleged violators being killed by authorities, including an elderly man and a former soldier, who suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder.

Of the country's estimated 110 million population, only about 1.95 percent were fully vaccinated as of Monday, according to the vaccine tracker, Herd Immunity PH.

According to a separate report by the government on Monday night, 8.4 million doses of vaccine have been administered. At least 6.2 million people have received their first dose, while 2.15 million are fully vaccinated.

As of Monday, the Philippines had reported 1.3 million coronavirus cases, with almost 56,000 still active. Many of the new cases are attributed to the surge of infections in Duterte's political stronghold of Mindanao. More than 23,700 have died, including 138 on April.

Duterte said that those refusing to get inoculated should just "leave the country", and either go to India or the United States.

The Philippines medical community has been stepping up efforts to encourage citizens to get the coronavirus vaccine, opening inoculation sites at churches, malls and cinemas, in order to give Filipinos easier access to the shots.

The government has resorted to incentives to get the COVID shot, including giving away cattle.

But the president's latest statement drew immediate condemnation from the Philippines' health practitioners.

In a statement to Al Jazeera, Harold Chiu, a specialist in endocrinology at the Philippine General Hospital in Manila, said that it is "against patient autonomy to force and incarcerate people for refusing an intervention."

"I encourage everyone to get vaccinated because vaccines work and they prevent us from getting severe Covid-19."

Cristina Palabay, who leads the Karapatan rights group, said Duterte's threat "has no basis in law."

"The legal basis for such statement is highly questionable, and morally and socially, it is unacceptable," Palabay said, adding that Duterte's approach will only scare off people.

"It will have far-reaching implications on how do we promote and enhance a truly comprehensive health care system in this country," she told Al Jazeera.

The World Health Organisation has said that countries should encourage its citizens to get vaccinate, but cannot coerce people if they refuse.

In a televised press briefing on Tuesday, Myrna Cabotaje, a health undersecretary, clarified that the president's threat was "borne out of passion", and that it should be taken in the context of his desire "to protect" Filipinos.

But in his press briefing on Tuesday, Harry Roque, the president's spokesman, said in a mix of Tagalog and English that there are jurisprudence that could make vaccination compulsory, and that the state "has the right to make vaccination mandatory" as part of its "police powers".

He said that can be done through legislation.

There is a crisis'

"There is a crisis being faced in this country. There is a national emergency," Duterte said of the pandemic, while warning that he could order all the village chiefs nationwide to make a list of everyone who is unvaccinated.

Dr Gene Nisperos, an assistant professor at the University of the Philippines (UP) College of Medicine, wrote in Tagalog on social media that in fact "many people want to get a jab, but there's not enough supply."

The country had previously faced some hurdles in acquiring vaccines. As of June 17, news reports and government data showed that 14.2 million doses of vaccine have been delivered to the country, including nine million doses of Sinovac from China, as well as almost five million doses of Astrazeneca and Pfizer from the WHO's Covax facility.

The Philippines announced on Monday that it has signed an agreement with Pfizer to deliver 40 million doses of Covid vaccines. But the delivery is not due until August.

Meanwhile, the Philippine health department reported detecting four new cases of the highly infectious Delta variant, prompting the government to raise restrictions to "heightened alert" level.

Aljazeera

Saudi Arabia's FM and IAEA chief discuss Iran's nuclear program

Saudi Arabia's foreign minister discussed with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) chief "the importance of imposing the necessary mechanisms for a rapid and comprehensive inspection of all Iranian nuclear sites," the foreign ministry wrote in a tweet on Monday.

During the meeting, Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud and IAEA's Rafael Grossi discussed the most prominent developments towards the Iranian nuclear program and the significant requirements needed to stop Iranian violations and policies of international laws and norms that destabilize the security and stability of the region and the world.

The two sides also discussed the importance of adhering to the application of international atomic energy standards in order to stimulate growth and progress to achieve sustainable development globally, in addition to discussing the most prominent developments on the regional and international arena.

The meeting was also attended by Prince Abdullah bin Khalid bin Sultan al-Saud, Saudi Arabia's Ambassador to Austria.

China tells banks to stop supporting cryptocurrency

China has expanded its clampdown on cryptocurrencies, telling banks and payments platforms to stop supporting digital currency transactions.

That follows an order on Friday to shut down Bitcoin mining operations in Sichuan province.

The price of Bitcoin slumped by more 10% on Monday but stabilised in Asian trading on Tuesday.

The value of the cryptocurrency has fallen by around 50% since hitting a record high above $63,000 in April.

On Monday, China's central bank, the People's Bank of China (PBOC), said it had recently summoned several major banks and payments companies to call on them to take tougher action over the trading of cryptocurrencies.

Banks were told to not provide products or services such as trading, clearing and settlement for cryptocurrency transactions, the PBOC said in a statement.

China's third-largest lender by assets, the Agricultural Bank of China, said it was following the PBOC's guidance and would conduct due diligence on clients to root out illegal activities involving cryptocurrency mining and transactions.

China's Postal Savings Bank also said it would not facilitate any cryptocurrency transactions.

Chinese mobile and online payments platform Alipay, which is owned by financial technology giant Ant Group, said it would set up a monitoring system to detect illegal cryptocurrency transactions.

World Bank rejects El Salvador Bitcoin request

The latest measure came after authorities in the southwest province of Sichuan on Friday ordered Bitcoin mining operations to close down.

China accounted for around 65% of global Bitcoin production last year, with Sichuan rating as its second largest producer, according to research by the University of Cambridge.

Last month China's cabinet, the State Council, said it would crack down on cryptocurrency mining and trading as part of a campaign to control financial risks.

Some analysts have warned of potential further falls in the price of Bitcoin due to a price chart phenomenon known as a "death cross", which occurs when a short-term average trendline crosses below a long-term average trendline.

Other cryptocurrencies also fell as investors worried about tougher regulation of digital currencies around the world.

Media captionBitcoin explained: How do crypto-currencies work?

Separately, the auction house Sotheby's said that a rare pear-shaped diamond that is expected to sell for as much as $15m can be bought at an auction next month using cryptocurrencies.

It is the first time that such a large diamond has been offered in a public sale with cryptocurrency. BBC

President-elect: US must return to nuclear deal with Iran, fulfill its commitments under accord

Iran's President-elect Ebrahim Raeisi says the United States must return to full compliance with the 2015 landmark nuclear deal with Iran, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), and fulfill its commitments as per the accord.

Raeisi made the remarks during his first press briefing attended by representatives of domestic and foreign media outlets on Monday, following his election as Iran's next president.

Asked what message he had for the United States and Europe, Iran's president-elect said, "I emphatically urge the United States to return to the JCPOA and comply with its commitment. The Iranian people expect you to abide by your obligations."

"European countries and the United States must look and see what they have done to the JCPOA. The United States violated the JCPOA while European countries [who were parties to the JCPOA] failed to comply with their obligations," Raeisi said.

"We tell the United States that you have to remove all sanctions [imposed on Iran] and must return [to the nuclear deal] and fulfill your obligations. Europeans must not be influenced by the US pressure and must act upon their commitments. This is what the Iranian nation wants from you," Iran's president-elect said.

'Removal of sanctions followed by verification, pivot of our foreign policy'

Elsewhere in his interview, Raeisi said the main focus of his administration's foreign policy will be to make sure about complete removal of unilateral sanctions imposed by the United States after Washington's illegal withdrawal from the nuclear deal with Tehran, followed by verification of sanctions removal.

"The United States must respond to the world. It has been frequently emphasized [by Iran] that the United States must comply with its obligations and remove all cruel sanctions [it has imposed on Iran]," Raeisi emphasized.

"The Iranian nation is not satisfied with the JCPOA, because it has failed to deliver on its promises and the reason is that Americans violated their obligations while Europeans failed to observe theirs as well."

He said the United States' "maximum pressure" campaign against Iran has failed to bring the Iranian nation to their knees.

The US, under former President Donald Trump, left the JCPOA in 2018 and initiated a "maximum pressure" policy against Iran, prompting Tehran to take remedial measures by gradually reducing its nuclear commitments under the deal.

President Joe Biden has said Washington is willing to return to the pact if Tehran first suspends its countermeasures taken in response to US violations and reimposition of sanctions.

Iran says the onus is on the US to revive the deal as it was Washington, not Tehran, that left the internationally recognized accord in defiance of global criticism.

'Iran will not pursue attritional talks to bring US back to JCPOA'

Elsewhere in his Monday interview, Raeisi said his administration will not pursue attritional talks with world powers with the aim of bringing the United States back into compliance with the 2015 nuclear agreement.

Raeisi emphasized that the US must remove the sanctions in a verifiable way in order for Tehran to reverse the nuclear steps it took in response to the US withdrawal from the nuclear deal. Presstv

Dubai's Emirates restricts UK flights to Heathrow, Birmingham amid travel curbs

Dubai's Emirates airline will restrict its UK flights to London Heathrow and Birmingham as it continues to operate a reduced flying schedule amid the COVID-19 pandemic, a spokesperson for the carrier told Al Arabiya English on Monday.

While the airline had been allowing passengers to also book tickets to London Gatwick for later in the year – despite the carrier not currently operating flights to the UKs second busiest airport – Emirates have now confirmed that, at present, it remains to only operate to two UK airports; London Heathrow and Birmingham.

Britain allowed international travel to resume in May, but nearly all major destinations like Spain, France, Italy and the US were left off the 'green' safe list. Those visiting 'amber' countries must quarantine for 10 days on their return and take multiple tests. 'Red' countries - such as the United Arab Emirates - have tougher rules.

In a statement, Emirates said: "Emirates is operating to and from the UK and is accepting eligible travelers to London Heathrow and Birmingham under special conditions. Understandably, the airline is serving its gateways in the UK with a reduced flying schedule due to ongoing travel restrictions in place."

"Full schedules are available on emirates.com and Emirates will continue to monitor and make additional adjustments as UK travel guidelines and entry conditions evolve. Customers with affected travel plans are urged to go to emirates.com for alternative booking options."

On Friday, Prime Minister Boris Johnson said he was very confident that he would be able to lift remaining coronavirus restrictions on his new target date of July 19, based on the most recent data. Alarabiya