The Kabul Times DAILY
facebook.com/thekabultimes
INTERNATIONAL
Saratan 06-1400 Sunday 27 June 2021 INo: 80- Vol: LIX
www.thekabultimes.gov.af

USD	GBP	INR	PKR	EUR	IRR	AED
01	01	1000	1000	01	1000	01
AFN 79.35	AFN 109.31	AFN 1073	AFN 498	AFN 94.68	AFN 0.37	AFN 21.22

'Health system close to collapse': Indonesia battling COVID surge

COVID infections have surged in Indonesia, a nation of 270 million people, in the past week, with more than 2.05 million cases reported as of Saturday, and hospital occupancy rates soared to more than 75 percent in the capital Jakarta and other hard-hit areas. The country is also grappling with new virus strains, including the highly infectious Delta variant first identified in India.

In Jakarta, the surge in cases have forced hospitals to set up emergency tents, according to Detik news website, which quoted provincial government officials.

In Medan, the capital city of North Sumatra province, Dr Inke Nadia D Lubis, member of the COVID task force in the area, reported that in the last six months as many as 1,800 children have been infected with the virus, including 14 who have died.

More than a third of the cases reported were elementary school-age students, while a quarter were high school-age students, Inke was quoted by Detik as saying.

On Friday, President Joko Widodo said that the country is facing an "extraordinary situation", vowing to respond with "quick and appropriate policies".

Nearly 1,000 Indonesian health workers have also died from the virus since the pandemic started, with the country's medical association confirming on Friday that 401 doctors were among the victims. This month, more than 300 vaccinated doctors and healthcare workers in Central Java were found to have been infected with COVID-19, with about a dozen hospitalised.

The rise of severe cases in inoculated medical workers has raised questions about the China-produced Sinovac jab, which Indonesia is heavily relying on to vaccinate more than 180 million people by early next year.

Clinical symptoms suggest that strain is responsible for a surge in cases in West Java, the medical association's spokesperson for the province, Eka Mulyana, said. "In West Java, bed occupancy rates have exceeded 90 percent. Some hospitals' rates are even more than 100 percent," he told reporters.

"At this rate, our health system is close to collapse."

Dozens of communities in Central Java's Kudus regency were put under lockdown after the Delta variant was detected in local testing samples, causing a sudden spike in virus cases.

The surge has been partly blamed on millions travelling from that region across the Muslim-majority nation at the end of Ramadan last month, despite an official ban on the annual migration.

The Indonesian medical association's Kudus representative, Ahmad Ipul Syaifuddin, has said the mass movement of people had made it next to impossible to determine where the surge began.

Fledgling UAE rail network step towards bridging the Gulf

In the desert emirate of Abu Dhabi, Ibrahim al-Hammadi inspects a freight train on the UAE's first railway line. He climbs aboard the locomotive, does a final systems check and then it's full steam ahead.

Hammadi is the first Emirati to become a train driver, in a country which already has a space program and two of the world's biggest airlines but is only now developing a rail network to connect all seven of its emirates.

"I was intrigued when I saw the train operating," the 23-year-old told AFP. "It was something new, and it pushed me to ask around about learning how to drive it."

The United Arab Emirates is well known for its audacious infrastructure and technology projects. It successfully sent a probe to Mars earlier this year, and the world's first superfast hyperloop system is planned to link its two main cities, Dubai and Abu Dhabi.

When completed, Etihad Rail will operate 1,200 kilometers (750 miles) of track connecting all of the emirates -- from Ghweifat in the western region of Abu Dhabi to the emirate of Fujairah on the eastern coast -- and link with neighboring Saudi Arabia.

The long-term plan is to be part of a wider railway network that would connect all six Gulf Cooperation Council countries, including Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman and Qatar as well as the UAE and Saudi Arabia.

And so far there has been little progress on the multi-billion-dollar GCC railway, which has languished after a feasibility study was approved by the six countries back in 2004.

"The rail projects within the GCC have been in a planning process for years, part of bigger goals of trade and economic integration within the regional organization of the Arabian peninsula," Young said.

Hammadi works on Etihad Rail's first section of line, which covers 264 kilometers and has been operational since 2016.

He drives trains transporting granulated sulfur from Abu Dhabi's inland fields in Shah and Habshan to the port of Ruwais.

George Floyd murder: Derek Chauvin sentenced to over 22 years

The US white ex-police officer convicted of murdering African-American man George Floyd in Minneapolis in May 2020 has been sentenced to 22 years and six months in jail.

The judge said Derek Chauvin's sentence was based "on your abuse of a position of trust and authority, and also the particular cruelty shown" to Mr Floyd.

Mr Floyd, 48, died after Chauvin knelt on his neck for nine minutes.

His murder caused global protests against racism and police brutality.

Chauvin, 45, was convicted of second-degree murder and other charges last month. During his trial, his lawyer described the killing as "an error made in good faith".

Chauvin was also told to register as a predatory offender and was barred from owning firearms for life.

He and three other former officers are separately charged with violating George Floyd's civil rights.

The Floyd family and their supporters welcomed the sentence.

"This historic sentence brings the Floyd family and our nation one step closer to healing by delivering closure and accountability," lawyer Ben Crump tweeted.

Mr Floyd's sister Bridgett Floyd said the sentence "shows that matters of police brutality are finally being taken seriously" but there was still "a long way to go".

President Joe Biden said the sentence "seemed to be appropriate" but admitted that he did not know all the details.

What was said during the sentencing hearing?

During the sentencing hearing, Mr Floyd's brother Terrence Floyd demanded the maximum available, a sentence of 40 years.

"Why? What were you thinking? What was going through your head when you had your knee on my brother's neck?" he said.

Mr Floyd's daughter Gianna, aged seven, appeared in a video recording, saying she missed him and she loved him.

"I ask about him all the time," she said. "My daddy always used to help me brush my teeth."

The judge said the case had been painful for the community and the country, but above all, for Mr Floyd's family.

"What the sentence is not based on is emotion, or sympathy, but at the same time, I want to acknowledge the deep and tremendous pain that all the families are feeling, especially the Floyd family," said Judge Peter Cahill.

Chauvin told the court he offered his condolences to the Floyd family, saying there would be "some other information in the future" and he hoped "things will give you some peace of mind".

However, he did not apologise.

In court, Chauvin's mother said he was a "good man".

"I have always believed in your innocence and I will never waver from that," said Carolyn Pawlenty.

Chauvin's sentence was "one of the longest a former police officer has ever received" for deadly force, said Minnesota Attorney General Keith Ellison.

What happened to George Floyd?

He bought a pack of cigarettes at a convenience store in May 2020. A shop assistant believed he had used a counterfeit note and called police after Mr Floyd refused to give the cigarettes back.

When officers arrived, they ordered Mr Floyd out of his parked car and handcuffed him. A struggle ensued when officers tried to put a screaming Mr Floyd in their squad car. They wrestled him to the ground and pinned him under their weight.

Chauvin pressed his knee into the back of Mr Floyd's neck for more than nine minutes.

As he was being restrained, Mr Floyd said more than 20 times that he could not breathe, pleading for his mother and begging "please, please, please".

When the ambulance arrived, Mr Floyd was motionless. He was pronounced dead about an hour later.

His death was filmed by Darnella Frazier, now 18, who was out walking with her cousin when she saw his arrest.

She said she began recording the incident on her phone because "I saw a man terrified, begging for his life".

Earlier this month, Ms Frazier was awarded a special Pulitzer Prize, the most prestigious award in American journalism.

bbc

Three killed in knife attack in Germany's Wuerzburg

A man armed with a long knife killed three people and seriously injured five others in an attack in the southern German city of Wuerzburg on Friday, authorities said.

Police stopped and arrested the attacker by firing a bullet through his thigh. They said his injuries were not life-threatening.

"As things stand, three are dead and five very seriously injured," Bavarian Interior Minister Joachim Herrmann said after arriving on the scene. "With the most seriously injured we are not sure they will survive."

Police said there was no indication that there were any other attackers, and that the situation was now under control. They did not give details on the suspect's motives.

Police spokeswoman Kerstin Kunick said officers were alerted around 5pm (15:00 GMT) to a knife attack on Barbarossa Square in the centre of the city.

Videos posted on social media showed a young man seemingly holding a knife being warded off by other men holding chairs until police arrived. Another video appeared to show blood on the ground.

Bavaria's governor Markus Soeder expressed shock at the news of the attack. "We grieve with the victims and their families," he wrote on Twitter.

Wuerzburg is a city of about 130,000 people located between Munich and Frankfurt.

aljazeera

Citing sanctions, US cautions Arab states against normalizing ties with Syria's Assad

A senior US official Friday warned Arab countries against normalizing ties with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's regime.

Assad was re-elected for a fourth term last month in what the West dubbed as "illegitimate elections," and he has ruled Syria since 2000.

And for the last ten years, his deadly crackdown and brutal oppression of what began as a peaceful pro-democracy protest in 2011 have marred his tenure.

Despite being kicked out of the Arab League, countries in the Middle East have softened their stance on Assad and his government in recent years.

The United Arab Emirates and Bahrain reopened their embassies in Damascus in 2019, and last year, Oman became the first Gulf state to send its ambassador back to Syria.

Syria has also been pushing for more countries in the region to normalize ties; however, the wrath of US economic sanctions continues to pose a threat.

On Friday, Acting Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs Joey Hood reiterated that the US would not alter its stance on the Assad regime "absent a major change in behavior on his part."

Asked about traditional US allies in the Middle East potentially re-establishing ties with Damascus, he said the US was asking them to consider "very carefully the atrocities committed by the regime on the Syrian people over the last decade."

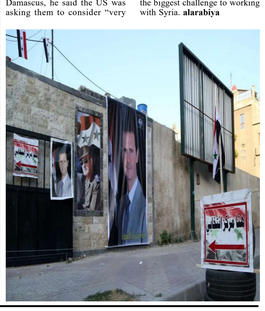
Hood also cited the regime's continuing efforts to block access to humanitarian aid to many parts of Syria.

"I would also, of course, add that we have Caesar [Act] sanctions; this is a law that has wide, bipartisan support in the Congress and the [Biden] administration is going to follow the law on that," Hood said in response to a question from Al Arabiya English.

"So, governments and businesses need to be careful that their proposed or envisioned transactions don't expose them to potential sanctions from the United States, under that act," Hood warned.

With a little less than 400,000 people left dead from the ongoing war in Syria and over six million Syrian refugees, the regime has been unable to draw investment to begin reconstruction efforts.

Russia and Iran, Assad's main backers, do not have the economic or political power to attract or provide the necessary funding.

The Caesar Act was law implemented by the Trump administration last June in an effort to thwart any potential business dealings with the Assad regime.

In March, the top UAE diplomat said the US sanctions were the biggest challenge to working with Syria. **alarabiya**