

ARAB NEWS

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The Kingdom vs. COVID-19

**This National Day, we honor
those who helped protect
not just Saudi Arabia
but the world**



We witness the fruits of our labor today. The huge improvement was thanks to everyone's efforts.

Dr. Mohammed Al-Abd Al-Aly
Ministry of Health spokesman

Spotlight

COVID-19: REGIONAL MEASURES IN 2020

Saudi Arabia acted quicker than most to contact trace, close borders, and restrict movement and gatherings

- START OF PUBLIC INFORMATION CAMPAIGNS **JAN. 30**
- CONTACT TRACING **FEB. 1**
- TESTING BEGINS **MARCH 5**
- RESTRICTIONS ON INTERNAL MOVEMENT **MARCH 8**
- SCHOOL CLOSURES **MARCH 9**
- WORKPLACE CLOSURES **MARCH 16**
- RESTRICTIONS ON PUBLIC GATHERINGS **MARCH 16**
- PUBLIC TRANSIT CLOSURES **MARCH 21**
- STAY-AT-HOME RESTRICTIONS **MARCH 23**
- SCHOOL CLOSURES **MARCH 9**
- CANCELLATION OF PUBLIC EVENTS **MARCH 13**
- INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL CONTROLS **MARCH 15**
- TOTAL BORDER CLOSURE **MARCH 15**
- START OF INCOME SUPPORT **APRIL 3**

DAILY CONFIRMED COVID-19 CASES IN SAUDI ARABIA

TOTAL DEATHS IN SAUDI ARABIA OVER TIME

CORONAVIRUS WORLDWIDE AND SAUDI ARABIA
Sept. 17, 2020

	JORDAN	YEMEN	OMAN	QATAR	IRAQ	IRAN	KUWAIT	BAHRAIN	UAE
INFORMATION CAMPAIGNS	MARCH 5	MARCH 21	JAN. 20	JAN. 30	FEB. 19	FEB. 26	JAN. 23	JAN. 21	MARCH 11
CONTACT TRACING	MARCH 17	■	MARCH 17	MARCH 8	FEB. 25	MAY 17	MARCH 7	FEB. 23	FEB. 1
TESTING BEGINS	MARCH 9	■	FEB. 1	FEB. 27	FEB. 24	MAY 17	JAN. 24	FEB. 9	MARCH 10
INTERNAL MOVEMENT RESTRICTIONS	MARCH 18	APRIL 30	MARCH 18	MARCH 17	MARCH 11	MARCH 5	APRIL 6	MARCH 18	MARCH 23
SCHOOL CLOSURES	MARCH 15	MARCH 15	MARCH 15	MARCH 10	FEB. 25	MARCH 5	MARCH 1	FEB. 24	MARCH 1
CANCELLATION OF PUBLIC EVENTS	MARCH 18	MARCH 17	MARCH 17	MARCH 12	FEB. 25	FEB. 20	MARCH 7	MARCH 18	MARCH 16
INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL CONTROLS	MARCH 15	MARCH 18	FEB. 3	JAN. 24	FEB. 20	JULY 11	FEB. 21	JAN. 27	JAN. 23
TOTAL BORDER CLOSURE	MARCH 15	MARCH 18	MARCH 18	MARCH 18	MARCH 17	■	MARCH 13	■	MARCH 25
WORKPLACE CLOSURES	MARCH 18	APRIL 10	MARCH 21	MARCH 17	MARCH 17	FEB. 26	MARCH 11	MARCH 18	MARCH 1
RESTRICTIONS ON PUBLIC GATHERINGS	MARCH 18	■	MARCH 17	MARCH 22	FEB. 25	APRIL 19	MARCH 11	MARCH 18	MARCH 27
PUBLIC TRANSIT CLOSURES	MARCH 18	■	MARCH 19	MARCH 15	MARCH 13	MARCH 11	MARCH 12	MARCH 28	MARCH 26
STAY-AT-HOME RESTRICTIONS	MARCH 18	MAY 1	APRIL 10	MARCH 17	MARCH 13	MARCH 19	MARCH 22	MARCH 18	MARCH 13
INCOME SUPPORT	MARCH 29	■	APRIL 15	MARCH 28	MAY 17	APRIL 7	APRIL 1	APRIL 1	■

NUMBER OF DEATHS: 195,000, 30,000, 1,000, 1

World toll: Deaths 945,817, Cases 30,0734,74, Recovered 21,826,660

SAUDI ARABIA TOTAL DEATHS: 4,369 (31st largest total in the world)

SAUDI ARABIA TOTAL CASES: 327,551 (16th largest total in the world)

EMERGENCY RESPONSE

How KSA kept the virus at bay

From its peak in June, Saudi Arabia's daily number of new cases has dropped below 500

Jonathan Gornall London

At the height of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, June 17 passed unremarked upon; just another day in Saudi Arabia's hard-fought battle against the worst public health crisis the country has ever seen.

In future, however, June 17 might be seen as an appropriate date for the people of the Kingdom to remember their nation's epic battle against the microscopic enemy that brought the world to its knees — for that was the day its number of daily new cases peaked.

At the time, the day's tally of 4,919 seemed daunting. In fact, the tide of battle had turned in favor of the Kingdom. After that, slowly but steadily the number began to drop. From its first case on March 2, Saudi Arabia had broken the back of the pandemic in just 107 days.

COVID-19 emerged in China in early January, spreading rapidly around the world, but Saudi Arabia managed to keep the enemy from its soil for two months, buying precious time to build its defences.

"We were luckier than many other countries because our cases started a little bit later," said Dr. Hani Jokhdar, deputy minister for public health, speaking in August at the Riyadh Global Digital Health Summit. "This gave us a small opportunity to develop our systems, watching and observing what was happening in the rest of the world."

Saudi Arabia was one of the first countries in the world to set up laboratories to test for the coronavirus, with those tests available

COVID-19 How Saudi Arabia has tackled the pandemic

Jan. 28-Feb. 6
Saudi Arabia launches a public information campaign on Jan. 28, holds the first meeting of the COVID-19 Follow-Up Committee on Feb. 1, and bans travel to China on Feb. 6.



March 2
Saudi Arabia reports its first COVID-19 case: A man who traveled from Iran via Bahrain over the King Fahd Causeway. He is quarantined and his contacts are tested.

March 4
As Saudi Arabia identifies its second COVID-19 case, it suspends all Umrah pilgrimages, extending the ban on pilgrims from overseas announced on Feb. 27 to include Saudi residents.

March 8
Saudi Arabia closes all schools and universities, continuing education through a virtual school platform set up by the Ministry of Education. The Qatif governorate, where all of the Kingdom's 11 cases to date are located, is closed off.

March 15
Saudi Arabia bans international flights and orders the closure of malls, restaurants

and public parks, four days after the World Health Organization declares COVID-19 a global pandemic.

March 20
Saudi Arabia announces a SR120 billion (\$32 billion) aid package in order to mitigate the effects of



COVID-19 on the Kingdom's economy.

March 23
King Salman issues an order imposing a 21-day curfew from 7 p.m. to 6 a.m., with exemptions for health staff, utility workers, food deliveries and media.

April 6
A 24-hour curfew is extended from Makkah, Madinah and parts of Jeddah to Riyadh, Tabuk, Dammam, Dhahran, Hofuf,

Taif, Qatif and Alkhobar, allowing people out only for essentials between 6 a.m. and 3 p.m.

June 17
The number of daily cases peaks at 4,919 in one 24-hour period, while the number of daily deaths peaks at 58 on July 5.



July 29-31
Saudi Arabia conducts the Hajj pilgrimage under strict health measures for 1,000 pilgrims, all of whom were tested and quarantined before completing it. No COVID-19 cases are detected.

Aug. 9
Saudi Ministry of Health announces China's CanSino Biologics will launch a Phase 3 clinical trial of a new COVID-19 vaccine in the Kingdom.

for anyone with symptoms from March 5 onward. Over the next five months more than five million would be conducted.

In February, travel to and from infected countries was halted, culminating in a ban on all international flights by March 15. Restrictions on internal travel followed.

And on Feb. 27, Saudi Arabia took the unprecedented but necessary step of suspending Umrah visas for foreign pilgrims. The Kingdom would also take the lead in closing mosques.

Saudi Arabia's defences were finally breached on March 2, when two citizens, who had returned home infected from Bahrain, neglected to mention that their journeys had begun in Iran, a

country already in the grip of the disease.

Nevertheless, Saudi Arabia, the last of the six Gulf Cooperation Council states to be hit by the virus, was better prepared than many countries for what was coming. A

We were luckier than many other countries.

Dr. Hani Jokhdar
Deputy minister for public health

raft of apps — some established, others developed quickly in the face of the new disease — allowed citizens and residents to report symptoms, book virtual appointments and access testing.

Such technology would also play a vital role in the management of Hajj. As the custodian of Islam's holiest sites, from the outset Saudi Arabia was keenly aware of the consequences for itself, the region and the entire planet if it failed to manage the pilgrimage effectively.

This year the decision was taken to limit numbers to a symbolic 1,000, selected from nationals and foreigners already in the country. Careful screening, monitoring and meticulous management ensured that, in this remarkable year, Hajj passed off without a single case of COVID-19.

Throughout, Saudi Arabia's battle against the virus has been led from the very top. On March 19, King Salman addressed the nation

on television. The Kingdom, he said, "continues to take all precautionary measures to confront this pandemic and limit its effects. We depend on the aid of God Almighty, then on deploying our full capabilities, supported by your strong determination to face adversity with the steadfastness of believers at the forefront."

Neither Saudi Arabia nor the world is out of the woods yet. But as the global daily tally of cases continues to rise, hitting a record high of over 316,000 on Sept. 11, for a total of 31.2 million cases and 965,372 deaths, so Saudi Arabia's daily caseload continues to shrink, even as restrictions have been relaxed and life in the country has begun to return to normal.

On Sunday, the number of daily new cases dropped below 500 for the first time in five months. As Ministry of Health spokesman Dr. Mohammed Al-Abd Al-Aly said: "We witness the fruits of our labor today." The "huge improvement," he added, was thanks to "everyone's efforts."

Let there be no doubt that, with a total of 329,271 cases and 4,458 deaths recorded by Sunday, Saudi Arabia has suffered in 2020.

But one has only to look at how badly many other states have fared — including some of the most powerful and advanced countries in the world — to realize just how much worse this terrible year might have been for the Kingdom, were it not for its preparations and timely and decisive actions.



Saudi National Day 2020

LEADERSHIP

How King Salman made a difference in the COVID-19 fight

Saudi Arabia's WHO representative: Swift action limited the spread of the virus across the Middle East and beyond

Lojien Ben Gassem Riyadh

The leadership of Saudi Arabia under King Salman has been praised for its handling of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak, which helped limit the spread of the virus both at home and abroad.

As the country closed its borders and checked citizens' movements, on March 30 the monarch ordered free health treatment for all residents of the Kingdom, identifying the population's well-being as a top priority.

In an exclusive interview with Arab News, Dr. Ibrahim El-Ziq, the World Health Organization's (WHO) representative for Saudi Arabia, said the first number of declarations had a strong impact in slowing COVID-19 and limiting its consequences.

"It can be clearly seen from the indicators, which compare favorably with some of the most advanced health care systems in the world. These actions could not have been possible without proper planning and advance preparedness.

"Also, successful implementation is only achievable with proper coordination between the various ministries and government entities, and with the active participation and involvement of the whole society," he added.

El-Ziq pointed out that this had been enabled by a high-level national coordination committee with multi-sectoral engagement.

"A national preparedness and response plan was in place early in January, long before the first case of COVID-19 was identified in Saudi Arabia on March 2. This whole-of-government approach allowed the right decisions to be taken on time and to be implemented promptly and in a coordinated manner," he said.

El-Ziq noted that the Saudi government had quickly distributed information and guidance, and engaged with communities through mass media and online platforms, stressing important messages such as staying at home, the need to observe social distancing, to wash hands regularly, and wear face masks.

"The information was not only provided in Arabic, but also in more than 15 other languages to reach the whole population," he added.

Under the chairmanship of King Salman, the Extraordinary G20 Leaders' Summit was held in March to discuss the unprecedented repercussions the world was facing due to the pandemic.

Addressing leaders of the G20



IN NUMBERS

\$103m

Saudi Arabia's total donations to the WHO to combat the pandemic

\$13m

Saudi Arabia donated to the response in Yemen

\$500m

G20 pledges to the global effort

80k

Number of hospital beds initially designated for COVID-19 cases in Kingdom

323

Tetamman clinics dedicated to COVID-19 in Saudi Arabia

King Salman has been praised for his leadership, and his government's response, to the coronavirus disease pandemic.

member states and invited guests, the king said: "The impact of this pandemic has spread to reach the global economy, financial markets, trade and global supply chains, hampering growth and development and reversing the gains accomplished in the previous years. "This human crisis requires a global response. The world counts on us to come together and cooperate in order to face this challenge."

As the rotating president of the G20, Saudi Arabia played a leading role in obtaining pledges from the G20 countries totaling \$500 million to fund the Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan (SPRP) for the global fight against COVID-19. The Kingdom itself, through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, offered \$80 million to the SPRP to support national, regional, and global efforts.

In addition, during the early March days of the pandemic, the King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Center (KSRelief), the country's international relief agency, made a \$10 million donation

to the WHO to implement urgent measures to minimize the global spread of the disease and to support countries with vulnerable or unstable health care systems with their preparedness and response.

KSRelief provided an additional \$13 million to the WHO national office in Yemen to purchase critical medical supplies and equipment, including personal



The world counts on us to come together and cooperate in order to face this challenge.

King Salman

protective equipment for health workers, laboratory tests, and trauma medication, to support the country's readiness to respond to COVID-19.

In all, Saudi Arabia has to date provided \$103 million to the WHO to combat the pandemic. The prominent role that the Kingdom has and will continue to play,

through its G20 leadership and national institutions is expected to only strengthen its partnership with the WHO.

El-Ziq said Saudi Arabia had always collaborated with the organization to promote health in the Kingdom as well as in other countries. "The strong relationship continues as well in the current pandemic, with a number of activities taking place. Seven Saudi hospitals have participated in an international study supported by the WHO to identify the most effective treatment for COVID-19."

He added that the Saudi Ministry of Health had initially designated 25 hospitals and 80,000 beds, including 8,000 intensive care unit (ICU) beds, for the treatment of COVID-19 cases.

"When needed, more facilities were added, for example, building a 100-bed field hospital in Makkah and Madinah, and later a 500-bed hospital in Jeddah. ICU beds across the country were increased by approximately 2,200 in the past three months. Also, 323 Tetamman clinics were provided across the

country as dedicated clinics for COVID-19."

Access to polymerase chain reaction testing was not only made available free of charge for all suspected COVID-19 cases, but also for anyone who wanted to have the test. "Anyone can have the test by visiting one of the Takkad (rest assured) drive-through centers after making an appointment through the Sehaty app," El-Ziq said.

With the pandemic at its peak in July, Saudi Arabia's leadership made the difficult decision to close the country's borders to Hajj pilgrims, limiting the number of worshippers to 1,000 from more than 150 nationalities residing in the Kingdom.

El-Ziq pointed out that the decision was made based on a risk assessment and analysis of different scenarios in line with WHO guidelines for mass gatherings in the context of COVID-19 to protect the safety of the pilgrims and minimize the risk of transmission inside the country and beyond.

"The WHO welcomed the

decision of Saudi Arabia to protect pilgrims' safety and promote regional and global health security," he said, adding that it was important to continue applying measures to prevent the spread of the virus until there was an effective treatment or vaccine, which could take time.

While more than 160 potential vaccines are under development, only five of them have reached the final stages (phase 3 human trials), he said. "These trials may take months before we have enough evidence that the vaccine is effective and safe. "Once an effective vaccine is developed," he said, "we need to produce billions of doses to vaccinate most of the susceptible individuals so that the transmission cycle is broken."

El-Ziq noted that no one could tell when the COVID-19 pandemic would be over, but it was possible that through global efforts and modern technology, it could be brought under control.

"We will be able to get rid of it if an effective vaccine or an effective treatment becomes available," he added.

OPINION

KSA and the WHO: Partners in health and development

DR. AHMED AL-MANDHARI

The World Health Organization (WHO) congratulates the Kingdom on Saudi National Day.

Saudi Arabia makes a tremendous contribution to the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region and beyond. It is a hugely important partner in our work, providing much essential support.

This year's Saudi National Day comes at an exceptional time in the history of the region and world. We face daunting challenges, above all the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. It continues to place massive demands on all of us. The efforts we have made together over the years in preparing, building, developing and investing in health and development are now tested to the limit.

It has been impressive to watch Saudi Arabia responding with confidence and competence. Through a rigorous approach, the authorities have been able to address the pandemic and minimize risks to the population. This success testifies to the strength and solidity of the Saudi health system, the resilience of the Kingdom's infrastructure, and the efficiency of years of planning by its leadership.

Alongside the considerable public health challenges, COVID-19 has undermined the economic situation across the globe, with widespread suspension of road and air traffic, and a contraction of economic activity. Yet even in these most difficult circumstances, Saudi Arabia has continued its humanitarian and relief efforts. We are profoundly grateful



Dr. Ahmed Al-Mandhari is the WHO's regional director for the Eastern Mediterranean.

for the generosity of the Saudi government, the King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Center (KSRelief) and the Saudi people.

I would like to thank the government for its continued and extensive support for the WHO's efforts and programs.

Saudi Arabia has been among the first to step forward and enable us to continue our activities, as we provide life-saving supplies to millions of displaced people, strengthen exhausted health systems, train and deploy medical personnel, maintain critical health programs, and fight chronic and communicable diseases, saving millions of lives.

Since its foundation, the Kingdom has demonstrated that great things are possible through spirit, commitment, solidarity and

action. It has undergone a renaissance while building bridges of friendship with neighboring states and beyond. I look forward to seeing further achievements in years to come.

At the WHO, we believe that solidarity, unity, cooperation and participation are vital to tackle the many challenges that confront us. Only by working together can we foster development, peace and progress and realize our vision of "Health for All, by All" in our region.

Let me once again express the WHO's appreciation for Saudi Arabia, its wise leadership and compassionate people. As we celebrate Saudi National Day with you, we are confident that the Kingdom will continue to play a key role in supporting the whole human community, leading the enhancement of the region.



Saudi National Day 2020



LEAP OF FAITH

A Hajj free of COVID-19

How Saudi Arabia conducted an extraordinary pilgrimage in the year of the coronavirus pandemic

Jonathan Gornall London
Mohammed Al-Kinani Jeddah

Of all the extraordinary images beamed around the world from this year's unprecedented Hajj, it was the time-lapse footage of pilgrims circumambulating the Kaaba with carefully choreographed, socially distanced precision that best captured the spirit of Saudi Arabia's determination to tackle the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic effectively, efficiently and on its own terms.

With responsibility for the health of the millions of pilgrims who visit each year, and by extension for the wellbeing of the nations from which they come, it was clear from the start of the pandemic that Saudi Arabia was not going to take any chances with its management of the fifth pillar of Islam.

On Feb. 27, before a single case of COVID-19 had been detected in the Kingdom, Saudi Arabia announced it was suspending overseas visitors' visas for Umrah, the lesser pilgrimage, and closing the holy sites to foreigners.

On March 17, Saudi Arabia took the unprecedented but necessary step of temporarily closing all places of worship but for the Two Holy Mosques in Makkah and Madinah. Three days later, these too were shut.

Meanwhile, Muslims around the world waited anxiously to see how the Kingdom would manage Hajj in this most extraordinary of years. It seemed impossible that Hajj would not go ahead in some form, but much was at stake.

In 2019, 2.5 million pilgrims converged on Makkah for Hajj, among them 1.85 million from overseas, and the prospect of potentially sending large numbers

home with the virus to dozens of countries around the world was unthinkable.

In the end, Saudi Arabia settled on a historic compromise.

On June 23, the government announced that Hajj would go ahead, but with only a "very limited" symbolic number of pilgrims allowed to take part, a decision taken in consultation with a number of other countries whose governments had decided to cancel their Hajj missions in light of the pandemic.

In a statement, Dr. Mohammed Saleh Benteen, minister of Hajj and Umrah, said the decision had been taken to limit numbers to just 1,000 pilgrims, chosen from among people who were already resident in the Kingdom, aged under 65 and free of serious health problems.

Qualified medical personnel would accompany small groups of pilgrims, each one of whom would be tested for COVID-19 before arriving at the holy sites, would wear an electronic tracking bracelet while performing Hajj and be subject to self-isolation afterwards.

Face masks would be mandatory, only pre-bottled Zamzam water could be drunk and even the pebbles used for the symbolic stoning of the devil, normally collected from the ground at Muzdalifah by the pilgrims themselves, would be gathered for them

A symbolic group of 1,000 pilgrims were permitted to take part in a socially distanced Hajj, above, as Saudi Arabia did its utmost to prevent the pilgrimage spreading COVID-19.

The Grand Mosque in Makkah was cleaned 10 times per day, below. Saudi Ministry of Media



beforehand, sterilized and issued in bags.

Throughout Hajj, 51 clinics, five hospitals and a mobile medical unit were ready to treat pilgrims, with no fewer than 200 ambulances and thousands of healthcare professionals on standby.

The Grand Mosque itself has been cleaned 10 times a day during the pandemic crisis.

On the eve of Hajj, at the 45th Grand Hajj Symposium on July 28, Benteen said the Kingdom was "keen to ensure that the fifth pillar of Islam is performed in a secure, healthy and safe manner, along with the great care of those who

will be able to attend and perform Hajj."

Sheikh Abdulrahman Al-Sudais, the head of the Presidency of the Two Holy Mosques, stressed the importance of "abiding by the preventive instructions and measures adopted by the government, which include ... paying attention to medicine and mental health, warning against myths and working to implement the Prophet's hadith."

For Islamic Affairs Minister Sheikh Abdullatif Al-Asheikh, the wisdom of the Islamic Shariah attached "great importance to the safety of worshippers and seeks to

protect them from any harm while praying and performing their religious duties."

Saudi Arabia's long experience of imposing strict protective measures to guard pilgrims against the possibility of contagious diseases helped to ensure that 2020 passed off without a hitch. In 2019, for example, when 2.5 million pilgrims performed Hajj, there were no public health issues.

In the end, not a single case of COVID-19 emerged during Hajj, a public health victory for the state that belonged also to the pilgrims, whose behavior and adherence to the new rules was exemplary.

شركة إستثمار باكستانية
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SAUDI ARABIA

Extend its joyous greetings to the
Custodian of the two Holy Mosques
His Royal Highness
King Salman Bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud
and His Royal Highness
Prince Mohammed Bin Salman Bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud
and to the Royal Family, Citizens & Residents of Saudi Arabia
On the occasion of
90th Saudi National Day

May Allah bless our Nation with prosperity, success & security
under the Leadership of the Custodian of the two Holy Mosques.
May Allah bless our beloved King.

Ch. Shafqat
CEO, ASCONCOM &
President Pakistan
investor forum Jeddah

هبة حتى
القمة
اليوم الوطني السعودي 90

استثمار للمقاولات
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Saudi National Day 2020

RESEARCH

KSA's role in finding COVID-19 vaccine

Saudi Arabia is working with global partners, including China and Russia

Frank Kane Dubai

In the fight against the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), the World Health Organization (WHO) has warned against the danger of "vaccine nationalism," or countries only trusting vaccines they have developed themselves, or which come from countries — usually Western — regarded as scientifically advanced.

"For the world to recover faster, it has to recover together," WHO Director General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said recently. "The economies are intertwined. Part of the world or a few countries cannot be a safe haven and recover."

Saudi Arabia seems to have learned this lesson early on in the pandemic, even taking it further by inviting cooperation with countries working on the vaccine from outside the Western "gold standard" group of pharmaceutical companies and health regulators.

It also gave the global effort a huge financial boost earlier this year when the G20 — the global leaders' summit under Saudi presidency this year — allocated \$21 billion to bridge a "health financing gap" in the fight against the virus. The grant was made after a special meeting of G20 health ministers organized by the Kingdom.

Saudi Arabia is working with American and British companies, but has also welcomed the involvement of Russian and Chinese vaccine developers in the Kingdom's efforts to produce a treatment for the disease.

The Saudi Health Ministry spokesman said recently: "The Kingdom is committed to participating in the global effort to find a vaccine. It has been participating since the beginning of the

pandemic to support all research efforts in finding a cure and a treatment."

There is a big proviso attached to this commitment to vaccine inclusiveness. Potential vaccines will not be used on people in a wholesale immunization program until they are approved by the Saudi Food and Drug Federation, the government body charged with upholding standards of health and safety in these matters.

"Our leadership is keen on boosting whatever is needed to enhance the health of society and vaccine availability, and to be one of the first to acquire a vaccine, but the safety of the vaccine and the procedure employed are also of great importance when approving any treatment," said Health Minister Dr. Tawfiq Al-Rabiah.

Once the essential safety parameters are set, there is a wealth of potential vaccine candidates on offer. Some experts believe there are nearly 200 under development worldwide, though only a handful of these are likely to come to anything like a production stage. The Kingdom is leaving its options open by considering a wide range from around the world.

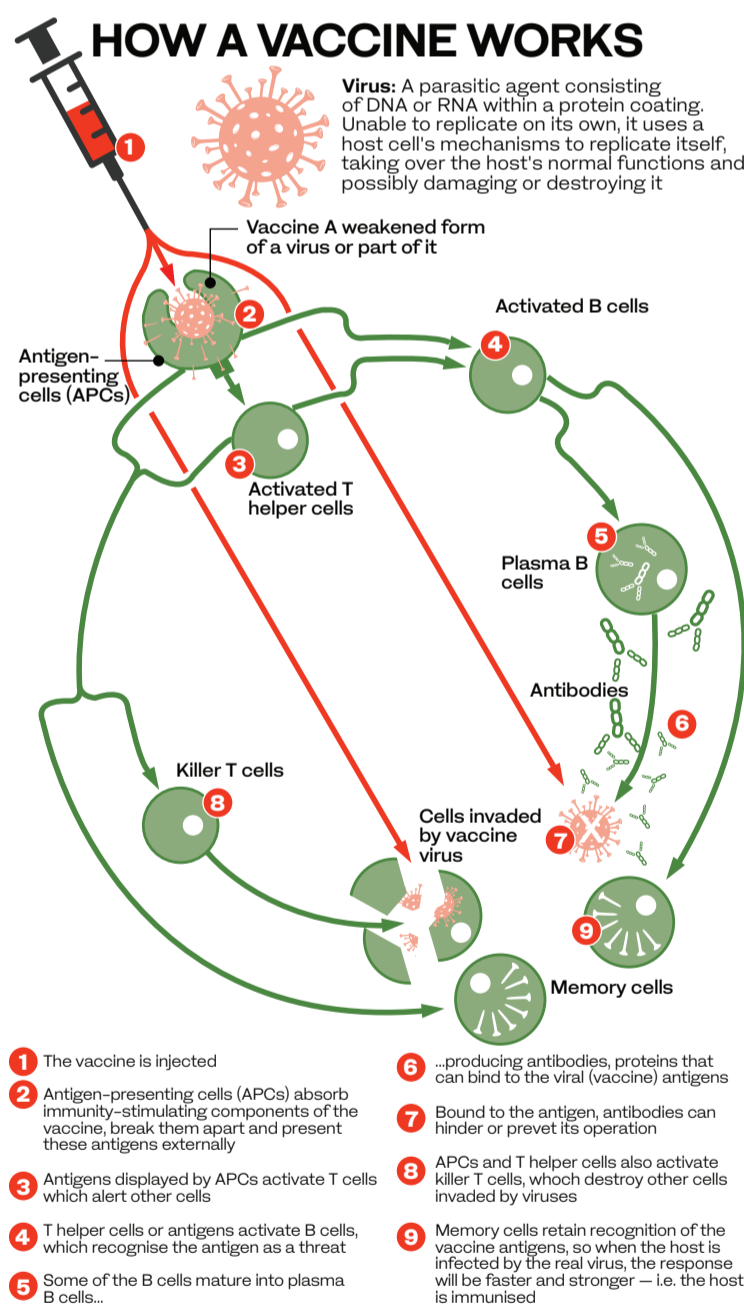
It has been in contact with the manufacturers of the AstraZeneca Oxford vaccine, Saudi health officials said recently. This is regarded as one of the most advanced under development. It is based on a chimpanzee vector, and has so far shown great promise among the 18,000 individuals who have taken part in trials in the UK, US, South Africa and Brazil.

AstraZeneca's CEO said the vaccine was on target to go into production by the end of this year or early 2021. "Then it depends how fast regulators review it and give approval," he added.

Given the world's biggest pharmaceutical companies are based in the US and Europe, you would expect manufacturers to be at the forefront



Above, a nurse prepares a dose of Russia's new coronavirus disease vaccine, named Sputnik V, (below left) developed by the Gamaleya Institute in Moscow. AFP



of vaccine development. American and European researchers have made big advances, some of them using the mRNA techniques to develop a vector for the vaccine transmission mechanism, as opposed to AstraZeneca's chimpanzee-based vector.

Drug companies Pfizer, Johnson & Johnson, Moderna, Valneva, CureVac and BioNTech all have products in advanced stages of trials, though none have yet received approval from a national health authority for their product. Saudi Arabia's health regulators are likely to wait until that has been given before it makes a decision on which to go with, although it enjoys good relationships with all the developers.

One vaccine that has been approved by a government, and which has generated controversy in doing so, is Russia's Sputnik V. This was the first vaccine to be officially approved, after development by the prestigious Gamaleya Institute in Moscow under the auspices of the Russian Direct Investment Fund, the country's sovereign investor that enjoys close relations with Saudi Arabia.

The Russians justify their rapid approval of the drug by pointing to the country's long tradition of vaccine expertise, and by its use of a human adenovirus vector already successfully developed for treatment of the Ebola disease.

Although Sputnik V received a skeptical reception in the Western media and scientific circles, it was recently favorably peer-reviewed

by the British medical journal The Lancet, which said it was successfully developing antibodies with no significant side-effects.

Kirill Dmitriev, the Russian businessman and public face of his country's vaccine effort, told Arab News that Saudi Arabia had been closely consulted on the work, and that the Kingdom was one of five countries that would take part in human testing on as many as 40,000 subjects. If all goes to plan, Sputnik V could be available before the end of the year.

China, where COVID-19 first emerged, is also well advanced in its vaccine plans, with at least three products at stage 2 testing within the country. Saudi Arabia has partnered with one of these — the drug developed by Tianjin-based CanSino Biologics — on trials that could yield results soon.

Vaccine experts say even when a tried and tested product is on the market, there will still be huge logistical challenges associated with manufacturing it in bulk and getting it to more than 7 billion people worldwide.

This is where the danger of "vaccine nationalism" resurfaces. The temptation will be for the wealthier countries that have developed the vaccines to save them for their own populations and not distribute them equably.

Bill Gates, the American philanthropist who has given billions through his vaccine organization GAVI, said recently: "If we don't get a vaccine in an equitable way, we're in trouble."

THE SPACE

Saudi Arabia unites the world against the pandemic

SARA AL-ASSIRI



Sara Al-Assiri is first secretary at the Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Our utmost current priority is overcoming the pandemic and its health, social and economic impact.

So stated King Salman in his address to the G20 Labour (L20) Summit, on Sept. 8, 2020. Global cooperation is the key to fighting the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, and to reflect on the issue I would like to go back to the Extraordinary G20 Leaders' Summit, called by Saudi Arabia on March 26 this year. It was followed by a strong statement in which the leaders committed to working closely together to fight COVID-19, saying: "We will overcome this. We will protect human life, restore global economic stability, and lay out solid foundations for strong, sustainable, balanced and inclusive growth."

The statement expressed the determination of the G20 to spare no effort in protecting lives, safeguarding people's jobs and incomes, restoring confidence, preserving financial stability, reviving growth, minimizing disruption to trade and global supply chains, providing help to all countries in need of assistance and coordinating public health and financial measures.

With the aim of enhancing global cooperation, Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al-Saud called for an extraordinary meeting of G20 foreign ministers, along with international organizations and guest countries, on strengthening global cooperation across borders. The meeting offered an opportunity to share countries' and organizations' practices and perspectives. To quote Prince Faisal's remarks from the meeting, which took

place on Sept. 3: "We are one world and we are one community, and we must work together to support each other through this crisis."

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Saudi National Day 2020

RESEARCH

KSA's role in finding COVID-19 vaccine

Saudi Arabia is working with global partners, including China and Russia

Frank Kane Dubai

In the fight against the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), the World Health Organization (WHO) has warned against the danger of "vaccine nationalism," or countries only trusting vaccines they have developed themselves, or which come from countries — usually Western — regarded as scientifically advanced.

"For the world to recover faster, it has to recover together," WHO Director General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said recently. "The economies are intertwined. Part of the world or a few countries cannot be a safe haven and recover."

Saudi Arabia seems to have learned this lesson early on in the pandemic, even taking it further by inviting cooperation with countries working on the vaccine from outside the Western "gold standard" group of pharmaceutical companies and health regulators.

It also gave the global effort a huge financial boost earlier this year when the G20 — the global leaders' summit under Saudi presidency this year — allocated \$21 billion to bridge a "health financing gap" in the fight against the virus. The grant was made after a special meeting of G20 health ministers organized by the Kingdom.

Saudi Arabia is working with American and British companies, but has also welcomed the involvement of Russian and Chinese vaccine developers in the Kingdom's efforts to produce a treatment for the disease.

The Saudi Health Ministry spokesman said recently: "The Kingdom is committed to participating in the global effort to find a vaccine. It has been participating since the beginning of the

pandemic to support all research efforts in finding a cure and a treatment."

There is a big proviso attached to this commitment to vaccine inclusiveness. Potential vaccines will not be used on people in a wholesale immunization program until they are approved by the Saudi Food and Drug Federation, the government body charged with upholding standards of health and safety in these matters.

"Our leadership is keen on boosting whatever is needed to enhance the health of society and vaccine availability, and to be one of the first to acquire a vaccine, but the safety of the vaccine and the procedure employed are also of great importance when approving any treatment," said Health Minister Dr. Tawfiq Al-Rabiah.

Once the essential safety parameters are set, there is a wealth of potential vaccine candidates on offer. Some experts believe there are nearly 200 under development worldwide, though only a handful of these are likely to come to anything like a production stage. The Kingdom is leaving its options open by considering a wide range from around the world.

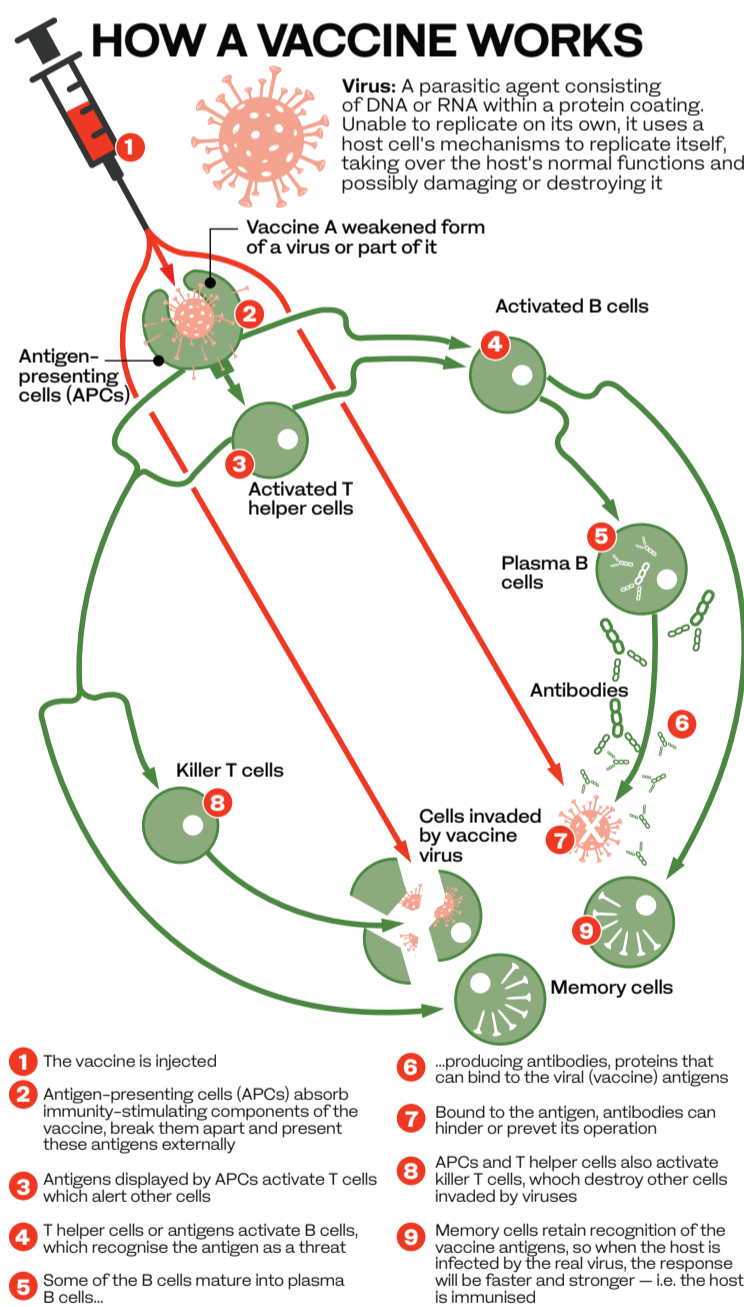
It has been in contact with the manufacturers of the AstraZeneca Oxford vaccine, Saudi health officials said recently. This is regarded as one of the most advanced under development. It is based on a chimpanzee vector, and has so far shown great promise among the 18,000 individuals who have taken part in trials in the UK, US, South Africa and Brazil.

AstraZeneca's CEO said the vaccine was on target to go into production by the end of this year or early 2021. "Then it depends how fast regulators review it and give approval," he added.

Given the world's biggest pharmaceutical companies are based in the US and Europe, you would expect manufacturers to be at the forefront



Above, a nurse prepares a dose of Russia's new coronavirus disease vaccine, named Sputnik V, (below left) developed by the Gamaleya Institute in Moscow. AFP



of vaccine development. American and European researchers have made big advances, some of them using the mRNA techniques to develop a vector for the vaccine transmission mechanism, as opposed to AstraZeneca's chimpanzee-based vector.

Drug companies Pfizer, Johnson & Johnson, Moderna, Valneva, CureVac and BioNTech all have products in advanced stages of trials, though none have yet received approval from a national health authority for their product. Saudi Arabia's health regulators are likely to wait until that has been given before it makes a decision on which to go with, although it enjoys good relationships with all the developers.

One vaccine that has been approved by a government, and which has generated controversy in doing so, is Russia's Sputnik V. This was the first vaccine to be officially approved, after development by the prestigious Gamaleya Institute in Moscow under the auspices of the Russian Direct Investment Fund, the country's sovereign investor that enjoys close relations with Saudi Arabia.

The Russians justify their rapid approval of the drug by pointing to the country's long tradition of vaccine expertise, and by its use of a human adenovirus vector already successfully developed for treatment of the Ebola disease.

Although Sputnik V received a skeptical reception in the Western media and scientific circles, it was recently favorably peer-reviewed

by the British medical journal The Lancet, which said it was successfully developing antibodies with no significant side-effects.

Kirill Dmitriev, the Russian businessman and public face of his country's vaccine effort, told Arab News that Saudi Arabia had been closely consulted on the work, and that the Kingdom was one of five countries that would take part in human testing on as many as 40,000 subjects. If all goes to plan, Sputnik V could be available before the end of the year.

China, where COVID-19 first emerged, is also well advanced in its vaccine plans, with at least three products at stage 2 testing within the country. Saudi Arabia has partnered with one of these — the drug developed by Tianjin-based CanSino Biologics — on trials that could yield results soon.

Vaccine experts say even when a tried and tested product is on the market, there will still be huge logistical challenges associated with manufacturing it in bulk and getting it to more than 7 billion people worldwide.

This is where the danger of "vaccine nationalism" resurfaces. The temptation will be for the wealthier countries that have developed the vaccines to save them for their own populations and not distribute them equably.

Bill Gates, the American philanthropist who has given billions through his vaccine organization GAVI, said recently: "If we don't get a vaccine in an equitable way, we're in trouble."

THE SPACE

Saudi Arabia unites the world against the pandemic

SARA AL-ASSIRI

Our utmost current priority is overcoming the pandemic and its health, social and economic impact."

So stated King Salman in his address to the G20 Labour (L20) Summit, on Sept. 8, 2020. Global cooperation is the key to fighting the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, and to reflect on the issue I would like to go back to the Extraordinary G20 Leaders' Summit, called by Saudi Arabia on March 26 this year. It was followed by a strong statement in which the leaders committed to working closely together to fight COVID-19, saying: "We will overcome this. We will protect human life, restore global economic stability, and lay out solid foundations for strong, sustainable, balanced and inclusive growth."

The statement expressed the determination of the G20 to spare no effort in protecting lives, safeguarding people's jobs and incomes, restoring confidence, preserving financial stability, reviving growth, minimizing disruption to trade and global supply chains, providing help to all countries in need of assistance and coordinating public health and financial measures.

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Sara Al-Assiri is first secretary at the Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

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Saudi National Day 2020

TECHNOLOGY

The apps that helped keep Saudis safe

The Kingdom launched new digital services, and improved existing ones, to help tackle the pandemic

Ruba Obaid Jeddah

As part of its efforts to contain the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, Saudi Arabia launched a set of new applications, as well as improving existing apps, to provide various health care services to its residents.

At the Riyadh Global Digital Health Summit in August, Saudi Minister of Health Dr. Tawfiq Al-Rabiah said pandemic preparedness and digital health had been key priorities for the Kingdom, and that technology had been the primary weapon in the battle against COVID-19. He said Saudi Arabia had "capitalized on many of (its) existing digital applications that offer artificial intelligence components in tackling this pandemic," playing a fundamental role in supporting health emergency management.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, the Saudi Ministry of Health (MOH) has launched three new apps: Tetamman (Rest Assured), Tabaud (Social Distancing), and Tawakkalna, in addition to a new version of the Sehhaty app.

Tetamman was launched in April and developed in the early days of the pandemic. The app allows users to book an appointment for a COVID-19 test, follow up on the results, conduct a self-assessment



Health workers perform a test at a hospital in Riyadh. Apps make it easier for people to book tests in the Kingdom. AFP

WHAT THE APPS DO

TETAMMAN

Allows users to book appointments for COVID-19 tests and enables regular follow-ups on cases through daily check-ins to report symptoms.



TAWAKKALNA

Shows users' health status, allows them to obtain movement permissions and report suspected cases or any potentially illegal gatherings.



TABAUD

Tracks the spread of COVID-19 infections, allowing users to know, confidentially, if they have been in contact with any positive cases.



SEHHATY

Provides access to health information and medical e-services offered by different health organizations in the Kingdom.



APP NUMBERS

17.73m

people have received medical consultations through the 937 number.

1.9m

people visited Tetamman clinics.

2.7m

people have had COVID-19 tests through Takkad drive-through stations.

7m

people have used the Tawakkalna app.

by the National Information Center and launched in April, provided a number of important services, including accessing temporary permits. Users surpassed 7 million over four months, with three new services added this month including an alert status, safe gathering management and dependent care for adults to monitor children. Users can also report suspected cases of COVID-19, with the app available in English, Arabic, Bengali, Filipino, Hindi, Indonesian and Urdu.


The MOH launched the Tabaud app in June to help people identify cases in proximity to them, by sending encrypted data to smartphones running the app, using Bluetooth technology to detect other nearby smartphones with it.

Sehhaty enables users to access medical e-services provided by different organizations, including COVID-19 test booking and prescription tracking.


It also promotes a healthy lifestyle through an integrated steps tracker. Other systems activated include the 937 health care number and the Seha and Mawid apps, launched in 2017, to allow users to receive medical consultations from accredited specialists, and to book appointments at public health centers. By September, the number of 937 calls grew to 17.73 million, while Seha app downloads exceeded 1.5 million.

of their health, manage their isolation period, access accurate educational material and more. It has helped to facilitate mass testing plans, including drive-through testing stations in 17 cities across the Kingdom, receiving over 2.7 million beneficiaries to date.

Tawakkalna, an app developed



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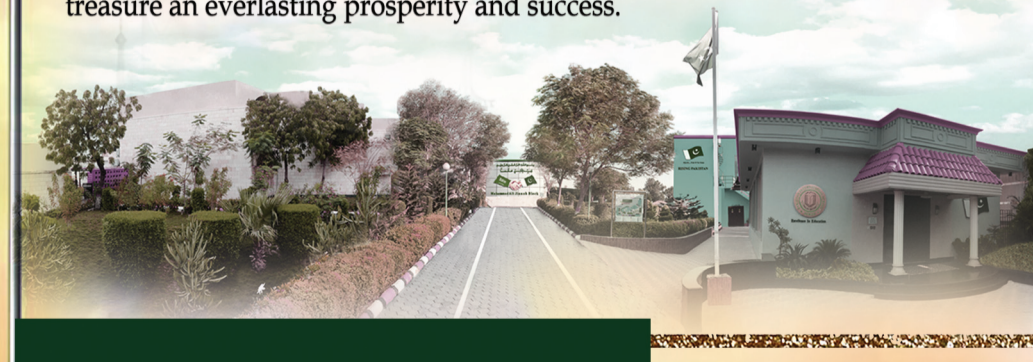


90th NATIONAL DAY
KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA

*When miracles and marvels combine, a land in its colossal eccentricity rise and shine;
Rich with the timeless legacy of Prophets and selfless submissions on the decree of Divine.*

To strengthen the Pak-Saudi cordial friendly relationship, PISJ-ES shares the pride and joy of Saudi National Day celebrations with the custodian of the two Holy Mosques, King Salman bin Abdul - Aziz al Saud, the Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman and people of the kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

May this land of hope and peace for the entire Muslim Ummah live long and treasure an everlasting prosperity and success.



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Saudi National Day 2020



A tribute by French street artist Ardif, depicting a Marianne and a medic, in Paris, France, where many Saudi doctors have worked to battle the coronavirus disease pandemic. AFP

INTERNATIONAL RESCUE

Saudi doctors without borders

Thousands of the Kingdom's medics, currently on international fellowship programs, are working in host countries against the coronavirus disease pandemic

Tareq Al-Thaqafi Makkah

Of the 6,000 or so Saudi doctors currently living across 41 countries on medical fellowship programs, many continue to do their part in fighting the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

These doctors have shown dexterity in combating COVID-19 alongside colleagues from their host countries. A substantial number of them refuse to leave despite the dangers, remaining in the countries where they are studying to help their colleagues in the battle.

Dr. Abdullah Boqays, a fellow working as a dermatologist in Toulouse, France, told Arab News that 2020 has been a frightening year for many medical care workers.

"Doctors with various specialties have fought since the start of the pandemic, especially the ones dealing directly with infected patients — not only while working in hospitals, which make them more vulnerable than others in terms of infection, but also while dealing with patients who suffer from a weakened immune system," he said.

Boqays told Arab News that the staff in his department, working on skin tumors and dermatology, have had to deal with follow-ups and consultations with visiting skin cancer patients, many of whom are at advanced stages of the disease or have weakened immune systems due to chemotherapy or immunosuppressants.

Tumor-removal surgeries have continued despite the pandemic, Boqays said. "The work environment, as well as behavioral and ethical practices, obliges us to continue the treatment, regardless of the reasons and methods used. Delaying chemotherapy drugs, administering immunosuppressants or not performing curative surgery

ies might have disastrous consequences for patients. We rely on God first, take the necessary precautionary measures to meet the demands of patients, support them and alleviate their pain," he said.

"Even though we are far from our precious country, we are at peace because our government — under the leadership of King Salman and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman — supports us and cares for Saudis abroad," Dr. Boqays said.

Dr. Abdullah Modhayan, a psychiatric resident at the Skane University Hospital in Malmo, has been in Sweden since 2015. "There are more than 50 Saudi doctors on a medical fellowship program, working in various specialties in different cities, and most of them were on the frontline in the Swedish health system," he said.

"Some of my colleagues were infected with COVID-19, and quickly returned to their positions to help after they'd recovered. The work achieved by Saudi doctors in Sweden was and still is appreciated here."

Sweden made headlines for its soft strategy in combatting the pandemic: The government did not close down shops, restaurants

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Dr. Abdullah Boqays

From top down: Dr. Abdullah Boqays, Dr. Abdullah Modhayan and Dr. Abdulghani Khogeer.

SAUDI DOCTORS AROUND THE WORLD

More than 6,000 doctors working in various specialties reside in 41 countries



or cafes, and did not impose a quarantine for its citizens and residents.

"This decision had major consequences at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in Sweden," Modhayan said. "The mortality rate was one of the highest in Europe, which was difficult on the health sector and its status amid a real challenge. Saudi doctors played an important role in the face of this challenge."

During the pandemic, Modhayan has been working in the psychiatric emergency department. He noted the psychological effect on individuals, most notably on those who lost loved ones. "Providing psychological support and treatment for those who need it is very important, especially in such difficult circumstances," he said.

Dr. Abdulghani Khogeer, a nephrologist surgeon (specializing in kidney and urinary tract diseases), has been living in France for the past seven years as part of a Saudi-French fellowship program. "Similar to other countries, France fought COVID-19 vigorously in the beginning, which required suspending non-urgent medical activities. This had a major effect on the workflow, as we followed remote procedures at clinics, canceled non-urgent operations, rescheduled surgeries, canceled clinics and followed other procedures. That required our constant presence and readiness to help in departments combating the virus such as the emergency department, performing many necessary surgeries during that time."

Khogeer is grateful to the Kingdom's embassy for its support and constant communication during this period. "I pray to God to protect us and help us return to our country safely, in order to serve it with all our learning and knowledge," he said.

OPINION

A remarkable year for KSA in face of COVID-19

OLE E. MOESBY

Greetings to all readers, and happy 90th National Day to Saudi Arabia. This year has been a remarkable one for Denmark and Saudi Arabia. On Feb. 1, we marked the 45th anniversary of diplomatic relations. It has been 45 years of interesting developments and continuously strong bilateral relations — politically and commercially.

Denmark and Saudi Arabia have ambitions in the field of renewable energy, which is a major priority for Denmark and has a prominent position in Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030. By that year, Denmark aims to cover 100 percent of its national energy demand by renewable energy, and Saudi Arabia aims to cover 50 percent.

One of the latest initiatives by Saudi Arabia towards realizing its ambitions in renewable energy was to sign a deal with the Danish company Vestas to deliver wind turbines for a 400 MW wind farm in Dumat Al-Jandal. The wind energy farm will become Saudi Arabia's first utility-scale wind-power source. I am excited to follow this development, and will be looking forward to witnessing the Danish wind turbines spin in northern Saudi Arabia in 2021.



"Saudi Arabia's G20 presidency has created significant international attention."

COVID-19

The coronavirus has had a significant impact on all of us this year.

When we first entered the new decade, we were not expecting that 2020 would be deeply affected by a global pandemic, economic recession and social strains. The crisis has forced global leaders to initiate strong countermeasures to combat the pandemic and mitigate the effects of a long and devastating economic recession.

The authorities in Denmark and Saudi Arabia reacted rapidly to the pandemic with drastic measures such as full lockdowns and social distancing, and the swift reactions delivered results. Danish and Saudi societies have reopened and resumed a somewhat normal situation for a couple of months now, while cautiously monitoring developments until we have an efficient vaccine.

Due to travel restrictions, people around the world have enjoyed domestic tourism to a new extent this year. An unexpected aspect of the COVID-19 situation was that I enjoyed a staycation in Saudi Arabia this year. I had the pleasure of a hiking trip to the beautiful Asir region in the south; I enjoyed beautiful nature, outdoor cooking and sleeping, as well as remarkable conversations around the bonfire. Saudi Arabia offers various climates, nature and wildlife, and it has extraordinary potential for tourism.

I have enjoyed my three years in Saudi Arabia. I have vivid memories of the King Abdullah Camel Festival and Formula-E. These experiences offered insights into a beautiful and extraordinary culture, as well as a peek into the modern Saudi Arabia with a focus on diversification and sustainable solutions. I am grateful to have witnessed the first part of the implementation of Vision 2030.

G20 and women's empowerment

Saudi Arabia's G20 presidency has created significant international attention. Under difficult global circumstances, Saudi Arabia has taken extraordinary measures to facilitate G20 discussions about how to tackle the pandemic and its global economic consequences.

The G20 presidency has also addressed other relevant topics, such as the empowerment of women. Saudi Arabia has launched new initiatives to move towards a goal of 30 percent labor-market participation among Saudi women. It is remarkable to see the increasing number of women in leading and managerial positions, as well as female entrepreneurs.

Denmark has decades of experience with high participation of women in the labor market. It has benefited Denmark in terms of economic growth, productivity and improved innovation.

I look forward to follow the preparations for the G20 Summit in November 2020, and wish the leaders good luck in achieving results on many important global issues such as COVID-19, green economic recovery and the empowerment of women.

In conclusion, allow me to share my best wishes for a joyful and happy Saudi National Day on Sept. 23. With yet another engaging year behind us, I am looking forward to the coming year, and the new opportunities it will bring for Denmark and Saudi Arabia.

Ole E. Moesby is the ambassador of Denmark to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman and Yemen.

Saudi National Day 2020

Ambassadors commend Saudi Arabia



I would like to commend the efforts of the Kingdom in handling the pandemic, particularly the benevolent gesture of King Salman in providing free medical treatment to expatriates, including Pakistanis suffering from COVID-19.

Raja Ali Ejaz
Pakistani Ambassador



Let me congratulate Saudi Arabia for its successful presidency of the G20, a work carried out under very challenging conditions due to the pandemic. I would like to extend our warm gratitude to all the brave health workers who saved many lives and provided care.

Niclas Trouvé
Swedish Ambassador



Saudi Arabia's progress is exemplified in its leadership of the G20. Throughout its presidency year, Saudi Arabia has convened leaders of the world's most prosperous nations to address global problems—like the health and financial consequences of COVID.

John Abizaid
US Ambassador



Saudi Arabia has shown strong leadership in dealing with COVID-19, as president of the G20, and by contributing to a new vaccine against COVID-19. It has also demonstrated strong leadership by reducing the number of pilgrims last year.

Ole Emil Moesby
Danish Ambassador



The decision taken by the authorities to limit access to the holy sites for Hajj and Umrah to a very small number of people has been difficult, but a necessary one to prevent the spread of COVID-19. I salute the courage of the authorities for having taken such a measure.

Dominique Mineur
Belgian Ambassador



I would like to mention the frontline health care workers who worked so hard to keep people safe during this COVID-19 pandemic. I would also like to mention all the officials and the staff who helped keep pilgrims safe during this year's limited Hajj.

Ridwaan Jadwat
Australian Ambassador

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Prince Mohammed Bin Salman Bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud
and to the Royal Family, Citizens & Residents of Saudi Arabia

On the occasion of

90th Saudi National Day

May Allah bless our Nation with prosperity, success & security
under the Leadership of the Custodian of the two Holy Mosques.
May Allah bless our beloved King.

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Saudi National Day 2020

DIPLOMACY

How virus strengthened ties between China and Saudi Arabia

Chinese ambassador says the Kingdom offered support at 'the critical time'

Lojien Ben Gasseem Riyadh

"The saying 'a friend in need is a friend indeed' has become the best footnote of the friendship between China and Saudi Arabia," Chinese Ambassador Chen Weiqing told Arab News, reflecting on the bilateral relationship between Saudi Arabia and China, and how it strengthened after the start of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

"At the critical time, when the Chinese people were striving to win the battle against COVID-19, the Saudi Arabian government and people have voiced support and offered assistance to China," the ambassador said.

"According to King Salman's instructions, the King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Center provided the Chinese side with much-needed medical supplies; a huge support for front-line Chinese medical workers."

Chen said that since the outbreak, Chinese President Xi Jinping and King Salman had spoken three



Chen Weiqing, China's ambassador to Saudi Arabia, and his wife Zhang Yuwei celebrate Saudi National Day. Supplied

times, and the two countries had cooperated on COVID-19 prevention and control. "I believe greater progress and development of bilateral relations will be achieved after the pandemic," he added.

In April, China and Saudi Arabia signed an agreement worth SR995 million (\$265.29 million) to face COVID-19, providing 9 million nucleic acid tests for Saudi Arabia and setting up laboratories in six major areas in the Kingdom. "Cooperation between the two countries has played a positive role in controlling the pandemic" Chen said. "China is willing to continue to maintain close cooperation with Saudi Arabia on pandemic prevention and control, and fully supports the Saudi people."

China also sent a team of medical experts to the Kingdom to help fight COVID-19. "Health officials and experts from the two countries held online exchanges before the Chinese medical experts departed for Saudi Arabia," he said. "The actions of China and Saudi Arabia have shown that the only correct choice is to work together to fight the pandemic, and unity and cooperation are powerful weapons."

The ambassador added: "We will work together with our Saudi counterparts to ... redouble our efforts to bring benefits to our peoples, and the people of other countries as soon as possible."

"Saudi Arabia, in the capacity (of the) G20's presidency this year, plays an important leading role in strengthening global cooperation in the fight against the pandemic. China stands ready to work with Saudi Arabia to safeguard world peace and stable development, promote global economic recovery in the post-pandemic era, maintain the stability of global industrial and supply chains, and carry out cooperation in new technologies and new industries."

The ambassador also congratulated King Salman, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the Saudi government and its people on Saudi Arabia's 90th National Day.

"No matter how the international landscape may change, China always takes Saudi Arabia as a good friend, a good partner and a good brother, and sticks to maintaining and developing the comprehensive strategic partnership between China and Saudi Arabia," Chen said.

THANK YOU TO THE FRONTLINE HEROES

For many years, we've had the privilege of being here alongside you, facing ups and downs along the way, but always positively facing the possibilities beyond the horizon.

When this pandemic arrived, few could imagine the tragic cost to life and health, along with the drastic changes to our everyday life and work.

But many, many more of us know that we live in a country where heroes live.

Whilst we're all working hard to find our new normal, the work against COVID-19 is far from done for frontline heroes. It's still at the very forefront of their day to day routine.

Aquafina's new **Thank You** pack across the Kingdom is a token of appreciation in recognition of the efforts of our everyday heroes, who stepped up when called for. These heroes continue to play an important role in moving us forward and keep us all safe.

Thank You to the Ministry of Health, the dedicated nurses and the determined doctors.

Thank You to the frontline heroes – delivery drivers, production line employees – who showed us what true commitment was, especially during lockdown.

We have been proud to lead with purpose in these turbulent times, and we are comforted by the fact that we are in the great company of so many heroes who lead with purpose too.

A **Thank You** is sometimes the easiest thing to do in the hardest times. It is also so important, so necessary and so well deserved.

Our sincere thanks to Saudi Arabia's frontline heroes





Saudi Ministry of Commerce spokesman Abdulrahman Al-Hussain.

BUSINESS

How KSA protected its economy

Ministry of Commerce put in place a number of measures to help firms weather the financial effects of COVID-19

Hebshi Alshammari Riyadh

The Ministry of Commerce played a proactive role in protecting businesses and consumers during the coronavirus disease pandemic, working in conjunction with the public and private sectors.

Continuous analysis was conducted on a daily basis to guarantee the continuity of services to the business sector and ensure consumer protection during the pandemic. The ministry focused on four pathways: The business sector, consumer protection and availability of products, coordination with government agencies, and e-commerce.

1 The business sector

The government mitigated the pandemic's economic impact on the private sector, deferring charges for commercial certificates for more than 116 businesses. The ministry also formed ad-hoc committees across the country to guarantee continuity of services. Ministry spokesman Abdulrahman Al-Hussain said the ministry assigned employees to carry out different transactions for businesses, sparing citizens the trouble of physically visiting branches. The employees contacted business owners and finalized all procedures remotely.



The Saudi Ministry of Commerce went to great lengths, working with many other government bodies and businesses, to keep the economy afloat. SPA

2 Consumer protection and availability of products

The ministry ran over 400,000 inspection visits to ensure that products were available. "We communicated directly with

the suppliers and distributors of the basic commodities and made sure they had ample inventory and resolved any issue faced by suppliers and distributors," Al-Hussain said, adding the ministry tightened control on markets, outlets, warehouses and wholesalers to keep

prices stable. An electronic system was established to monitor prices of food items, and over 30,000 penalties were given to people for price manipulation and other offences. The ministry also increased call-center employee numbers to help people with complaints.

3 Coordination with government authorities

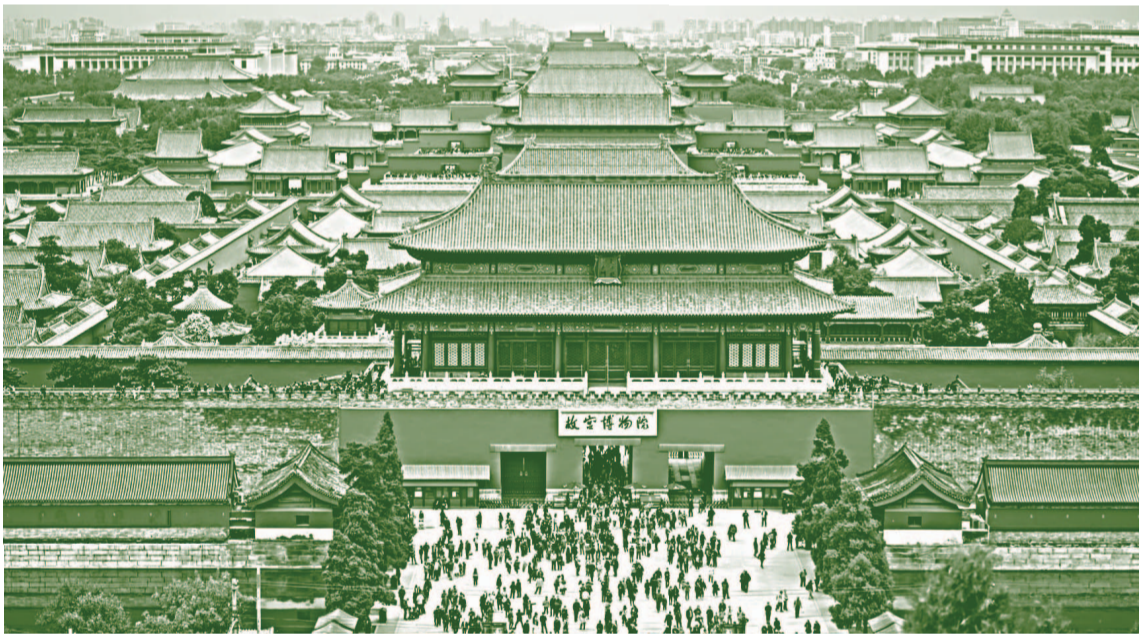
Al-Hussain said the ministry continuously coordinated with the Ministry of Health and the Saudi Food and Drug Authority to ensure availability of ample quantities

of sanitizers and face masks, while more than 25 million face masks and sanitizers were confiscated from different stores and outlets for price manipulation.

The ministry coordinated with the General Authority for Competition to investigate monopolistic and exploitative practices during the pandemic. It also coordinated with the Ministry of Environment, Water and Agriculture to ensure no shortages of essential food items, and to encourage local producers to increase production.

4 E-commerce

Al-Hussain said the ministry worked with the Communications and Information Technology Commission to link supermarkets and pharmacies with 32 phone delivery apps, and to launch a campaign encouraging the general public to make use of them. The ministry also worked closely with the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology to find urgent solutions to the challenges facing shipping and delivery companies. Al-Hussain said the approach "resulted in great success. The ministry and other agencies worked together to ensure there were food supplies, the largest inventory in the Middle East."



The Chinese Embassy Riyadh extends best wishes to



Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud

Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud

and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on the occasion of the 90th Saudi Arabia National Day