

# Yemen cholera cases could jump to 300,000: UN

Geneva

**A cholera outbreak** in war-ravaged Yemen will probably have infected more than 300,000 people by September, up sharply from the current tally of nearly 193,000 cases, the United Nations said yesterday.

"Probably at the end of August we will reach 300,000" cases, UN children's agency (UNICEF) spokeswoman Meritxell Relano told reporters in Geneva during a conference call.

Since the outbreak was declared in April, an estimated 1,265 people have died, she said.

"The number of cases continue to increase," Relano said, adding that all of the 21 governorates in Yemen, the Arab world's poorest country, have been affected.

She said children had been hit hard by the outbreak, accounting for half of the registered cases to date. But only a quarter of the people

who have died so far were children.

Cholera is a highly contagious bacterial infection spread through contaminated food or water.

Although the disease is easily treatable, doing so in conflict-torn Yemen has proved particularly difficult.

Saudi Arabia on Friday announced it was contributing \$66.7 million towards an anti-cholera programme in Yemen run by UNICEF and the World Health Organization. (AFP)



Yemeni women sit next to aid baskets donated by Kuwait during the holy month of Ramadan

## US, Russia hotline for Syria still in use: US



Washington

**Russian and US** military officials are still using a special hotline to communicate about operations in Syria, a US official said yesterday, days after Moscow said it was severing the connection.

Russia on Monday said it would stop using the so-called "deconfliction" line in response to a US pilot shooting down a regime war plane in northern Syria, with Moscow accusing Washington of

failing to issue a warning. But Colonel Ryan Dillon, a spokesman for the US-led coalition, told reporters in a video call that "the deconfliction line is in use." "It is in use to make sure that... our air crews and ground forces are safe," he said.

The Russian defence ministry said yesterday it had conducted a "surprise mass missile strike" against IS targets, using cruise missiles fired from the Mediterranean.

Dillon would not say if Russia had used the line to warn the Americans ahead of the strike, but a US defence official confirmed that it had.

Sunday's shoot-down saw a US pilot fire on a regime warplane as it "dropped bombs" on US-backed local forces.

Moscow quickly said it would stop using the line, but the reality is that the communication channel is a vital link between Russia and the United

States to make sure the two powers avoid mishaps in Syria's confusing battlespace.

After the United States launched a cruise missile attack on a regime air base in retaliation for a suspected chemical weapons strike on civilians, Moscow made a similar threat in April.

But it later emerged that Russia and the United States continued to use the hotline even after Moscow said it was hanging up. (AFP)

## Saudi Arabia raises foreign player quota

Riyadh

**Saudi Arabia** will increase by 50 per cent the quota of foreign footballers in its pro league, as part of broader efforts to develop sports in the kingdom.

Six foreigners instead of four will be allowed per team in the Abdul Latif Jameel League, the Saudi Football Federation decided, in a ruling carried by the state press agency late Thursday. The ruling applies to the 14-team league from next August when the new season begins.

Under wide-ranging plans for social change and economic diversification announced last year, the kingdom wants more of its citizens exercising while raising Saudi Arabia's global competitiveness in selected sports.

As part of that effort, "the managing board of the Saudi Football Federation has decided to increase the number of professional non-Saudi players in the clubs", said Adel bin Mohammed Ezzat, who heads the federation.

He was quoted by the official *Saudi Press Agency*.

The government has also talked of privatising football clubs, most of which are reportedly owned by the state.

## Syria regime penetrates eastern province

Beirut

**Syrian regime** forces yesterday broke into the eastern Deir Ezzor province for the first time since 2014, a monitor said, after seizing territory from Islamic State group jihadists.

Government forces control part of Deir Ezzor city and the adjacent military airport, but IS holds the vast desert province and most of the provincial capital.

"Backed by Iranian, Lebanese and Iraqi fighters, the Syrian army entered Deir Ezzor province from

the southeast, near the Iraqi border," said Rami Abdel Rahman, who heads the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

He said the pro-government forces had advanced eight kilometres (five miles) into the province.

They are now just 12 kilometres (less than eight miles) from the key T2 oil pump, which lies on a pipeline extending from Iraq through central Syria to its western coast.

Syria's desert, known as the "Badiya", extends over 90,000

square kilometres (35,000 square miles) from central Syria to the borders with Iraq and Jordan to the east and southeast.

Much of the Badiya has been held by IS, but Syria's army has been chipping away at it for months.

In addition to capturing key oil fields and infrastructure, government forces are keen to break IS's stranglehold on regime-held districts of Deir Ezzor city.

An estimated 100,000 civilians are living under IS siege.



Smoke rises following a reported air strike on a rebel-held area in the southern Syrian city of Daraa.