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Saudi Arabia announces first case of coronavirus

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JEDDAH: Saudi Arabia reported its first case of the new coronavirus on Monday amid growing fears that a surge in the number of those infected in Iran is threatening the whole region.

The Kingdom had been free of the virus for more than three months as it spread from China to 66 countries.

Almost all those infected in the Middle East have recently traveled to Iran, or have been in contact with someone who has been there.

The Saudi virus patient traveled from Iran via Bahrain over the King Fahad Causeway, the Health Ministry said on Monday. The man is in quarantine and all those he has been in contact with are being tested.

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In Iran, the number of those infected rose by 523 to 1,501, and the death toll from the virus rose from 54 to 66.

Among the dead was Mohammad Mirmohammadi, 71, a member of the Expediency Council, the powerful body that advises Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and settles disputes with parliament.

The virus has killed more people in Iran than anywhere except China. A team from the World Health Organization arrived in Tehran on Monday with medical supplies, protective equipment for health care workers and laboratory kits to test nearly 100,000 people.

Elsewhere in the region, virus cases were reported for the first time in Tunisia and Jordan, and there were 10 new cases in Kuwait, six each in Iraq and Bahrain, four more in Qatar, three in Lebanon, two in Iraq and a second case in Egypt.

Worldwide, the virus has infected at least 89,000 people and killed more than 3,000, mostly in China. Outside China there have been more than 8,800 cases and 130 deaths, with secondary outbreaks in Iran and northern Italy.

The first new cases were reported on Monday in Andorra, Armenia, the Czech Republic, the Dominican Republic, Iceland and Indonesia.