

Children return to classrooms in Jordan after a year away

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AMMAN: Almost 774,000 students went back to school in Jordan on Sunday, in the first return to classrooms since a nationwide shutdown imposed at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic last year.

The in-class learning on Sunday saw attendance by 773,812 kindergarten, first graders and general secondary (Tawjihi) students from public and private schools and those run by UNRWA. This is to be followed by second graders the following day and third graders on Feb. 9, as per the safe return to school guidebook prepared by the education and health ministries.

Tenth and 11 graders will resume in-person education on Feb. 21, while grades four to nine will return to school on March 7, according to the guidebook.

Jordan's Education Minister Tayseer Nuaimi told government-owned Al-Mamlakah TV: "Sunday went smooth and safe," adding that health monitors were observing schools' commitment to health standards.

According to the guidebook, each school will have a health monitor to observe adherence to safety measures, which also require that schools maintain a two-meter distance between each student. Schools incapable of meeting these requirements must maintain a mix of distance and in-class learning.

"The epidemic situation is changing worldwide and it is not time yet to relax our guard," the minister said.

The guidebook stipulates that no medicine shall be given to a student suspected of infection but a parent or guardian will be contacted to have the child tested at an accredited lab or public hospital. Those testing positive must undergo home quarantine for 10 days in case they are asymptomatic or 13 days if they develop symptoms, and those who are in contact with them must also be tested.

"I am really happy to see my children receiving in-class education again," Tahani Salman, a mother of four, said.

Salman said that she had no health concerns about her children attending in-class education "as long as there are strict health procedures in place."

Nadine El Saket, a mother of two, said: "No matter what, in-class learning is a lot better than online learning."

"School, not home, is students' best place," El Saket said. "Teacher-student

interaction and outdoor activities are more useful to students than computers (online learning).”

The availability of COVID-19 vaccines has removed many health concerns, Mohammad Abdulqader, a father of three, said.

“I am happy to see my children going back to their schools after nearly a year. I want them to wake up early, go to their classes, do their homework and sleep early as during the old days. I am seriously not concerned that much with the availability of the vaccines,” Abdulqader said.

Jordan recently eased coronavirus containment measures, lifting the Friday curfew and reopening sectors that had been closed since March last year, after the kingdom witnessing an improvement in the epidemic situation. The country has also embarked on a nationwide vaccination program.

Calls for the return of in-class education have been mounting in Jordan with parents, activists and NGOs expressing dissatisfaction with online education.

The National Campaign for the Return to Schools had called on the government to take a “decisive and immediate decision” to reopen schools and nurseries.

The campaign also urged the government to allow parents to choose between in-class education and distance learning, which has been the education model since the outbreak of the pandemic.

They also demanded that online learning platforms be kept for students who did not want to return to schools but were serious about continuing their education online.

Save the Children Jordan said that the closure of nurseries and schools had been a “challenge to all children, especially the younger ones, in light of the importance of early education to ensure children improve their capabilities, release their energies and boost their mental growth.”

The relief organization said that early education contributed to children’s social and emotional development, and preserved their physical health, making remote education “a hindrance.”

Addressing the Lower House ahead of a vote of confidence in early January, Prime Minister Bisher Al-Khasawneh announced the gradual return of students to schools starting this coming second semester in accordance with safety protocols.

King Abdullah directed the government to reopen schools and various sectors in a systematic manner that safeguarded public health and the national economy.







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Jordan recovers bodies of 3 swept away in flash flood
Gyms reopen in Jordan as pandemic ebbs, but new variants pose risks

[UAE temporarily provides COVID-19 vaccines only to elderly, people with chronic disease](#)

Sun, 2021-02-07 07:39

DUBAI: The UAE is to dedicate all coronavirus vaccination centers to the elderly and people with chronic diseases for up to six weeks as numbers of infections in the country continue to climb.

The health ministry said people in other categories may still get vaccinated after prior appointment with centers across the country, state news agency WAM reported on Sunday.

The UAE plans to inoculate half the population by April, with priority going to the more vulnerable groups. The whole population should be vaccinated by the end of the year.

Department of Health dedicates all Covid-19 vaccination centres in Abu Dhabi and other emirates to all citizens and residents who are senior citizens, people with chronic diseases, and People of Determination for six weeks starting 7 Feb.

pic.twitter.com/EUlz06oizj

– مكتب أبوظبي الإعلامي (@admediaoffice) [February 7, 2021](#)

More than 4.3 million people have already been vaccinated in the Emirates, with 112,521 people receiving the jab in the 24 hours leading up to Sunday's announcement.

As cases grow, Dubai has announced a series of new precautions and Abu Dhabi followed suit on Sunday with new measures introduced with immediate effect to try and stop the spread.

The Abu Dhabi Emergency, Crisis and Disasters Committee said it has "capped operating capacity of commercial, economic and tourism activities."

Abu Dhabi Emergency, Crisis and Disasters Committee has capped

operating capacity of commercial, economic and tourism activities, effective 7 February, to bolster precautionary measures implemented to curb the spread of Covid-19. pic.twitter.com/0dhEaNceDd

– مكتب أبوظبي الإعلامي (@admediaoffice) [February 7, 2021](#)

Cinemas were closed and shopping malls reduced to 40 percent capacity. Gyms, private beaches and swimming pools are only allowed half the amount of people compared to normal.

Restaurants, coffee shops, hotels, public beaches and parks were reduced to 60 percent and taxis and buses to 45 percent and 75 percent, respectively. The committee also said gatherings and parties would be prohibited, except for weddings, which would be limited to 10 people, and funerals and mournings, limited to 20 people.

Community Development Authority and Dubai Health Authority launch home vaccination drive for senior citizens in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and Prevention. [#Dubai #UAE @CDA_Dubai @DHA_Dubai @mohapuae pic.twitter.com/lCfC75zTCG](#)

– Dubai Media Office (@DXBMediaOffice) [February 7, 2021](#)

On Saturday, Abu Dhabi reduced attendance at the workplace in government and semi-government institutions to 30 percent.

In Dubai, a home vaccination drive for senior citizens was launched while Dubai Police encourage members of the public to report any violations of coronavirus measures. The force has already received around 1,000 reports in one week.

Several people were fined 50,000 dirhams (\$13,613) after a private yacht party. The license was revoked for one month from the boat's operators. The Emirates has suffered 921 deaths. Some 3,093 new cases and seven deaths were recorded Sunday.

Elsewhere in the Gulf, Kuwait reported 962 new cases of COVID-19 and two deaths.

تعلن [#وزارة_الصحة](#) عن تأكيد إصابة 962 حالة جديدة، وتسجيل 445 حالة شفاء، و 2 حالة وفاة جديدة بـ [#فيروس_كورونا_المستجد](#) COVID-19 ، ليصبح إجمالي عدد الحالات 170,998 حالة pic.twitter.com/VqBuZq1Cro

– وزارة الصحة - الكويت (@KUWAIT_MOH) [February 7, 2021](#)

Oman's health ministry confirmed 633 new cases and two additional deaths.

[#Statement](#) No. 283

February 7, 2021 pic.twitter.com/090Dwp92NC

– عُمان – وزارة الصحة – (@OmaniMOH) [February 7, 2021](https://twitter.com/OmaniMOH/status/1358123456789)



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COVID-19 infections in Saudi Arabia increase nearly four-fold during last month COVID-19 travel ban forces Netanyahu to postpone UAE, Bahrain visits

UN special envoy Martin Griffiths visits Tehran for talks on Yemen

Sun, 2021-02-07 10:12

DUBAI: The United Nations special envoy to Yemen began a two-day visit to Iran for the first on Sunday to meet with senior Iranian officials to discuss the on-going conflict.

Martin Griffiths will meet with Minister of Foreign Affairs Javad Zarif as part of the diplomatic efforts to reach a political solution in Yemen that has seen instability since 2011.

Griffiths' priorities during the meetings will focus on reaching a ceasefire in all parts of Yemen, enforcing urgent humanitarian measures and the resumption of the political process, the [UN said in a press release](#).

Iran agreed to the visit after several discussions between both sides, a source close to the UN office in Amman told Arab News. The capital of Jordan was announced in 2017 as the headquarters of the office of the UN Special Envoy for Yemen.

Griffiths' spokeswoman, Ismini Palla, told Reuters the visit had been planned for some time, adding it comes at a time when he is trying to bring together more diplomatic, regional and international support to his efforts to end the war.

Last month [UN experts accused Iranian](#) entities and individuals of supplying the Houthis with weapons. The annual report by sanctions monitors stated: "There is a growing body of evidence that shows that individuals or entities within Iran are engaged in sending weapons and weapons components to the Houthis."

"The Iranian regime and its proxy have continued to demonstrate their fierce and ruthless strategy through acts of terror," Iranian-American political scientist, [Majid Rafizadeh said](#).

Griffiths visit to Tehran also comes just days after US President Joe Biden announced the appointment of Timothy Lenderking as his special envoy for Yemen in a bid to step up American diplomacy "to end the war in Yemen."

"The appointment of a US Special Envoy, coupled with attention the Biden Administration has dedicated to the Yemen file in the first 30 days, prompted Griffiths to resume efforts to revive consultations with regional and local actors," Yemen and Gulf analyst Ibrahim Jalal told Arab News.

Jalal, who is a non-resident scholar at The Middle East Institute, also believes the envoy's visit to Iran marks "a continuation of his efforts to engage influential regional actors."

Meanwhile, several [European ambassadors to Yemen visited the southern port of](#)

[Aden](#), the interim capital of the country, on Saturday as officials reported that the Houthis were raising obstacles during the prisoner swap talks in Amman.

Yemen's foreign minister, Ahmed Awad bin Mubarak, discussed with the ambassadors the Riyadh Agreement, Houthi resistance to repairing the Safer tanker, the government's efforts to restore services in the liberated provinces and the government willingness to reach a "real, comprehensive and lasting" peace in Yemen.



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[Somalia leaders fail to reach deal on elections](#)

Author:

Sun, 2021-02-07 02:18

MOGADISHU: Somalia's leaders have failed to break a deadlock over the country's elections, with no clear path to a vote just days before the government's mandate expires.

The country is likely to miss a Feb. 8 deadline to choose a new president after days of negotiations between the central government and federal states

collapsed on Friday.

The impasse could usher in a political crisis in the Horn of Africa nation already confronting a violent insurgency, a locust invasion and serious food shortages.

President Mohammed Abdullahi Mohammed, who is seeking a second term, told parliament on Saturday his administration "made compromises on everything" to secure a last-minute agreement during talks with regional leaders in Dhusamareb, some 400 km north of the capital Mogadishu.

"I was hoping there would have been some sort of commitment if we got together there but unfortunately that prospect did not materialize," said the president, who is also known as Farmajo.

"There is still hope. We have agreed to go forward, and make appointments for further talks."

The president accused Jubaland and Puntland, two of Somalia's five semi-autonomous regions, of failing to compromise and thereby scuttling an earlier deal to hold indirect parliamentary and presidential elections in late 2020 and early 2021.

That agreement, reached in September, fell apart as squabbles erupted over how to conduct the vote, and deepened mistrust between Farmajo and his regional rivals, most notably in Jubaland.

Jubaland's leader, Ahmed Madobe, said Saturday that his administration negotiated in good faith but encountered hurdles and resistance all the way.

"The responsibility for the failure to hold timely and consensus-based elections lies solely on President Farmajo," his office said in a statement. Jubaland, a lush, relatively prosperous part of Somalia bordering Kenya, has been locked in a power struggle with Mogadishu and the scene of recent violent clashes between local and national forces.

A major bone of contention involved the electoral process in Gedo, a Jubaland region, where Madobe accused Farmajo of "trying to control the vote from afar."

He said earlier: "We have previously asked the president to stop meddling with the election process and stick to his campaign, but this didn't happen." Farmajo blamed "foreign interference" for undermining the electoral processes. He did not name Kenya, but Somalia has repeatedly accused its larger neighbor of supporting armed groups in Jubaland, straining ties between the countries.

Kenya sees Madobe as an ally, and Jubaland a buffer between Al-Shabab militants who have staged bloody attacks across the border.

Somalia plunged into chaos after the 1991 overthrow of president Siad Barre's military regime, leading to years of clan warfare followed by the rise of Al-Shabab which once controlled large parts of the country and capital.

The central government remains weak, and controls only part of the national territory.

Somalia's foreign backers, who provide the embattled government the necessary security and financial aid to stay afloat, warned this week against any attempts at subverting the poll process.

"We underscore that any alternative outcomes, including a parallel process or partial elections, or other measures short of an agreed electoral process, would be a setback that would not obtain the support of partners," the UN, African Union and other international partners said in a statement on Thursday.

Somalia had set itself the goal of holding its first one-person, one-vote ballot since 1969, a pursuit hailed by the UN as a “historic milestone.” But frequent attacks by the Al-Shabab militant group, among other governance challenges, made such an exercise an unlikely prospect. Instead, the one-person, one-vote model was abandoned for a complex indirect system used in the past, where special delegates chosen by clan elders pick lawmakers, who in turn choose the president. While the process mirrors the last election held in 2017, it was to go a bit further in terms of inclusivity, with 27,775 delegates voting – almost twice as many as last time.



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KSrelief, UNICEF to support education in SomaliaDeaths after hotel attack in Somali capital

[EU delegation in Aden expresses support for government push for peace](#)

Sun, 2021-02-07 01:06

AL-MUKALLA: Several European ambassadors to Yemen visited the southern port of Aden, the interim capital of the country, on Saturday as Yemeni officials reported that the Houthis were raising obstacles during the prisoner swap talks in Amman.

The ambassador of the EU and ambassadors of France, Germany, France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Sweden, Ireland and Finland, as well as the deputy ambassador of Norway, landed in Aden, where they discussed peace efforts with senior government officials.

Ahmed Awad bin Mubarak, Yemen's foreign minister, was quoted by the official media thanking the EU ambassadors for their visit to Aden that carries an "important political message" of support to the Yemeni government, adding that he discussed with the ambassadors the Riyadh Agreement, Houthi resistance to repairing the Safer tanker, the government's efforts to restore services in the liberated provinces and the government willingness to reach a "real, comprehensive and lasting" peace in Yemen.

The EU delegation is the highest ranking group of foreign envoys to visit Aden since the arrival of Yemen's new government, which was formed under the Riyadh Agreement.

The Yemeni government delegation in the prisoner swap talks in Amman said the talks encountered a stumbling block after the Iran-backed Houthis refused to swap abducted journalists and activists and seriously ill abductees.

"The Yemeni government delegation has offered concessions for the talks to succeed," Majed Fadhail, deputy minister of human rights and a member of the government delegation in the talks, told Arab News on Saturday, adding that the Houthis have become more uncompromising and sought to obstruct the talks.

The Yemeni official attributed the Houthis' new hardline behavior during talks to the US decision to reverse the designation of the Houthis as terrorists.

"Everyone must know that this criminal and terrorist militia refuses to release the remaining journalists in their detention or even consider swapping them with their fighters captured on the battlefields," Fadhail said.

Representatives of the Yemeni government and the Houthis last month resumed UN-backed prisoner exchange talks with the aim of releasing 301 prisoners on both sides.

At the same time, the Abductees Mothers' Association, an umbrella organization for thousands of relatives of abductees in Yemen, called for the urgent release of 127 extremely sick prisoners held by the Houthi militia and the Yemeni government.

Fadhail said the government delegation presented names of dozens of sick abductees among the Houthi prisoners and demanded their release during this round of talks. "We floated their names during the talks, but the Houthis refused to discuss releasing them," Fadhail said.

In a social media campaign Yemeni activists, journalists and politicians demanded an end to Houthi crimes against Yemenis and criticized the US move to drop the terrorist designation of the Houthis.

Using the hashtag #StopHouthiTerrorismInYemen, dozens of Yemenis said that the Houthis have displaced thousands of people, abducted thousands more, blown up the houses of their opponents and carpeted the Yemeni land with tens of thousands of landmines.

Jamal Al-Mamari, a former abductee, reminded the new US administration in a tweet that the Houthis had tortured and killed an American contractor John Hamen, who died in Houthi custody in 2015

“For the Yemenis, the word Houthis means death, destruction, kidnapping, displacement, prisons, torture, diseases, starvation and rape,” said Mohammed Al-Asal, the deputy governor of Raymah province.

Yemeni activists also expressed opposition to any peace deal with the Houthis that does not punish them for human right abuses.

“Yemen does not want an incomplete peace with the Houthi militia who only believe in the language of exclusion, murder, torture, pillage and lack of equal citizenship. Our demand is a comprehensive and just peace, punishing the Houthis for all violations and crimes they committed and disarming them,” Huda Al-Sarari, a Yemeni lawyer and human rights activist who documents human right abuses in the southern city of Taiz.

The US administration should have used the terrorism designation of the Houthis as pressure to force them to stop obstructing the UN mission to repair the floating Safer tanker, Yemen experts said.

“By revoking Houthis designation unconditionally, the Biden administration made a huge mistake. It could have been used as leverage on the Houthis to deliver something in return – at least to allow engineers to empty the Safer. The US just lost that leverage for nothing,” said Nadwa Al-Dawsari, a Yemeni conflict analyst and a non-resident fellow at the Middle East Institute.



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EU delegation arrives in Yemen's Aden
Yemeni warring factions welcome Biden
peace push