

Lebanon launches online platform for vaccine registration

Author:

Fri, 2021-01-29 00:02

BEIRUT: Lebanon on Thursday launched an electronic platform for citizens and residents wishing to receive the coronavirus vaccine.

Meanwhile, protests over the full lockdown have spread to cities in the south of Lebanon, considered as pro-Hezbollah and Amal Movement.

Demonstrations in Tripoli turned violent – a protester was killed and tens of people were injured during clashes with security forces that have continued for the fifth consecutive day.

In a conference on Thursday, Lebanon's Caretaker Health Minister Hamad Hassan hoped citizens would "respond to the national plan to inoculate over 80 percent of the population and achieve herd immunity to protect society from the virus."

Registration began as soon as the platform's launch was announced, with an average of 2,000 people visiting the site every five minutes.

The Health Ministry said that "the official vaccination platform protects the privacy of beneficiaries as well as the database and was tested under the supervision of an IT team from the World Bank to ensure it cannot be hacked."

Hassan, who has recently recovered from COVID-19, said: "The vaccination plan requires the commitment of all institutions and administration to the principle of equality and justice above any other consideration, whether political, regional or sectarian."

Caretaker Information Minister Manal Abdel Samad said in a press conference: "The number of coronavirus cases in the productive sectors is extremely high, with 72 percent of the cases from the productive segments of society, i.e., those between 20 and 59 years old, which reflects the danger of this pandemic."

Abdel Rahman Bizri, head of the national committee for the administration of the COVID-19 vaccine, told Arab News: "Lebanon needs to vaccinate between 70 and 80 percent of its population to achieve herd immunity."

"The Pfizer vaccine that Lebanon has chosen for its vaccination plan is expected to arrive to the country between Feb. 7 and 15, to be followed by more doses in in March," he said.

The first phase of the vaccination plan is expected to cover medical staff and workers in the health care sector, as well as citizens and residents who are 75 and older, to be followed by younger groups in the next phases.

MP Assem Araji, head of Parliament's health committee, said: "No serious side effects have yet been seen to the vaccination against the coronavirus. Do not hesitate to take it."

People on social media have been sharing videos and medical articles warning against the vaccination, claiming that the vaccine causes dangerous side effects or alters recipients' DNA.

To counter these claims, the ministry has launched the message "count to 10 before you spread it," urging people on social media to check their facts before spreading false and misleading information.

The programmer of the vaccination platform, Ali Roumani, said: "Racing for registration will not give priority to anyone. The vaccine will be given according to clear and specific criteria."

People who register on the platform will receive a text message with the date of the vaccination of the group they belong to. After receiving the first dose, the platform will automatically set the date for the second dose, which will be given about three weeks later.

Claudio Cordoni, director of UNRWA affairs in Lebanon, has reassured Palestinian refugees in Lebanon that "they will be included in the free national vaccination plan."

The Health Ministry received food and medical aid from Egypt and the Arab Ministers Council on Thursday. Three warplanes arrived in Rafic Hariri International Airport, two of them carrying aid from the Egyptian government and one from the Arab League.

Egypt's Minister of Health Dr. Hala Zayed said that the airlift carried "a message of love and solidarity from President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi and the Arab League Secretary-General Ahmed Aboul Gheit."

"The airlift consists of two aircrafts carrying medicine and medical supplies to address the coronavirus and a third aircraft carrying milk for babies. The airlift was launched after the Beirut blast and will continue as long as needed," she said.

The Arab League later announced in a statement that "the council of Arab Health Ministers has decided to support Lebanon by providing health equipment worth over eight million Egyptian pounds or half a million dollars."

Lebanon has been reporting new records in the number of coronavirus fatalities in the past few days, reaching 80 deaths a day.

Authorities have discussed the possibility of extending the full lockdown until Feb. 15.

On Thursday, Tripoli bid farewell to Omar Farouq, the young protester who died of injuries suffered during overnight clashes.

In the Tripoli clashes, protesters used hand grenades for the first time, and

were shot with live bullets by security forces.

Protests spread to Bekaa, where activists closed some roads. For the first time, protests also spread to Nabatieh and Tyre in the south of Lebanon, where protesters raised Lebanese flags and denounced “the state’s starvation policy.”



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[Egyptian Health Ministry to receive 50k AstraZeneca vaccine doses in February](#)

Author:

Thu, 2021-01-28 23:47

CAIRO: A contract has been signed by the Egyptian Authority for Unified Purchase with pharmaceutical giant AstraZeneca, and expects to receive 50,000 coronavirus vaccine doses from the company in February, announced Egyptian Health Minister Hala Zayed.

The minister explained that the vaccines will be distributed using the country's electronic registration system, and that medical workers, the elderly and critical cases would be prioritised given that the initial doses will only be enough to inoculate 25,000 people.

She said that the vaccinations would reduce the number of deaths, and would blunt the symptoms of the disease, preventing infection and limiting its spread.

In total, the ministry expects to receive 20 million vaccine doses from AstraZeneca, and 40 million doses of the Chinese Sinopharm vaccine, as well as securing vaccines for about 20 percent of the population through the GAVI Vaccine Alliance.

In previous statements, Zayed said that a partnership contract had been signed with an international company to manufacture vaccines in Egypt, with the aim of exporting them to other African countries.

The ministry has set up a complex for vaccines in Helwan, on an area of 10,000 square meters, with 27 storage fridges.

She explained that the ministry is currently conducting consultations with one of the companies producing the single-dose coronavirus vaccine for this purpose.



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Security and aviation experts inspect Hurghada airport to prepare for return of Russian tourists

Author:

Thu, 2021-01-28 23:38

CAIRO: A Russian security delegation inspected Sharm El-Sheikh and Hurghada airports on Thursday in preparation for the resumption of Russian flights to Egypt, sources close to Egyptian Civil Aviation said.

The sources confirmed that the delegation's visit would continue until Feb. 4.

The delegation will follow up on security and safety procedures carried out in travel and arrival halls to protect travelers from the risk of coronavirus infection.

The sources confirmed that Egyptian airports were ready for Russian inspections, as insurance standards inside airports were applied according to international aviation organizations. The security system inside airports had been completely modernized, and airports had passed European and American inspections recently, with many companies making plans to fly to Egyptian airports, they said.

On Wednesday, Cairo International Airport received a Russian delegation that included security and aviation experts to inspect security measures.

Delegation members are to be divided into three groups to inspect the three airports. At the end of the tour, the delegation will meet officials of the Ministry of Civil Aviation before submitting their final report on the visit to the civil aviation authorities in Russia.

Mohamed Manar, the Egyptian Minister of Civil Aviation, has met representatives of Russian companies involved in air navigation to follow up on the implementation of the contract signed between the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Russia to develop the Egyptian airspace.

During the meeting, the two sides discussed the stages of implementing the agreement, and cooperation mechanisms to create a flexible, safer and more effective airspace for international and regional movement.

Direct Russian flights to the tourist destinations of Hurghada and Sharm el-Sheikh have been suspended since an Airbus 321 aircraft crashed in the Sinai desert on Oct. 31, 2015, with 224 people on board.

Although direct flights between Moscow and Cairo were resumed on April 11,

2018, Red Sea resorts have remained closed to Russian charter flights.



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[Palestinians welcome Biden decision to reverse Trump policies](#)

Author:

Thu, 2021-01-28 02:42

ATLANTA: Palestinian leaders have welcomed the announcement that US President Joe Biden plans to resume diplomatic ties with the Palestinian Authority in Ramallah and restore US aid for the Palestinian people.

Richard Mills, the acting US ambassador to the UN, told the Un Security Council that the Biden administration intends to fully restore diplomatic relations and reinstate economic and humanitarian aid that was blocked by the Trump administration.

Palestinian government spokesman Ibrahim Milhem said that President Mahmoud Abbas and Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh welcome the announcement, which emphasized US support for a two-state solution and the importance of a return to negotiations between Israel and Palestine.

He added that the Palestinian leadership is keen for negotiations to resume, based on mutually agreed UN resolutions and the principles of international law that demand an end to Israeli occupation and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state.

"We are ready to resume diplomatic negotiations with Israel, with the help of international parties, based on international laws and UN resolutions," he said. "Any solution, however, that does not take into account Palestinian rights as enshrined by international laws and UN agreements will fail."

Wasel Abu Yousef, a senior member of the Palestine Liberation Organization, said that Palestinians realize the Biden administration has signaled a clear break from Trump's policies, while also being aware of its continuing, unequivocal support for Israel.

"What the Palestinians really want is a clear path toward ending the Israeli occupation and the establishment of their state, not a policy of conflict management in the way it was done for eight years under the administration of former President Barack Obama," he said.

Trump halted US economic aid to the Palestinian Authority, worth \$200 million, and more than \$350 million of humanitarian aid provided through the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), after Palestinian leaders rejected Trump administration policies they believed denied the Palestinian people their rights and violated previous international agreements.

Mills said the decision by the Biden administration was made to improve the lives of ordinary Palestinians and Israelis.

"We do not view these steps as a favor to the Palestinian leadership," he said. "US assistance benefits millions of ordinary Palestinians and helps to preserve a stable environment that benefits both Palestinians and Israelis."

He also stressed the Biden administration's "steadfast support for Israel" but added that it will support efforts to reach a mutually agreed two-state solution in which Israel lives in peace and security alongside a viable Palestinian state.

Democratic US Congresswoman Marie Newman, who represents Illinois's 3rd congressional district in the House of Representatives, said that the decision to restore ties with the Palestinians is a step in the right direction on the path to peace and prosperity for Palestinians and Israelis.

"I am extremely hopeful that with the new Biden administration's intentions and efforts to re-establish UNRWA funding, oppose illegal land annexation, and resume peace talks with the Palestinian leadership, that we will have a clearer path to peace, justice and prosperity in the region for both the

Palestinian and Israeli people.”

Israel occupied the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem during the 1967 war and has refused to abide by numerous UN resolutions calling on it to end the occupation. In 1994 the Israelis and Palestinians signed the Oslo Accords, which stipulated the end of the occupation and the eventual establishment of a viable Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Under the Trump administration, the US government in 2017 recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and moved its embassy there from Tel Aviv, in violation of international law that does not recognize Israeli sovereignty over the holy city.

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Palestinian leaders applaud Boris Johnson for standing against annexation

Tunisian press syndicate raps police over night arrest

Author:

Thu, 2021-01-28 01:49

TUNIS: Tunisian police slapped and arrested a photojournalist working at night despite his having an authorization to be out after curfew, the national press syndicate said on Wednesday amid criticism of the security forces' handling of protests.

Islem Hkiri, a freelance photographer, was charged with breaking curfew and assaulting a public servant.

He had earlier published pictures of police using pepper spray during a recent surge of protests in Tunisia, a democracy since the 2011 revolution that inspired the "Arab spring." Protesters have decried both inequality and police abuses.

Security forces have arrested more than 1,200 people including many under the age of 18 and have widely used teargas against demonstrators. Although daytime protests have mostly been peaceful, those at night have involved repeated clashes with police as well as some looting.

The Journalists' Syndicate condemned police violence and asked the Interior Ministry for an immediate investigation.

An Interior Ministry spokesman said he could not comment on a file in the hands of the judiciary.

A judicial official was not immediately available for comment.

Tunisian rights groups have criticized what they call the police's aggressive handling of protesters and the arrest of bloggers.

The opposition and activists also criticized the unprecedented security measures and restrictions on the freedom to demonstrate, and the closure of streets in the capital against protests on Tuesday.

They accused the prime minister of seeking to restore a security state like that which existed before the 2011 uprising.

Prime Minister Hichem Mechichi said the government wanted to protect property but would defend the right to protest, a freedom gained after revolution.

A video showed a policeman firing tear gas at a man who appeared from his house during recent clashes. It sparked anger and doubts about the credibility of police reform over the past decade.

Suspicious powder

The office of Tunisia's president has received a letter containing suspicious powder and is investigating the matter, a source there said on Wednesday.

President Kais Saied did not open the letter and is in good health, the source said.

Some local websites reported that the lethal toxin ricin had been found in the envelope, and that it had been addressed to the presidency in the Carthage Palace.

The source in the office declined to comment on the reports.

Factional tensions have been growing within the government, amid protests.



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Tunisians protest arrests; government faces confidence vote
Hundreds protest police repression in Tunisia