

Lebanon reinstates lockdown amid economic crisis

Author:

Wed, 2020-11-11 02:48

BEIRUT: As he met with a delegation from the Association of Depositors in Lebanon on Tuesday, the country's central bank governor, Riad Salameh, stressed: "Lebanon is not bankrupt."

The governor continued: "However, the financial sector is suffering due to the repercussions of the regional crisis that Lebanon has not been able to break free from, organized smear campaigns that were used as instruments of pressure over the past 3 years, and the public losses due to the increasing current account and budget deficits over the past 5 years. These factors had an impact on the national exchange rate."

Salameh's statement coincided with the decision of the Supreme Defense Council, which convened under the chairmanship of President Michel Aoun, to reinstate a two-week lockdown starting next Saturday, with a curfew from 5 p.m. to 5 a.m. every day in an attempt to reduce the country's rate of coronavirus disease infections.

"Despite the under-performance and stagnation caused by the coronavirus and the country's decision to not honor its external obligations (Eurobonds), which directly affected the flow of foreign capital and hard currencies, the central bank has proven that it has done its job in a professional way," Salameh added.

"Lebanese banks still control 90 percent of the circulation, which helps the country avoid additional increases in inflation rates. Since the beginning of the crisis, the central bank granted banks loans in US dollars and Lebanese Pounds (LBP), allowing them to meet the demand on liquidity.

Estimates show that \$10 billion is stored in Lebanese houses, which requires a new organizational mechanism to restore the trust in banks. This includes the setting up of a Lebanese digital currency project in 2021 to help implement a cashless system that allows the movement of the money market locally and abroad.

"Lebanon does not have any natural resources. That is why we need to preserve the gold we have because it is an asset that can be liquified in foreign markets if we are ever to face an inevitable fateful crisis," Salameh pointed out.

The formation of the new Lebanese government is still facing hurdles due to the conditions imposed by the political parties on Prime Minister-designate Saad Hariri, especially by the head of the Free Patriotic Movement, Gebran Bassil, who was sanctioned by the US a few days ago.

The adviser to the French President Emmanuel Macron for the affairs of the Middle East and North Africa, Patrick Durel, is expected to arrive in Beirut on Wednesday night to try and assess the possibility of reviving the French initiative concerning the formation of a government whose mission is to implement reforms.

The US sanctions turned into a dispute between Bassil and the US Ambassador to Lebanon Dorothy Shea, who, on Monday, said Bassil "has a misunderstanding about how sanctions work and a lack of understanding about US policy." This came in response to the press conference Bassil held last Sunday to defend himself.

Shea affirmed that the sanctions targeting Bassil were "against the individual not the party."

She also welcomed Bassil's decision to challenge the sanctions in a US court of law, adding that "Mr. Bassil complained that I did not forewarn him that he would be sanctioned on grounds of corruption, as if that was my responsibility to reveal prior to the designation. It was not. There are various authorities under US law for sanctions. The fact that Mr. Bassil has been designated at this time under the Global Magnitsky Act, does not mean that he or any others, for that matter, could not be sanctioned under a different authority at some later date."

"During our exchanges, he expressed willingness to break with Hezbollah on certain conditions. He actually expressed gratitude that the US had got him to see how this relationship is disadvantageous to the party. Key advisors even informed me that they had encouraged Mr. Bassil to take this historic decision," Shea revealed.

Bassil responded to Shea by asking her about "the evidence on the basis of which he was accused of being involved in corruption," after she had said that such evidence could not be published. He also expressed his commitment to the alliance with Hezbollah.



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Lebanon heading for total lockdown as health sector bucklesIran, Lebanon to impose lockdowns, curfews as virus surges

[Uprooted by war, Syrians settle on ruins of Roman temple](#)

Author:

Wed, 2020-11-11 02:26

BAQIRHA, Syria: Abdelaziz Al-Hassan did not want to live in an overcrowded camp after fleeing war in northwestern Syria, so instead his family pitched a tent in the ruins of a Roman temple.

He, his wife and three children are among almost 1 million Syrians who fled their homes last winter during a Russia-backed offensive on Syria's last rebel stronghold of Idlib.

In the UNESCO-listed site of Baqirha, near the Turkish border, they are now

among dozens of Syrians uprooted by war who have settled among centuries-old Roman and Byzantine ruins.

Hassan and his family have set up a tunnel-shaped tent between the three surviving walls of a second-century Greek temple, on a site strewn with broken columns and a plinth.

Behind their tent, laundry hung on a rope strung between the ancient walls. Propped up over the centuries-old stones, solar panels soaked in the sun near a blackened pot on a small wood-burning stove.

Hassan says the site is a far better option than living in one of the numerous informal displacement camps that have sprouted up along the frontier, especially amid the coronavirus pandemic.

"I chose this place because it provides peace of mind, far from overcrowded places and those riddled with disease," said the middle-aged man with a salt-and-pepper beard.

Syria is filled with archaeological sites, from Roman temples and Crusader castles to Ottoman-era caravanserais.

Many have been damaged, bombarded or plundered throughout a nine-year-old conflict that has killed more than 380,000 people and displaced millions.

Northwest Syria is home to 40 UNESCO-listed villages from the first to the seventh centuries that, the UN cultural body says, provide insight into "rural life in late Antiquity and during the Byzantine period."

Dotted with the remains of temples and churches, the sites illustrate "the transition from the ancient pagan world of the Roman Empire to Byzantine Christianity," it says.

In Baqirha, Zeus Bomos, or Zeus of the Altar, was built almost two millennia ago, historians say, in a wider area that later prospered from olive oil production.

Maamoun Abdel Karim, the head of Syria's antiquities authority, said Baqirha was exceptional for its well-preserved buildings, also including two churches from the sixth century.

But for all the grand architecture, Hassan admitted there were a few inconveniences to living where he does, including a long walk for his children to the village school.

He also said the area is crawling with poisonous snakes and insects.

"Two days ago, near the tent's opening, I killed a viper," he told AFP. And "every other day, we have to kill a scorpion."

"But we haven't found anywhere better than here yet."

Hassan's brother-in-law, Saleh Jaour, and his dozen children have also made

the ancient ruins of Baqirha their new home, after fleeing bombardment last winter that killed his wife and a son.

“I chose this region because it’s close to the Turkish border. If anything happens, we can flee to Turkey on foot,” said the portly 64-year-old wearing a long dark robe.

As the crow flies, the Turkish border lies just four kilometers (2.5 miles) away.

“This place is far from the crowds and the noise,” he added, saying he too was taken aback by how many people were living at close proximity in the camps.

Both Hassan and Jaour’s families escaped their homes further south during a government-led offensive between December last year and March on the jihadist-dominated stronghold of Idlib.

A cease-fire deal reached by rebel backer Turkey and regime ally Russia has since largely stemmed the fighting, but less than a quarter have returned.

Local officials have asked families living on the archaeological site in Baqirha to leave, but they have refused until they are provided with alternative shelter.

“We’ve gotten used to this place,” said Jaour, reluctant to uproot the family again at the start of the rainy winter season.

“Where else can we go?”



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Impoverished Syrian refugee sets himself on fire outside UN center in Lebanon
Shelling in Syria rebel enclave kills 7, including children

[Ethiopian troops, refugees fleeing fighting cross into Sudan](#)

Author:

Wed, 2020-11-11 02:22

NAIROBI: At least 30 armed Ethiopian troops and “large numbers” of refugees fleeing the fighting in Ethiopia’s northern Tigray region have crossed the border into Sudan, the state-run SUNA news agency reported, while one diplomat on Tuesday said hundreds of people have been reported killed on both sides of Ethiopia’s week-long conflict.

Nobel Peace Prize-winning Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed again vowed that his military will bring a speedy end to the fighting in the heavily armed Tigray region and the removal of its leadership, which his government regards as illegal. With the region almost completely cut off, it remained difficult to confirm either side’s claims. Each blames the other for sparking the conflict.

Sudan, which has sent more than 6,000 troops to the border, has been under pressure from the international community to help make peace and from the Ethiopian government, which seeks to cut Tigray off from the outside world.

The troops from Ethiopia’s Amhara region neighboring Tigray fled into Sudan’s Qadarif province Monday evening, the SUNA report said, citing witnesses. Local authorities have started to prepare a refugee camp for the fleeing Ethiopians, it said, while aid groups warn of a brewing humanitarian crisis affecting millions of people at the heart of the Horn of Africa region.

The Ethiopian troops turned themselves and their weapons in, and appealed for protection as fighting raged over the border, said a Sudanese military official on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to brief reporters.

Abiy described his government’s military campaign in the Tigray region as “law enforcement operations” that he said will end as soon “as the criminal junta is disarmed, legitimate administration in the region restored, and fugitives apprehended and brought to justice – all of them rapidly coming

within reach." On Monday a military official said the air force was "pounding targets with precision."

The African Union Commission chairman, Moussa Faki Mahamat, has called for the "immediate cessation of hostilities."

In a statement Monday, he said the AU, based in Ethiopia, is ready to support an "inter-Ethiopian effort in the pursuit of peace and stability."

Abiy has shown no sign of opening talks with the Tigray People's Liberation Front, which once dominated Ethiopia's ruling coalition. Feeling marginalized by Abiy's political reforms after he took office in 2018, it broke away last year as the prime minister sought to transform the coalition into a single Prosperity Party. The TPLF defied the federal government by holding a local election in September.

Diplomats and others assert that the conflict in Tigray could destabilize the region and other parts of Ethiopia, Africa's second-most populous country with 110 million people. Ethiopia has scores of ethnic groups and other regions that have sought more autonomy even as Abiy, who won the Nobel just last year, tries to hold the country together with exhortations of national unity.

Several hundred people reportedly have been killed on both the Ethiopian government side and the Tigray regional government side, a diplomat in the capital, Addis Ababa, told The Associated Press.

More than 150 citizens of European Union countries alone are thought to be in the Tigray region, which is increasingly cut off with airports and roads closed and communications largely severed, and governments are trying to ensure their consular protection, the diplomat added, speaking on condition of anonymity.

"There are so many uncertainties," the diplomat said. "How far can Abiy go with this operation while keeping the possibility of, in the end, having a more or less peaceful solution? You need the support of the people."

Experts worry that the longer the conflict lasts, the more difficult it will be for the federal government to bring the Tigray region back to Ethiopia's federation of regional states.

And aid groups warn the humanitarian needs will grow. A United Nations spokesman told reporters on Monday that discussions were underway on the relocation of all non-essential UN staff and on gaining humanitarian access.

Ethiopia's state television on Monday showed scenes of federal government troops arriving in the border town of Dansha, to cheers, and of what the report said were Tigrayan militia members after surrendering to federal forces.



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In escalating conflict, people of Ethiopia's Tigray risk displacement, UN says
Ethiopia's military operations in north have limited objectives: PM

[UAE records 1,096 new COVID-19 cases, 3 deaths](#)

Wed, 2020-11-11 01:14

DUBAI: The UAE on Tuesday recorded 1,096 new COVID-19 cases and three deaths. The Ministry of Health and Prevention said the total number of cases since the pandemic began has reached 144,385, with the death toll at 518. The ministry added that 742 people recovered over the previous 24 hours, bringing the total number of recoveries to 139,701.

UAE Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Anwar Gargash, said that the Emirati leadership has taken effective steps to confront the coronavirus pandemic to protect public health and at the same time mitigate the negative effects on the economy.

He said that the UAE has provided medical supplies to 118 countries,

benefiting more than 1.5 million health workers around the world.

"The UAE insisted that wider political considerations should not be taken into account when providing humanitarian assistance, and that is why the Emirates did not hesitate to provide aid to Iran when it needed it," he said at the 7th Abu Dhabi Strategic Debate, organized virtually by the Emirates Policy Center as the UAE nears the 50th anniversary of its independence. Spokesperson for the National Committee for Management and Governance of the Recovery Phase of the COVID-19 Crisis, Saif Al-Dhaheeri, said many sectors have been affected by the pandemic, especially health care, economy, tourism, sports, education, aviation and transportation.

But "the proactive and forward-looking thinking of the UAE government has enabled it to contain the situation and accelerate the process of a safe, gradual return to the new normal life," he said during a media briefing on the developments of the health situation in the country.

The briefing's spokesperson Abdul Rahman Al Hammadi said from Nov. 4 to 10 "the total number of deaths reached 15, a decrease of 29 percent, leaving the death rate at 0.4 percent, which is one of the lowest rates in the world compared to the EU which is 2.4 percent, the MENA region at 2.5%, and the the countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development at 2.8%."

Meanwhile, Dubai Economy launched the 'Smart Inspection' project, an initiative that helps mitigate the repercussions of the pandemic.

Director Sami Al-Qamzi said the authority is "committed to supporting the emirate's digital transformation and accelerating the adoption of smart measures to improve the quality of services provided to the community."

Etihad Engineering launches an in-house production lab to cater to the continuous demand for face masks in the aviation industry.

The masks are produced using the finest material which provide up to 98% bacterial filtration efficiency for a high level of protection and safety. pic.twitter.com/jsibg1YABy

– Etihad Airways (@etihad) [November 10, 2020](#)

Abu Dhabi's Etihad Airways announced that it has launched an in-house production facility to produce face masks for the aviation industry to meet the rise in demand and has already accepted an order for 1.3 million masks to be manufactured.

"Over the next three months, the medical face masks will be distributed to staff across the entire Etihad Aviation Group from cabin and ground crew, to catering, cargo, engineering employees, and medical professionals," the carrier said in a statement on its website.

Elsewhere, Kuwait recorded 903 new COVID-19 cases, bringing the total to 133,381. The death toll reached 821 after five new fatalities were registered.

تعلن [#وزارة_الصحة](#) عن تأكيد إصابة 903 حالة جديدة، وتسجيل 842 حالة

شفاء، و 5 حالات وفاة جديدة بـ [#فيروس_كورونا_المستجد](#) COVID-19 ،
ليصبح إجمالي عدد الحالات 133,381 حالة pic.twitter.com/2h5se8giy1

– (@KUWAIT_MOH) [November 10, 2020](#) وزارة الصحة – الكويت

Oman's health ministry confirmed 381 new cases and six deaths, bringing the total to 118,884 and 1,316 respectively.

[#Statement](#) No. 223

November 10, 2020 pic.twitter.com/JRRszB6dxy

– (@OmaniMOH) [November 10, 2020](#) وزارة الصحة – عُمان

In Bahrain, two deaths were reported, bringing the death toll to 331, while 179 new infected cases were confirmed.

Out of 10355 COVID-19 tests carried out on 10 November 2020, 179 new cases have been detected among 69 expatriate workers, 102 new cases are contacts of active cases, and 8 are travel related. There were 189 recoveries from [#COVID19](#), increasing total recoveries to 81414 pic.twitter.com/mRDGCK1Eaz

– (@MOH_Bahrain) [November 10, 2020](#) وزارة الصحة | مملكة البحرين



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Virus recovery rate continues to rise in Saudi Arabia UAE confirms 1,146 new COVID-19 cases as government gives mask exemptions

[Iranian lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh tests positive for Covid-19 after release from jail](#)

Author:

AFP

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1605045285513163000

Tue, 2020-11-10 17:36

TEHRAN: Iranian human rights lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh has tested positive for Covid-19 only days after being released from prison, her husband said on Tuesday.

“Nasrin tested positive today,” Reza Khandan wrote in a brief post on his Facebook account.

“Last Wednesday, during (a) meeting I had with Nasrin at Qarchak prison, she said that the coronavirus had spread in her ward and many (inmates) had become sick.

“That’s why she was in a rush to follow up on her furlough process,” he added.

Sotoudeh, 57 and a winner of the European Parliament’s Sakharov prize, was released from jail on Saturday after being granted a temporary leave of absence.

The lawyer and activist was jailed in 2018 after defending a woman arrested for protesting against the requirement for Iranian women to wear the hijab. She was told at the time that she had been sentenced to five years in prison in absentia for spying, according to her lawyers.

In 2019, she was sentenced again to 12 years in prison “for encouraging corruption and debauchery.”

According to her husband, Sotoudeh’s health deteriorated badly behind bars, where she had to end in September a 45-day hunger strike that she had launched to seek the release of prisoners during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Iran is the Middle East country hardest hit by the pandemic.

Since March, more than 100,000 inmates have been granted temporary release to limit the spread of the disease in prisons.



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Iran judiciary says jailed rights lawyer Sotoudeh given furlough Jailed Iranian rights lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh hospitalized amid hunger strike