

# West Bank under lockdown as virus numbers soar

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Wed, 2020-07-01 15:31

RAMALLAH: The Palestinian Authority on Wednesday announced a five-day lockdown across the West Bank after total confirmed coronavirus infections in the territory more than doubled following the easing of previous restrictions.

“Starting from Friday morning, all governorates of the West Bank... will be closed for a period of five days,” government spokesman Ibrahim Melhem said, adding that pharmacies, bakeries and supermarkets were exempt.

The latest data from the Palestinian ministry of health said that as of Wednesday morning, a total of 2,636 people had tested positive for COVID-10 since the illness was first recorded in the West Bank, compared with just 1,256 a week ago.

Last week, after the easing of a previous coronavirus lockdown in late May, Palestinian health minister Mai Al-Kaila said the territory had entered a second wave of infections “more dangerous than the first”.

Most infections were traceable to Palestinians working in Israel or Arab Israeli visitors to the West Bank, Kaila said.

There have been seven deaths from the virus in the territory.

Israel has also recorded a surge, with 25,547 confirmed cases on Wednesday morning, up around 15 percent from a week earlier.

The Palestinian Authority imposed a full West Bank lockdown after the first coronavirus cases were identified on 5 March, lifting it at the end of May. A public health state of emergency was reimposed for 30 days from early June. Bethlehem was closed from Monday morning after a major spike in COVID-19 infections.

The cities of Hebron and Nablus were also already under lockdown.

Tens of thousands of West Bank Palestinians travel to work in Israel as day labourers and Palestinian prime minister Mohammed Shtayyeh has urged them to self-isolate for 14 days.

Those who are temporarily staying in Israel have been asked not to return home for the time being.

Arab Israelis – descendents of Palestinians who remained on their land after the creation of Israel in 1948 – have also been asked to avoid visiting.



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UK PM Johnson tells Israel: do not annex parts of the occupied West Bank  
Israeli defense chief says West Bank annexation 'will wait'

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## [\*\*Egypt court sentences one monk to death, another to life for abbot's killing\*\*](#)

Author:

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Wed, 2020-07-01 18:30

CAIRO: An Egyptian court upheld a death sentence for one Coptic monk and life in prison for another over the killing of the abbot of a desert monastery in 2018, a judicial source said.

In a case that shocked the Middle East's largest religious minority, Bishop Epiphanius was found with a bleeding head wound after being bludgeoned to death in July 2018.

Epiphanius was the abbot of the Saint Macarius monastery in the plains of Wadi Al-Natrun, northwest of the capital Cairo.

Prosecutors said one of the monks, Isaiah, confessed to beating the cleric with a metal bar as the second monk, Philotheos, kept watch.

Authorities blamed the killing on unspecified "differences" between the bishop and the two monks.

Isaiah, whose original name is Wael Saad Tawadros, was later defrocked.

An earlier sentence passed down in April 2019 condemned them both to death. It was later referred to Egypt's Grand Mufti, the country's top theological authority, who is required by law to give his legally non-binding opinion in cases of capital punishment.

Wednesday's verdict, which cannot be appealed after the Cassation Court upheld it, reduced the sentence for Philotheos to life in prison.

The court said in last year's ruling the defendants had carried out "one of the greatest crimes," according to a court official.

"(Their) status as monks did not stop them from carrying out this crime, the place of the crime did not deter them, and they did not care about the advanced age of the victim or his religious status," it said.

In the wake of the bishop's killing, Egypt's Coptic Church placed a one-year moratorium on accepting new monks.

It also banned monks from social media, tightened financial controls and refocused attention on spiritual life.

Coptic Christians make up about 10-15 percent of Egypt's predominantly Sunni Muslim population of over 100 million.

The country's vast desert are home to some of Christianity's oldest monasteries.



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## [Iran sentences journalist to death, clamps down on jailed female activists](#)

Tue, 2020-06-30 20:39

LONDON: Iran has sentenced to death a journalist whose work helped to inspire nationwide protests in 2017, and is further suppressing female rights activists within the country's notorious prison system.

From his exile in Paris, Ruhollah Zam ran a website called AmadNews which posted embarrassing videos and information about Iranian officials. He also ran a channel on Telegram, the most popular messaging app in Iran, that

spread information about upcoming protests and shared videos from the demonstrations.

Judiciary spokesman Gholamhossein Esmaili announced the journalist's death sentence on Tuesday.

Zam was persuaded to return to Iran in October 2019, and was subsequently arrested. Following his detention, he appeared in televised confessions where he offered an apology for his past activities.

The journalist is the son of a reformist Shia cleric, Mohammad Ali Zam, who served in the Iranian government during the early 80s and openly denounced his son's activities during the 2017 protests.

In addition to Zam's death sentence, Tehran has recently increased its campaign against women's rights activists in the country.

Tehran temporarily released thousands of prisoners to deal with a COVID-19 outbreak in the country's crowded prison system, but the regime has been criticized by rights groups for denying release to women's rights campaigners by levelling additional charges at them.

For example, Narges Mohammadi, one of Iran's best-known women's rights defenders, was jailed for 16 years in 2015 after she campaigned to abolish the death penalty.

Her family said that she was denied prison furlough and charged with "dancing in prison during the days of mourning to commemorate the murder of the Shia Imam Hussein" – a charge the family dismissed as absurd.

She could face an additional five years in prison and 74 lashes for the new charges.

Atena Daemi, 32, a women's rights activist and anti-death penalty campaigner, was expected to be furloughed on July 4, but now faces additional charges that make her ineligible for release.

Held in the notorious Evin prison, she faces a further 25 months in prison for allegedly "disturbing order" by chanting anti-government slogans, a claim she denies.

Jasmin Ramsey, of the New York-based Center for Human Rights in Iran, said: "Women are on the frontlines of struggles for rights and equality in Iran, as shown by the multiple political prisoners who continue to speak out for the rights of others from inside jail cells.

"By going so far as to alter the judicial process with the hope of muzzling these prisoners under lengthy jail sentences, Iranian judicial and intelligence officials are revealing how desperate they are to prevent women from taking on more leadership roles."

US-based journalist and activist Masih Alinejad said: "For years and years, we had the fear inside us. And now women are fearless. They want to be



warriors and that scares the government.”



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Iran journalist flees Zarif delegation to stay in Sweden  
Iran sentences journalist to two years in jail

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## [Explosion at Tehran clinic kills 13 people](#)

Tue, 2020-06-30 20:35

TEHRAN: Thirteen people were killed and several were injured in an explosion at a medical clinic in the north of the Iranian capital Tehran, the Khabaronline news site reported on Tuesday.

The explosion was caused by a gas leak, Tehran Deputy Governor Hamid Reza Goudarzi told state TV.



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## [Japanese FM Motegi emphasizes his country's support for two-state Middle East peace solution](#)

Tue, 2020-06-30 19:47

TOKYO: Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi stressed that the Japanese government has supported and will continue to support a two-state solution for Israel and Palestine, effectively rejecting Israel's annexation plans for the West Bank.

In replying to Arab News Japan question, Motegi said at a press conference at the foreign ministry Tuesday that the issues between Palestinians and

Israelis “should be solved through negotiations and our position has not been changed.”

Israel currently plans to annex the part of West Bank containing the Jordan Valley, but Japan stands against that and opposes the annexation of disputed territories in principle and has shown concern about such a trend spreading internationally, as it could have implications for Tokyo’s claims to islands disputed by Russia, China and South Korea.

Japan is traditionally supportive of Palestinian rights to their land based on the relevant UN Security Council resolutions and has accused Israel of violating international law by expanding settlements into occupied Palestinian territory.

**#BREAKING:** Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi (@moteging) stressed that the Japanese government has supported and will continue to support a two-state solution for Israel and Palestine. <https://t.co/DT9sx4rnZ5> [pic.twitter.com/24Yq1RXnMw](https://pic.twitter.com/24Yq1RXnMw)

– Arab News Japan (@ArabNewsjp) [June 30, 2020](#)



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