

Iran urges social distancing as coronavirus cases top 200,000

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DUBAI: Iran's tally of confirmed coronavirus cases topped 200,000 on Friday, as state media continued to warn about a lack of proper social distancing despite a new surge of infections.

Daily deaths have exceeded 100 most of this week, for the first time in two months. The Health Ministry announced 120 deaths in the previous 24 hours, taking the total to 9,392, and 2,615 new cases for a total of 200,262.

State television showed several families picnicking without masks or social distancing. Reminded about the fact that one person was dying every 12 to 15 minutes, an unidentified family father said: "My daughter was getting depressed. We really had to get out of the house."

The parliamentary research center issued a report in April suggesting that the actual number of coronavirus deaths might be almost twice the official figure.

State television quoted Hossein Erfani, head of the Health Ministry's contagious disease care department, as saying provinces will be allowed to decide locally to impose or suspend restrictions in the fight against the virus.

"Depending on whether it is high-, medium- or low-risk, each province and county will decide on imposing necessary restrictions or suspending them," Erfani said.

Six of Iran's 31 provinces are currently high-risk coronavirus areas, state said.



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Saudi Arabia backs IAEA efforts to inspect Iran's nuclear sites

[Turkey ready for fast reconstruction in conflict-torn Libya, official says](#)

Author:

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Fri, 2020-06-19 13:50

ANKARA: Turkey is ready to rapidly start rebuilding conflict-torn Libya, a senior Turkish official said on Friday, after President Tayyip Erdogan's senior deputies visited Tripoli this week to discuss cooperation on energy, construction and banking.

Turkish support has helped the internationally-recognized Government of National Accord (GNA) reverse a 14-month assault on Tripoli by Khalifa

Haftar's eastern-based Libyan National Army (LNA) that is backed by Russia, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt.

A Turkish delegation including the foreign and finance ministers met GNA officials on Wednesday for talks Ankara said aimed to bring about an end to fighting.

They also discussed payments owed to Turkish companies for past energy and construction work in Libya, the official told Reuters, requesting anonymity. The Turkish and GNA officials discussed how Turkey could help in energy exploration and operations, including cooperation "on every imaginable project" to help resources reach global markets, the senior official said. "Many parts of the country are in debris, there is a serious need for infrastructure and superstructure. Turkish companies ... are in a position to rapidly begin such work," the official said.

Before Turkey officially threw its support behind the GNA in November last year, Turkish builders had worked on projects in Libya. The backlog of Turkish contract work in Libya amounts to \$16 billion, including \$400-500 million for projects which have not yet begun, a sector official said in January.

Turkish energy firm Karadeniz Power could use its ships to remotely alleviate Libya's energy shortages amid the fighting, the official added.

Another Turkish source said Ankara and the GNA also discussed sending Turkish advisers to Tripoli to help rebuild its banking system.

On Thursday, Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said on broadcaster CNN Turk that part of the talks were about Turkish firms returning to Libya after the conflict. He said Turkey may also expand the scope of its military cooperation with the GNA.

Turkey and Russia, which back opposing sides in Syria too, have been collaborating for a cease-fire in Libya. Turkish entry into the conflict has also stoked tensions with other actors, as Ankara seeks a foothold in the oil-rich North African country.

The GNA and LNA have resumed United Nations-brokered cease-fire talks.



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Arab League plans urgent meeting on Libya
Greece urges EU not to be 'weak' on Libya after naval tension

[UN calls for human rights investigation in Libya](#)

Author:

Thu, 2020-06-18 22:05

UN special representative to Libya calls for an “investigative mechanism” to be established for human rights abuses.



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UN mulls proposal to reopen Iraq crossing for pandemic aid to Syria

Author:

Thu, 2020-06-18 21:46

NEW YORK: The United Nations Security Council is considering a proposal to reopen a border crossing from Iraq into Syria for six months to allow the delivery of humanitarian aid to help millions of Syrian civilians combat the coronavirus pandemic.

The 15-member council in January allowed a six-year-long cross-border aid operation to continue from two places in Turkey until July 10, but dropped crossing points from Iraq and Jordan due to opposition by Syrian ally Russia and China.

Germany and Belgium gave the council a draft resolution on Wednesday that would extend approval for the Turkish border crossings for one year and reopen the Iraq crossing for six months.

The draft text also gives the council an option to extend the approval for the Iraq crossing for another six months based on an evaluation of the impact of the coronavirus in Syria by UN chief Antonio Guterres later in the year. In December Russia and China vetoed a draft resolution that would have authorized all three crossing points for one year. A resolution needs nine votes in favor and no vetoes by Russia, China, the United States, France or Britain to pass.

Western diplomats have said the closure of the Iraq crossing cuts off 40 percent of medical aid to northeastern Syria.

"Failure to renew cross-border aid will cause unnecessary suffering and deaths, and COVID-19 could spread like wildfire. Surely Russia can't want that," said Louis Charbonneau, U.N. director for Human Rights Watch.

Last month US Ambassador Kelly Craft pushed the council to reauthorize aid deliveries from Iraq. However, Russian UN Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia said: "Do not waste your time on efforts to reopen the closed cross-border points." A crackdown by Assad on pro-democracy protesters in 2011 led to civil war, with Moscow backing Assad and Washington supporting the opposition. Millions of people have fled Syria and millions are internally displaced.



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US hits Syria with toughest sanctions yet to push Assad to end war
New US sanctions aim to 'starve' Syria, Lebanon: Hezbollah

[Kuwait eases curfew hours to start from 7 pm till 5 am effective June 21](#)

Thu, 2020-06-18 21:03

CAIRO: Kuwait's cabinet decided on Thursday to ease curfew hours to start from 7 p.m. until 5 a.m. effective June 21, Kuwait TV citing government spokesman's live conference.

The cabinet also decided to extend working with the first phase in a 5-phases plan to go back to normal life for one more week, also total lockdown on Hawally area has been lifted.

Kuwait will also allow traveling for patients with critical health conditions and students who might be missing exams with applying needed precautionary measures.



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Kuwait plans resumption of commercial flights Churches in Kuwait prepare for re-opening