

Lebanon warns protesters against blocking roads

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Thu, 2020-06-04 22:32

BEIRUT: The Lebanese Council of Ministers has extended the period of general mobilization in the country to July 5 following a recommendation by the Lebanese Supreme Council of Defense.

The decision comes two days before the demonstration planned by the civil movement on Saturday, resuming anti-government protests that erupted in the country on Oct. 17.

"We do not fear the demonstrators, rather we fear for their health, and we are keen to protect the demonstration so that it would achieve its goals," said Minister of Information Manal Abdel Samad after a Cabinet session on Thursday.

In a statement, the Lebanese Supreme Council of Defense said: "The military and security services should be firm in deterring violations of the general mobilization in order to prevent the proliferation of the coronavirus, and to cooperate with civil society and local authorities to achieve this objective."

General mobilization conditions include wearing masks, maintaining social distancing and avoiding overcrowding.

During the meeting of the Supreme Council of Defense, Prime Minister Hassan Diab said: "The risk remains high, considering that cases of COVID-19 are still being recorded.

"The precautionary and preventive measures are still necessary to avoid a second wave of the pandemic, which could be harder than the first wave.

"The government understands the suffering of the people due to the social situation, but there is fear that some groups might take advantage of this for their political objectives in cutting roads and dismantling the country, shutting down enterprises, and obstructing people's businesses, that could result in employees losing their jobs," he added.

"We respect the right to demonstrate, but it would become total chaos if roads were blocked and public and private property was sabotaged," he said, adding: "Lebanese people cannot accept these practices as democratic practices.

"People will soon see a decline in food prices and a gradual return to the normal economic cycle after a large number of enterprises were allowed to reopen in order to save businesses, and people's jobs and enterprises," the Lebanese leader said.

Meanwhile, lawyers from the civil movement filed a case against outspoken parliamentarian Jamil Al-Sayyed for calling for the killing of protesters. Al-Sayyed's comments drew widespread condemnation on social media, even among his own supporters. In a press conference on Wednesday, he said: "If demonstrators come to the doorstep of an official who does not have guards,

then this official has the right to shoot them from his own window, especially if the protesters verbally abuse the official.”

In a follow-up statement, he added: “My words yesterday were addressed to every bully who would dare come under my window to insult me or insult my family, I am serious when I say this and it is not a slip of the tongue.” The Lebanese General Security declared that Lebanon will open its borders with Syria for two days per week to allow Lebanese citizens to return, while the government approved a fourth stage of repatriation of Lebanese people from abroad between June 11 and 19.

“We will take a decision to open the airport and start air travel with specific countries,” said Minister of Health Hamad Hassan.

Ethiopian workers



An Ethiopian domestic worker cries as she waits outside the Ethiopian consulate in Hazmieh, east of Beirut, Lebanon, on Thursday, June 4, 2020. (AP)

Dozens of Ethiopian workers gathered in front of the Ethiopian Embassy in Hazmieh in the eastern suburb of Beirut.

The Ministry of Labor said on Thursday that 35 Ethiopian workers had been transferred to a hotel in Beirut to provide them with shelter after they were dismissed by their employers.

The ministry said it provided health examinations for the workers, before transferring them from the hotel to the Caritas Foundation, adding that it is investigating claims of unfair dismissal.

The founding committee of the Domestic Workers Union and the National Federation of Employees' and Workers' Union in Lebanon said: “We condemn the

racist behavior against migrant workers, especially domestic workers, in these economic conditions and during this health crisis.”

The Union of Owners of Recruitment Agencies of Domestic Workers hoped that the ministry would succeed in returning foreign workers to their countries.



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Lebanon's money dealers agree to exchange limitsLebanon earmarks June 21 to reopen airport if coronavirus decline remains stable

[Egypt calls for anti-Daesh coalition to prioritise Africa](#)

Thu, 2020-06-04 21:08

CAIRO: Egypt's foreign minister said Thursday that the coalition to defeat Daesh must prioritise the extremist group's growing threat in Africa. In a video conference held by the coalition, Sameh Shoukry said the coalition efforts in curbing the group's ambitions must continue.

Shoukry said the Global Coalition to Defeat Daesh should prevent the extremists from exploiting the coronavirus pandemic, according to Ahmad Hafez, Shoukry's advisor.

Hafez said the foreign minister was concerned about the emerging threat posed from Daesh in West Africa and the Sahel, and that the coalition needed to make this a top priority.

But Shoukry said the coalition needs to complete efforts to defeat Daesh and prevent it from reshaping itself in Iraq and Syria. The coalition must ensure the group and its affiliates are unable to reconstitute any territorial enclave, he added.

The meeting included 31 representatives who met at the invitation of Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs Luigi Di Maio and US Secretary of State Michael R. Pompeo.

The coalition ministers reaffirmed their belief that this comprehensive effort is necessary to achieve a full and enduring defeat of Daesh worldwide. Pompeo urged the 31 member states to step up funding to defeat the group despite a budget crunch caused by the pandemic.

A US raid last year killed the group's leader, Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi.

"That said, our fight against ISIS (Daesh) continues, and will for the foreseeable future. We cannot rest," Pompeo told the conference.

"We must continue to root out ISIS cells and networks and provide stabilization assistance to liberated areas in Iraq and Syria," he said.

He asked nations to pledge toward a goal of more than \$700 million for 2020.





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Iraq's counter-terrorism forces kill senior Daesh member US blames Daesh for Afghan hospital attack

[UN cease-fire talks resume in Libya but fighting continues](#)

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Wed, 2020-06-03 19:58

NEW YORK: Military talks on a cease-fire in Libya resumed Wednesday, the United Nations announced, welcoming it as a "positive" first step. The interim UN envoy, Stephanie Williams, met with a five-member delegation representing military commander Khalifa Haftar's forces, UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric said.

A meeting with the UN-recognized Government of National Accord will be held within the coming days, he added.

"Negotiations will continue on the cease-fire agreement and associated arrangements on the basis of the draft presented by the UN mission to both delegations on Feb. 23 this year," Dujarric said.

“The UN mission encourages the parties to de-escalate, consider a truce to enable improved delivery of humanitarian assistance and to refrain from incitement and create an environment conducive for negotiations and building trust between the parties.”

The UN mission in Libya had announced on Tuesday that the rival factions had agreed to resume talks after a suspension of more than three months.

Fighting has continued, however, notably near the capital Tripoli, which since April 2019 has been the target of an offensive by Haftar’s eastern-based forces.

On Wednesday, the GNA said its forces had retaken Tripoli’s international airport after heavy fighting with troops loyal to Haftar.

The conflict has resulted in hundreds of deaths, including numerous civilians, and displaced more than 200,000 people.

Over the past year, foreign powers have become increasingly involved in the conflict.

The UAE, Egypt and Russia have supported Haftar’s camp, while Turkey has intervened militarily on behalf of the GNA, which has recently scored a series of military victories.

All previous attempts at a cease-fire, most recently in January on the occasion of a conference in Berlin, have failed.

In February, when talks were suspended, the rival camps had agreed to negotiate a “permanent cease-fire” under a joint GNA/pro-Haftar military commission.



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UAE, Egypt welcome Libya cease-fire talks Senior Libyan official arrives in Moscow for talks

[Palestinians snub tax handover by Israel over annexation plan](#)

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Wed, 2020-06-03 20:15

RAMALLAH: The Palestinians said on Wednesday they were rejecting taxes collected on their behalf by Israel, an escalation of measures in protest of Israel's plan to annex parts of the occupied West Bank.

The taxes, managed by Israel under 1990s accords, make up over half of the budget of the Palestinian Authority. The Palestinians snubbed the handovers for several months last year after Israel trimmed the cash in retaliation for their funding for the families of jailed or slain militants.

With Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu having last month secured a new government, and annexing the West Bank's Jewish settlements and Jordan Valley on the agenda, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has declared bilateral deals null.

Ibrahim Melhem, spokesman for the Palestinian government, said in a statement that it had rejected the May tax levies "in compliance with the leadership decision to stop all forms of coordination with Israel."

Israel's Finance Ministry declined comment.

It was not immediately clear how the PA, its economy already hit hard by the coronavirus crisis, could function should it continue doing without the around \$190 million in monthly taxes.

Abbas previously said his security forces would stop helping Israel stem violence in the West Bank, among territories where the Palestinians, with international support, seek statehood.

Abbas' peace talks with Israel stalled in 2014 and he is boycotting the Trump administration for perceived bias. Israel and the United States appear to prefer to see the PA stay afloat rather than West Bank Palestinians revert to full Israeli rule.



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Israeli PM: Palestinians in Jordan Valley won't be citizens

[WHO denies Houthi 'faulty testing kit' claims](#)

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Wed, 2020-06-03 21:53

AL-MUKALLA: The World Health Organization (WHO) office in Yemen has rejected a claim by Iran-backed Houthis that COVID-19 test kits provided by the organization are faulty and hampered their efforts to declare an accurate number of infections in their territories.

In a statement seen by Arab News, the WHO said that the kits were made in

Germany and have been used in 120 countries.

“The batch of almost 7,000 COVID-19 test kits provided to Yemen by the WHO are the same PCR test kits provided to over 120 countries. An estimated 2 million of these kits were manufactured by TIB Molbiol, a company based in Germany,” the statement said.

Under local and international pressure to disclose accurate information about the pandemic in their territories, Houthi Health Minister Taha Al-Mutwakel said in a press conference on May 30 that one reason they did not reveal the number of infections in areas under their control was faulty testing kits that returned false positive results on non-human samples.

The WHO said: “The PCR test kits manufactured by TIB Molbiol met ISO standards for quality manufacturing. The kits were tested and validated by three external laboratories, and the validation results were published in a peer-reviewed journal.”

Despite ruling the most densely populated areas in Yemen, including the capital Sanaa, the Houthis have reported only two deaths and two recoveries.

In less-populated liberated provinces, the Aden-based National Coronavirus Committee reported on Tuesday 45 new coronavirus cases, including three deaths, bringing the total number of cases to 399, including 86 deaths and 15 recoveries.

Speaking at the virtual donors conference hosted by Saudi Arabia on Tuesday, Yemeni Prime Minister Maeen Abdulmalik Saeed said the Houthis have suppressed information about the pandemic, and intimidated Yemeni doctors and relatives of coronavirus patients who might speak out about their ordeal.

“The Houthis have rejected and disregarded all our initiatives for working together to fight the pandemic,” Saeed said.

In Aden, Dr. Ishraq Al-Subaee, a spokesman for the National Coronavirus Committee, told Arab News on Wednesday that there is no direct communication between the committee and Houthi health authorities.

“There is indirect cooperation through international agencies. There is great secrecy about the scale of the pandemic inside Houthi-controlled areas,” she said.

Suppression

Ironically, when the Houthi health chief was boasting about the health-care facilities and accusing the WHO of wrongdoing, a Houthi militia official was using social media to appeal for help after developing symptoms of COVID-19.

Ahmed Al-Hubaishi, a media adviser to the Houthi Supreme Political Council, wrote on Twitter, urging Houthi officials to send a medical team to his house. “I suffer from acute and intermittent fever, dry and severe coughing, and difficulty breathing,” he said.

Al-Hubaishi died on Wednesday of the virus. But instead of saying his father died of coronavirus based on his post, Al-Hubaishi's son deleted his father's old posts about his illness and said that he had died of diabetes, another indication of pressure on the families of infected people, experts said.

At the same time, new amateur videos posted on social media showed health workers in white protective clothing burying victims of COVID-19 in Sanaa and other northern provinces.

Confirmed images also show a notice from Houthis outside a closed cemetery in Sanaa, saying the cemetery was full.

Experts in Yemen believe that the health situation in Sanaa and other areas under Houthi control is dire, despite their efforts to suppress information about deaths and infections.

Ali Al-Fakih, editor of Al-Masdar Online, whose news site extensively covered COVID-19 deaths in Houthi areas, told Arab News that he had documented the deaths of at least 30 doctors since early May.

"They suppress information about the pandemic because they want life to continue as it is. The disruption of life would have an impact on their mobilization and recruitment efforts," he said, adding that many COVID-19 patients prefer to isolate themselves at home to avoid Houthi harassment.

Al-Subaee said that her colleagues in different health facilities in Sanaa told her they receive more than 100 new virus cases every day.

"The infection has spread through society. Doctors in our Whatsapp group say that Kuwait hospital alone receives 90 coronavirus patients in 24 hours," she said.



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Houthis reject Yemeni government offer to cooperate against COVID-19\$1.35bn raised for Yemen in virtual donors conference hosted by Saudi Arabia, UN