UAE suspending all passenger flights to curb spread of coronavirus

Author:
AFP

DUBAI: The United Arab Emirates announced on Monday it will temporarily suspend all passenger and transit flights amid the novel coronavirus outbreak.

The Emirati authorities "have decided to suspend all inbound and outbound passenger flights and the transit of airline passengers in the UAE for two weeks as part of the precautionary measures taken to curb the spread of the COVID-19," reported the official state news agency, WAM.

It said the decision — which is subject to review in two weeks — will take effect in 48 hours, adding: "Cargo and emergency evacuation flights would be exempt."

The UAE, whose international airports in Abu Dhabi and Dubai are major hubs, announced on Friday its first two deaths from the COVID-19 disease, having reported more than 150 cases so far.

Monday's announcement came hours after Dubai carrier Emirates announced it would suspend all passenger flights by March 25.

But the aviation giant then reversed its decision, saying it "received requests from governments and customers to support the repatriation of travelers" and will continue to operate passenger flights to 13 destinations.

Emirates had said it will continue to fly to the United Kingdom, Switzerland, Hong Kong, Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines, Japan, Singapore, South Korea, Australia, South Africa, the United States and Canada.

"We continue to watch the situation closely, and as soon as things allow, we will reinstate our services," said the airline's chairman and CEO, Sheikh Ahmed bin Saeed Al-Maktoum.

Gulf countries have imposed various restrictions to combat the spread of the novel coronavirus pandemic, particularly in the air transport sector.

The UAE has stopped granting visas on arrival and forbidden foreigners who are legal residents but are outside the country from returning.

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Emirates suspends flights to more cities over coronavirus fears, closing routes to 111 destinationsEmirates asks pilots and cabin crew to take unpaid leave

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[Iraq extends curfew in Baghdad to contain disease](#)

Author:
Mon, 2020-03-23 01:32

BAGHDAD: Iraq's government has extended a curfew on travel in and out of Baghdad until March 28 as part of strict measures to prevent the coronavirus from spreading, it said in a statement.

It said it had also decided to extend a ban on all inbound and outbound flights from the country's airports until March 28.
Under the curfew imposed on March 17 no persons can travel into or out of Baghdad.
At least 230 cases of coronavirus have been confirmed so far in Iraq, the Health Ministry said on Sunday, and 20 people have died.

Elsewhere in the Middle East, Jordan earlier ordered all shops to close and all people to stay off the streets until at least Tuesday, when it plans to announce specific times for shopping.
Authorities have already arrested 392 people accused of violating the curfew, said Amer Sartawi, a spokesman for the Public Security Directorate.
He warned that anyone violating the orders would face legal action.
Several countries in the Middle East have closed schools, universities and nonessential businesses.
Many are threatening fines or jail time to those caught violating the decrees. Egypt announced that all museums and archaeological sites, including the famed pyramids at Giza, would be closed from Monday until the end of March.

BACKGROUND

At least 230 cases of coronavirus have been confirmed so far in Iraq, the Health Ministry said on Sunday, and 20 people have died.

Mostafa Waziri, head of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, said authorities would disinfect all sites during the closure.
Egypt also announced the temporary suspension of Friday prayers and other congregations in all mosques.
The Coptic Orthodox Church canceled all services and wedding parties, and said funeral processions would be limited to family members of the deceased.
The most populous Arab nation is home to more than 100 million people.
Cairo, the capital, is one of the most densely populated cities on earth, with more than 20 million residents. Most people only experience minor flu-like symptoms from the coronavirus and recover within a few weeks, but the virus is highly contagious and can be spread by those who appear well.
It can cause severe illness, including pneumonia, in some patients, particularly the elderly and those with underlying health problems.

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Will the ravaging disease slow world's conflicts — or intensify them?Lebanon told to 'prepare for the worst' as virus cases rise

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[French charity MSF deploys treatment center in Iran](#)

Mon, 2020-03-23 01:25

PARIS: Medical charity MSF is setting up a 50-bed emergency center to treat severe COVID-19 cases in Iran, the French organization said.
A team of nine MSF intensive care medics will staff the facility on the grounds of the Amin hospital in the central province of Isfahan, the charity said, as Iran grapples with the worst outbreak of coronavirus in the region.
"The size of the COVID-19 epidemic in Iran is particularly worrying," MSF said.
France is already contributing to a package of medical aid for Iran alongside Britain and Germany, amid signs that the global fight against the coronavirus could help ease some diplomatic tensions.

In recent days, Tehran freed a French academic in a prisoner swap that also saw the release of an Iranian engineer held in France.

Iran on Sunday announced 129 new deaths, raising to 1,685 the official death toll in one of the worst-hit countries along with Italy and China.

Health Ministry spokesman Kianouche Jahanpour said more than 1,028 new cases had been recorded in the past 24 hours and a total of 21,638 people had now tested positive for the virus.

The US offer to help Iran in its fight against the new coronavirus pandemic is strange, Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said in a televised speech on Sunday.

Washington has offered humanitarian assistance to the Middle Eastern country most affected by the coronavirus.

Tensions between the two countries have been running high since 2018, when US President Donald Trump exited Tehran's 2015 nuclear deal with six world powers and reimposed sanctions that have crippled the Iranian economy.

"Several times Americans have offered to help us to fight the pandemic. That is strange because you face shortages in America. Also you are accused of creating this virus," said Khamenei, an anti-US hard-liner who has the final say in Iran.

NUMBER

1,685 — Iran on Sunday announced 129 new deaths, raising to 1,685 the official death toll in one of the worst-hit countries along with Italy and China.

"I do not know whether it is true. But when there is such an allegation, can a wise man trust you and accept your help offer? … You could be giving medicines to Iran that spread the virus or cause it to remain permanently."

Frictions increased when Trump ordered a US drone strike that killed the top commander of Iran's Revolutionary Guards, Qassem Soleimani, on Jan. 3. Iran retaliated by hitting US targets in Iraq on Jan. 8.

"Our No. 1 enemy is America. It is the most wicked, sinister enemy of Iran … its leaders are terrorists … Liars and charlatans," said Khamenei. Iranian authorities have blamed US sanctions for hampering its efforts to curb the outbreak and President Hassan Rouhani has urged Americans to call on their government to lift sanctions as Iran fights the coronavirus.

China, a party to Iran's nuclear deal, has urged the US to lift sanctions on Iran immediately amid Tehran's response to the coronavirus outbreak.

But the US sent Iran a blunt message this week: The spread of the virus will not save it from US sanctions that are choking off its oil revenues and isolating its economy.

Khamenei, who canceled his annual speech for Persian new year from Mashhad on March 20 because of the outbreak, said Iran would triumph over the virus.

Iran "has the capability to overcome any kind of crisis and challenges, including the coronavirus outbreak," said Khamenei, who called on people to stay at home. While many Iranians avoided traveling during the Persian new year holiday, police said millions have defied warnings issued by officials to avoid unnecessary trips aimed at curbing the spread of the virus.

The office of Tehran's governor said all shopping centers will be closed in the capital from Sunday.
"Only pharmacies and shops that provide essential goods will remain open in Tehran," Iranian state TV reported.

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Will the ravaging disease slow world's conflicts — or intensify them?New curbs in West Bank as first Gaza virus cases confirmed

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[Will the ravaging disease slow world's conflicts — or intensify them?](#)

Mon, 2020-03-23 01:22

NEW YORK: Syria, Libya, Yemen, Afghanistan, the Sahel … with the great powers focused intently on the COVID-19 virus, will armed conflicts across the world decrease in severity or intensify? Experts as well as diplomats at the UN say there is a serious risk of the latter.
For guerrilla fighters and extremist groups, "it's a clear godsend," said Bertrand Badie, a specialist in international relations at France's Institute of Political Studies (Sciences Po).

When the "powerful become powerless," he said, one can see "the revenge of the weak over the strong."

In recent days, some 30 Malian soldiers were killed in an attack in northern Mali blamed on terrorists, without drawing any sharp reaction from the Security Council.

In Libya, and Syria's Idlib region — the object of intense diplomatic attention before the coronavirus stole the spotlight — fighting continues.

Evoking the "potentially devastating impact of #Covid-19 in #Idlib and elsewhere in Syria," the UN undersecretary-general for political affairs, Rosemary DiCarlo, called on Twitter for all parties to show restraint.

"If anyone — incredibly — still needed a reason to stop the fighting there," she added, "this is it."

Up to now, these countries have not been afflicted by Covid-19 on the scale seen in China, South Korea or Europe. But the virus carries the potential, once it reaches into poor and conflict-ridden countries, of having a devastating impact.

In the absence of concerted assistance from abroad, the UN fears "millions" could die.

The pandemic will not necessarily favor any particular group of belligerents, one diplomat noted, because the ravaging disease has been "uncontrollable."

"The pandemic could lead to a worsening of conflicts, with the risk of exacerbating the humanitarian situation and population movements," he said.

But the pandemic might also sap the will of the belligerents and their ability to fight in coming months, some experts said.

"Throwing their troops into battle will expose both states and violent nonstate groups to contamination, and thus to potentially catastrophic losses of human life," said Robert Malley, president of the Washington-based International Crisis Group.

He believes that the virus "will very certainly diminish the capacity and will of states and of the international system — the UN, regional organizations, refugees, peacekeeping forces — to dedicate themselves to the resolution or prevention of conflicts."

It will also throw up a whole set of new obstacles, he said, complicating access to conflict zones, making it harder to organize negotiations in neutral countries, and diverting financial investments to the fight against the coronavirus.

"What government would want to invest in the pursuit of peace in Yemen, Syria, Afghanistan, the Sahel or elsewhere when it is facing an economic, social and political crisis almost without precedent?" he asked.

With the news media obsessively focused on Covid-19, Malley said, "these conflicts, however brutal and violent they may be, will for many people become unseen and unheard."

At the UN, which has been struggling to respond as best it can, diplomats insist that their efforts to monitor regional crises and conflicts will continue, even if the international organization has sharply curbed its schedule of meetings.

"We intend to ensure that #UNSC plays its vital role in maintaining global peace and security," Britain's interim ambassador to the UN, Jonathan Allen, wrote on Twitter. "Covid-19 is the major global focus, but we have not forgotten about Syria, Libya, Yemen."

But Richard Gowan, a New York-based specialist in UN matters, expressed some

doubt.

"Security Council diplomats say that it is hard to get their capitals to focus on UN issues," he said.

Among non-governmental organizations (NGOs) dealing with human rights issues, like Human Rights Watch, concern is growing that whole areas of action are falling by the wayside.

One example: diplomats say the much-awaited and repeatedly delayed publication of a UN summary report on the bombing of hospitals in Syria — originally due at the beginning of the year — is now not expected before April, at the earliest.

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Germany's Angela Merkel in quarantine after meeting doctor who tested positive for coronavirusQuake strikes north of Zagreb, damages buildings

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[Lebanon in 'race against time' as coronavirus cases soar](#)

Author:
Sun, 2020-03-22 02:49

BEIRUT: Lebanese Prime Minister Hassan Diab asked the security forces on Saturday to enforce stricter measures to keep people indoors and prevent gatherings to curb a coronavirus outbreak.

In a speech, Diab said this would include patrols and checkpoints, calling on the Lebanese to stay home and only go out if "absolutely necessary."
Lebanese officials called for tougher emergency measures, including curfews, after the number of coronavirus cases in the country surged to 230 on Saturday, with four victims believed to be in a critical condition.
The Ministry of Health urged people to "adhere to complete domestic quarantine," and warned that those who ignore repeated government warnings could face criminal prosecution.
Dr. Assem Araji, head of the Parliamentary Health Committee, demanded that emergency measures be stepped up "because people have not adhered to the domestic quarantine."
As the number of coronavirus cases in Lebanon continued to climb, it was revealed that a former minister, Mohammed Safadi, had also contracted the virus.
"The result of the laboratory examination is positive. He is now in good health and will soon join the list of those recovering from coronavirus disease (COVID-19)," said his wife, former minister Violet Safadi.
Meanwhile, local police issued warnings to people breaching home quarantine and raids were carried out on businesses ignoring the ruling. Penalties were imposed on shop owners defying the government measures.
Municipalities used loudspeakers to warn residents against renting out homes to Lebanese or Syrian families from outside towns and villages "for fear of spreading the virus and to maintain health security." Syrian residents were also told to refuse visits by relatives or acquaintances.
The warning reached the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon, which closed their entry and exit points.
"We are worried about the lack of medical facilities to treat the disease," an official at Ain Al-Hilweh, the largest Palestinian camp in Lebanon, told Arab News.
Medical and health teams with the Palestinian Red Crescent Society, together with Palestinian security forces, began checking people entering or leaving the camp, and disinfecting vehicles and other machinery.

FASTFACTS

• **The number of cases reached 230 on Saturday.**

• **Mohammed Safadi, a former minister also tested positive for coronavirus.**

• **Authorities urge people to adhere to 'complete domestic quarantine.'**

About 4,000 Lebanese Red Cross volunteers are helping to transport those infected with the virus to hospital.
George Kettana, director general of the Lebanese Red Cross, said: "We receive many calls from all regions and we respond to every possible case."

Kettana called on people to "be honest and frank so that we do not expose volunteers to danger."

Some supplies, including protective clothing, had started to run out and international aid organizations are ready to help, he said.

President of the Syndicate of Private Hospitals, Suleiman Haroun, warned that "trying to reduce the number of daily cases is important because it is a race against time.

"If the number of daily cases reaches hundreds, we will not be able to receive all cases. Hospitals capacity is limited and hospitals were not initially prepared to face such a pandemic," he said.

Former Prime Minister Saad Hariri said: "The pandemic is a treacherous enemy. Please stay in your homes. The quarantine is the only safety line."

Walid Jumblatt, head of the Progressive Socialist Party, said: "The disease is spreading rapidly because people refuse to stay in their homes."

"People should be forbidden at any cost from wandering around," he said.

Grand Mufti Sheikh Abdul Latif Derian called for a "general amnesty for prisoners, so that we will not face a tragedy in light of the outbreak of the coronavirus, despite all the precautionary measures."

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Egyptians' 'negligence is fueling coronavirus threat'Proposed UK law to shut door on historic war crimes cases