

Tunisia to impose compulsory quarantine on visitors who have not been fully vaccinated

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TUNIS: Tunisia will from Aug. 25 require 10 days of quarantine for visitors who have not been fully vaccinated against COVID-19.

The move is to help keep the pandemic under control as cases have begun to fall, the health ministry said on Thursday.

Effective on Thursday, the North African country relaxed its nightly curfew and allowed cafes and restaurants to remain open until 10 p.m., in a partial easing of restrictions imposed to curb COVID-19 contagion.

The moves come amid a decline in the number of coronavirus infections and a clear increase in vaccination rates.



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Saied grapples with Tunisia's economic woes
Tunisia arrests 14 officials in phosphate graft probe

Women in Turkey stand in solidarity with their Afghan sisters

Thu, 2021-08-19 21:46

ANKARA: Zakira Hekmat, president of the Afghan Refugees Solidarity Association in Turkey, said her nights have been sleepless since hearing that the civilian government in Afghanistan had fallen to the Taliban.

She fears this political change in her homeland will take the heaviest toll on educated women who had come to expect a bright future for themselves and all girls and women in the country.

Hekmat, 33, believes that some high-profile women will be in the fortunate position to be able to leave the country, but the majority of ordinary citizens will be forced to live under the Taliban regime and require help and support.

"At first, it will be difficult to reach out to all women in Afghanistan," she told Arab News. "However it would be wise to start with specific segments of society, by providing scholarships for students at high school and encouraging them to finish their school studies and start university education."

According to the latest UN data, women and children account for about 80 percent of displaced Afghans. Hekmat, who was born into an internally displaced family in the Jaghuri district of Ghazni province in Afghanistan, graduated from high school while living under Taliban rule. She briefly attended Kabul University before moving to Turkey on a scholarship to study medicine at Erciyes University in Kayseri and becoming a doctor.

"The Turkish government should also help university-age girls in Afghanistan through scholarships and help them leave the country and continue accomplishing their dreams in this way," she said.

Hekmat is a well-known rights activist in Turkey, a country she now considers her home. In particular she campaigns for the rights of girls and women in Afghanistan. She is not alone; in recent days people from all walks of life in Turkey, across the political spectrum, have expressed solidarity with Afghan women and urged the international community not to abandon them to the mercy of the Taliban.

They fear that women will face great challenges under an oppressive regime that could once again strip women and girls of the rights they painstakingly

reclaimed over the past two decades, especially in the realms of education and employment.

As the Afghan government fell and the Taliban took control of the country in recent days, hashtags such as “#TurkishWomenforAfghanWomen” and slogans such as “Be Their Voice” quickly began to trend on social media in Turkey.

Turkish group the Women’s Platform for Equality on Wednesday call on the international community to mobilize in support of Afghan women and share the responsibility for hosting the refugees from the country in a fair and responsible way.

“We consider that abandoning Afghanistan to the Taliban’s rule is as ruthless as the methods of the Taliban,” the group said. “Act now for Afghan women and Afghan people.”

Gulsum Kav, a campaigner for women’s rights and co-founder of the We Will Stop Femicide Platform, said: “Afghan women are never alone. We are the women of the world. We will absolutely get our freedom one day.”

Authorities in Ankara are currently in talks with all parties in Afghanistan, including the Taliban, but the extent to which they will be able to use political leverage to protect the rights of women and girls in the country remains unclear.

On Tuesday the Taliban pledged to respect women’s rights within the norms of Islamic law. However, memories of women largely being confined to their homes under the previous Taliban regime, and facing the threat of public execution, remain fresh in the minds of many.

Begum Basdas, a gender and migration scholar at Humboldt University in Berlin, shares the concerns raised by human rights organizations that have warned the world must not fall for the Taliban’s “charm offensive” and its claim to now support women’s rights.

“I do not believe that the Taliban has changed,” she told Arab News. “Many female activists and women in high-profile jobs such as judges, journalists, government posts, as well as teachers, fear that their lives are at risk.

“The Taliban claim that women will not be discriminated against, but only within the framework of Shariah. We have observed their interpretation of Islam in the past, and more recently since they started to gain power. There are reports of women and girls who are barred from schools, dismissed from their jobs and ordered not to appear in public spaces. Already their actions do not conform to their statements.”

Yet the world has also witnessed the immense strength and resilience of Afghan women, Basdas added.

“They are still on the streets reporting, filming, protesting and fighting against the Taliban,” she said. “Our task is not to repeat the past mistakes of the Western world and treat them merely as people to be ‘saved;’ we must stand with them in solidarity to protect their lives and rights in

Afghanistan.”

Some prominent women have managed to leave the country, including Sahraa Karimi, a leading female filmmaker who thanked the Turkish government for helping her to get out of Kabul this week.

According to Basdas, all Afghan women who have fled to other countries must have access to effective asylum procedures and other other safe legal paths to resettlement in Europe and elsewhere.

“They should not face the risk of deportation ever,” she said. “I agree with the call to authorities in Turkey that instead of further military interventions, we must ensure all women, and everyone who needs protection, are evacuated from Afghanistan urgently.”

However, this potential wave of refugees from Afghanistan is already causing tensions to rise in domestic Turkish politics. On Wednesday the main opposition Republican Peoples’ Party displayed a banner on its headquarters that read “Borders are our honor.” Hundreds of Afghan refugees have arrived in the country in recent weeks, resulting in public anger among some and calls for the government to boost border security by building walls.

“Human rights should not be used as political leverage but Turkey first must ensure that Afghans in Turkey are safe and have access to international protection procedures without the fear of deportation,” Basdas said.

She also noted that discriminatory comments about migrants and refugees must end, and that the introduction of effective migration policies that respond to the needs of local populations as well as the refugees can help to achieve this.

“Not just Turkey, the entire international community must stand to protect human rights in Afghanistan,” she added. “The EU’s call to the Taliban ‘to respect their obligations under international humanitarian law’ will not suffice.

“The actions of the West are partly to blame and so there should not be any negotiations with the Taliban that could endanger women’s rights. We should support Afghan women and show them that we are not just watching but taking action.”



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Former Afghan women's football captain tells players to burn kits, delete photos

[Amid anger, sorrow, Lebanon buries victims of fuel tank blast](#)

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Thu, 2021-08-19 02:54

AL-DAOUSEH, Lebanon: Families on Wednesday laid to rest victims of a fuel tank blast that killed at least 28 people in northern Lebanon amid anger and sorrow over the crisis-hit country's latest tragedy. The explosion on Sunday in Al-Tleil in the Akkar region scorched crowds clamoring for petrol that the army was distributing in light of severe fuel shortages that have paralyzed a country also beset by medicine, gas and bread

shortages.

The victims included soldiers and Akkar residents who darted to Al-Tleil after midnight to fill gasoline in plastic containers straight from a fuel tank that exploded in circumstances that remain unclear.

The tank was among supplies confiscated by the military, which has lately wrested supplies from alleged fuel hoarders across the country.

The disaster came on top of an economic crisis branded by the World Bank as one of the world's worst in modern times and follows an explosion of poorly stored fertilizer at Beirut port last summer that killed more than 200 people.

Akkar, one of Lebanon's poorest regions, buried several blast victims on Wednesday, according to an AFP correspondent.

The village of Al-Daouseh held funerals for four of its dead, all of whom are from the Shraytih family.

"They died for petrol – if we had fuel this would have never happened," said Mouin Shraytih who was burying two sons – one 16 and the other 20.

"Political leaders and officials should consider what it is like to have two young boys and find them burned and charred in front of your own eyes," the man in his fifties told AFP at the funeral.

Corpses from the tanker blast had been identified in and transported from hospitals hit by power and telecom outages, with even landlines disrupted. Dozens had gathered at the family's home when a convoy of vehicles carrying the corpses arrived from a nearby hospital, an AFP correspondent said. Shots were fired into the air as residents threw rice and flowers over the coffins.

Fawaz Shraytih, a relative of Mouin, was burying two brothers, both army soldiers.

"What happened is because of deprivation, Akkar is a deprived region," he said.

But "all we do is pay with our blood," he added, explaining that soldiers make up the bulk of Al-Daouseh's male population.

There are eight soldiers among his own immediate family, he said.

Nearly 80 people were injured in the blast, medics said, many with burns that further overwhelmed hospitals struggling to function without electricity.

Foreign countries and UN agencies have scrambled emergency aid to help exhausted health workers cope with the new influx of serious injuries and run DNA tests to identify charred remains. A plane was due to arrive in Lebanon to evacuate severe burns victims to Turkey.

Lebanon, a country of more than 6 million, is grappling with soaring poverty rates, with 78 percent of the population living below the poverty line, according to the United Nations.

The Lebanese pound has lost 90 percent of its black market value against the dollar while food prices have shot up by up to 400 percent.

The country braced for higher inflation rates after central bank governor Riad Salameh said last week that the lender can no longer afford fuel subsidies.

Despite the spiraling crisis, bitterly divided leaders have yet to agree on a new Cabinet a year after the previous one resigned in the wake of the Beirut blast.



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Mother and four daughters killed as they looked for fuel amid Lebanon's petrol shortage PM-elect Mikati optimistic about new Lebanon government

[US envoy to Yemen Lenderking calls on donor countries to 'step up' pledges](#)

Thu, 2021-08-19 01:15

LONDON: The US envoy to Yemen called on donor countries to "step up" contributions at an upcoming pledging conference, hosted by the Biden administration in New York in September.

"The UN is in constant need of financial support to carry out any programs that it does that really make a difference inside Yemen, including feeding people who would otherwise starve, working on sanitation, improving distribution networks, rehabilitating ports, a lot of this is being done with international funding, so that funding has got to increase," Tim Lenderking said during an interview with Yemeni American News.

He said since the conflict began, the US has provided more than \$3.6 billion. USAID last week announced an additional \$165 million in humanitarian assistance.

"Compared to the needs, it's a small amount but this is going to be a collective effort and so we need other countries to step up," Lenderking said during a visit to Michigan where he also met with Yemeni-American community members.



US envoy to Yemen Tim Lenderking speaks during an interview with Yemeni American News in Michigan during a visit to meet members of the Yemeni-American community. (Screenshot/Twitter/@StateDept_NEA)

Most of the additional aid is going to the World Food Programme to bring immediate relief to Yemeni people, while some of it will also go toward COVID-19 relief.

"COVID is a serious problem in Yemen...it's under reported, it needs to be addressed by the authorities in Yemen, it's a serious problem, and it's only compounding the other humanitarian challenges that exist," Lenderking said. He also said most of their funding does not go to the Yemeni government or the Iran-backed Houthi militia, but does help support programs and NGO's operating in "hot areas of Yemen that are controlled by the Houthis," adding: "This should not be political, this is money that's going to help people who need it."

Lenderking said that the US is open to dialogue with any party in Yemen except those whom it has designated as terrorist organizations.

"Our interests as to ensure Al-Qaeda (and Daesh) do not regain a foothold inside Yemen" and expand their presence or have outsiders play a role in exacerbating or extending the civil war.

"I could also mention the very negative role that Iran plays in the conflict," he said. "This is a great opportunity for Iran to show a new face to the region and to the world by engaging in a constructive way in Yemen rather than fueling the conflict."

Listen to [#USEnvoyYemen](#) Lenderking share highlights of his trip to Michigan and answer questions about U.S. commitment to end the conflict in [#Yemen](#) during an interview with the Yemeni American Newspaper [@yamericannet](#) <https://t.co/W5DHoNkjXk>

– U.S. State Dept – Near Eastern Affairs (@StateDept_NEA) [August 18, 2021](#)

Lenderking said the main thing that the US administration is doing is to try to create "a sense that peace in Yemen is possible." Besides from ending the war, which is their main objective, Washington is also focusing on humanitarian assistance, implementing a nationwide cease-fire, opening ports and airports and lifting the remaining restrictions to improve the lives of the Yemeni people, he added.

"We know that the situation is urgent, there are people dying on a daily basis, it's a tragic situation," he said, adding that his appointment as envoy by US President Joe Biden in February and his announcement that Yemen was a foreign policy priority was "a big deal."

Since then, he said the Yemeni crisis has gained momentum and "there is an international consensus about the urgency of ending the war that did not exist before January."

He said there has been significant development in the UN's peace plan and that the [appointment of new UN envoy to Yemen Hans Grundberg](#) is going to add

further momentum.

“We are trying to bring the influence we have and you will see more pressure exerted by us on the parties moving forward and it will drive an international resolution to the conflict,” he said.

The US wants to see Yemen back as a fully functioning part of the Arabian peninsula and a source of stability for the region, he said, expressing hope that the US can reopen its embassy in Sanaa in the near future. He also said that the US hopes people will come to appreciate Yemen for its rich culture and heritage and beauty and not associate it with war.



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Arab coalition reiterates support for Yemeni government as battle for Marib continues
Former US envoy Gerald Feierstein says original Saudi strategy in Yemen was right to end Houthi assaults

[Tunisia's President Saied appoints Sami El-Hichri as new director general of national security](#)

Wed, 2021-08-18 21:11

LONDON: Tunisian President Kais Saied appointed Sami El-Hichri as director general of national security and Shukri Riahi as commander of the National Guard, state news agency said on Wednesday.

The announcement was made following a meeting between Saied and acting Interior Minister Ridha Gharsallaoui.

The president [appointed Ridha Gharsallaoui](#), a former national security adviser to the presidency, to run the Interior Ministry last Thursday, and pledged to protect rights and freedoms.

On Friday, Saied said in a statement: "There is no reason to worry about the subject of freedom, justice and democracy" in Tunisia."

The president said he took the "exceptional measures" in July in line with the constitution to "respond to the expectations of the people against a backdrop of political, economic and social crisis."

(With Reuters and AFP)



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