

Lebanon's caretaker PM says lifting subsidies would cause 'social explosion'

Fri, 2020-10-09 20:29

BEIRUT: Lebanon's caretaker Prime Minister Hassan Diab said on Friday any step to lift subsidies now on vital goods would be unacceptable and would cause a "social explosion."

In a televised address, Diab, who resigned two months ago after a huge explosion damaged much of Beirut and worsened the country's economic crisis, said \$4 billion had been spent so far in 2020 on subsidizing food, medicine, flour and wheat imports.

He warned that the country's central bank and "all those who support such a decision" on subsidies would be responsible for the ensuing chaos in the country, already gripped by a financial meltdown.

Crushed by a mountain of debt, Lebanon is facing its worst economic crisis since its 1975-1990 civil war. As prices soar, many Lebanese have been plunged into poverty and are increasingly reliant on subsidised food, medicine and fuel.

Lebanon has \$1.8 billion of foreign exchange reserves left for subsidising food and other imports but could make this last for six more months by scrapping support for some goods, an official source told Reuters on Thursday.

Diab said the subsidies should not be completely removed, but suggested targeting them to support those most in need.

Parliamentary consultations to choose a new prime minister will begin on October 15, in an effort to push Lebanon's fractious political class to move on forming the country's next government.

Recent efforts faltered amid bickering over cabinet posts among the country's various political factions, dealing a blow to a French plan aimed at rallying politicians to tackle the country's woes.

Diab said it was incumbent upon the country's feuding sectarian political leaders to revive the French road map and form a government swiftly because the country "cannot wait another two months."



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[Defying social media rules could see end of Facebook in Turkey: Industry expert](#)

Author:

Thu, 2020-10-08 23:00

ANKARA: Social media giant Facebook's decision not to appoint a company representative in Turkey could mark the beginning of the end for the platform in the country, according to an industry expert.

New Turkish government regulations, which went into effect on Oct. 1, require

all social media firms to open an office or face a hefty fine, an advertising ban, and data restrictions.

Representatives must also be a Turkish citizen, and user data on the networks has to be stored in Turkey.

At 37 million, statistics show Facebook to have more users in Turkey than in any other European country.

But Suleyman Irvan, a professor of journalism at Uskudar University, told Arab News that if Facebook stuck to its reported stance, Turkish users could eventually see the platform's demise.

Analysts believe that Facebook's move could also influence the decisions of other social media companies, including Twitter, over whether or not to have legal representation in Turkey.

Under the new Turkish rules, firms not having opened an office in Turkey by Oct. 1 will have to pay a fine of 10 million Turkish liras (\$1.26 million) by November, which if unpaid will triple in December. Further refusal to comply would result in an advertisement ban in January next year, and bandwidth being gradually slashed by up to 90 percent until May (which would lead to a post taking about 15 minutes to open).

In a tweet, cyber rights expert Yaman Akdeniz, said: "Although it is a matter of curiosity about how the government will react, if you put a stick on the table without taking the opinions of the stakeholders and pass a very problematic law in terms of fundamental rights and freedoms just in 10 days, the result will be as such."

The regulation also provides social media users with the opportunity to report content, obliging social media representatives to investigate claims within two days and either remove "unacceptable" items or face a 5 million lira fine.

"Social media giants may have been concerned over this clause because they will have to remove all dissident content if they open a representation office," Irvan said.

In a country where censorship and the absence of impartial media have become the norm, this clause is believed to have influenced the decision of Facebook. However, the Turkish government said the requirements were aimed at "establishing commercial and legal ties" with the social media platforms.

Turkey's media watchdog RTUK recently imposed a fine on broadcaster Halk TV over a program in which a journalist went beyond "the boundaries of criticism" with remarks on Azerbaijan's state of democracy.

RTUK said the penalty was also to show to the world Turkey's support for Azerbaijan in its conflict with Armenia over the Nagorno-Karabakh region.

"If social media giants end their operations in Turkey, it will also deal a major blow to the media sector, as Turkish people more and more use social

media platforms to follow up objective news,” Irvan said.

Isik Mater, a digital rights activist and research director at the NetBlocks monitoring group, told Arab News: “The administrative fees are relatively insignificant in the eyes of these social media giants.

“However, although they risk being deprived from advertisement revenues and bandwidth, Facebook seems to be determined in this decision and I expect that it will be followed by other social media giants as well.”

Turkey ranked among the top 10 countries for users of the social media networks Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, a survey by London-based We Are Social revealed in February.

Dr. Sarphan Uzunoglu, editor-in-chief of NewsLabTurkey, a digital journalism academy, said Facebook’s decision was not just about the company itself but the future of already oppressed communities and professional groups in Turkey.

“Having a representative here would make Facebook more responsible about user-generated content, which is a problematic content type big technology companies love but try to avoid the responsibility about the most.”

He noted that Facebook’s move could trigger a broader debate on the taxation of media actors and professionals.



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YouTube and Facebook could be banned, warns Turkey PMTurkey tightens control

on social media platforms

Fire at Al-Azhar Mosque contained and under control

Thu, 2020-10-08 22:51

CAIRO: A fire that broke out inside Al-Azhar Mosque, in Al-Gamaleya area, has been brought under control without any fatalities.

Grand Imam Ahmed El-Tayeb called for an urgent and comprehensive report on the damage caused.

The Civil Protection used four fire engines to control the fire, a result of a short circuit in a lamp in a storage room, before it spread to the prayer square.

Hani Odeh, director of Al-Azhar Mosque, said that the fire was limited to one of the back rooms of the third floor.

Osama Talaat, head of the Islamic, Coptic and Judaic antiquities sector, confirmed that the building was safe, adding that a committee, headed by Ahmed Abu Bakr, vice president of the sector, immediately went to the site to ascertain the damage.

Upon visual inspection they found no damage to the building, its inscriptions, decorations or wooden items where the fire started, he said.



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encyclical
Egypt's Al-Azhar and Coptic Church send two aid planes to Lebanon

[Egyptian authorities focus on water resources and irrigation](#)

Author:

Thu, 2020-10-08 22:45

CAIRO: Egypt has lifted its state of emergency in preparation for the season of floods, torrents and rains, and instructed officials to follow up locally on the matter.

Mohammed Abdel Aty, minister of water resources and irrigation, held a virtual meeting with the heads of the central departments of water resources and irrigation for the governorates of Upper and Lower Egypt on Thursday to discuss mechanisms for dealing with flood season.

The ministry stressed that preparatory measures needed to be completed urgently – including ensuring that all bridges are secure enough to withstand any emergency, and that emergency units in hot spots in the West Delta region are fully prepared for the expected torrential rains.

The ministry is also focused on removing all waste from canals to ensure there are no obstacles to hinder the flow of the water.

Mohammed Al-Sibai, spokesman for the Ministry of Water Resources and Irrigation, said the ministry “is in a state of emergency throughout the year,” but especially during the flood season at the end of October, but said it has managed to deal with it well so far despite the high water levels and heavy rain.

“We are prepared to deal with all volumes of torrents and rain during the coming period,” he said.



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Egypt's farmers fear impact of dam as water dwindlesEl-Sisi: Egyptian water rights are 'national security issue'

Jordan returns to weekend lockdown as COVID-19 cases mount

Author:

Reuters

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Thu, 2020-10-08 15:27

AMMAN: Jordan will enter a nationwide 48-hour lockdown on Friday for the first time in months as health officials worry a major spike in coronavirus infections could threaten its stretched health care system, officials said. The country has seen what officials say is an “exponential” rise, with around 10,000 cases confirmed in just over a week – a near-doubling of the total number of infections since the first cases in early March and a reversal what had been among the lowest infection and death rates in the Middle East. Senior officials are struggling to avoid a broader lockdown that the hard-hit economy can ill afford. The IMF forecasts the economy, which was struggling even before the health crisis, will shrink 6% this year, the first contraction since 1990.

“The last thing we want is a complete lockdown for two weeks or three weeks, we don’t want to reach this ..It remains the last weapon if cases rise unbelievably high and lead to our hospitals being overwhelmed,” Health Minister Saad Jaber told state television this week.

The community spread of the virus has forced authorities to maintain the closure of schools for 2 million pupils, after a brief resumption of lessons at the start of last month, and impose strict bans on large public gatherings.

Thousands of troops have been deployed to enforce the lockdown, which begins at midnight.

Daily cases hit a peak of 1,824 last Monday, with total number of infections now standing at 20,200 and 137 deaths.

Officials blamed the initial outbreak in Jordan on infected truck drivers crossing the northern border with Syria. Authorities have tried to control the spread of the virus with partial curfews to isolate neighborhoods in the capital and outlying towns.

King Abdullah has criticized the government for mistakes in handling the pandemic, and ordered newly appointed Prime Minister Bisher al Khaswaneh on Wednesday to raise hospital capacity in coming weeks and ramp up testing. The king has also pushed the armed forces to help set up a 2,000-bed field hospital in the Dead Sea region.



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