

# UN envoy Griffiths thanks Arab coalition for Yemen cease-fire extension

Thu, 2020-05-14 17:14

RIYADH: The UN envoy to Yemen Martin Griffiths on Thursday thanked the Arab coalition for its recent extension of the cease-fire in the country.

Speaking to the United Nations Security Council, Griffiths said negotiations between the Yemeni government other parties were making “significant progress,” especially with the cease-fire, but that differences on both sides remain regarding the humanitarian and economic solutions.

He added that, despite the constructive efforts from both sides, the people of Yemen were “right to be frustrated about the slow pace,” and said he hoped the negotiations would “soon come to a successful close.”

Griffiths also said that he was alarmed by the Southern Transitional Council’s (STC) declaration in the south and the steps it had taken to make local institutions in Aden answer to them.

He called the situation in southern Yemen “very disturbing,” and urged the Yemeni government and the STC to “urgently” implement the Riyadh agreement.

Yemen’s government said earlier this week that forces would confront an “armed rebellion” by southern forces, in the latest developments of a near month-long standoff between allies in the anti-Houthi alliance. On April 25, the STC declared a plan to move towards self-rule.

Griffiths highlighted the positive steps made by women in Yemen.

“Yemeni women have demonstrated leadership and activism, leading cease-fire calls, calls for prisoners’ release as well as assisting civilians. I reiterate my call that both parties include women in their negotiation delegations and decision-making, in line with National Dialogue outcomes,” he said.

Griffiths said he was concerned about the recent death sentences passed down to journalists in Yemen, and used his address to call for the immediate release of detained journalists.

Yemen’s Prime Minister, Maeen Abdulmalik Saeed, [met with the ambassadors](#) of the five permanent members of the Security Council on Wednesday to discuss the latest security developments, and efforts to bring peace to unify efforts to confront the coronavirus pandemic.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Middle East](#)

[Yemen](#)

---

## [Hezbollah leader says Israel turns attention to hitting missile-making sites in Syria](#)

Author:

Reuters

ID:

1589393362105470600

Wed, 2020-05-13 16:42

BEIRUT: Hezbollah leader Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah said on Wednesday that Israel is now concentrating its attacks in Syria on missile-manufacturing sites.

Israel has conducted many raids inside Syria since the start of the civil war in 2011. It sees the presence of Hezbollah and its ally Iran there as a strategic threat.

The heavily armed Lebanese Shiite movement has played a vital role in the war, helping Syrian President Bashar Assad reclaim much of the country.

In rare comments on Israeli attacks in Syria, Nasrallah said that with Assad firmly in control, Israel has turned its attention more recently to striking

Syrian targets for precision missile manufacturing seen as a threat. He denied that Israeli air strikes have pushed either Hezbollah or Iran to retreat from Syria, calling Israel's insistence that they have done so "imaginary victories."

Israeli Defense Minister Naftali Bennett said in April that the Israeli military was working to drive Tehran out of Syria.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Hassan Nasrallah](#)

[Lebanon](#)

[Syria](#)

[Israel](#)

Lebanese refuse Nasrallah's 'declaration of war' on US Hezbollah leader  
Nasrallah claims 'specific, known parties' are behind Lebanon's protests

---

## [UAE to review government structure, size in post-coronavirus strategy](#)

Author:

Reuters

ID:

1589393283925465300

Wed, 2020-05-13 14:50



DUBAI: The United Arab Emirates will review the structure and size of its government as part of its strategy for dealing with the effects of the coronavirus pandemic, the country's vice president said on Wednesday. "We may merge ministries and alter bodies. We will make changes. We need a more agile, flexible and speedy government," Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum, who is also the ruler of regional tourism and business hub Dubai, said on Twitter, reporting the outcome of government meetings held Wednesday.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Coronavirus](#)

[UAE](#)

[government](#)

UAE confirms 783 new coronavirus cases, more recoveries and fatalities  
The UAE's Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque Centre launches remote cultural tours

---

## [Virus-hit Iran reopens mosques for holy Ramadan nights](#)

Wed, 2020-05-13 16:21

TEHAN: In spite of their fears over the coronavirus, hundreds of pious Iranians took advantage of the temporary opening of mosques Wednesday to pray at one of the holiest times of year.

The mask-clad faithful for the most part adhered to social distancing guidelines as they sat in designated areas of Reihanat Al-Hussein mosque, in west Tehran.

Clutching their own prayer mats and Qur'ans, they showed up with their families, including a couple with a baby, and appeared to be in high spirits. Worshippers spilled out into grounds outside the mosque were disinfected by a sanitary worker in a hazmat suit who sprayed them as he walked among them. But some of the gaps between those seated at the back appeared to be too close for comfort, and the Basij militia were on hand to ensure they kept apart.

"Of course, everybody is worried about the disease, even my own family," said one of the worshippers who gave his name only as Mahmoudi.

"When I decided to come they were concerned about me and I promised them to respect the directives," he said.

"So I came and saw that everyone is respecting the (social) distancing, otherwise, I wouldn't have stayed and I'd have gone back home."

Iran reopened the mosques for two hours from midnight for Laylat Al-Qadr, a high point during the fasting month of Ramadan that marks when the Qur'an was revealed to Prophet Muhammad.

The Islamic republic shut its mosques and shrines in March as part of its efforts to contain the Middle East's deadliest outbreak of COVID-19.

The first cases emerged in the Shiite holy city of Qom on February 19 and spread rapidly to all 31 of the country's provinces.

It has gone on to claim nearly 6,800 lives in Iran.

President Hassan Rouhani, whose government has faced criticism for being slow to react to the crisis, praised worshippers for abiding by health guidelines.

"There were concerns about how people would follow health guidelines if mosques were opened, but last night, you found that it was a special ceremony," he said.

"Wherever people participated, they followed all the instructions," he said in televised remarks.

Health Minister Saeed Namaki had sounded a note of caution on Tuesday as he announced the special reopening for three out of the next five nights.

And on Wednesday he admitted it had been a "difficult and risky decision... criticized by some of my colleagues."

"Everywhere people observed the instructions, except in one county where, contrary to our protocols, tea was offered to the participants," he said.

The Qadr ceremony lasts three nights because the exact time of the revelation of the words of God is unknown.

Those at the first gathering overnight at Tehran's Al-Hussein mosque appeared to be exalted at the chance to finally pray after being shut out for more than two months.

"We have brought masks and gloves and everything. I think that if we follow the security and health protocols, then nothing will happen to us and we will be able to continue with this ceremony," said Masoumeh, a housewife.

For Amir Hosein, a private sector worker, it was a chance not to be missed.

"These nights are special for people and I think the government wasn't able to cancel these ceremonies because we go out and pray together: that is the

whole joy of this ceremony.”



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Iran](#)

[Ramadan](#)

[Mosques](#)

[Laylat Al-Qadr](#)

[Coronavirus](#)

Pompeo: Iran trying to 'foment terror' during pandemic  
Virus-hit Iran to reopen mosques for holy nights

---

## [Lebanon to reinstate total lockdown amid spike in infections](#)

Author:

By SARAH EL DEEB | AP

ID:

1589374386434170200

Wed, 2020-05-13 11:34



BEIRUT: Lebanese rushed to food stores to stock up on vegetables and basic items, hours before the government was to reinstate a four-day nationwide lockdown on Wednesday, following a spike in reported coronavirus cases. The government called on the public to stay home, starting Wednesday evening and until dawn on Monday, reversing measures earlier this month that phased out restrictions imposed since mid-March.

The new shutdown is a rare reversal and comes as many countries, seeking to balance economic and health care needs, have started easing restrictions despite grave concerns of a setback.

Restaurants will close down after they partially opened 10 days ago, and food deliveries will be halted altogether. The country's top Sunni Muslim cleric announced that communal Friday prayers in mosques will also be halted, only a week after they were allowed to resume at limited capacity.

The public health crisis comes at a particularly turbulent period for Lebanon. The country is facing an unprecedented economic and financial crisis, putting pressure on a population that is seeing its savings erode. The currency, pegged at a fixed rate to the dollar since 1997, has lost 60% of its value in a few weeks.

Unemployment had been rising even before the coronavirus restrictions as economic growth and investment dropped. Officials say 45% of the population now lives in poverty. The government has asked the International Monetary Fund for financial assistance, and talks over the rescue plan are due to begin with the IMF later Wednesday.

Lebanon began a phased-out plan to relax a national lockdown late last month that allowed small businesses to reopen, and shortened a nighttime curfew. But after a few days of single-digit cases detected, there was a spike in reported infections this week, including among Lebanese returning home during repatriation programs who did not observe quarantine measures.

Lebanon, a country of just over 5 million, has so far been able to contain the virus, recording only 870 infections, including 117 repatriated Lebanese, and 26 deaths after imposing early lockdown measures and strictly implementing restriction on movement.

But over the last few days, government and health officials criticized carelessness and lax implementation of social distancing and other restrictions among the public, warning that the relaxation of restrictions would be reconsidered.

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia said Wednesday it will go into a full lockdown during the days of celebration that follow the Muslim holy fasting month of Ramadan. The Interior Ministry said the lockdown would be in effect from May 23 through May 27 – days mark the Eid Al-Fitr holiday that comes at the end of Ramadan. That holiday typically sees families invite loved ones over for meals and go out to eat and drink during the day.

And the United Arab Emirates, a federation of seven sheikhdoms, said it will offer free coronavirus testing for all citizens, beginning next week.

Foreigners in the country with coronavirus symptoms, pregnant women, those over 50 and those in contact with those who fell ill with COVID-19 also will be among those able to be tested for free.

Private beaches at hotels also are beginning to reopen in Dubai, even as the number of confirmed cases and deaths continue to rise in the country.

In Tehran, mosques temporarily reopened Tuesday night after about two months closure, for a special night of prayers in Ramadan.

A mosque at Tehran university campus in central Tehran hosted worshippers for the “Qadr,” or “Night of Destiny,” a special night of prayers in the Muslim holy month.

Officials in Iran had closed down all mosques and holy sites across the country in mid-March, at the height of the coronavirus outbreak, to lower the risk of the contagion. The virus has killed more than 6,700 people and infected more than 110,000 people in Iran so far.

“Obviously, everyone is feeling great tonight. It has been a tough time especially for mosque-goers and those who love praying,” said Reza Abbasi, a worshipper who was praying along with his family on the campus of Tehran university.

Upon entering the campus, a group of medical students disinfected hands and shoes of worshippers and gave away face masks. Worshippers also had their body temperatures taken by infrared thermometers. Spots were marked on the mosque floor for worshippers to sit down while practicing proper physical distancing.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Coronavirus](#)

[Lebanon](#)

[lockdown](#)

AUB's saga of survival in the limelight as Lebanon battles financial, coronavirus crises  
Lebanon to shut down again for 4 days