

# Israel government swearing-in delayed a day by Pompeo visit

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JERUSALEM: The swearing-in of Israel's new unity government has been postponed by one day to Thursday due to the upcoming visit of US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, officials said.

A parliament spokesman said Monday the joint administration of incumbent premier Benjamin Netanyahu and his former rival Benny Gantz would be inaugurated on Thursday instead of Wednesday.

A spokesman for Netanyahu's right-wing Likud party told AFP the delay was "because of the visit" of the US top diplomat on Wednesday.

Pompeo's trip comes as US President Donald Trump's administration gives its blessing to Netanyahu's plans to annex much of the occupied West Bank, despite warnings from the Palestinians that the move will kill the prospects of a long-term peace agreement.

Israel's new government is the result of a deal allowing Netanyahu to continue on as prime minister for another 18 months, before the former military chief Gantz takes over the post for the same period.

The proposed government had been challenged in the high court, with opponents arguing Netanyahu is ineligible due to corruption indictments he faces.

But the judges ruled there was no legal reason to prevent him from serving as prime minister.

Netanyahu has secured the participation of Gantz and his center-left allies in his coalition along with the ultra-Orthodox parties.

But the six-member right-wing Yemina has so far refused to join over what it criticizes as the emerging "left-wing" nature of the incoming government.

Pompeo's visit will give Netanyahu another day to attempt to bring Yemina into the coalition.



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## [Libyan intelligence chief Abdul Qader Al-Tuhami dies of heart attack in Tripoli](#)

Sun, 2020-05-10 15:07

LONDON: Libya's intelligence chief Abdul Qader Al-Tuhami died of a heart attack on Saturday in the capital Tripoli, the country's presidential council said.

In a statement, the council offered condolences to his family and colleagues, describing Al-Tuhami as "one of Libya's loyal sons."

The Libyan Government of National Accord's presidential council appointed Al-Tuhami as the deputy head of the Libyan Intelligence Service for Security Affairs on April 24, 2017, and he was the acting head of the service until he died.

Al-Tuhami, who hails from Aqar Al-Shati, south Libya, served as an officer in the security apparatus under toppled leader Muammar Gaddafi.



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## [New Iraq PM releases protesters, promotes respected general](#)

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By SAMYA KULLAB | AP

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Sun, 2020-05-10 11:29

BAGHDAD: Iraq's judiciary ordered courts on Sunday to release anti-government protesters, carrying out one of the first decisions of the recently inaugurated prime minister just as dozens of demonstrators burned tires in renewed protests against the new leadership.

Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhimi also promoted a well-respected Iraqi general, who played a key role in the military campaign against Daesh, to lead counter-terrorism operations. Former leader Adel Abdul-Mahdi had previously mysteriously demoted the general, prompting outrage and sparking popular protests in northern Iraq and Baghdad in October.

The Supreme Judiciary Council said in a statement that it had ordered the

release of protesters detained since those demonstrations erupted, in line with the new prime minister's call.

The council released detainees based on Article 38 of the constitution which guarantees the right to protest, "provided that it is not accompanied by an act contrary to the law," the statement said.

In a press briefing Saturday night following his first Cabinet meeting as premier, Al-Kadhimi said demonstrators should be protected and that all protesters should be released, except those involved in violence.

Protests erupted in Baghdad and across the country's south on Oct. 1, when frustrated Iraqis took to the streets to decry rampant government corruption, unemployment and poor services. Human rights groups say at least 600 people died in the following three months at the hands of Iraqi security forces who used live fire and tear gas to disperse the crowds.

The demonstrations petered out with the rise of the coronavirus pandemic, though dozens of protesters are still camped out in Baghdad's Tahrir square determined not to let the movement die.

Al-Kadhimi also said he was promoting Lt. Gen. Abdul Wahab Al-Saadi to become head of Iraq's elite Counter-Terrorism Service, just as the country was experiencing an uptick in attacks by Daesh in the north. Previously he was a force commander in the the service before Abdul-Mahdi demoted him in September to a post in the Defense Ministry. The Iraqi public considered his sudden demotion a sign of corrupt government practices and took to the streets in outrage.

Al-Saadi, 56, was one of the leading commanders in the fight against Daesh and the battle to retake Mosul, taking the lead in many operations.

In a recent briefing with reporters, American Lt. Gen. Pat White, head of the Combined Joint Task Force responsible for fighting Daesh, said the group was failing "miserably" in a renewed campaign to launch more attacks.

"IS leadership has stated what their intent is, and they do this every year. They put out what is generally described as a military campaign," he said.

"To date, they have failed miserably at achieving those goals."

Still, plumes of acrid smoke choked the air Sunday as protesters, unpersuaded by Al-Kadhimi's decisions, returned to the streets and burned tires on a key bridge leading to the heavily fortified Green Zone, the seat of Iraq's government.

Protesters said they rejected Al-Kadhimi and any candidate chosen by the political establishment and gathered by the dozens near Jumhuriya bridge, closed off since late last year in a standoff with riot police.



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Iraqi PM Al-Kadhimi calls on govt to meet peoples' demands Saudi crown prince calls new Iraqi prime minister

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## [Needy Tunisians get food aid via text messages](#)

Author:

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Sat, 2020-05-09 17:57

TUNIS: A Tunisian NGO has set up a food bank that dispenses aid by text message to some 300 needy families rendered more vulnerable because of the coronavirus pandemic.

The initiative, which had been long in the making, was finally launched at the end of April to coincide with the start of the holy Muslim fasting month of Ramadan.

It targets families who have lost jobs because of the lockdown imposed by Tunisia to contain the spread of the virus, like that of Messaouda Raouafi, a cleaning woman forced to stay indoors.

"Because of Ramadan and the lockdown I can no longer go out to work," said the 49-year-old.

"I cannot clean homes and earn money to feed my seven children."

Her family was among the 300 chosen by the women's affairs ministry and signalled to the NGO known as the "Banque Alimentaire Durable" or Sustainable Food Bank.

Under the initiative, Raouafi receives a code by text message allowing her to spend 40 to 60 Tunisian dinars (around \$21-32) weekly at specially designated grocery stores.

With that money, Raouafi has been able to buy basic goods such as oil, milk, coffee and flour.

Farah, who runs a grocery store in the working-class district of Kram, is among those who signed up to take part in the project.

"The money is sent to us ahead of time – that way the clients can buy what they want with the funds allocated to them," she said.

Farah said this works much better than allowing customers to buy on credit, a system that takes its toll on her own finances.

"In our area there are many poor families and unemployed people," she said, explaining why she decided to embrace the initiative.

A member of the NGO, Aisha Zakraoui, said she hopes the initiative will grow so as to reach more needy families across Tunisia.

The NGO also aims to help families become more self-sufficient through training in skills such as growing their own vegetables or baking bread to sell.

"Our objective is to provide food aid to needy people and in exchange they agree to take part in initiatives aimed at integrating them socially and professionally," Zakraoui said.

Even before the virus outbreak, Tunisia has been struggling with economic and social hardship that has worsened since the country went into lockdown in March to battle the pandemic.

The government estimated that two million of Tunisia's 11.5 million population were in need of financial assistance during that time.

In March and April, the government made emergency handouts of 200 dinars to vulnerable families.

Tunisia, which has officially declared 1,000 cases of the novel coronavirus including 45 deaths, began easing its lockdown on May 4.

In the early days of the containment measures, several hundred Tunisians had demonstrated in working class districts of the capital demanding government support and protesting the lockdown.



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Tunisian actress Henda Sabri to star, create new Netflix drama-comedy Tunisia to partially reopen economy from next week

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## [Coronavirus crisis changing public attitudes in the Middle East, polls suggest](#)

Sat, 2020-05-09 19:24

DUBAI: Public opinion surveys conducted in Saudi Arabia and the UAE are revealing a mix of sharp changes in attitudes and an uptick in optimism that the coronavirus crisis will be resolved in the next three months.

Nearly two months ago, as coronavirus was declared a global pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO), the online research firm YouGov began tracking attitudes and behaviors surrounding the coronavirus disease

(COVID-19), using their global research panel of more than 8 million respondents.

When YouGov published its first findings on March 18, 64 percent of Saudi residents said they were scared of catching the virus; the corresponding figure for the UAE was 61 percent.

On May 6, YouGov released the eighth wave of their tracker data, which suggests that the threat perception has only increased: 75 percent of Saudi respondents reported being fearful of contracting the infection while 73 percent of UAE residents felt the same way.



Just 7 percent described themselves as “Not at all scared that I will contract COVID-19,” while 12 out of the 2,002 people surveyed reported having already contracted the virus.

Globally, over 4 million people have been infected by COVID-19 and more than 276,000 of them have died.

In Saudi Arabia, the number of confirmed cases now exceeds 35,000 while the UAE has reported 16,793 confirmed cases.



A Saudi man, wearing a protective mask as a precaution against COVID-19 coronavirus disease, walks with his wife along Tahlia street in the centre of the capital Riyadh. (AFP/File Photo)

With widespread and persistent fear of the illness continuing to dominate



daily life, it is unsurprising that 46 percent of Saudi and UAE residents strongly feel that the pandemic will permanently change the way we live and interact with each other.

Just 8 percent of respondents do not agree with the statement “The coronavirus pandemic will permanently change the way we live and interact with each other.”

Both the UAE and Saudi Arabia have managed to keep COVID-19 fatality cases to less than 1 percent of the total number of infections – among the lowest ratios in the world, going by available data.

## **FASTFACTS**

## **NUMBERS**

62% of KSA and UAE residents have increased socializing online.

66% of residents are spending more time social media browsing.

According to self-reported figures, just 0.66 percent of those contracting the virus in Saudi Arabia die from the disease where as In the UAE, the figure is 0.93 percent.

These figures are lower than the WHO’s latest estimated mortality rate of 3.4 percent (by comparison, seasonal flu globally kills far fewer than 1 percent of those infected).

The low mortality rates of Saudi Arabia and the UAE can perhaps be explained by their high testing rates, young populations and effective social distancing measures.



Volunteers distribute Iftar meals to migrant workers keeping distance from each other during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan within the initiative of Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al-Maktoum, the ruler of Dubai, to distribute 10 million meals. (AFP/File Photo)

YouGov data suggests that the practice of social distancing has been widely adopted in both countries.

Indeed, 98 percent of Saudi and UAE respondents said they have changed their daily behaviors and are now taking precautionary measures.

These include avoiding crowded places (78 percent), wearing a face mask (71 percent), improved personal hygiene (74 percent) and working from home (47 percent).



In the UAE, where wearing a face mask is now mandatory in public, 80 percent of respondents said they are complying with this measure.

The corresponding figure for Saudi Arabia is lower, at 63 percent.

By contrast, the percentage of people who said they are working from home in Saudi Arabia is higher (54 percent) than in the UAE (44 percent).

And as the Gulf countries enter the second week of the holy month of Ramadan, the YouGov data indicates that the coronavirus is not only changing residents' daily habits, but also having an impact on some of their oldest traditions.



A security guard checks temperature of man arriving at a shopping mall, as a screening precaution against the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic, in the Saudi capital Riyadh on May 4, 2020, as malls reopen after authorities began a partial lifting of the coronavirus lockdown. (AFP)

With more residents observing Ramadan at home, 50 percent of UAE and Saudi respondents reported spending more money on essential items such as groceries, 45 percent of residents said they are watching more TV than in previous years, and 49 percent said they are watching more online content.

With 68 percent reporting fewer in-person gatherings, many residents are looking online to maintain connections with friends and families.

The YouGov data suggests 62 percent of Saudi and UAE residents have increased the amount of time they are spending socializing online through messaging or video calling and 66 percent are spending more time social media browsing.

Data released by YouGov in early April suggests that an increasing number of people (51 percent) in Saudi Arabia and the UAE are concerned about losing their jobs.

Notably, UAE residents are much more worried about this outcome compared with those of Saudi Arabia (64 percent vs 38 percent).



People wearing masks for protection against the coronavirus, walk in the Mall of Dubai on April 28, 2020, after the shopping centre was reopened as part of moves in the Gulf emirate to ease lockdown restrictions. (AFP/File Photo)

Mindful of a challenging time ahead, 58 percent of Saudi respondents said they have decreased their spending on non-essential items since last year.

The proportion of UAE residents who expressed the same sentiment was higher, 61 percent.

At the same time, the streak of generosity remains strong as ever, with 39 percent of respondents saying that they have increased their charitable donations since last year.



In the two countries, 35 percent said their charitable giving is the same as last year, with just 20 percent saying this amount has decreased since last year.

The virus impact is being felt positively in other areas as well.

Going by the YouGov tracker data, a majority of residents in Saudi Arabia and the UAE feel that the coronavirus crisis will have a positive impact on life as they know it.

Only 10 per cent (most likely 18-24-year-olds) said they feel that nothing positive will emerge from the experience.



A Saudi man, wearing a protective mask as a precaution against COVID-19 coronavirus disease, walks along Tahlia street in the centre of the capital Riyadh on March 15, 2020. (AFP/File Photo)

The vast majority of respondents (61 percent) agree that coronavirus pandemic will have a positive impact on the environment; 55 percent feel that it will lead to greater appreciation of family and social ties; and 34 percent believe it has the potential to drive transformation in technology.

The data suggests, however, that the two countries' residents are divided on when and how the coronavirus crises is likely to be resolved.

In terms of numbers, 37 percent were optimistic that a global resolution would happen by the end of June; 53 percent said by the end of August; and 66 percent by the end of the year.

Whilst the majority are optimistic, 13 percent expect the crisis to continue into 2021 and a further 21 percent do not know or cannot say when the crises might end.

Many in the Kingdom and the UAE think waiting for a vaccine to materialize before resumption of normal activities might not be possible.

Just 9 percent said that they would need a vaccine to be ready before they feel comfortable visiting shopping malls.

One in five people feel that an effective coronavirus treatment is the key to

getting life back to normal.

Overall, a mere 20 percent of Saudi and UAE respondents said they would feel comfortable visiting restaurants, cinemas, shopping malls and hotels even if a medicine to treat coronavirus was made widely available.



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