

Israel rivals resume unity govt talks with two-day deadline

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Jerusalem: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his main rival Benny Gantz held new talks on forming an emergency unity government Tuesday, with a deadline less than two days away.

A deal would give Israel its first fully functioning government since December 2018, stability that could prove crucial as it confronts the coronavirus pandemic.

The two men had been negotiating prior to a deadline that expired at midnight Monday night, but jointly asked President Reuven Rivlin for a two-day extension to finalize details.

They met in Jerusalem on Tuesday morning, after releasing a joint statement late Monday hailing "significant progress."

There have been repeated claims of progress in coalition talks since an inconclusive March 2 election, Israel's third poll in less than a year, but a deal has remained elusive.

Tuesday's talks ended without a breakthrough but the two men committed to meet again after the Jewish passover holiday ends at sunset on Wednesday, with a view to reaching a deal by a midnight that evening.

As Israel's unprecedented political deadlock has persisted, there have been widespread calls for an interim national unity government to combat the novel coronavirus, which has infected more than 11,500 Israelis and killed 117. Gantz, a centrist ex-military chief, has squared off against the veteran right-wing prime minister in three elections since April last year. Neither has earned enough support from voters and potential coalition partners to form a government.

In the March 2 election, Netanyahu's Likud emerged as the largest party but Gantz's Blue and White won the backing of most of the country's 120 MPs. Gantz was therefore given a 28-day mandate to try and form a government. But deep divisions within the anti-Netanyahu camp meant his chances of forging a stable coalition were always remote.

In a surprise move last month, Gantz was elected speaker of parliament and effectively stopped seeking to form a coalition with himself as prime minister.

He called for an alliance led by Netanyahu for a defined period, allowing Israeli politics a rare moment of unity as it stares down an unprecedented health crisis.

In the process, Gantz broke his political party in two, with more than half his allies in parliament leaving to join the opposition rather than ally with the deeply divisive Netanyahu.

Since then talks have stalled over a number of key issues.

Forming a government involves distributing ministerial portfolios and agreeing a political roadmap for the country.

A major source of tension has been the choice of a justice minister who will be tasked with overseeing the corruption case against Netanyahu.

Disputes have also emerged over the nomination of a defense minister, including speculation that Gantz, a former army chief, may want the job.

Policy toward the Palestinians, notably Netanyahu's stated desire to unilaterally annex the strategically important Jordan Valley in the occupied West Bank, has also reportedly caused friction.

"Netanyahu, this is our moment of truth. It's either a national emergency government or a senseless fourth round election, costly and unnecessary in this hour of crisis," Gantz said on Monday night.

"History will not be forgiving toward leadership that shirks its responsibility at this critical point of time."

In office since 2009, Netanyahu is Israel's longest-serving premier and the first to be indicted while in office.

The premier denies charges of bribery, fraud and breach of trust, filed against him in January.

Netanyahu critics have charged that he will stop at nothing to make the indictments disappear, including pushing for a fourth election in the hope of gaining a parliamentary majority to push through a law granting him immunity from prosecution.



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Israel tightens quarantine in Jerusalem to halt virus spread
Israeli president rejects request for coalition extension

[Bahrain sets up coronavirus ICU in military hospital car park](#)

Author:

Reuters

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Tue, 2020-04-14 13:02

DUBAI: Bahrain has converted the multi-story car park of a military hospital into a 130-bed intensive care unit for patients with COVID-19, the respiratory disease caused by the new coronavirus, and plans to set up four more field ICUs.

The island state reported 161 new infections, most of them among foreign workers, the health ministry said on Tuesday, taking its total of infections to 1,522 with seven deaths.

The number of cases recorded in the six Gulf Arab states has surpassed 16,500, with more than 100 deaths, as most countries stepped up testing after witnessing a rise in cases among low income foreign workers.

At the makeshift ICU at the Bahrain Defense Force Hospital in Riffa, south of the capital Manama, each bed is equipped with a ventilator. Authorities said they plan to raise capacity to 500 beds once other field units are set up across the country.

Dubai, an emirate in the United Arab Emirates, has also said it was planning to set up field hospitals to cope with any surge in cases.

Bahrain is one of the few Gulf Arab states that has not imposed a curfew or locked down areas to curb the spread of the virus and its national carrier still operates some flights. Like its neighbors, it has closed schools and most public venues.









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Gulf Air to repatriate stranded Bahrainis from Iran

Abu Dhabi families to get aid through new government fund

Author:

Tue, 2020-04-14 14:39

DUBAI: Families in Abu Dhabi struggling because of the coronavirus pandemic can expect support from the emirate's Authority of Social Contribution (Ma'an) to help them defray costs on education, food supplies, health support and basic needs.

"We will now use these contributions to provide support to those most in need and, while the situation is dynamic, we will endeavor to prioritize the most deserving families and individuals so they are receiving timely assistance to help them through these difficult times," Salama Al-Ameemi, director general of Ma'an, said.

Families needing immediate relief can contact the special helpline 800-3088 or the microsite [togetherwearegood.ae](#), which was created particularly for the endeavor.

"The sheer number of financial and in-kind contributions that have been pledged show our residents' desire help each other through the biggest health and economic challenge of a generation," Al-Ameemi said.



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Abu Dhabi extends closure of entertainment sites
Abu Dhabi government urges public to report suspected coronavirus cases

[How are Egyptians dealing with the coronavirus?](#)

Author:

Tue, 2020-04-14 00:34

CAIRO: Egyptians are taking different approaches towards dealing with the coronavirus disease.

There are those who follow the government's instructions and that of the Ministry of Health to a tee, so much so that they seem obsessed.

There is also an indifferent lot, probably the majority of the country's 100 million people, who deal with the spread of the virus nonchalantly, due to either lack of awareness of the severity of the pandemic or the nature of the Egyptian character, which believes in fate.

A third category is obligated to deal with the virus due to the nature of

their profession or their economic circumstances.

"I haven't seen the streets for the past month except to get the most basic necessities," Mohamed Abdel-Karim, a journalist, told Arab News.

"Be very careful in dealing with others in the supermarket and other stores. I fear for my children and my wife, and we take great care regarding safety and hygiene at home," Abdel-Karim said.

"I think that the UAE has suspended selling newspapers because it may contribute to spreading the virus. In Egypt this did not happen," Abdel-Karim said. He called on newspapers in Egypt to suspend printing, saying that only websites should publish news. "When the crisis is over, print newspapers can return," Abdel-Karim said.

"I am anxious, and what I see in the world obliges me to be extra careful in fear for my life and my children," Abdel-Karim said. "I go out every day to the market to buy the needs of the home," Zeinab Wafik, 48, a housewife, said. "Everyone in my neighborhood goes out like I do. I see some people wearing face masks but the majority do not.

"How long one lives is in the hands of God. If God wants someone to get hurt, He will not wait for the virus, and if He wants to take a soul, then He will," Wafik said.

"I always wash and clean whatever I buy from the market. There is absolutely nothing new in what I do. I don't know about ethanol. I use chlorine, similar to many of my neighbors," a mother of three said.

Despite the strict government measures and the constant media appeals, Egyptian streets are crowded most of the day, basically until the curfew starts at 8 p.m. The nighttime curfew was recently extended for a second time.

SPEEDREAD

Despite the strict government measures and the constant media appeals, Egyptian streets are crowded most of the day, basically until the curfew starts at 8 p.m. The nighttime curfew was recently extended for a second time.

With the increasing number of people infected with the coronavirus in Egypt, the government is applying strict measures to prevent crowding but there are millions of Egyptians, given the nature of their work, who are forced to work in cramped conditions.

"I have to walk the streets every day in search of my livelihood," deliveryman Ahmed Al-Najdi said.

Al-Najdi said that if he stays at home, he and his children will not find someone to feed them.

He called on the government to support the poor by exempting them from bills and debts, and to provide more financial support to help them overcome the crisis.

"We disinfect the restaurant, we wear hand and face guards, and carry ethyl alcohol bottles with us, and yet some customers are scared of dealing with us," Al-Najdi said.

Dr. Suzy Ibrahim, head of the infection control team at Al-Zawya General

Hospital in Cairo, suggested moderation when dealing with the spread of the virus, stressing that people should not be overly afraid of the pandemic. "The fear must be controlled because it greatly affects immunity," Ibrahim said.

"The most important thing is to prepare the immune system to deal with this virus in case of an infection, God forbid, and that is by playing sports, getting a good amount of sleep, eating healthily and avoiding fear because it weakens the immune system."

By Saturday, the Health Ministry had the total number of coronavirus cases in Egypt at 1,939, with 146 deaths recorded.

Meanwhile, Egypt's chief prosecutor late Sunday ordered 23 people to remain in detention for 15 days pending an investigation into blocking a road to a cemetery in a Nile Delta village to prevent the burial of a physician who died from the coronavirus. Public Prosecutor Hamada El-Sawy described preventing her burial as a "terrorist act."



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Gaza opens Egypt crossing to returnees despite virus
Son of Egyptian coronavirus victim doctor recalls terror of mob attack

Lebanese politicians split over economic rescue efforts

Tue, 2020-04-14 00:20

BEIRUT: Lebanese politicians are divided on how to best rescue the country's economy, which has been in freefall for months.

Parties disagree about the implementation of reforms requested by foreign countries in order to provide support.

The coalition government was formed in January after almost 100 days of widespread public protests about the state of the economy, corruption, high unemployment and a lack of basic services. The majority of ministers belong to Hezbollah and its allies.

Opposition parties, especially the Future Movement headed by former Prime Minister Saad Hariri, object to the way the government is dealing with the country's financial freefall.

Hezbollah and the Amal Movement oppose an IMF bailout, which could be a way to ease the crisis.

One suggestion, from the Lazar Financial Advisory Company, proposed a plan on ways to develop the Lebanese economy. It advised the government to confiscate bank deposits in return for shares to depositors, in addition to other measures related to the banking sector.

FASTFACT

Lebanese people stood on their balconies on Sunday and sang the national anthem ahead of the 45th anniversary of the civil war.

But the grand mufti of the Lebanese Republic, Sheikh Abdul Latif Derian, the highest religious authority of the Sunni community in Lebanon, rejected the idea. "We must take lessons from the experiences that the country has gone through," he said. "What we are witnessing now in Lebanon is an economic war to illegally take away people's bank deposits, while on the other hand there is public money that was looted and we know nothing about it ... citizens should not be the victims."

Dr. Tariq Majzoub, the minister of education and higher education, said that Lebanon was facing a great ordeal as a result of the influence of "particular interests over the supreme public interest."

The squabbling came as Lebanese people emerged from their homes on Sunday evening to stand on their balconies and sing the national anthem ahead of the 45th anniversary of the civil war. The civil war started on April 13, 1975, and lasted for 15 years.

NGO Farah Al-Ataa urged people to go to their balconies because April 13 was behind them and they should unite for a better Lebanon.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Lazar Financial Advisory Company proposes a plan on ways to develop the Lebanese economy. It advises the government to confiscate bank deposits in return for shares to depositors, in addition to other measures related to the banking sector. But the grand mufti rejects the idea.
- Lebanese education minister says the country is facing a great ordeal as a result of the influence of 'particular interests over the supreme public interest.'

But political activist Dr. Ziad Abdel Samad said Lebanese society did not share the same perception about the war's outcome. "Within the war generation there are those who got the lesson and want to build a civil state, and those who insist on committing the same mistakes," he told Arab News. The political elite was not ready to relinquish its interests and gains, he added, and its practices were no better than those who were in power during the war. "It will not relinquish these gains and its performance proves that. It obstructed judicial reforms because it wants to keep its control over the judiciary, for it does not want to tackle the issue of looted money, nor to set a regulating authority for electricity."

Within the war generation, there are those who want to build a civil state, and those who insist on committing the same mistakes.

Dr. Ziad Abdel Samad, Lebanese political activist

Protests have stopped because of a coronavirus lockdown, with people only allowed out for essential purposes. There are also severe restrictions on movement.

Samad said more pressure was needed and that people would have to wait for a new wave of revolution. "This time it will be different and I hope that it does not turn violent. The people who protested in the streets are waiting for the actions and reforms of the new government, but it seems that those in power did not learn the lesson."



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Lebanon scrambles to fight pandemic, as cases reach 619
Lebanon puts Bcharri town under lockdown as stranded nationals return