

Lebanon scrambles to fight pandemic, as cases reach 619

Author:

Sun, 2020-04-12 00:23

BEIRUT: Lebanon on Saturday reported 10 new cases of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), pushing the total number to 619.

The number of people in quarantine in hospitals is 1,282, 387, most of whom are from Mount Lebanon and 311 from the north.

During a tour to parts of Khroub district, where COVID-19 cases have been recorded, Health Minister Hamad Hassan described the results of the general mobilization as "good." "We must continue to restrict movement and ban gatherings. We have been seeing stability in the cases' figures," he said. The authorities have decided to impose a curfew on Sunday and during Easter to restrict people's movement.

Bsharri district has entered a mass quarantine, starting on Saturday, in light of the growing number of cases. Eddie Lazem, the director of Bsharri's government hospital, announced that the number of tests carried out in a few hours had reached 70.

The number of COVID-19 cases in northern Lebanon is 125, and there are 329 cases in Mount Lebanon. Matn district in Mount Lebanon continues to have the highest number of cases in Lebanon, with 124 infected people as of Saturday. Dr. Abdul Rahman Al-Bizri, an infectious disease specialist and member of the emergency committee on coronavirus, told Arab News: "Tracking the sources of the novel coronavirus infection continues and might reduce the number of cases of unknown sources to three cases only."

Meanwhile, video footage of a Lebanese doctor went viral on social media on Saturday. The date of the recording is unknown but it shows an exhausted doctor wearing a face mask in a room inside a medical center. An ambulance siren can be heard in the background. He speaks on the phone and says: "Can you recognize me? I cannot take my mask off. I'm very exhausted. I have been working for 30 hours, standing on my feet. Things are out of control here. One batch of patients after the other. We received yesterday a batch from Sayyida Zainab (in Damascus), all of whom are infected (with coronavirus). Everyone you ask would tell you they have been with an Iranian. Iranians have become producers of coronavirus. It is a catastrophe. I do not know why Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah is not interfering. It is a catastrophe. No one can carry on like this."

Hashem Safieddine, head of Hezbollah's executive council, spoke two weeks ago about Hezbollah's plan to fight COVID-19. He talked about "the assigning of 24,500 doctors and paramedics to implement the plan, in addition to another team of 4,500 people from the party, municipalities (controlled by Hezbollah), and a medical team from Amal Movement."

FASTFACTS

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cases in Mount Lebanon.

- **Four Middle East Airlines aircraft arrived in Beirut on Saturday, carrying Lebanese expatriates from Kuwait, Dubai, Rome and Lunda.**
- **A curfew will be imposed on Sunday and during Easter.**

“This plan is in line with the government’s agencies and measures,” he said, highlighting that “it aims to stop the spread of coronavirus.”

Safieddine announced that St. George Hospital was prepared to receive coronavirus patients. He said: “We have rented and equipped private hospitals as a precautionary measure, and they will be used when needed. We have also established diagnostic centers to evaluate and examine the cases and determine the required procedures.”

“We have prepared 32 backup medical centers to fight coronavirus in all Lebanese regions, trained 15,000 people to fight coronavirus, conducted training workshops for some paramedics in the Palestinian camps, and equipped 25 ambulances with respirators and devices,” he said.

The administration of Al-Rassoul Al-Aazam Hospital, which is affiliated with Hezbollah, was quick to respond to the video footage. They said: “This (footage) was not recorded inside the hospital, and the doctor does not work here. The hospital does not receive any coronavirus patients because St. George Hospital has been prepared for this purpose.”

Meanwhile, four Middle East Airlines (MEA) aircraft arrived in Beirut on Saturday, carrying Lebanese expatriates from Kuwait, Dubai, Rome and Lunda. The airplane returning from Kuwait carried 123 passengers, most of whom were families, some of whom had particular health conditions, in addition to Lebanese citizens whose residence permits in Kuwait had expired.

Lebanon’s Ambassador to the UK Rami Mortada announced that the embassy would implement measures to prevent anyone who did not have a negative PCR result from boarding the plane from London to Beirut, to ensure the safety of the journey and the Lebanese community.

MP Fadi Alame, a member of the Development and Liberation parliamentary bloc, headed by Nabih Berri, said that the measures taken were “on the right track.”

Alame, who is the owner of Sahel General Hospital in the southern suburb of Beirut, said: “The capacity of government hospitals is still within an acceptable range. There are quarantine centers in the districts that have contributed to relieving these hospitals. The challenge is to continue to secure the supplies for the medical and nursing staff, who are in direct contact with coronavirus (patients). These supplies are declining around the world. There are attempts to manufacture them locally, and we are seeking to do so.”



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Lebanon's creditors divided over draft financial restructuring plan
Lebanon makes largest ever cannabis drug bust

[Netanyahu rival Gantz seeks more time to form coalition government](#)

Author:

Reuters

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Sat, 2020-04-11 20:02

JERUSALEM: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's election rival Benny Gantz asked for additional time on Saturday to try to form a government with the long-time leader, to end more than a year of political deadlock. A 28-day mandate to put together a governing coalition, following an inconclusive March 2 election, expires on April 14. Gantz, an ex-armed forces chief who heads the centrist Blue and White party, asked President Reuven Rivlin for a 14-day extension to the mandate. Gantz had run on a promise not to serve in a government with Netanyahu, citing the prime minister's indictment on corruption charges. Netanyahu

denies those charges.

But in a reversal that dismayed many of his supporters, Gantz said the coronavirus crisis had made a national emergency government with Netanyahu's right-wing Likud party an imperative.

"The political, health and social crisis have brought me to the decision that even at a heavy political and personal price, I will do all I can to establish a government with the Likud," Gantz wrote in a letter to the president, published by his party.

Rivlin gave no immediate word on whether he would grant more time to Gantz, who in his letter said the two political rivals appeared close to a final agreement.

According to Israeli media reports, the parties have already agreed on a power-sharing deal in which Netanyahu would serve as prime minister for 18 months, after which Gantz would take over. Israel has held three inconclusive elections since last April.

With more than 10,000 reported cases of COVID-19 and 101 deaths, Israel's tight restrictions on movement aimed at curbing the coronavirus spread have forced many businesses to shut down and have sent unemployment rates soaring to about 25%.



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Israel's Gantz nominates himself to be parliament speaker Netanyahu challenger
Gantz chosen to form new Israeli government

[Sudan's health minister says country needs \\$120 mln to fight coronavirus](#)

Author:

Reuters

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Sat, 2020-04-11 19:11

KHARTOUM: Sudan urgently needs \$120 million to fight the new coronavirus, the country's health minister told Reuters on Saturday, amid a shortage of the equipment to fight the epidemic which has ravaged richer countries. Although Sudan has so far reported relatively few cases, the global outbreak has arrived at a time when it faces an economic crisis.

"We are preparing a strategy to face coronavirus that extends until the end of June, but to execute it we urgently need \$120 million to provide protective equipment for health care workers and to prepare health care facilities and advanced lab testing equipment," said health minister Akram Ali Altom.

Altom serves in the civilian-led government which has run Sudan following a power-sharing agreement with the military signed in August. Exactly one year ago, months of protests brought down three-decade ruler Omar Al-Bashir. Until now, Sudan has reported 19 confirmed coronavirus cases, including two deaths, but Altom said that "if it spreads, Sudan's situation health-wise and economically means it cannot handle a large outbreak."

Current capacity for beds with ventilators was just in the "hundreds," he said. The coronavirus outbreak is the latest epidemic to face Sudan, which has had to deal with outbreaks of cholera with a depleted infrastructure. Sudan began testing for those who arrived at its international airport in February. In March it closed all airports and border crossings to non-commercial traffic.

The government also imposed a twelve-hour curfew, shut down schools and universities, and banned events and gatherings. Some of its measures have been met with a lack of cooperation.

The minister said that his ministry has recommended a complete lockdown of the capital Khartoum for three weeks, as well as an increase in the number of quarantine centers and testing capacity.

A major barrier to any lockdown is likely to be the large number of Sudanese people who work in the informal economy.

The minister said that he expected that a new health emergency law would be introduced on Sunday.



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Sudan still in crisis a year after Bashir's ouster
Sudan raises bread price, year after Bashir's fall

[Pandemic raises questions over Egypt's health care system](#)

Author:

Sat, 2020-04-11 00:18

CAIRO: Egyptian society is facing controversy over its handling of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak.

As of Thursday, Egypt had recorded 1,699 cases of the disease, with 118 deaths.

Many believe that hospitals have been contributing to the spread of the virus amid daily announcements of doctors and nurses resulting positive.

In March, several hospitals were shut down including the University of Alexandria Hospital, the Al-Shorouk Hospital in Cairo and the Al-Salam Hospital in Mohandessin when medical staff were infected by COVID-19, according to sources in the Ministry of Health.

The National Cancer Institute in downtown Cairo was also closed after discovering that 17 doctors and nurses were infected by the virus.

Authorities ordered an investigation amid accusations that information regarding the spread of the virus in the institute was being concealed.

The institute is the largest of its kind in the Middle East. It treats 300,000 patients annually and employs 600 nurses and 750 doctors.

"COVID-19 infections started a week before the discovery from a nurse who showed symptoms of the virus," said the institute's director, Hatem Abu Al-Qasim.

"The nurse was later quarantined after her test resulted positive."

Al-Qasim told an Egyptian satellite TV channel that the nurse, considered case zero, worked in another hospital assumed to be the source of the virus. Comments of this nature have reinforced Egyptians' fear of healthcare in the country.

Hajar Ashmawi, a pharmacist at the National Cancer Institute, accused the director of rejecting calls to close down the institute until it was disinfected.

"Those who fear getting infected by the virus should submit their resignation and stop coming to the institute," Ashmawi quoted Al-Qasim as saying.

NUMBER

300,000 – Patients are treated annually at the National Cancer Institute in Cairo that employs 600 nurses and 750 doctors.

She said Al-Qasim had threatened pharmaceutical staff who refused to work by taking unspecified measures against them and saying that he was able replace them with new staff members.

MP Hatem Bashat disclosed the discovery of 22 cases of infected doctors and nurses at Al-Zaytoun Specialized Hospital in Amiriya.

Talking to Arab News, Bashat confirmed that the infection was transmitted to the hospital after a 72-year-old woman was admitted on March 23 for kidney dialysis.

According to Bashat, she manifested symptoms of the virus during her stay in the intensive care unit. She later tested positive for COVID-19. She died in the hospital on April 4.

"I understand the concerns and fears toward doctors at this stage," Dr. Ahmed Youssef, a chest specialist at a quarantine hospital in Cairo, said.

"I too am afraid of becoming infected, but we must all join forces to fight this virus," Youssef said.

Many people who, until recently, praised medical staff for their efforts in fighting the infection have now become pessimistic with regard to how well the healthcare system is coping.

This bleak outlook has prompted some people and institutions to launch awareness campaigns about the role of doctors in fighting the virus. On Wednesday, Egypt extended the nationwide night-time curfew by two weeks in an attempt to curb the spread of the virus. The country also extended other preventative measures, including the closure of schools and universities and the suspension of international flights.



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Egypt's urban consumer inflation falls to 5.1% in March
Keepers, animals keep each other company at Cairo's shuttered zoo

[Oxfam: Coronavirus could push half-a-billion people into poverty](#)

Sat, 2020-04-11 00:13

LONDON: The economic fallout from the coronavirus pandemic could have devastating effects in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) unless action is taken, a major charity has said in a new report.

Oxfam, a confederation of 19 independent charitable organizations and one of the world's biggest non-profit groups, said the damage caused by COVID-19

could push half-a-billion people into poverty worldwide.

An Oxfam worker focusing on the MENA region told Arab News: "An extra 44 million people could be pushed into poverty in the region."

The charity has called on world leaders to form an economic relief package ahead of meetings of the International Monetary Fund and finance ministers of the G20, which is currently under Saudi Arabia's presidency, to prevent the catastrophe.

Oxfam's report, titled "Dignity Not Destitution," said 6-8 percent of the world's population could be forced into poverty as governments shut down their economies to slow the spread of the virus.

King's College London and the Australian National University conducted Oxfam's research, which found that a 20 percent drop in income from a recession due to COVID-19 would leave 548 million people living on less than \$5.50 per day, one of the World Bank's definitions of poverty.

"The economic crisis that is rapidly unfolding is deeper than the 2008 global financial crisis," Oxfam said. "The estimates show that, regardless of the scenario, global poverty could increase for the first time since 1990."

The report added that some countries could face their poverty rates set back to levels not seen for three decades.

Nabil Abdo, a senior policy advisor at Oxfam, told Arab News that the MENA region faces specific challenges with the economic downturn due to "prevailing socioeconomic and political structures that were in place long before the outbreak."

He added: "It's the most unequal region in the world. The top 10 percent hold 64 percent of the share of income, while the bottom 50 percent hold just 10 percent of the share of income."

He said the region is also home to the largest refugee populations in the world. "While home to just 5 percent of the world's population, roughly 34 percent of the world's refugees and displaced people are found here: Over 5 million Syrian refugees and 13 million people displaced within their countries," Abdo added.

Oxfam's report comes after Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan said: "If we shut down the cities ... we will save (people) from corona at one end, but they will die from hunger."

The charity's report called for a variety of policies to alleviate suffering caused by economic shutdowns related to COVID-19, including increasing aid from richer countries while also suspending debts in developing countries for a year.

SPEEDREAD

The charity has called on world leaders to form an economic relief package ahead of meetings of the International Monetary Fund and finance ministers of the G20 to prevent the catastrophe.

Many wealthy nations such as France, the UK and the US have been able to launch high-cost stimulus packages to keep businesses afloat and keep roofs over peoples' heads.

But Oxfam fears that the weaker financial systems of developing countries

will struggle to meet the demands posed by the shutdowns.

In Lebanon, which was enduring enormous political crises and a national revolution before the COVID-19 outbreak, ministers have struggled to produce a plan to handle euro bond payments due since March as the country's debt skyrockets.

Lebanon cannot afford a lockdown. This dire situation is replicated in other territories, with Palestine under significant pressure to prevent economic collapse.

"Even during 'normal' times, which include three active wars, public hospitals (in the region) don't have necessary supplies and equipment. They're unable to cater to the needs of most people, even before taking into account these challenges," said Abdo.

"At the same time, the informal economy is expanding and 63 percent of all employment is informal. This means many people won't get the health care they need in terms of testing or treatment during this new pandemic."

The World Bank has stepped in across the MENA region, supporting the implementation of Djibouti's Preparedness Plan with \$5 million in International Development Association (IDA) credit.

It has also awarded the internationally recognized government in Yemen a \$26.9 million IDA grant to be implemented in partnership with the World Health Organization.

But Oxfam has said this is not enough, and has called for a vast rise in aid spending from wealthy nations.

"Of the \$2.2 trillion stimulus package announced by the US government in late March, only 0.05 percent, or \$1.1bn, will help address the crisis in poor countries," the report said.

This is "shocking and shortsighted," it added. "Unless rich countries are ready to quarantine themselves for ever, this crisis will not end without international solidarity."



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World's 26 richest own same as poorest half of humanity: Oxfam
Oxfam told to do more to tackle sexual misconduct and abuse