

# Abu Dhabi crown prince, Syrian president discuss coronavirus

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CAIRO: Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan and Syrian president Bashar Assad discussed the coronavirus pandemic over the phone on Friday, a statement from United Arab Emirates' news agency (WAM) reported. The statement added that both leaders discussed the precautionary measures taken in their countries to face this pandemic, adding that Sheikh Mohammed stressed to Assad that Syria would not be alone in these critical conditions. Sheikh Mohammed said Syria and the UAE need to place humanitarian solidarity over political issues during this common challenge "we are all facing."



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Italy coronavirus deaths rise by 919, highest daily tally since start of outbreak  
King Salman holds calls with Chinese, Italian leaders about efforts to tackle coronavirus

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## Turkish economy 'will be hardest hit by virus' among G20, says Moody's

Fri, 2020-03-27 22:57

ANKARA: Turkey's economic outlook has been revised downwards by the international rating agency Moody's amid warnings that the country faces a major shock from the coronavirus pandemic.

"We expect Turkey's economy to be hit hardest" among G20 economies, Moody's said.

The agency said that the Turkish tourism sector, which accounts for about 13 percent of the country's \$753 billion economy, will be badly hit by domestic travel restrictions and falling demand because of the outbreak.

In its "Global Macro Outlook" report for 2020-21, Moody's said: "We expect Turkey's (B1 negative) economy to be hit hardest, with a cumulative contraction in second- and third-quarter gross domestic product (GDP) of about 7 percent. The shock will likely take a large toll on Turkey's tourism-related sectors through the summer."

In its previous report for 2019, Moody's kept Turkey's credit rating at B1 with a negative outlook.

Turkey's tourist industry employs about 1 million people, and experts warn that the coronavirus pandemic will weigh heavily on the sector with restrictions on commercial flights and holiday cancellations.

"The sector will shrink by up to 80 percent because of the coronavirus outbreak," Bulut Bagci, president of the World Tourism Forum Institute, told Arab News. "I don't expect any foreign tourists from the European market to come to Turkey this year."

While Moody's painted a gloomy picture concerning Turkey's economic outlook, Treasury and Finance Minister Berat Albayrak said that he remains optimistic the country will meet its 5 percent growth target.

Turkey last week announced a \$15 billion fiscal stimulus plan focused entirely on the business sector in the wake of the coronavirus outbreak.

Moody's revised its 2020 growth forecasts downward for all G20 economies, except Saudi Arabia (A1 stable), which is expected to maintain its GDP growth this year.

With Turkey's indebted economy vulnerable to external shocks, tourism is one of the main sources of money flow.

Meanwhile, the Turkish business group TUSIAD has penned an open letter to

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, urging him to take tougher steps against the coronavirus outbreak.

TUSIAD claims that the stimulus plan announced by Erdogan is insufficient to halt the economic fallout from the virus.

Businesses say the country's lockdown will curb the spread of the virus, but fears remain about the impact on the economy, which has yet to recover from the 2018 currency crisis.

Turkey's economic confidence index fell by 5.9 percent month-on-month in March to 91.8 points, the state-run Turkish Statistical Institute said on Friday.

The consultancy firm Capital Economics also cut its 2020 growth forecast for Turkey this week, saying its economy would contract by 2 percent and warning that Turkey will face an economic slowdown like other European emerging market countries.

Wolfgang Piccoli, co-president of Teneo Intelligence in London, said that Turkey needed an "economic pact" that caters for workers and households in order to minimize economic disruption because of coronavirus.

"The package announced by Erdogan looks like a package for a standard economic crisis, but the current situation is unprecedented and requires unprecedented responses, similar to measures being announced in the UK and Germany," he told Arab News.

According to Piccoli, Turkish authorities seem to think the crisis is a temporary issue.

"They underestimate the damage that will result, and they are not giving the business community guidance on the duration of the restrictive measures or the length of the economic slowdown," he said.

Turkey is facing the crisis with limited fiscal and monetary capabilities to help its economy recover, Piccoli said.



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Turkey could impose stay-at-home order if coronavirus outbreak worsens  
Turkey limits export of respiratory support gear as coronavirus cases surge

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## [Fighting escalates in Libya despite coronavirus threat](#)

Author:

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Fri, 2020-03-27 12:24

BENHAZI: Battles raged on several fronts in Libya on Friday after a night of heavy bombardment in Tripoli, combatants and residents said, despite the threat continued fighting poses to efforts to stop the coronavirus pandemic. Serious warfare resumed this week after a comparative lull in recent weeks, defying international calls for calm to allow Libya's fragmented and overstretched health system to prepare for any spread of the coronavirus. Libya confirmed its first case of the highly infectious respiratory disease

on Monday – a Libyan man recently returned from overseas. After years of instability and violence, much of the North African country's medical infrastructure is in ruins, hospitals and clinics have been targeted, and many doctors and nurses have not been paid since December.

The Libyan National Army (LNA) of eastern-based commander Khalifa Haftar has been assaulting Tripoli for nearly a year, hoping to capture the capital in the northwest where the internationally recognized Government of National Accord (GNA) is based.

The United Arab Emirates, Egypt and Russia have been supporting the LNA militarily, while Turkey and allied Syrian fighters are backing the GNA. Diplomacy has foundered, with the latest round of talks in Geneva making no progress toward a political solution last month, and the UN envoy resigning for health reasons.

Before he quit, he warned that the arms embargo on Libya was being routinely violated, with foreign weaponry and fighters arriving in the country to join both sides.

On Thursday, the European Union said it would launch a new naval and air mission to stop further breaches of the embargo.

Huge explosions rattled Tripoli from midnight onwards, with artillery fire echoing around the city on Friday morning, according to residents.

Fierce clashes were reported in the west of Libya, between Tripoli and the Tunisian border, in the capital's southern suburbs, and in the frontline region between Sirte and Misrata to the east of Tripoli.

An LNA military source said fighting had resumed at dawn on Friday west of Sirte, a port city in central Libya captured by the LNA in January. The media office for pro-GNA forces did not comment.

The United Nations "is alarmed that hostilities have continued in and around Tripoli despite the announced humanitarian pause," a UN statement said on Friday.





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War-torn Libya reports first coronavirus case  
Five Libyan civilians killed in Tripoli shelling, says unity government

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## [Israel's Gantz nominates himself to be parliament speaker](#)

Author:

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1585235782756473900

Thu, 2020-03-26 14:51

JERUSALEM: Israel's ex-military chief Benny Gantz, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's main rival, submitted himself on Thursday as a candidate for speaker of parliament, a move that could lead to an emergency alliance between the two men.

The Knesset, Israel's parliament, declared on its website that Gantz was the only candidate to succeed Netanyahu ally Yuli Edelstein, who resigned as

speaker under pressure on Wednesday.

A formal vote electing Gantz is expected later on Thursday.

A staunch ally of Netanyahu's right-wing Likud party, the ultra-Orthodox United Torah Judaism party, has committed to backing Gantz as speaker.

A source from Gantz's centrist Blue and White party, who requested anonymity, told AFP that the party leader's bid to become speaker was part of an effort to form an emergency government with Likud.

Israel has been mired in a crippling political crisis that has seen the country hold three inconclusive elections in less than a year.

Gantz was tasked with forming a government following the last vote on March 2, but there was no guarantee he would succeed, given the deep divisions within the anti-Netanyahu camp.

Amid the coronavirus pandemic that has seen more than 2,600 Israelis infected, there have been widespread calls for an alliance between Netanyahu and Gantz.



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Netanyahu challenger Gantz chosen to form new Israeli government



# [US imposes fresh sanctions on Iranian individuals, companies amid coronavirus](#)

Thu, 2020-03-26 17:56

WASHINGTON: The United States on Thursday blacklisted 20 Iran- and Iraq-based companies, officials and individuals, accusing them of supporting terrorist groups and ramping up pressure on Tehran even as the Islamic Republic battles the coronavirus outbreak.

The US Treasury Department said in a statement that the individuals and entities supported Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) and its elite foreign paramilitary and espionage arm, the Quds Force, as well as transferred lethal aid to Iran-backed militias in Iraq, including Kataib Hezbollah and Asaib Ahl Al-Haq.

Treasury said the people and entities were involved in smuggling weapons to Iraq and Yemen and selling US-blacklisted Iranian oil to the Syrian government, among other activities.

The sanctions freeze any US-held assets of those designated and generally bar Americans from doing business with them.

"Iran employs a web of front companies to fund terrorist groups across the region, siphoning resources away from the Iranian people and prioritizing terrorist proxies over the basic needs of its people," Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said in the statement.



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Iran government grossly under-reporting coronavirus cases, deaths: Radio Farda  
Ex-FBI agent missing for 13 years died in Iran custody, family says