

Tunisia minister says hospital infection killed 12 newborns

Author:

AFP

ID:

1552318114378512200

Mon, 2019-03-11 14:45

TUNIS: A dozen newborn babies whose deaths at a Tunisian state hospital sparked public outrage are believed to have been killed by an infection acquired in the clinic, the acting health minister said Monday.

Sonia Ben Cheikh told a news conference that a 12th infant had died at the Rabta state hospital in Tunis on Sunday.

According to the preliminary findings of the ongoing investigation, a nosocomial (hospital-acquired) infection caused the deaths, she said.

"The whole health sector is in a state of emergency," she told a news conference.

Reforms were needed to restore confidence, added Ben Cheikh, whose predecessor resigned Saturday in the face of a growing outcry over the deaths.

Prime Minister Youssef Chahed swiftly vowed that "those responsible for any negligence" will face prosecution.

Officials launched medical and judicial investigations after the premature babies began dying on Thursday at the Rabta state hospital in Tunis.

The public health system, once a source of pride in Tunisia, has been hit by management and financial problems that lowered standards and caused drug shortages.



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[Sudan's parliament shortens state of emergency to six months – witness](#)

Author:

Reuters

ID:

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Mon, 2019-03-11 14:23

KHARTOUM: Sudan's parliament voted on Monday to shorten a state of emergency declared by President Omar Al-Bashir last month from one year to six months, a Reuters witness said.

Parliament may renew the state of emergency.

Bashir declared the nationwide state of emergency, the first since 1999, on Feb. 22 to try to quell persistent protests that have posed the most serious challenge to his three-decade rule.



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[Palestinians in Gaza receive new Qatari aid](#)

Author:

AFP

ID:

1552307816777619400

Mon, 2019-03-11 12:31

GAZA: Tens of thousands of Palestinians in Gaza began receiving \$100 payouts from Qatar on Monday, the latest tranche of funds under an informal deal between the territory's Islamist rulers Hamas and Israel.

A flare-up of violence along the border fence between Israel and the Gaza Strip this month has threatened another escalation between the two sides, but the Qatari cash could help ease tensions.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Sunday warned Hamas he would not hesitate to launch a "large-scale operation" in Gaza.

Many analysts however believe he wants to avoid a conflict with unpredictable results while campaigning for re-election in Israel's April 9 polls.

The Qatari Gaza Reconstruction Committee, in a statement, said "disbursement began Monday of the fourth payment of cash assistance to poor families in the Gaza Strip."

In total 55,000 families in the strip would receive payments of \$100 each. Thousands of Palestinians could be seen queueing early at post offices across Gaza.

"I am here to receive \$100, but \$100 does not solve the crisis," said Bassam Khalil Jaber, 40. "We need permanent solutions, and this grant is a temporary solution."

In November, the Gulf state, which is a longtime Hamas ally, committed to around \$15 million a month in aid over six months.

In exchange, Hamas committed to relative calm along the Israeli border, which has been rocked by often violent Hamas-backed protests since March 2018.

But the deal became a major bone of political contention in Israel – whose territory was used for delivery of the cash – and also in Gaza.

Part of the funds were originally used to pay salaries of Hamas employees, but this was stopped after political criticism in Israel.

Instead much of the money will be funneled into cash for work programs with the United Nations.

The impoverished strip, which has a population of around two million, has been under a crippling Israeli blockade for more than a decade.

Israel says it is necessary to isolate Hamas but critics say it amounts to collective punishment of residents of the densely-populated coastal territory.

The two sides have fought three wars since 2008.



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Israel strikes Hamas targets in Gaza over rocket: army
Palestinian wounded in Israel border clashes dies: Gaza ministry

[Palestinian Authority cuts back wages in tax, prisoner dispute with Israel](#)

Author:

Reuters

ID:

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Sun, 2019-03-10 14:39

RAMALLAH: The Palestinian Authority is scaling back wages paid to its employees in response to a cash crunch deepened by a dispute with Israel over

payments to families of militants in Israeli jails, it said on Sunday. In February, Israel announced it was deducting five percent of the revenues it transfers monthly to the Palestinian Authority (PA) from tax collected on imports that reach the occupied West Bank and Hamas-run Gaza Strip via Israeli ports.

Israel said the sum represented the amount the PA pays to families of Palestinians jailed in Israel or killed while carrying out attacks or other security offenses.

Palestinians see their slain and jailed as heroes of a national struggle but Israeli and US officials say the stipends fan Palestinian violence and are scaled so relatives of prisoners serving longer sentences receive larger payments.

After Israel's deduction announcement, Palestinian President Mahoud Abbas said the PA would not accept any of the tax revenues, which totalled 700 million shekels (\$193 million) in January and account for about half of the authority's budget.

As a result, Palestinian Finance Minister Shukri Bishara said the PA would pay full salaries – which had been due on March 1 – only to its lowest-earning employees, or the 40 percent of its workforce that takes home 2,000 shekels (\$550) or less a month.

Civil servants earning more than that, including cabinet ministers, will have their wages cut by half, he told a news conference.

However, Bishara said prisoners' families will continue to be paid their full allocations.

"No force on earth can alter that," he told a news conference.

Bishara said the PA will have to take bank loans of between \$50 million to \$60 million for the coming five to six months to weather the crisis.

An Israeli official, commenting on condition of anonymity, said the PA had a cash-flow problem as a result of US cuts in aid to the Palestinians and the tax revenues dispute but that the situation would not spiral out of control.

"The nightmare scenario of the PA collapsing, or of PA security coordination with Israel ceasing, won't happen," the official said.

"No one, including us and the United States, would allow that. If need be, we'll look for ways of preventing this."

The US has cut all aid to the Palestinians, including \$360 million it used to give to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian refugees. The cuts were widely seen as a bid by Washington to press the Palestinians to re-enter peace talks with Israel that collapsed in 2014.

(\$1 = 3.6288 shekels)



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[dispute](#)

[Morocco repatriates eight alleged militants from Syria](#)

Author:

AFP

ID:

1552239515411104000

Sun, 2019-03-10 16:47

RABAT: Morocco said Sunday it had repatriated eight of its nationals from Syria, who will be investigated for “suspected involvement in acts linked to terrorism.”

“The competent Moroccan authorities proceeded on March 10 to repatriate a group of eight Moroccan citizens who were in conflict zones in Syria,” the interior ministry said in a statement.

The Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces launched a final offensive against

the Daesh group's last redoubt in the east of the war-torn country a month ago.

Backed by an international military coalition, the SDF has arrested thousands of Daesh extremists who have fled the shrinking stronghold.

Many of those flooding out of Daesh territory are foreign fighters and their families – including some Moroccan women, according to AFP journalists on the ground.

The SDF wants foreign fighters and their families to be repatriated by their countries of origin.

Sunday's operation had a "humanitarian character" and allowed the Moroccans to return to their home country safely, the ministry added.

In 2015, the number of Moroccans in extremist ranks in Iraq and Syria was estimated at more than 1,600.

Those who return are arrested and receive sentences of 10 to 15 years in prison.

Syria's multi-fronted war has killed more than 360,000 and displaced millions since it erupted in the wake of the government's bloody repression of street protests in 2011.



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