

Jordan faces virus-era elections in crisis mode

Author:

Mon, 2020-11-09 01:22

AMMAN: Voters in coronavirus-battered Jordan go to the polls on Tuesday in an election focused on the Arab country's economic crisis which has been heightened by the devastating pandemic.

Resource-poor and dependent on foreign aid, in particular from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), public debt in the small country of 10 million people – which is also hosting more than 1 million Syrian refugees – exceeds 100 percent of its GDP.

And unemployment was running at 23 percent in the first quarter of 2020.

"This vote is different, with people in greater distress because of the epidemic," said Oraib Rintawi of the Al-Quds Center for Political Studies. Coronavirus has claimed more than 1,180 lives from over 104,800 cases in Jordan, according to Health Ministry data.

However, Rintawi doubted there would be a high turnout because "most Jordanians think parliament plays a marginal role in the political system," as the formation of governments in the Hashemite kingdom is not party-based or dependent on the outcome of the vote.

There have been some calls on social media to postpone the elections, but the government has said the vote will go ahead.

Parliament was already dissolved in late September ahead of the vote, and under the law new elections must be held within four months.

Jordanian Minister of Political and Parliamentary Affairs Musa Al-Maaytah insisted on Friday it would be better to hold the vote now than in a few months' time.

"Economic, political and social life must continue," he added.

King Abdullah last month named veteran diplomat Bisher Al-Khasawneh as prime minister ahead of the vote, after parliament reached the end of its term.

"People will vote along tribal lines, for a candidate from their clan or for representatives who will provide them with services," not for political reasons, Rintawi told AFP.

Some 4.5 million people eligible to vote will cast their ballots for candidates to fill 130 seats in parliament, 15 of them reserved for women, from a field of 1,674 candidates running on 294 lists.

Security forces are also expected to fan out across the country's 1,880 polling stations.

NUMBER

4.5m people eligible to vote will cast their ballots for candidates to fill 130 seats in parliament, 15 of them reserved for women.

But virus curbs banning gatherings of more than 20 people have put paid to

traditional shows of patronage such as candidates' tents offering Arabic sweets and coffee.

The Islamic Action Front, political branch of the Muslim Brotherhood and the main opposition force in Jordan, has vowed "to work to defend people's rights, dignity and livelihood, and to confront corruption."

Also in the running for four-year terms in parliament are representatives of the country's main tribal clans, independents, leftists and a large number of wealthy businessmen.

Jordan has taken an economic hammering from COVID-19 with some \$3 billion lost in vital tourism revenues in the first nine months of 2020.

Campaigning for the legislative elections was also forced to switch to videos posted on social media platforms, especially Facebook.

Saleh Al-Armouti, a former deputy, put the focus squarely on economic hardships in a campaign video.

"Our poor country can no longer feed itself because of the hegemony" of the IMF, he said.

Official statistics show the poverty rate has increased to 15.7 percent, a rate which the World Bank forecasts will rise sharply because of the novel coronavirus.



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Jordan to reimpose night curfew after parliamentary elections
Israeli army destroys Palestinian village in Jordan Valley

UAE records 1,111 new COVID-19 cases

Author:

Mon, 2020-11-09 00:25

DUBAI: The UAE on Sunday recorded 1,111 new COVID-19 cases and no deaths. The Ministry of Health and Prevention said the total number of cases since the pandemic began has reached 142,143, with the death toll stood at 514. The ministry added that 683 people recovered over the previous 24 hours, bringing the total number of recoveries to 138,291. Meanwhile, a joint study between Dubai Economy and Visa expected the UAE'S e-commerce sector to be "on the verge of distinct levels of continuous growth during the coming period, coinciding with the increasing demand among consumers for electronic payment options, and the awareness of merchants of the need to enhance their electronic presence during the coronavirus pandemic."

The study said that continuous growth in the UAE'S e-commerce sector, supported by a boom in digital payments, showed that 49 percent of the survey's respondents said they had been doing more online shopping since the pandemic started.

It also said that the UAE would see more growth in the e-commerce sector and an increase in digital payments as changes in government policies, entrepreneurship and consumer behavior were expected to continue.

"The multi-party approach and strategic partnerships between the public and private sectors represent a fundamental pillar in supporting companies and accelerating the growth of e-commerce in the UAE," Dubai's economic authority said on Twitter.

Elsewhere in the region, Kuwait recorded 538 new COVID-19 cases, bringing the total to 131,743. The death toll reached 811 after three new fatalities were registered.

تعلن [#وزارة_الصحة](#) عن تأكيد إصابة 538 حالة جديدة، وتسجيل 687 حالة شفاء، و 3 حالات وفاة جديدة بـ [#فيروس_كورونا_المستجد](#) COVID-19 ، ليصبح إجمالي عدد الحالات 131,743 حالة pic.twitter.com/7JDnmGMAFP

November 8, 2020 (@KUWAIT_MOH) وزارة الصحة - الكويت -

Oman's Health Ministry said its total number of cases had reached 118,140 and the death toll was 1,301.

[#Statement](#) No. 221

November 8, 2020 pic.twitter.com/skA0r77bcw

November 8, 2020 (@OmaniMOH) وزارة الصحة - عُمان -

In Bahrain, 192 new infected cases were confirmed, and the death toll stands

at 329 after no deaths were reported in the previous 24 hours.

Out of 9832 COVID-19 tests carried out on 8 November 2020, 192 new cases have been detected among 86 expatriate workers, 103 new cases are contacts of active cases, and 3 are travel related. There were 237 recoveries from [#COVID19](#), increasing total recoveries to 81000 pic.twitter.com/6mjUq0kGqk

– مملكة البحرين | وزارة الصحة (@MOH_Bahrain) [November 8, 2020](#)



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Saudi Arabia's virus recovery rate inches higher as numbers settle 1,161 new COVID-19 cases in UAE as death toll reaches 505

[UAE's Hope Probe expected to complete Mars orbit in February](#)

Sun, 2020-11-08 23:56

DUBAI: The UAE's Hope Probe is expected to reach its planned orbit around Mars in around three months from now, Vice President and Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid announced on Sunday.

The Hope Probe has 189 million kilometers remaining and is planned to complete its orbit around Mars on Feb. 9, 2021 at 7.42 p.m. local time. Hope has so far covered 60 percent of its journey, equivalent to 290 million kilometers over 111 days since it was launched on July 20.

"We will celebrate the arrival of the first Arab mission to Mars," Sheikh Mohammed tweeted.

The Hope probe has completed its last trajectory correction maneuver after travelling 290 million km into space in 111 days. We officially announce Hope probe will arrive to Mars on Feb. 9, 2021 at 7:42pm UAE timing. We will celebrate the arrival of the first Arab mission to Mars

– HH Sheikh Mohammed (@HHShkMohd) [November 8, 2020](#)

Dubai's Crown Prince Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed said: "The Hope Probe mission is the culmination of a 50-year journey, which began in 1971. It also marks the beginning of another 50 years that will bring about major achievements based in the fields of science, knowledge and innovation."

"Our nation does not have the word impossible in its dictionary," he added. With Hope's arrival, the UAE will become the fifth nation to reach the Red planet – following the United States, Soviet Union, India, and the European Space Agency.

The Probe is a step by the UAE to become a knowledge-exporting country.

The Hope Probe has successfully completed its third and final trajectory correction maneuver today – another major milestone in its journey to [#Mars](#). The maneuver is to ensure that the probe continues directly targeting Mars' capture orbit. [#HopeMarsMission](#)

[#HopeProbe](#) pic.twitter.com/dwaMI7bGkJ

– Hope Mars Mission (@HopeMarsMission) [November 8, 2020](#)



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Mars Hope probe completes first major milestone on journey to red planet

[Egyptian COVID-19 infections to rise in winter if measures not adhered to, minister warns](#)

Sun, 2020-11-08 22:39

CAIRO: Egypt is expected to witness an increase in coronavirus infections and

deaths during December and January if citizens do not observe preventive measures, the country's health minister said on Sunday.

Health Minister Hala Zayed said that a study model, carried out in coordination with the World Health Organization, predicted a spike in infections and deaths in the coming two months.

"The infection rate is expected to at least double and the death toll is expected to triple in December and January if citizens ignore wearing face masks," the minister said in statements carried by Ahram Online.

She also recommended wearing protective face masks in enclosed or poorly ventilated places.

A total of 108,962 infections and 6,355 deaths have been reported in Egypt since the outbreak began in February.



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France FM in Egypt affirms 'deep respect for Islam'

Biden's presidency won't go smoothly on Turkey, say experts

Author:

Sun, 2020-11-08 21:19

ANKARA: Joe Biden's presidency is likely to lead to new developments in US relations with Turkey as his approach differs from that of his predecessor, who was providing shelter to Turkey's assertiveness in the region.

Experts said that bilateral relations could even get worse and much more vulnerable, given the two nations' divergent priorities.

Ozgur Unluhisarcikli, Ankara office director at the German Marshall Fund of the United States, said there were several factors that could complicate matters during Biden's presidency.

He explained that the personal relationship between former President Donald Trump and President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, which formed a buffer between an increasingly upset Washington and a defiant Ankara, could not be created between Biden and Erdogan because the two leaders had demonstrated a dislike of each other and because Biden, unlike Trump, was expected to give priority to institutionalizing relationships rather than personalizing them.

The new US administration was likely to bring forward the democracy and human rights deficit in Turkey, while also trying to contain its moves in Libya, Syria and naval ambitions in the eastern Mediterranean.

According to Unluhisarcikli, the people Biden brought on board would also play key roles in the relationship and that some of these individuals were likely to be from former President Barack Obama's administration whom Erdogan had scapegoated.

"Biden, unlike Trump, is not likely to overlook democratic backsliding in Turkey and Erdogan will not take his criticism lightly," he told Arab News.

Turkey's testing of the Russian-made S-400 air defense system and a possible green light on sanctions against it will also be on the agenda. The US Congress remains stubborn and has bipartisan support to take measures against Ankara as Washington is concerned that the Russian missiles could compromise NATO defenses.

So far, Washington's only "stick" to Turkey's purchase of the S-400 has been kicking it out of the F-35 fighter jet program.

Although the impact of punitive measures from the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) would be catastrophic for Ankara, especially in economic terms, the country currently gives no signal of walking back from its controversial rapprochement with Russia.

Turkey's main opposition leader, Kemal Kilicdaroglu, was the first Turkish

politician to congratulate Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris for their electoral victory.

"I look forward to strengthening Turkish-American relations and our strategic alliance," he tweeted late Saturday.

In an interview with The New York Times last December, Biden described the Turkish president as an autocrat and criticized his policy toward the Kurds. He also suggested emboldening the Turkish opposition leadership, comments that provoked much reaction.

As Biden's priorities will focus on containing Russia and Iran and bolstering the commitment to multilateral alliances, especially NATO, Ankara's chances to mend ties with Washington will depend on how its policies align with this pattern.

Soner Cagaptay, a Turkish academic from the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, said Biden was going to prioritize developing relations with key allies.

"Democracy, human rights, rule of law and freedom of expression are also important for Biden, who would expect Erdogan to take positive steps on these issues," he told Arab News.

Cagaptay said as Biden would prioritise reviving NATO's vision and forming a unified bloc against Russia, that he would see Turkey as an important ally.

"Of course the US can implement its policies without Turkey but, with Turkey, those policies are easier, less cumbersome, less costly, and more effective. The worst-case scenario is preventing Turkey from being a spoiler of US policy against Russia, and the best-case scenario is Turkey becoming an ally and joining US efforts to unify NATO."

Cagaptay added that, with Trump out, it was now more likely that the US would implement CAATSA sanctions. But he expected Biden to prefer symbolic sanctions over those that destroyed Turkish economy.

Back in Oct. 2014 a diplomatic rift emerged after Biden officially apologized to Erdogan for implying that Turkey had helped the rise of Daesh by letting foreign fighters cross the border into Syria.

Unluhisarcikli said there was an element of self-prophecy when it came to relations between Biden and Erdogan, that their ties would start on a downward spiral because both leaders assumed they would be negative.

"However, things could also move in the opposite direction if Erdogan provides Biden with a perspective toward the convergence of policies. What Turkey decides to do with its S-400s will be taken as an early sign of Turkey's approach," he added.



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Turkey gives muted first response to Joe Biden win Biden, pledging unity, begins transition as Trump refuses to concede