[Fearful Lebanese stay home as virus cases hit new high](#)

Author:
Fri, 2021-01-15 02:14

BEIRUT: Lebanon's security forces have praised public compliance with lockdown measures as the country struggles to reduce a dramatic rise in the number of coronavirus cases.

Internal Security Forces spokesman Col. Joseph Mousallem told Arab News that the rate of commitment to the curfew was 90 percent across the country, including poorer districts, where residents previously have been skeptical about measures to stop the spread of the virus.

However, with 10 days until the nationwide lockdown ends, a record 5,000 confirmed coronavirus cases were reported on Wednesday. A 19-year-old man was among the 35 deaths.

Director of the Hariri Governmental University Hospital, Dr. Firas Al-Abyad, renewed his warning that "the situation is very serious, and we need to work together to end these difficult circumstances."

Lebanon's healthcare sector is exhausted after 10 months of dealing with the pandemic, he said.

"We need to find an exit from this situation."

FASTFACT

Observers say that a media campaign urging people to stay home by highlighting the suffering of patients and those unable to find a hospital bed appears to have convinced most Lebanese to adhere to the latest restrictions.

Most hospitals in Lebanon have canceled all but emergency operations amid warnings of bed shortages and medicines running low.

Beirut and other major cities have been largely silent in recent days, with traffic limited to grocery deliveries and vehicles exempted from the curfew.

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However, Dr. George Jovelekian, head of the intensive care department at St. George Hospital University Medical Center, said that the country still faces

"two catastrophic weeks in terms of coronavirus cases."

He called on people to follow the restrictions so that medical staff can continue to perform their duties.

Mousallem said that security checkpoints have been set up in all regions in coordination with the Lebanese army. Security personnel also have been placed at army checkpoints to ensure people comply with the measures.

Meanwhile, a directive that people make requests to leave their house via a dedicated website has led to widespread confusion amid complaints that the platform had crashed.

"The permits are electronic, so mistakes are inevitable," Mousallem said.

"However, anyone who wants to leave their house after having their requests approved must present the required documents to the security checkpoints."

Those violating the curfew could face detention for three months, in addition to fines of up to 600,000 Lebanese pounds ($500).

Hamad Hassan, the caretaker health minister, is being treated in hospital after it was confirmed he had coronavirus. Three people in his office also have been infected.

Security forces in Halba in northern Lebanon said that a large number of Syrian refugees had failed to comply with the safety measures by going to a bank to withdraw money from an ATM.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) later called on refugees to comply with the full lockdown and other preventive measures.

The agency said that there had been 3,991 coronavirus cases among Palestinian refugees since February 2020, with 145 deaths.

It warned that Lebanon's hospitals are reaching maximum capacity and accommodating patients in intensive care units is becoming more difficult.

The civil emergency authority in Lebanon, Lebanon SOS, complained that relief organizations have been included in the curfew, threatening the distribution of food to needy families.

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[Jordan's King Abdullah, Crown Prince Hussein get COVID-19 jab](#)

Author:
Fri, 2021-01-15 01:54

AMMAN: Jordan's King Abdullah II received a COVID-19 vaccine jab on Thursday, a day after the country launched its inoculation campaign.
Abdullah was vaccinated alongside his son and Crown Prince Hussein and his uncle Prince Hassan, the royal palace said in Twitter posts accompanied by pictures of them getting a shot in the arm.
Jordan kicked off its COVID-19 vaccinations on Wednesday with injections for health care workers, people with chronic illnesses and those over the age of

60.
Last week the kingdom announced it had approved China's Sinopharm vaccine for emergency use after giving the green light to the US-German Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine.

<blockquote>
اليوم، أثناء تلقي جلالة الملك، وسمو الأمير الحسن، وسمو الأمير الحسين، ولي العهد، لقاح "كورونا" #الأردن

His Majesty and Their Royal Highnesses Prince El Hassan and Crown Prince Al Hussein receive the COVID-19 vaccine today[#Jordan](#) [pic.twitter.com/YQY5KjXhPD](#)

— RHC (@RHCJO) [January 14, 2021](#)
</blockquote>

Jordan's Prime Minister Bisher Al-Khasawneh and several members of the government received the Chinese vaccine during its testing phase, the health ministry said on Sunday.
By Wednesday evening Jordan said it had recorded 310,968 cases of Covid-19 infection and 4,091 deaths.
The health ministry on Thursday said the total number of cases of a more contagious variant first identified in England had risen to 25, with most of them people who arrived in Jordan from abroad.
The government has said it hopes to vaccinate a quarter of the country's 10 million inhabitants, and the jab would be given free of charge to Jordanians and foreign residents.

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Jordan begins COVID-19 vaccination drive as physician, 87, gets first jabJordan PM, ministers have had Sinopharm COVID-19 vaccine: health minister

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[US sanctions controversial deputy of Iraqi paramilitaries](#)

Author:
Thu, 2021-01-14 04:35

BAGHDAD: The United States on Wednesday imposed sanctions on an influential Iraqi militia leader and deputy of a powerful Iran-backed umbrella of mostly

Shiite paramilitary groups, designating him a global terrorist figure.

The move by the US Treasury against Abdulaziz Al-Mohammadawi, known as Abu Fadak, was expected by many Iraqi officials. It was also the second time in a week that a senior Iraqi militia official has been sanctioned.

The chairman of the paramilitary umbrella, the Popular Mobilization Forces, Falih Al-Fayyadh was sanctioned last Friday under the Magnitsky Act and accused of rights abuses against antigovernment protesters. The law allows the US to target any foreigner accused of human rights violations and corruption.

Abu Fadak, a senior figure of the Iran-backed Kataib Hezbollah militia, is also acting deputy chairman of the Popular Mobilization Forces, a role he took on after a US airstrike last January in Baghdad killed the militia's deputy head Abu Mahdi Al-Muhandis, a powerful founding member of Kataib Hezbollah and the lead architect of the umbrella group of paramilitaries. Top Iranian Revolutionary Guard commander, Gen. Qassim Soleimani, was also killed in that airstrike.

Apart from being a member Kataib Hezbollah, which the US has described as an "Iran-backed terrorist organization," the US claims Abu Fadak is working with the Iranian Revolutionary Guard's expeditionary Quds Force to "reshape official Iraqi state security institutions … to instead support Iran's malign activities," according to the US State Department.

The statement said Iran-backed elements, including Kataib Hezbollah, are involved in sectarian violence and are responsible for attacks against Iraqi government facilities and diplomatic missions.

The PMF was formed in 2014 to counter the Daesh group, following a fatwa from Iraq's top Shiite cleric Ali Al-Sistani, and was later brought under the government's fold. Its growing influence in Iraqi affairs has alarmed the US officials who accuse it of orchestrating attacks on the American Embassy in Baghdad.

Abu Fadak was a largely unknown figure until he replaced Al-Muhandis even though some militia groups opposed his selection.

In contrast to Abu Fadak's designation, Iraq's Foreign Ministry promptly denounced last week's measures against Al-Fayyadh, who is a more established political figure and a former Iraqi national security adviser. The ministry said it would follow up with the incoming Biden administration in Washington on the matter.

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[Lebanon begins 11 days of 24-hour curfews to stem COVID-19 surge](#)

Author:
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1610565382862280500
Wed, 2021-01-13 22:16

BEIRUT: Starting Thursday morning, the Lebanese people will be put to the test again, as a new 11-day lockdown is imposed.
All projections predict a spike in the country's coronavirus disease (COVID-19) cases in the upcoming days, while the hundreds of intensive care hospital beds dedicated to COVID-19 patients are full. Doctors have started to check on patients inside ambulances, and ask those who need oxygen to provide it at their own expense, and stay home.
According to the Lebanese Health Ministry's statistics, there were 618 critical cases and 80,386 active cases as of Wednesday morning, while the number of daily cases recorded has not dropped below 4,300 for days. These infections came a week after social interactions during New Year

celebrations.

A state of health emergency, a total lockdown and a curfew have been imposed in the country between Jan. 14-25, a period that can be extended, to face the most dangerous COVID-19 wave Lebanon has witnessed since recording its first case last February.

The Lebanese Armed Forces, along with the state's security apparatus, will ensure the implementation of the curfew across Lebanon, noting that this is the first time the army has been asked to take part in the measures to limit the spread of the virus.

Under the state of emergency, "the security forces and judicial authorities have the right to strictly enforce the laws that punish the hospitals that refuse to treat urgent cases, including coronavirus cases, punish those who do not abide by the prevention measures, and issue tickets for those who violate these measures and contribute to the spread of the virus."

The Supreme Defense Council has prohibited people from going onto the streets, with some exceptions for medical personnel, nursing staff, diplomats, travelers and the employees of a number of institutions that require minimum administration. However, food and grocery stores will only be operating through delivery service.

Lebanon's land and sea borders will be closed from Thursday, while the country's airport will be operating at its lowest operational capacity. Only transit passengers with tickets showing their crossing date will be allowed to cross into Lebanon through the land borders.

Minister of Health Hamad Hassan announced on Wednesday that he is now quarantined pending the necessary tests after three of his office staff tested positive for COVID-19, joining 18,715 others who have been forced to quarantine over the past 2 days.
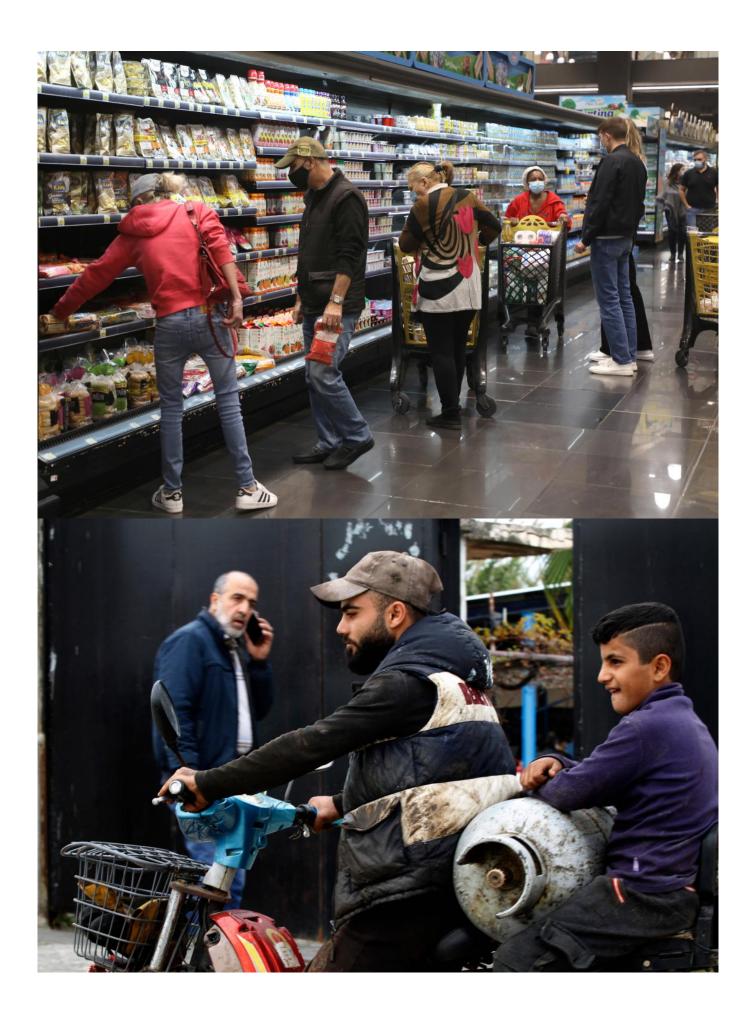
This comes at a time when all eyes are on the government to the implement the measures after being criticized for a general state of confusion in previous weeks.

The country has also failed to form a government capable of leading the efforts to save Lebanon from its various crises beyond the coronavirus.

The Health Ministry's statistics show that 45,445 positive COVID-19 cases were recorded in the first 12 days of January, while 53,559 cases were recorded during the whole month of December.

Firas Al-Abyad, director of the Hariri Governmental University Hospital, said that "a large number of people in Lebanon have caught the coronavirus. This requires … people to be admitted into hospitals, which are at their maximum capacity. What scares us is that we have reached the point that we did not want to reach."

He expected that "the number of people in need (of) intensive care will double next week, which means that we are heading toward a major disaster."

Dr. Abdul Rahman Al-Bizri, head of the Health Ministry's Scientific Committee on Combatting the Coronavirus Pandemic, told Arab News: "I hope that the strict total lockdown will limit the spread of the virus. However, I am afraid of going back to how things were and completely opening up the country without any measures after the lockdown is over."

Al-Bizri is the person charged with communicating with Pfizer, on behalf of the Health Ministry, to procure its coronavirus vaccine.

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Lebanese health minister hospitalized after testing positive for COVID-19

Wed, 2021-01-13 22:34

BEIRUT: Lebanon's caretaker health minister Hamad Hasan was admitted to hospital the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) on Wednesday evening.

The Hezbollah-appointed minister was transferred to the St. George hospital in Beirut's suburb of Al-Hadat for treatment, according to a hospital statement.

Hasan's condition was good, the statement added.

Lebanon has experienced a spike in COVID-19 cases and deaths over the past week, with a record-high of 5,540 new cases recorded on Friday.

The surge has been put down to widespread non-adherence to precautionary measures during holiday celebrations, during which the government eased restrictions.

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