

# Tunisia considers curfew to slow second wave of pandemic

Author:

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TUNIS: Tunisia was expected on Wednesday to announce a curfew in the capital after the governors of four provinces that make up greater Tunis called for action to halt a surge in coronavirus infections.

"The decision has come too late but it will help us break the rise in cases," said Imed Souissi, a fruit seller.

The governors proposed measures that would include a curfew between 8:00 p.m. and 5:00 am and a suspension of Friday prayers in mosques. A government decision was expected later on Wednesday, with the curfew likely to take effect from Thursday.

Tunisia entirely shut down its economy in March and closed its borders, limiting the spread of coronavirus to a few hundred confirmed cases. But it has now racked up more than 20,000 cases over the past month, with only 200 intensive care beds designated for COVID-19 available in the whole country. Elyes Fakhfakh, who stepped down as prime minister last month after denying allegations of a business conflict of interest, has announced he has tested positive, as has the leader of a major party, Abir Moussi.

Many Tunisians say the authorities should have done more to prepare with the time secured by the economic hardship of the lockdown.

"The Tunisian political class lost its opportunity to be ready for a second wave. What did they do to prepare over the past months? Nothing. They were just focused on their usual disputes," said Chaker ben Hussein, a baker in the Iben Khaldoun district of the capital.

Even before the pandemic, Tunisia was grappling to reverse a decade of sluggish growth, high unemployment, declining public services and concerning levels of sovereign debt.

The economy contracted by 21% in the second quarter as unemployment rose by 3 points to 18%, with expectations it will exceed 20% by the end of the year. The government has said the crisis has cost it 6 billion dinars (\$2.2 billion) so far.

A political crisis has rumbled since an election last year, with the fragmented parliament taking months to produce a government in January that lasted just eight months.

The new government, also seen as fragile, has said another lockdown is impossible. The new prime minister, Hichem Mechichi, sacked the culture minister within weeks of taking office for rejecting government coronavirus restrictions for public events.



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## [Tunisia](#)

Tunisia's tourism industry hit hard by coronavirus pandemic Jordan to suspend in-school learning amid rise in coronavirus cases

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## [UAE reports 1,046 coronavirus infections, one death](#)

Wed, 2020-10-07 19:24

DUBAI: The UAE on Wednesday recorded 1,046 new COVID-19 cases and one death. The Ministry of Health and Prevention said the total number of cases since the pandemic began has reached 101,840, while the death toll rose to 436. The UAE, with a population of around 9.9 million people, has seen the number of daily new cases surge over the past two months from 164 on Aug. 3 to a new high of 1,231 cases on Saturday.

However, it has also become the first country, among countries with a population of over one million, where the number of coronavirus tests has exceeded the population, with around 10.4 million tests conducted so far since the pandemic emerged.

The ministry also said 1,154 cases recovered from COVID-19 over the previous 24 hours, bringing the total to 91,710.

Abu Dhabi police said they recorded 1,252 violations against anti-COVID-19 rules that ban or restrict meetings and gatherings.

#أخبارنا | #شرطة\_أبوظبي تُحرر 1252 مخالفة لـ " منع التجمعات والحفلات والتجمع في العزب" بالإمارة  
<https://t.co/GwiKay2cg3>  
<pic.twitter.com/Qf4Gckw18n>

– شرطة أبوظبي (@ADPoliceHQ) [October 7, 2020](#)

The organizers were fined 10,000 dirhams and those who attended were fined 5,000 dirhams, Abu Dhabi Police said.

Dubai Economy issued fines to five businesses and warned seven other shops for not adhering to anti-COVID-19 measures.

Meanwhile, Ras Al-Khaimah's (RAK) Tourism Development Authority claimed it would be the first global destination to provide free coronavirus PCR (Polymerase chain reaction) tests for international visitors.

[#RasAlKhaimah](#) becomes the first destination to provide free Covid-19 PCR tests for international visitors. [@RAKTourism](#)  
Read more: <https://t.co/zMD0ujIQaV>

– Ras Al Khaimah Government Media Office (@RAKmediaoffice) [October](#)

[7, 2020](#)

The testing, which will be subsidized by the authority, will be available until the end of the year.

“As travel corridors begin to open up, we will continue to incorporate and implement global best practices into our efforts to safeguard against the spread of the pandemic,” said Raki Phillips, CEO of the authority.

Elsewhere, Kuwait recorded 475 new COVID-19 cases, bringing the total to 108,743, while the death toll stood at 639 after seven new deaths were registered.

تعلن [#وزارة\\_الصحة](#) عن تأكيد إصابة 475 حالة جديدة، وتسجيل 597 حالة شفاء، و 7 وفيات جديدة بـ [#فيروس\\_كورونا\\_المستجد](#) COVID-19 ، ليصبح إجمالي عدد الحالات 108,743 حالة [pic.twitter.com/0JwA1zd30L](https://pic.twitter.com/0JwA1zd30L)

– (@KUWAIT\_MOH) [October 7, 2020](#) وزارة الصحة – الكويت –

Oman’s health ministry confirmed 1,651 new cases and 10 deaths, bringing the total to 103,465, with 1,000 respectively.

[#Statement](#) No. 200

October 7, 2020 [pic.twitter.com/Fh2BDcs9Xp](https://pic.twitter.com/Fh2BDcs9Xp)

– (@OmaniMOH) [October 7, 2020](#) وزارة الصحة – عُمان –



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[Polymerase Chain Reaction \(PCR\)](#)

Saudi Arabia records 24 more COVID-19 deaths UAE surpasses 100,000 coronavirus infections

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[\*\*Slow start as Algeria kicks off\*\*](#)

# constitutional campaign

Author:

Amal Belalloufi with Philippe Agret in Tunis | AFP

ID:

1602082001211758100

Wed, 2020-10-07 14:22

ALGIERS: Algeria launched its campaign Wednesday for constitutional reforms for a “New Republic” that the government hopes will satisfy a popular protest movement – to the apparent indifference of many.

The constitutional changes, a flagship initiative of President Abdelmadjid Tebboune, are set to be put to a referendum on November 1, the anniversary of the start of Algeria’s 1954-1962 war of independence from France.

“November 1954: liberation, November 2020: change,” the official campaign slogan reads.

But many ordinary Algerians – struggling during a deep economic crisis that has seen unemployment soar – appear skeptical it will make any meaningful difference.

“What change are we talking about? Nothing has changed with these people in power,” said Ali, a former trade union official.

Popular anti-government demonstrations led by the Hirak – meaning in Arabic, “the movement” – pushed ailing president Abdelaziz Bouteflika from power last year.

Protesters demanded radical changes to the entire state system they revile as undemocratic and corrupt.

In a bid to shore up his mandate, Bouteflika’s successor Tebboune pledged to revise the constitution and allow people to approve or reject proposals in a referendum.

But some see the referendum as a cynical way for the government to appear to bring change while maintaining its power.

“They want to steal the hopes born from Hirak,” Ali added.

While the referendum was mentioned on radio and television stations, there were no campaign posters seen on the streets of Algiers.

“Why vote for a project to which I do not have access?” said elderly Algerian Brahim Bahmed, complaining that the “promised broad debate did not take place.”

“It’s hard to imagine popular enthusiasm during the campaign,” said political scientist Mansour Kedidir, noting that ordinary citizens “care more about the precariousness of life than the rhetoric of reform.”

Opposition parties are themselves divided, with some calling for people to vote against the changes, and others to boycott the referendum entirely.

“Abstention risks being... the main winner and a crisis of legitimacy its logical consequence,” said Louisa Dris-Ait-Hamadouche, a lecturer from the University of Algiers.



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## [Will coronavirus crisis widen Middle East's rich-poor gap?](#)

Tue, 2020-10-06 22:32

DUBAI: Economically battered even before the COVID-19 crisis, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region is hard pressed to defy predictions of greater gloom.

Extended lockdowns, border closures and flight cancelations have exacerbated the economic pains of millions of skilled and unskilled laborers, mainly in middle- and lower-income countries, already struggling to meet daily needs.

With government measures to combat COVID-19 threatening to tip millions of people into poverty – hitting women, refugees, migrant workers and those in

the informal economy the hardest – a huge increase in inequality is very likely, the international charity Oxfam said in a recent report.



A Palestinian man collects plastic containers on his horse cart while wearing a protective mask due to the COVID-19 coronavirus in Deir al-Balah in the central of Gaza Strip on October 1, 2020. (AFP)

“If another decade of pain is to be averted, governments need to take immediate action to reduce inequality through providing public services to protect ordinary people by taxing the richest and guaranteeing decent work.”

At the same time, the combined wealth of the rich in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) increased by nearly \$10 billion, more than twice the total emergency financing the region received from the International Monetary Fund to help it weather the global crisis, according to Oxfam, a confederation of nearly 20 charitable organization working to alleviate poverty around the world.

The pandemic has “exposed the lack of protection for the most vulnerable people in MENA, deepened the gap between the rich and the poor, and exacerbated the existing inequality in the region, said the report, entitled “For a decade of hope, not austerity, in the Middle East and North Africa.”

“Sometimes you have an idea of the size of the wealth and the inequality in the region, but when you are able to quantify some of these issues, this can be very important,” said Nabil Abdo, senior policy adviser and co-author of the Oxfam report, in an interview with Arab News from Beirut. “I think that is the important thing we did in this report.”

Based on nearly three months of research and data from government and international and regional organizations, the report focuses on four Arab countries – Egypt, Morocco, Jordan and Lebanon. Data on the region’s wealthy was based on Forbes magazine’s list.

“The coronavirus pandemic has exposed the lack of protection for the most vulnerable people in MENA, and will result in these people being even more vulnerable than they are already,” the report said.

“The impacts of the pandemic are expected to create a deep economic hole, out of which countries will have to climb. A fiscal deficit of 11.1 percent in regional GDP is expected, compared with 3.2 percent in 2019,” Oxfam said.

“Remittances, which constitute 5.7 percent of GDP, are expected to fall by almost 20 percent. Foreign investment is projected to drop by 45 percent, and an astonishing 1.7 million jobs expected to be lost – 700,000 held by women – with an estimated total loss of income of \$42 billion. It is thought that more than 10 percent of working hours in the region were wiped out in the second quarter of 2020, equivalent to at least 8 million full-time jobs.”

The middle and working classes are expected to suffer the biggest hit, says the report, with the economic measures introduced to prevent the spread of the virus likely to push an additional 45 million people into poverty across the region.

“This will intensify the already huge inequalities found in MENA, where the richest 10 percent of the population control 76 percent of all income,” the report said.

The affluent were “untouched,” and their wealth has increased by at least \$9.8 billion between March and August 2020, according to Oxfam.

Bridging the gap, Nabil Abdo says, requires a combination of policies. Foremost would be tax reforms in the form of a new “solidarity tax” on the net wealth of the extremely rich and a reduction in taxes levied on the poorest.

## **INNUMBERS**

### **Impact of Coronavirus**

- \* **45% Projected drop in MENA foreign investment.**
- \* **\$42bn Estimated lost wages.**
- \* **45m More people pushed into poverty across the region.**
- \* **1.7m Expected job losses across MENA.**

**\* 700,000 Estimated female job losses.**

Other steps recommended by him include strengthening “weak” social protection nets; investing in public services including health, education and transportation; ensuring “dignified and decent work” with full rights such as leave and pensions for people and migrant workers; and relaxation in terms and conditions for loans to support small and medium enterprises.

Hussein Mohamed Suleiman, an economic researcher at Cairo’s Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies, says new taxes on the wealthy is an idea worth exploring as long as it does not amount to excessive revenue collection.

“You have to be careful, or you might face capital (and) business flight. We are living now in an open world, so if you overtax businesses, they might go elsewhere, while you actually need them,” Suleiman told Arab News from Cairo.

“You have to avoid taxing corporate profits too much, and start taxing spending, such as in real estate, and personal wealth,” he said. “Some are proposing progressive consumption tax, not income tax. In other words, a wealthy person who earns a large amount of money is not taxed that much. But if he or she starts spending this money on luxuries, then it is taxed.”

In Egypt, the most populous country in the Arab region, COVID-19 has exacerbated the gap between the rich and the poor, which has been widening for the past three years in tandem with the implementation, in consultation with the IMF, of an economic reform program.

Egypt’s poverty rate, which had reached 32.5 percent in mid-2018, is believed to have risen since then. Unemployment is estimated at about 10 percent, but the situation might have worsened due to the pandemic’s impact on the country’s main income sources, namely tourism revenues, remittances from expatriates abroad and trade through the Suez Canal, which together traditionally have accounted for nearly 15 percent of Egypt’s GDP.

Though Egypt has tried to minimize economically damaging lockdowns, many parts of the world have stopped “sending tourists” or conducting trade through the Suez waterway.

Jordan, which introduced strict measures during the first six months of the pandemic, is also suffering. At least 15 economic sectors, including tourism facilities, transportation and meeting halls, are on the verge of complete shutdowns.



People wearing masks for protection against the coronavirus, leave the Mall of Dubai on April 28, 2020, after the shopping centre was reopened as part of moves in the emirate to ease lockdown restrictions imposed last month to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 illness. (AFP/File Photo)

Nearly 200,000 people have lost their jobs in a country where nearly 90 percent of the domestic economy is based on small and medium enterprises, according to economist and columnist Khaled Al-Zubeidy. "In June, the official unemployment percentage reached 23 percent, the highest in the history of the kingdom," he told Arab News from Amman.

"Unemployment is accompanied by poverty, because those who don't have jobs are inevitably poor. The gap between the rich, on the one hand, and the poor or extremely poor, on the other hand, has widened." On the positive side, Al-Zubeidy said, businesses producing sanitizers, masks and disposable protective suits for health workers have flourished in recent months.

To bridge the rich-poor gap, the government must rationalize its expenses, especially those on non-essential goods and services. "In Jordan the annual budget is very large compared to the GDP, which is really odd," Al-Zubeidy said.

"It is like someone who buys a shirt for 20 dinars and wears it with a suit that costs 2 dinars. One should not forget that Jordan's foreign debt has reached \$43 billion, which is equivalent to nearly 103 percent of its GDP."

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## [Expo 2020 Dubai launches pre-event Space Week](#)

Author:

Tue, 2020-10-06 21:57

DUBAI: Dubai's Expo 2020 two-day digital event "Space Week" that featured the latest on space travel and exploration came to a close on Tuesday.

The event held on Oct. 5-6 brought together Expo 2020 international participants, official partners and the general public to highlight the latest innovations in space research and travel.

It discussed topics such as the participation of women in the space

sector and the UAE space landscape.

“Science is the most international profession, the one truly global culture. Protons and proteins are the same everywhere in the world so science can straddle every nationality and faith more easily than most professions can, so we find it easier to collaborate.

It’s clear that more and more of the issues that the world cares about – anything to do with the environment or the climate – require collaboration,” Lord Martin Rees, Astronomer Royal; Institute of Astronomy, University of Cambridge, said.

Space week was the first of Expo-led ten thematic weeks offering a preview of a wide range of exhibitions and initiatives that will be brought to life when Expo 2020 takes place, from Oct. 1 2021 to March 31, 2022.

Omran Sharaf, Project Director of the Emirates Mars Mission (Hope Probe) from the UAE’s Mohammed Bin Rashid Space Centre said: “The nice thing about space is that we don’t have one identity, we are citizens of this planet. So through this mission, the UAE wants to send that message to the Arab youth and inspire them – if the UAE, a young nation is able to reach Mars in less than 50 years, then we can do much more.”

Themes such as new perspectives about life on Earth and combatting misinformation were addressed in the World Majlis, the event’s thematic dialogue programme that engaged thought leaders and students.

Brian C. Odom, NASA’s acting chief historian (Acting), added: “I’m excited, and I know a lot of people at NASA are, about Expo 2020 and NASA’s participation. I think it’s a great opportunity to talk about our past. It’s a great opportunity to talk about where we are in space flight today. I think that’s what opportunities like this Expo do for us. It allows us to think about what we can accomplish collectively as a species and what might be ahead of us in exploration.”

Meanwhile, on Monday, Saudi Arabia organized its first-of-a-kind [meeting of space agency leaders](#). The Saudi Space Commission met with its counterparts from other G20 countries in a forum to address present and future space enterprise.



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