

# Lebanon has hands on masks and hearts for fear of new pound collapse

Sun, 2020-04-26 21:49

BEIRUT: As if the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak was not enough for Lebanon, the possible rise in the US dollar's exchange rate against the Lebanese pound is adding to problems for those already facing severe economic hardship.

The sliding pound will have a huge impact on the earnings of average Lebanese people. The exchange rate of the dollar on the black market on Sunday was 4,200 Lebanese pounds.

The Lebanese Health Ministry has recorded three new COVID-19 cases, raising the total number of confirmed cases from Feb. 21 until Sunday to 707. No new deaths have been recorded, leaving the toll at 24.

The Ministry of Interior is set to relax COVID-19 restrictions on Monday, but with certain precautions like wearing face masks now mandatory.

The new procedures will allow factories, storage facilities for medical drugs and foodstuffs, supermarkets, minimarkets, sweet shops, patisseries, bakeries, restaurants, takeaway shops, hotels, serviced apartments, insurance offices, and libraries to work longer hours.

People in vocational trades will be allowed to work, including carpenters, blacksmiths, plumbers, seamstresses and tailors, electricians, mechanics, upholsterers, goldsmiths and florists.

Public transport and cargo vehicles will resume work from 5 a.m. to 9 p.m.

Health Minister Hamad Hassan wrote on Twitter: "We are moving very carefully and cautiously on the right and disciplined path. We all abide by the general mobilization controls as the safe return journey takes effect."

Licensed moneychangers will resume work on Monday, having not done so since Thursday in protest of the "unjustified deterioration of the exchange rate." This return coincides with the growing political tension toward the monetary policy of the governor of the Banque du Liban.

The head of the Syndicate of Money Changers, Mahmoud Murad, told Arab News: "We are literally holding our breath on Monday because things are rapidly developing and heading in a very dangerous direction."

He added: "Things have got out of control. What is happening is not convincing at all. Some people are messing with the exchange market, and we know nothing about them except that they are controlling the exchange rate even from their houses."

Murad said: "We are waiting for the platform that the Banque du Liban

promised us to know how to price the dollar, but we have not been informed of anything until now. There is an app on social media known as Lebanese Lira. We do not know its source, but it has been controlling the market for more than 3 months. This app has been shared by people since the dollar's exchange rate was 1,600 liras. People have only been selling their dollars according to this app's price. Someone is buying all the dollars on the market in an abnormal way."

Murad pointed out that he "filed a complaint in the court against this app, but no one has acted yet." He explained that there were people working from their houses and delivering exchanged money after buying dollars. "This practice dissolves the capital of legitimate money changers," he said.

He added that dismissing the governor of the Banque du Liban, Riad Salamé, in light of the current political crisis was not the cure. He said the central bank must intervene strongly in the market by injecting \$50 million to \$100 million for the market price to stabilize. He said: "It is not enough to intervene using \$5-\$7 million a day, which happened last week for one day."

On Saturday night, a bomb was thrown at a Fransabank branch in Sidon, resulting in material damage. The bank's security camera captured images of two suspects, according to preliminary investigations by the security services.

The phrase "You are in danger" was sprayed outside several other banks in Sidon, prompting the security services to take measures to protect banks and the central bank's branch there.

The leader of the Free Patriotic Movement, Gebran Bassil, defended in a press conference on Sunday the government's request to audit the central bank's accounts. He held "thieving, corrupt, and greedy beneficiaries as well as bank owners, shareholders, and the central bank" responsible for the state's financial losses. He defended himself by refuting charges of having "any property or money at home or abroad."

Attacks on Salamé were met with violent reactions from the opposition of Hassan Diab's government.

Maronite Patriarch Bechara Boutros Al-Rahi also rejected accusations leveled against the governor, blaming him for the slide in the value of the pound, and called for Salamé to be given the right to defend himself.

Al-Rahi said: "It is totally unacceptable to target the dignity of the man and the institution that has not known such a thing since its establishment in the days of President Fuad Chehab."

Al-Rahi asked: "Who benefits from destabilizing the governorship of the Banque du Liban? It is part of a plan to change the face of Lebanon."



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Lebanon](#)

[pound](#)

[Coronavirus](#)

Lebanon's top Christian cleric backs central bank governor as currency tumbles  
Lebanon has avoided coronavirus worst case scenario, health minister says

---

## [Syrian govt ends school early for over 4 mln students](#)

Author:

AFP

ID:

1587921200646514500

Sun, 2020-04-26 16:42

DAMASCUS: More than four million students in Syria confined at home due to the coronavirus will not resume classes this year but will advance to the

next grade, the government said Sunday.

The decision was taken weeks after schools were closed in mid-March to combat the spread of the virus, leaving many students and teachers to adapt to distance learning.

“All primary and secondary school students will move on to the next class,” the government announcement said, according to state news agency SANA.

Brevet and baccalaureate examinations – usually taken at the end of secondary school and high school respectively – will still be sat by 557,000 students, according to the education ministry.

The government will increase the number of exam centers to ensure “distance” between students, SANA reported.

After schools were shuttered, some institutions moved to online teaching, while a specialized education ministry TV channel broadcast Arabic, English, mathematics and science courses.

But daily power cuts that can last for hours and capped, costly household Internet have posed challenges to distance learning efforts in the country wracked by war since 2011.

Universities will remain closed at least through the end of the holy month of Ramadan in late May, according to SANA.

Damascus has officially reported 42 cases of COVID-19 and three deaths from the disease in government-controlled territory.

Authorities have adopted a series of measures to stem the spread of the virus, closing shops and restaurants as well as imposing a strict curfew and movement restrictions.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Syria](#)

[Schools](#)

Syrian dancer takes a spookily empty Paris as her canvas

---

## [Lebanon has avoided coronavirus worst case scenario, health minister says](#)

Author:

Sun, 2020-04-26 11:25

DUBAI: Lebanon's Public Health Minister Hamad Hassan has praised the way the government managed the coronavirus outbreak, saying it has avoided a "bad scenario" of mass infections and deaths, state-run National News Agency has reported.

The country's COVID-19 toll stood at 704 on Sunday – one of the countries with the lowest cases in the region. There have been 24 deaths from the virus so far.

Hassan said this figure was due to Lebanon's "cooperation and collaboration between the ministries concerned."

He said it was particularly notable given the country's "financial and catastrophic conditions," adding other more capable countries "have not been able to cope with the widespread of the disease."

But the Lebanese government should not be lenient, Hassan said, as it gradually eases down lockdown measures.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Lebanon](#)

[Coronavirus](#)

Attackers lob explosive at Lebanon bank amid currency crisis Hariri blames Prime Minister Diab for Lebanon's economic crisis

---

## [UN chief slams Israel's 'unilateral' actions that harm Palestinians amid COVID-19 outbreak](#)

Author:

Sun, 2020-04-26 10:27

DUBAI: The United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres has criticized Israel for its intention to annex parts of the West Bank, especially amid the coronavirus outbreak that poses risks to the fragile Palestinian community.

Guterres was responding to a letter penned by the Arab League Secretary General Ahmad Aboul Gheit warning Israel might exploit the pandemic to annex

parts of the Palestinian territories, the Jordan News Agency reported.

The UN chief said such “unilateral Israeli actions” would jeopardize negotiations between the two groups, as well as kill other efforts of a peace deal.

Aboul Gheit had earlier urged the UN to take seriously Israel’s actions against regional stability and security.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[UN](#)

[Israel](#)

[Palestine](#)

[Coronavirus](#)

Thousands demonstrate against Israeli coalition deal  
Pompeo: West Bank annexation plans an ‘Israeli decision’

---

## [Jordan allows expats to leave without paying fines amid coronavirus pandemic](#)

Author:

Sun, 2020-04-26 09:08

DUBAI: The Jordanian government has agreed to waive all labor-related fines and fees for expat workers wanting to return to their home countries, state-run Jordan News Agency has reported.

The country's labor minister, Nidal Bataineh, has called on migrant workers to apply through Hemayah.jo, an online platform that coordinates their repatriation amid the coronavirus outbreak.

The application deadline is May 4.

Bataineh added fines and fees related to work permits will be waived, even for illegal migrant workers in the country.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Jordan](#)

[Coronavirus](#)

US pledges \$8 million aid in Jordan's coronavirus fight Jordan mulls further easing of coronavirus lockdown, to reopen some public institutions