

# Syria, Yemen among countries most at risk due to coronavirus, says UN

Author:

Fri, 2020-04-24 03:07

LONDON: The UN's World Food Programme (WFP) has raised concerns that the coronavirus pandemic could lead to worst famines in the Middle East and North Africa.

Around the world, the agency said those suffering from hunger could be pushed up from 135 million to 250 million. It said the 10 countries most at risk of famine are those embroiled in civil war and conflict, including Syria and Yemen. Addressing the UN Security Council, David Beasley, head of the WFP, said the world needs to "act wisely and fast" to prevent huge amounts of suffering.

"I do believe that with our expertise and our partnerships, we can bring together the teams and the programs necessary to make certain the COVID-19 pandemic doesn't become a human and food crisis catastrophe," he said.

Partner nations and the UN "don't have time on our side," he added, warning: "We could be facing multiple famines of biblical proportions within a few short months."

The WFP previously said it was set to halve aid to parts of war-torn Yemen controlled by the Iran-backed Houthis due to a funding crisis.

It said some donors had stopped their aid over concerns that deliveries were being obstructed by the Houthis. The comments came as Washington's USAID program recently cut back aid it sends to Yemen due to concerns that the Houthis are using the supplies to control the population.

The WFP feeds some 12 million Yemenis every month, 80 percent of whom are in areas controlled by the Houthis, who have failed to maintain a cease-fire agreement with the country's internationally recognized government.

This has led to further concerns about the safety of transporting aid into the country.

Yemen confirmed its first case of COVID-19 earlier this month. With a weak health system that relies on support from governments and external charities – such as Saudi Arabia's King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Center – aid agencies have warned that the disease could quickly spread in Yemen, causing havoc.



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## [Hadi vows to defeat Iran's 'evil designs' in Yemen](#)

Fri, 2020-04-24 01:46

AL-MUKALLA: Yemen's President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi has vowed to foil Iran's attempts to derail peace and security in Yemen through the Houthi militia, stressing that his government is committed to complying with all peace efforts to end the war.

At an annual speech on Wednesday on the occasion of the holy month of Ramadan, Hadi said that his government had offered many concessions and positively responded to peace initiatives, seeking to end the suffering of the Yemenis.

He accused Iran of inciting hatred and sectarianism in Yemen through the Houthis.

"It is time, after the world has seen how the Houthi militia dealt with the truce, that the international community understands the nature of this bloody Houthi militia. It is just tools and dolls serving Tehran's suspicious designs," Hadi said, referring to a recent UN call for a truce in Yemen to allow health workers to fight the spread of the coronavirus.

Hadi said that his government would not allow the Houthis and their backers in Tehran to turn Yemen into a launching ground for attacks on neighboring countries.

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Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi, President of Yemen

He expressed the country's appreciation of the Saudi-led coalition military intervention in Yemen, which reversed Houthi gains and enabled government forces to take the upper hand on the battlefields.

"We reiterate that we will not accept that Yemen becomes a hotbed for those destructive ideas or used for undermining security of the region," he said.

"We pledge that Yemen will not dissociate itself from the Arab skin in favor of a culture alien to our people and history."

Hadi and his consecutive governments have long accused Iran of providing the Houthi militia with the arms, military know-how and funds that enabled them to expand militarily across Yemen.

Yemen's president also pledged quick assistance to residents of the port city of Aden who were affected by the destructive rainstorm on Tuesday.

In Aden, a senior government official told Arab News on Thursday that the death toll from Tuesday's downpour had reached 14 and heavy rains destroyed 66 houses and battered basic services in Yemen's temporary capital.

"Our focus now is on dispersing financial assistance to the families who lost members, opening roads and fixing power grids and water stations," the government official said on condition of anonymity as he was not authorized to brief reporters.

He said that the government had allocated more funds to help address the destruction caused by the floods.

On Wednesday, Yemen's army said that it had taken a defensive position since the beginning of the Saudi-led truce two weeks ago, despite Houthi breaches.

Abdu Abdullah Majili, a Yemeni army spokesperson, said that the Houthis had mounted hundreds of missile and mortar attacks on government forces and residential districts in the provinces of Al-Jawf, Marib, Taiz and Al-Baydha.

"The Iran-backed Houthi militia has carried out more than 1,428 attacks on national army positions on various battlefields and civilians since the beginning of the truce on Thursday, April 8," Majili said in a statement carried by the official news agency.



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## [Lebanon's Berri urges government to halt dramatic collapse of currency](#)

Fri, 2020-04-24 01:16

BEIRUT: The political conflict between Lebanon's speaker of parliament Nabih Berri, the government and circulars issued by the Central Bank regarding dollar transfer services has led to a new wave of chaos in the local financial market.

As the Central Bank issued a circular ordering all money transfer services to process dollar transfers in the Lebanese pound, the local currency hit a record low. On Thursday noon, the Lebanese lira significantly collapsed from 3,200 to 3,800 against the dollar.

The head of exchange houses in Lebanon, Mahmoud Mrad, told Arab News: "What happened is incomprehensible. People rushed to money transfer services to receive their money in dollars, just hours before the circular of the Central Bank enters into force, ordering money transfer services to issue cash in the local currency at a market rate and not the official rate."

He added: "At the same time, people also rushed to exchange houses to buy dollars, amid fears of a price increase as the political scene seems very unstable in the country and since people have lost confidence in the financial situation."

The demand for dollars on Thursday was "unprecedented," according to Mrad.

He said: "I personally sold \$200,000 to normal people and not to dealers. I cannot explain the situation. It smells fishy and it seems like there is an attempt to confuse the situation."

Mrad added: "Unlicensed money changers have highly contributed to the current situation by selling dollars at high prices after the closing of approved money changers' houses, without being punished by the state. They are arrested only to be set free later, without even confiscating their money. I personally told this to the interior minister."

On Thursday, people formed long queues outside money transfer businesses.

The gatherings violated the lockdown decision, which banned gatherings to prevent the spread of coronavirus.

Lawmaker Faisal Karami said the surprising increase in the dollar price reminded him of what happened to his late uncle, former Prime Minister Omar Karami, in 1992 to bring him down.

Prime Minister Hassan Diab called on “eliminating all red lines protecting Central Bank Governor Riad Salameh and corruption.”

He also warned that “the dollar game is the beginning of a social and maybe even a security disaster.”

Meanwhile, Berri criticized the performance of the government: “The government must use its legal powers to stop the dramatic fall of the lira before it is too late.”

Berri stressed that the government cannot remain “an observer to the financial chaos, claiming to be very concerned about the people.”

Berri has criticized the government for referring draft laws to parliamentary sessions without passing them by parliamentary committees. The secretariat said: “The government must learn to send draft laws to the parliament before insulting it.”

A parliamentary session was suspended because of a lack of quorum, before the parliament could treat the draft law aiming to allocate 1,200 billion liras to support agriculture and industry, import raw material and provide soft loans to small and medium-sized enterprises.

Meetings between Salameh, President Michel Aoun and then Diab did not produce any immediate solutions to the crisis.

Diab is expected to announce what he described as “restrictive positions over the dollar crisis” after Friday’s ministerial session.

He complained about “a lack of coordination between the government and the governor of the Central Bank.”



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## [Besieged Gazans anxious over new Israeli government's moves](#)

Author:

Fri, 2020-04-24 00:07

GAZA CITY: Gazans fear that the new Israeli government's handling of the Gaza Strip could damage political agreements made between the government and Hamas.

Concerns are especially high with regard to understandings reached with Hamas on humanitarian issues and a prisoner exchange deal.

Israel's new "emergency" government is the fruit of a tough agreement and three elections within one year between the Likud party, headed by Benjamin Netanyahu, and the Blue and White party, headed by Benny Gantz.

The policies of this new government appeared to support annexing settlements in the West Bank.

However, the future relationship with Gaza remains unclear.

Among the most important provisions of the agreement to form the Netanyahu-Gantz government is to advance US President Donald Trump's peace plan, especially the issue of imposing Israeli sovereignty over the Jordan Valley and West Bank settlements from July.

Experts on Israeli affairs believe the government will be interested in accomplishing the annexation and use what remains of Trump's presidential term before elections in November.

## **FASTFACT**

**Adnan Abu Amer, an Israeli affairs columnist, said that the understandings are primarily an Israeli project, and that Benjamin Netanyahu is interested in neutralizing all issues, including Gaza, and devoting attention to Iran and his internal problems.**

It is expected to calm the Gaza issue and to prevent anything that hinders the US plan.

Hamas, which has assumed full control of Gaza since mid-2007, rushed after the Netanyahu-Gantz agreement to call for the formation of a "unified national strategy" to confront the "extremist Zionist blocs." It is opposed – according to experts and observers – to further deterioration in Gaza, and therefore does not want a "military confrontation" with Israel.

In this regard, Musa Dudeen, a member of the Hamas political bureau, said that the movement is committed to understandings as long as Israel maintains its obligations.

Hamas and Israel reached agreements that stopped the tension on the borders and a sharp retreat in the momentum of the "Great Return March" in exchange for Israel allowing the flow of funds, and partly lifting restrictions imposed on exports and imports.

Regarding the future of these understandings, Dudeen said: "There are no fundamental differences between the leaders of the occupation, its parties and its governments. The ball is in the Israeli court regarding the understandings, including the prisoner exchange deal."

Hamas seized four Israelis, including soldiers Shaul Aaron and Hadar Golden, in the 2014 war. While Israel maintains that they were killed, Hamas has not

given any information on their situation.

Hamas is also holding Abraham Mengistu and Hashem Badawi Al-Sayyid, who hold Israeli citizenship. The first is Ethiopian and the second is Arab.

Adnan Abu Amer, an Israeli affairs columnist, said that the understandings are primarily an Israeli project, and that Netanyahu is interested in neutralizing all issues, including Gaza, and devoting attention to Iran and his internal problems.

According to Abu Amer, the estimate in Hamas was that a government formed by the Blue and White party headed by Gantz with the membership of generals would write a "death certificate" for the understandings.

But it seems that the movement's fears have relatively declined with the formation of the new government, given that Netanyahu is able to subdue Gantz and his party.

"The presence of army commanders within the new government as a factor that may accelerate the prisoner exchange deal, not hinder it, in an attempt to win Israeli public opinion by showing its eagerness to recover their captured soldiers." Abu Amer told Arab News.

Wadi Awawdeh, an expert on Israeli affairs based in Israel, agreed with Abu Amer that Netanyahu feared developing understandings with Hamas and their impact on his political life, but today he may have found a "loss partner" in his agreement with Gantz, with whom he will share the "price" of any agreement or understandings with Hamas.

"The development of Israeli humanitarian and security understandings with Hamas into political understandings is possible, and not excluded, based on Netanyahu's policy that is based on the strategy of separating Gaza and the West Bank, and maintaining division and dissonance in the Palestinian arena. This strategy may be strengthened by an agreement with Hamas – even if it was an interim one – for five or 10 years," Awawdeh told Arab News.



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## [Dubai to ease curfew restrictions as Ramadan starts](#)

Thu, 2020-04-23 21:40

DUBAI: Dubai announced on Thursday it would ease coronavirus curfew restrictions.

Residents will have to stay home between 10 p.m. and 6 a.m. instead of the 24-hour lockdown that has been in place for several weeks.

The changes will come into effect on Friday – the first day of Ramadan, Dubai Media Office said.

The decision was made after the emirate's officials "carefully evaluated" the

results of preventive measures taken during the past three weeks, including the national sterilization program.

The government stressed the need for all citizens and residents in Dubai to abide by preventative measures including wearing masks and avoiding all gathering outside their homes.

The fine for not wearing a mask outside the home is AED1,000.

Ramadan gatherings should not be held at home or in public places.

Those sectors of Dubai's economy that have resumed work will operate at 30 percent of their capacity.

Dubai's metro, public buses and taxi services will also resume operation on Sunday, Dubai's Roads and Transport Authority (RTA) announced. Passengers will have to observe social distancing measures and wear face masks.

Only two passengers can travel in the back of a taxi.



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