

3,000 Palestinians under Lebanon lockdown after first camp virus case

Author:

Thu, 2020-04-23 01:51

BEIRUT: A refugee camp in Lebanon was sealed off and under lockdown on Wednesday after a Palestinian woman from Syria tested positive for the coronavirus.

The woman, who lived in the Wavel camp in Baalbek, known locally as the Jalil or Galilee camp, was taken to Rafik Hariri Hospital in Beirut for treatment.

A medical team from the UN refugee agency UNRWA and hospital staff tested 146 people at the camp, home to about 3,000 people, including all those who had recent contact with the woman.

Lebanon hosts tens of thousands of Palestinian refugees and their descendants, mostly in squalid camps with no access to public services and limited health care. There are also more than 1 million refugees from the conflict in Syria.

Wednesday's virus case is the first inside one of the camps, but aid workers have warned for months that if the COVID-19 pandemic reached the camps it could cause carnage.

"There is always concern of an outbreak in a crowded place like the camps ... but we hope that the measures we are taking with the ministry and others concerned will help us avoid an outbreak," said Huda Samra, communications adviser for UNRWA in Lebanon.

The Popular Committee inside the Wavel camp urged people to stay at home, close shops, and sanitize neighborhoods, houses and cars.

Lebanon's Health Ministry reported five new COVID-19 cases on Wednesday, including two in Rayak in the Bekaa Valley, raising the total to 682. One patient with underlying health issues died, raising the death toll to 22.

Dr. Iman Shankiti, the World Health Organization (WHO) representative in Lebanon, urged patience, and said measures taken to prevent the spread of the virus should continue.

The US Embassy offered \$13.3 million to help stop the spread of COVID-19 in Lebanon, including an \$8 million donation to UNHCR.

Saudi Arabia recorded 1,141 new cases of COVID-19 on Wednesday, bringing the total to 12,772. Six patients died, raising the death toll to 114.

In the Middle East's worst-hit country, Iran, 94 more people died, raising the total 5,391 from 85,996 confirmed cases.

Egypt's parliament on Wednesday amended the state of emergency law to give President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi power to ban public and private meetings, protests, celebrations and other forms of assembly, suspend classes at schools and universities, and quarantine people returning from abroad.

Egypt has recorded nearly 3,500 cases of the virus, with 264 deaths.

Jordan eased movement restrictions on Wednesday in the large and sparsely populated southern districts of Karak, Maan and Tafileh, where no coronavirus cases have been reported. In Karak city, 120 km south of Amman, heavy traffic clogged the streets.

Jordan has recorded 428 positive cases of the virus and seven deaths.

Worldwide, the number of people infected with the coronavirus passed 2.6 million, and the death toll rose to more than 182,000.



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First virus case in Lebanon Palestinian refugee camp: UNLebanon to start mass coronavirus testing

Abu Dhabi considering reopening shopping malls to ease coronavirus restrictions

Thu, 2020-04-23 00:44

DUBAI: The authorities in Abu Dhabi are considering reopening shopping malls as the emirate prepares to gradually increase economic activity.

The Abu Dhabi Department of Economic Development (ADDED) said Wednesday it was “consulting with stakeholders” and preparing health and safety guidelines.

[.@AbuDhabiDED](#) is consulting with stakeholders on re-opening malls in [#AbuDhabi](#). In line with government plans for a gradual increase in economic activity, the Department is exploring options in collaboration with the private sector. pic.twitter.com/46ny6Rmmgb

– مكتب أبوظبي الإعلامي (@admediaoffice) [April 22, 2020](#)

“In line with government plans for a gradual increase in economic activity, the Department is exploring options in collaboration with the private sector,” Abu Dhabi Media Office said.

Shoppers would be required to wear gloves and face masks and anyone with a high temperature would be denied entry, according to an ADDED circular reported in UAE media.

Measures would also be in place to limit the number of people inside stores and restaurants.

The UAE has been in a lockdown as part of tough measures to tackle the outbreak.



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Abu Dhabi launches new COVID-19 tracking app to help fight virus spread
Abu Dhabi launches coronavirus operations center to deal with industrial zones

[Bahrain extends closure measures for two weeks starting April 23](#)

Author:

Wed, 2020-04-22 22:55

CAIRO: Bahrain extended the closure measures it took to limit the spread of coronavirus for two additional weeks which set to start from April 23 until May 7, state news agency reported on Wednesday.

Those measures include closing all cinemas, sports centres, gyms, salons, and restricting restaurants operations to food delivery and takeaway only, among other measures.

Bahrain registered 2009 cases till now with a death tally that stands at 7.



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Bahrain sets up coronavirus ICU in military hospital car park

[Lebanese Parliament convenes amid protests](#)

Wed, 2020-04-22 20:07

BEIRUT: The Lebanese Parliament convened for the third time this week on Wednesday as dozens of protestors again took to the streets in their cars to raise their concerns about rising poverty and hardships amid the COVID-19 lockdown.

Parliament dropped the expedited status of a proposed law to waive the immunity of presidents and ministers and returned it to parliamentary committees “for further study, to secure the independence of the judiciary and its constitutional right to trial.”

Parliament also rejected a bill proposing that – in line with demands of protestors for the past six months – the current parliamentary term be shortened and elections held as soon as possible, and another bill proposing the suspension of public works in order to focus on the construction of the Bisri Dam. The dam has been strongly opposed by the civil movement, residents of mountainous areas, and environmental activists.

Parliament did approve a proposed law put forward by MP Paula Yacoubian to ban pictures and posters of political leaders, officials, and employees in public places. Prime Minister Hassan Diab announced his approval of this move, while Progressive Socialist Party bloc MP Hadi Abou Hassan said, “It is implementation that matters.”

Independent MP Michel Moawad suggested that the law should also apply to “posters of religious figures and party flags,” referring to Hezbollah.

A number of MPs attempted to address Lebanon’s ongoing economic and social crisis, which has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. They warned of possible civic unrest and of the possibility of a greater collapse of the Lebanese lira against the dollar. A number of MPs also enquired about the fate of misappropriated funds.

Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri responded that the government “has completed its promised economic plan, and Parliament will soon discuss it.”

After the legislative session, Diab said the government’s reform plan would be discussed next week.

The civil movement continued its car-bound protests for the second day in succession – obeying the social-distancing guidelines – but protestors were unable to get close to where the legislative session was held.

The Ministry of Health reported five new COVID-19 cases, including two in Rayak in the Bekaa Valley, which brought the total number of cases in Lebanon to 682. One patient from Dinniyeh in northern Lebanon with underlying health issues died bringing the number of COVID-19-related deaths to 22.

Baalbek-Hermel Governor Bachir Khodr announced that the Palestinian refugee in the Galilee camp who tested positive for COVID-19 earlier – becoming the first case reported in Palestinian camps in Lebanon – had taken a second test and the result had been negative. Khodr claimed “all measures have been taken as if the result were positive.”

Health Minister Hamad Hassan said: “The Ministry of Health and international organizations, especially UNRWA, have a shared responsibility to implement the same measures adopted with the discovery of every other case in other parts of Lebanon.”

The camp’s entrances have been closed and other measures put in place by state security and municipal police. The Popular Committee inside the camp stressed the importance of committing to home quarantine, closing shops, and sanitizing neighborhoods, houses and cars.

Hamad also said that the ministry has “15 days to increase the number of randomized PCR tests to get a better understanding of the epidemic in Lebanon and take the appropriate measures in light of field data,” adding that the apparent decrease in the rate of infection is not a sufficient indicator to relax the current measures, in case that leads to a second wave of infections.

Dr. Iman Shankiti, World Health Organization (WHO) representative in Lebanon, said the measures taken to prevent the spread of the epidemic in Lebanon should continue. She counseled patience on the part of the Lebanese people, and said that Lebanon has entered international COVID-19 clinical trials.

The US Embassy in Lebanon announced on Wednesday that it will provide \$13.3 million to help stop the spread of COVID-19 in Lebanon, which includes an \$8 million donation to UNHCR to assist refugees and Lebanese host communities.



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First virus case in Lebanon Palestinian refugee camp: UNLebanon MPs meet in hall as protesters stage car convoy

Iranian regime accused of corruption over COVID-19 test kits

Wed, 2020-04-22 19:30

LONDON: London-based Iran International TV said on Wednesday that it has obtained a leaked document that reveals widespread corruption in the Iranian Health Ministry, the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) and two organizations under the control of the Iranian supreme leader Ali Khamenei.

The document is a letter sent by a private company to an official at Iran's national coronavirus taskforce in the health ministry regarding the importation of testing kits for the novel coronavirus COVID-19.

It reportedly reveals "the competition process" between a subsidiary affiliated with the IRGC and another organization controlled by Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, seeking to establish the exclusive rights to import and distribute COVID-19 testing kits from a Korean company – MiCo BioMed – in Iran.

According to the letter, MiCo BioMed representatives were invited to Iran by a private company called Irgan Mehr.

The Iran International report claimed that several health ministry officials "used their influence" to sign a contract with the Korean company through a subsidiary foundation under the direct control of the Supreme Leader of Iran, known as the Execution of Imam Khomeini's Order foundation (EIKO).

This enabled them to buy the testing kits for around 25,000 Iranian Toman (\$5.94) and sell them for 60,000 Iranian Toman (\$14.25).

The negotiations with MiCo BioMed began in late February and the Korean company was given assurances that although American parts were used in the testing kits, US sanctions would not hinder the deal, Iran International reported.

The negotiations stalled when the Medical Community Basij Organization, a paramilitary organization affiliated with the IRGC, confiscated the equipment and froze the funds for the devices – as well as 300 test kits – holding them "hostage" on condition it would receive the exclusive rights to distribute the products in Iran.

While Irgan Mehr was waiting to receive the relevant distribution permits from the Health Ministry, another subsidiary of the EIKO, called KBC, stepped in and signed a contract with MiCo BioMed, without a permit from the ministry, the letter reportedly reveals.

Sadeq Saba from Iran International said: "The leaked letter that we have seen

states that the Korean company was surprised to see how the regime's institutions are fighting over financial gain instead of focusing on the coronavirus crisis.

"With many cases such as this, it seems that the main problem in fighting the coronavirus crisis in Iran is the corruption within the regime and not the sanctions."

Dr. Majid Rafizadeh, an Iranian-American political scientist, told Arab News the report is an example of the regime's "total disregard for their citizens and human life."

He said there is widespread corruption within Iran's Ministry of Health, the IRGC and other organizations controlled by the Iranian regime, claiming that financial and political corruption at the top level of Iranian authorities has been documented for almost four decades.

"The Iranian regime's corruption and mishandling of the coronavirus pandemic, and its attempts to hide and downplay the scope of the coronavirus in the country have sparked anger and fury inside Iran and abroad," he said. "Once again, the regime's actions show that it prioritizes its revolutionary ideals and its survival over public health and human lives."



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Iran state broadcaster keeps internet slow by withholding needed frequency bands