

# Organizers recommend postponing Expo 2020 Dubai by a year

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PARIS: Organizers of the Expo 2020 global trade fair have recommended pushing it back a year owing to the coronavirus, while keeping the name unchanged, they said Tuesday.

Planned to open in October, the six-month expo in Dubai has hoped to attract around 25 million visitors to a country that has one of the most diversified economies in the Gulf region.

On Tuesday, a statement said the executive committee of the Bureau International des Expositions "has unanimously agreed to propose the postponement of Expo 2020 Dubai to 1 October 2021 – 31 March 2022.

"Assessing the unforeseen impact of the Covid-19 on public health, economic activity and global restrictions on movement, the Executive Committee unanimously recommended approving the UAE's request to postpone the Expo, and to maintain the name 'Expo 2020 Dubai'," the statement said in reference to the United Arab Emirates.

Changing the date requires consent of a two-thirds majority of BIE member states, the statement added, with a vote to "be carried out remotely between Friday 24 April and Friday 29 May."

Dubai, known for hosting hundreds of conferences annually, has already scrapped a string of cultural and entertainment events but had not announced plans to postpone the much-anticipated Expo.

As of 1100 GMT on Tuesday, a tally from official sources compiled by AFP showed that the Middle East has reported 129,497 cases of COVID-19, with 5,683 deaths.



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[Bureau International des Expositions](#)

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UAE officially asks to postpone Expo 2020 Dubai

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## [Lebanon MPs meet in hall as protesters stage car convoy](#)

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Tue, 2020-04-21 17:04

BEIRUT: Lebanon's parliament sat Tuesday in a conference hall to allow for social distancing between lawmakers amid the coronavirus pandemic, while outside anti-government protesters demonstrated in a car convoy.

As the country struggles with a battered economy, MPs approved the re-allocation of \$40 million from the World Bank to help fight COVID-19, which

has officially infected 677 people and killed 21 nationwide.

It also passed a law to fight corruption in the public sector and set up a national body in charge of stamping out graft.

On the agenda of the three-day session were proposals for a divisive general amnesty, to legalize cannabis for medical use, and to lift immunity for ministers and lawmakers to allow prosecutions for corruption.

Outside the venue, dozens of protesters drove a noisy convoy of cars covered in slogans, drivers honking their horns and passengers brandishing the national flag and leaning out of the windows in face masks.

They took to the streets on wheels to protest deteriorating living conditions while maintaining social distancing, as they kept up the pressure on a political elite under fire since mass protests erupted last October.

"Today, instead of passing a general amnesty law... they could pass a law on the independence of the judiciary," Jad Assaileh, a young demonstrator said.

"We want to recover the stolen money," he said, referring to allegations that Lebanon's ruling elite transferred billions out of the country while regular citizens were prevented from withdrawing their savings by the banks.

Similar protests took place in the cities of Saida and Tripoli.

Lebanon's worst economic crisis since the 1975-1990 civil war is now compounded by the lockdown. Poverty has risen to 45 percent of the population, according to official estimates.

Protests had petered out after a new government took office in January, and demonstrators have largely remained at home since the coronavirus lockdown started mid-March.

But on Friday, hundreds again protested in Tripoli to mark six months since the street movement started to demand an overhaul of a ruling class widely deemed inept and corrupt.

The lawmakers met in a 1,000 seat conference hall at the UNESCO Palace in Beirut, as part of measures to halt the spread of the novel coronavirus.

Among their 66 items to discuss, legalizing growing marijuana for medical purposes was expected to be approved by a majority as it could generate revenue for the indebted state.

Lebanon bans growing, selling and consuming cannabis, but illicit production in the country's east has developed over decades into a multi-million-dollar industry.

No consensus was in sight, however, for a general amnesty to free thousands of detainees and to suspend arrest warrants for thousands more.

Supporters – which include Shiite movements Hezbollah and Amal as well as the Sunni Future Movement – say an amnesty could lessen overcrowding in jails housing 9,000 prisoners.

But its detractors, including the president's Christian parliamentary bloc, say the bill is merely an attempt to boost popular support.

The amnesty has long been a demand of the families of some 1,200 so-called "Islamist detainees," most of whom hail from the Sunni-majority city of Tripoli, where the former premier's Future Movement is dominant.

They are accused of carrying out crimes including fighting and assaulting the army, taking part in clashes in the city, and planning explosives attacks.

Families have also clamoured for the release of thousands more detainees from the eastern regions of Baalbek and Hermel, where Hezbollah and the parliament speaker's Amal Movement are powerful.

Most of these are accused of drug-linked crimes including growing hashish

illegally, or other offenses such as stealing cars.

Lebanon, one of the most indebted countries in the world with a debt equivalent to 170 percent of its GDP, defaulted on payments for the first time last month.

As the country faces an acute liquidity crisis, banks have banned transfers abroad and gradually restricted dollar withdrawals until suspending them last month.

The Lebanese pound has for decades been pegged to the dollar, but in recent months lost half of its official value on the black market.

The official exchange rate remains 1,507 Lebanese pounds to the dollar.

The banks earlier this month set their rate at 2,600 pounds to the dollar, but money changers were offering more than 3,200 pounds for the greenback on Tuesday on the black market.

On Tuesday, the central bank asked banks to allow depositors with foreign currency accounts to withdraw their savings in Lebanese pounds at the "market rate," likely to signify 2,600 pounds to the dollar.





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No new corona cases in Lebanon in past 24 hours

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## [Gunman shoots nine people dead in Lebanese village of Baakline](#)

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Tue, 2020-04-21 14:44

BEIRUT: A gunman shot dead nine people Tuesday, including five Syrians, and left their bodies in several locations in a mountain village southeast of the capital Beirut, the prime minister and state news and said.

A motive for the killings was not immediately known, said the state-run

National News Agency. It said the shooter fled to nearby fields and was being chased by security forces.

Such shootings in Lebanon, where many people keep rifles or pistols in their homes, are rare. Lebanon is home to more than a million Syrian refugees and other Syrians who are residents.

NNA said a pump action rifle and a Kalashnikov assault rifle were used in the shootings.

Prime Minister Hassan Diab "denounced the horrific crime," his office said in a statement. The prime minister called on security agencies and judicial authorities to accelerate the investigation to disclose its circumstances and identify the perpetrators.

The dead included five Syrians and four Lebanese whose bodies were left behind at several locations in Baakline, local LBC TV reported.

"It is similar to the shootings that happen in America," Marwan Hamadeh, a member of parliament from Baakline, told reporters in Beirut. He urged security forces to detain the shooter, saying "there are some indications that he might be a mentally unstable person."

Baakline's mayor, Abdullah al-Ghoseini, told the daily An-Nahar newspaper the motive behind the shooting was unclear, adding that it took place in an area that includes housing units for Syrian workers.

Al-Ghoseini later told LBC the shooting started at 3:30 p.m. (1230 GMT) and search operations for the shooter were still ongoing five hours later. He added that the Syrians who were killed had been living in the village for nearly 10 years.

The shooting comes as Lebanon experiences its worst economic and financial crisis in decades. A crash in the value of the local currency against the U.S. dollar has led to a sharp increase in prices.

Anti-government protests resumed Tuesday calling on the Cabinet to work on improving living conditions in the nearly bankrupt country.



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Canada's worst mass shooting leaves at least 18 dead  
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## [Syrian war monitor says Israeli strike near Palmyra kills 9](#)

Author:

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Tue, 2020-04-21 13:39

BEIRUT: An Israeli airstrike in central Syria killed nine fighters, including

six who were not Syrians and some who were loyal to the militant Hezbollah group, an opposition war monitor said Tuesday.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights gave no nationalities for the foreigners who were killed on a military post in the desert near the historic central town of Palmyra. It said the dead included some fighters loyal to Lebanon's Hezbollah group.

Israel says it has been behind a series of airstrikes mainly targeting Iranian and Hezbollah forces in Syria that have joined the country's war fighting alongside the government. It rarely confirms the attacks and did not comment on Monday's airstrike.

Syrian state TV reported the country's air defenses shot down several missiles launched by Israeli warplanes Monday night. The station gave no further details about the attack, the latest of several to hit central Syria in the past three weeks.

The Observatory said late Monday the Israeli strikes targeted Iranian and Iran-backed fighters in the desert near Palmyra. It added that Israeli warplanes were also flying over neighboring Lebanon.

The strikes came hours after Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammed Javad Zarif was in the Syrian capital Damascus, where he met with President Bashar Assad and his Syrian counterpart.



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Israel accuses Hezbollah of “provocative” activity Wearing face masks, Syria’s Assad and Iran’s Zarif condemn West at Damascus meeting

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## [At least seven dead, 85 injured in Yemen flash floods](#)

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Tue, 2020-04-21 12:46

SANAA: At least seven people have been killed and 85 injured in flash flooding in Yemen this month, the UN said Tuesday, as the coronavirus threat also looms over the war-torn nation.

Yemen announced its first case of COVID-19 on April 10, and aid organizations have warned that its health system – all but collapsed since a conflict between the internationally-recognized government and the Houthi militia broke out in 2014 – is ill equipped to handle the crisis.

“Heavy rains and flooding across northern governorates, including Marib, in mid-April led to casualties and damaged property and sites for internally displaced persons,” the UN humanitarian coordination agency OCHA said.

“Initial information indicated that seven people – five women and two children – were killed in the flooding and another 85 people were injured, including seven who were seriously injured and hospitalized.”

The Houthi-held capital Sanaa and districts in the same governorate “have been badly affected,” it added.

Storms also hit other provinces, including Ibb, Hajjah and Marib – which is the government’s last northern stronghold and currently the conflict’s “center of gravity.”

The UN special envoy for Yemen, Martin Griffiths, said last week that progress was being made toward a cease-fire after calls for a pause to face the coronavirus threat.

An estimated 24 million Yemenis – more than 80 percent of the population – depend on some form of humanitarian or protection assistance for survival, according to the UN.

More than three million people are displaced, many in camps that are especially vulnerable to disease.



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Iran floods leave 21 dead  
Deadly floods drown pending fears of coronavirus in Yemen's Aden